

***Moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:  
An Analysis of 'Pragmatist' and 'Puritanical' Discourses***

Submitted by Eid Al Yahya to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics in December 2011.

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30/11/2011

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the rise of moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The investigation consists of analysis of two trends of thought which reformulate the ideas and projects of an earlier generation of dissidence. These trends, which have adopted a clearly more 'accommodationist' discourse towards difference of opinion, peaceful coexistence, political competition, equality, pluralism, and gender inclusiveness, have adapted themselves to a new context of social revolution.

This social revolution has resulted from the expansion of links with the outside world, and this has been deepened through the process of 'reintellectualisation'. This term used by scholars of Muslim politics such as Dale Eickelman is used in the dissertation to contextualise the rise of discourses of moderation. In particular, this reintellectualisation relates to two processes, which are gradually changing the culture in the direction of more public debate, participation and acceptance of values of dialogue and diversity in general. The first is the media revolution which increased the flow of information and the other is the massification of university education abroad. These two combined factors contribute to a quasi-cultural shift in Saudi society. This dynamic is not acknowledged by Orientalist scholarship that treats the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as incompatible with change.

The key objective of the dissertation is to analyse the discourses of moderation of two prominent trends of thought, which are called here 'pragmatists' (not liberals) and 'puritanical' (not conservative). It is through this investigation that the key values they both associate with moderation become clear. The investigation uses discourse analysis of primary data both spoken and written. These two combined sources disclose a number of preliminary observations. The pragmatist trend is not fully secular and is still influenced by the politico-religious identity of the Kingdom. Its discourse of moderation relies on Western values and concepts but these values and concepts are not in any way anti-Islamic. The puritanical trend puts the politico-religious tradition into sharper focus, showing attachment to the agenda of *da'wa* and the normative framework of Islam's socio-moral order. However, this trend shows signs of moderation that is no longer concerned with issues of *jihad*, and is venturing into areas of political reform having to do with just government, equal citizenship, and forms of inclusiveness within the normative system of Islam.

It is concluded that moderation as pluralism, ideological moderation and respect of the rules of the political game has the building blocks of maturation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its specificity within the Saudi politico-religious context, moderation for the pragmatists is aided through synthesis whereas for the puritanical trend it is expressed through reformulation of the existing religious heritage.

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# CHAPTER 1

## SAUDI ARABIA POST 9/11: A FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING THE RISE OF MODERATION IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently as God's great judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border nor breed nor birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the end  
of the earth!<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the 9/11 Backdrop

In the wake of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, no Arab and Muslim country drew as much security, media and academic attention as did the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The exception was the Taliban's Afghanistan, which shared the spotlight with the Saudi Monarchy. The fact that most of the hijackers who crashed the planes on the Twin Towers and on the Pentagon were Saudi nationals came as a surprise not only to 'Saudi-ologists', but also to the Saudis themselves. The tragic events refocused attention on this important oil-rich Arab Gulf country, forcing rethinking along a number of lines of inquiry. These tragic events produced more questions than answers about the nature of politics, religion, society, and culture in Saudi Arabia. The nature of the religious establishment and discourse was frequently confused with extremism, and religious education was blamed for 9/11. The whole question of polity and the legitimacy of the state and its institutions came under close scrutiny. At the same time one most academic question had to do with whether the ruling Saudi House would have survived the September 11 attacks had they been directed at Riyadh instead of New York or Washington. Hypothetical questions do not lend themselves to easy answers. But what is certain is that, like the US and with the benefit of historical hindsight of what happened in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Royal House would not have spared any firepower at its disposal to safeguard the position of its institutions, people, and the ruling elite of the Saudi Kingdom. Events like 9/11 serve to refresh our memory that the society of states tends from time to time to take recourse to violence in order to defend state survival and interest. And it is quite plausible that neither the US nor its Western and Middle Eastern allies would have hesitated to fight

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<sup>1</sup> Rudyard Kipling, The Ballad of East and West, 1889

on behalf of the Saudi Kingdom. The Kuwaiti precedent is sufficiently illustrative of the point made here. So is a more relevant precedent: the 1979 take-over of the Grand Mosque by Saudi extremists, which was defused both violently and legally (with the approval of the juridical and religious establishment in Saudi Arabia). Another intriguing aspect of the largely Saudi nationals-led 9/11 attacks is the extent to which this brand of hideously violent militancy was a statement by Saudis against both their rulers and their rulers' protectors. It is not out of place to assume that the perpetrators of the violence visited upon New York and Washington on September 11 were motivated by local concerns (e.g. Saudi first, and Arab/Muslim second). This is in spite of the fact that their attacks seemed to signal a new wave of 'global terrorism' – in this case led by al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden, a Saudi who was stripped of his Saudi citizenship in 1994 for his extremism at the turn of the third millennium.

In order to lend credence to the study and inquiry in this thesis, the whole question of politico-religious culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia legitimacy must be placed under close scrutiny. If the September 11 events are to be read as an oppositional political behaviour, deploying a very bloody strategy, then questions must be asked about how politics and religion and the discourse of the political and religious elites are implicated in the production, legitimisation and application of extremism or moderation. This type of questioning relates to leads to the specificity of politics and religion in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It must be noted from the outset that secularism (understood as privatisation of religion, which leads to separation of religion and politics in the running of state affairs) has not in any shape or form featured as a political value that is either represented or contested in the Kingdom's top-down or bottom-up, official or unofficial discourses of religion and politics. Secularism is simply not an arena of contention in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia -- as it has been in other Middle Eastern states (e.g. Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq or Syria). No reference will therefore be made to it in the ensuing analysis.

It must be pointed out that religion in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intertwines with all aspects of statecraft, social affairs, laws, education and social custom. A central hypothesis in the ensuing analysis within my thesis is that religion informs both reformist and conservative forces in Saudi Arabia. One observation must be made here: Whilst Sunni Islam is the dominant sect in Saudi Arabia, the Shi'a form the main other

sect, present largely in the Eastern Province of the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> This thesis focuses on discourses within Sunni Islam. It is from within Islam and through the interpreting and reference to the Holy Qur'an, the Hadith (the Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad Peace upon Him), and the legal traditions of Islam's supreme learned scholars and doctors that the advocates and opponents of reform derive and develop their their public discourses. The type of debate today in Saudi Arabia is not about the validity or utility of religion. Rather, the debates competing for influence, public ascendance, and political acceptance are about which Islamic arguments are to be used to justify or deny reform. It is within this moment of debate and counter-debate that an emerging culture of 'moderation' is being created in Saudi Arabia. This is the key position that I propose to develop and examine in my analysis.

The specificity of the Saudi case and religion and politics within it cannot be stressed enough. The following observations explain this specificity. The first observation regards the nature or the brand of Islam adopted in Saudi Arabia and how it relates generally to the state and the practice of politics. It is the association of the two that gave birth to the Saudi state King Abd Al-Aziz created in 1932. Dissolving this association is neither is nor would it be without consequences for the state's very *raison d'être* and historical identity and even legitimacy. However, despite the historical confusion of religion and politics in the Saudi Kingdom, Islam is increasingly becoming diverse. Voices of challenge or opposition from below to 'official' Islam are emerging. The sources of these voices will be identified and explained throughout the thesis, highlighting how the state has sought to control or influence Islamic responses from below. In the main, however, the dynamics of the relationship between Islam and the Saudi State generally remains intact. Hanbali (very often referred to by scholars as Wahhabi) Islam is bound up with the Kingdom's *raison d'être* and even *raison d'Etat*. But some adjustments have been made to shore up the House of Saud's political legitimacy, namely, by creating the long-awaited *Majlis al-Shurah* (Consultative Council in the early 1990s. Whether the Consultative Council and the emerging voices of Islam from below bode well for religious and political freedoms is not clear at the moment. This may become clearer in the future after one generation or two go through

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<sup>2</sup>For more on the Shi'a in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, see Jacob Goldberg, "The Shii minority in Saudi Arabia," in Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie (eds.), *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Josh Teitelbaum, "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 10 (August 2010).

the usual ‘democratic apprenticeship’ needed for a new political class made up of Saudis from both the Royal House (e.g., reform-minded princes, such as, amongst many others, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Prince Salman, Governor of Riyadh, and Walid bin Talal, are not averse to liberal measures of the Saudi system) and from society (e.g. non-princely caste).

The second observation regards an important caveat. It regards the tendency of students of the Middle East, including its Arab and Muslim states and societies, to ‘Orientalize’.<sup>3</sup> When writing about Arab or Muslim countries, it is always tempting to proceed from the assumption that Islam is the “master signifier” of identity and that its place in all aspects of political or ideological discourse and practice is a given. This temptation for Orientalist thinking is strong in relation to the nexus of politics and religion in Saudi Arabia, and how they collectively shape and re-shape political legitimacy, discourse, family laws, international politics, and domestic affairs. In any case, such a temptation is problematic in two ways. To resist it is to deny that the conflation of politics and religion in Saudi Arabia is empirically a fact of political life. To give in to it is to engage in reductionism. For no critical exploration of the relation of religion and politics in Saudi Arabia can be thorough without implicating equally important dynamics, which sustain and reproduce it. Such dynamics include the political economy and its hydrocarbon basis (which cultivates loyalty and patronage), and external relations, namely the nature of the ruling house’s alliance with the US and the resulting Pax-Americana that originated in the early 1990s (which tacitly accepted the nature of the politico-religious association in Saudi Arabia). All of these factors cannot obviously be placed in separate boxes as though they do not intertwine.

In order therefore to capture the nature of politico-religious discourse, and what I hold to be the resulting culture of moderation, the analysis below will therefore adopt an approach through the thesis that stresses the context of this trend. In order to appreciate the context thoroughly, I will try to account for the interplay of multiple factors, rather than adopting a mono-dimensional understanding of the question of politico-religious discourse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Such a multi-dimensional enquiry seems all the more timely given that the September 11 attacks continue to preoccupy scholars with recurring research questions. These questions concern the

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

potential for reform, the source of reform and moderation, the role of religious and political elites within such a movement, and even the very viability of a Saudi State that continues to be averse to freed debate, dissidence, power sharing, institutionalisation, rulers' accountability, and greater equity. But they regard questions about autonomy from foreign meddling in Saudi affairs, which increased following the 9/11 attacks with criticism of the association of religion and politics and even the viability of religious education and syllabi in Saudi schooling and higher education.

## **1.2 The Key Questions and Thesis 'Problematique'**

What is the nature of politico-religious discourse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the post-9/11 world today? How is the process of the 'reintellectualisation' (the term belongs to Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson) of the public sphere in Saudi Arabia producing discursive moderation and moderates? To what extent it can be argued that current discourses are constructing a 'culture of moderation' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? If so, what is the context for the rise of such a culture? These are the key questions that I shall follow in order to address the question of a culture of moderation in my thesis with special reference to Saudi Arabia.

The post-9/11 world has condemned the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to unquestioned Orientalist depictions and stigmas. The Kingdom is more or less reduced to an exporter of 'terrorists' and of a brand of Islam wrongly called in journalistic and academic writings 'Wahhabism'. Rarely, does the name 'Hanbalism', the correct name of one of Islam's four rites of Sunni jurisprudence feature when describing the nature of the religious verve and discourse in KSA. The thesis I am attempting to develop and find evidence for the discourse analysis exercise within it has a threefold research agenda: 1) Generally, to argue that KSA is neither frozen in time nor is it single or fixed as far as politico-religious discourse is concerned. Contrary to Orientalist generalizations and reductionisms, KSA is today witnessing a quiet transformation or process of renewal (*tajdid*), religiously and politically. Yet little or no scholarship has been produced about this emerging trend. Both KSA and politico-religious discourse tend to be represented as monolithic. My thesis contests this misrepresentation. One of my key objectives is to display the diversity of the politico-religious debate and fervour in KSA. I aim at exploring the full gamut of the attendant trends of innovative thought in the 'public sphere' with special reference to religion and politics. As far as this

section of my thesis is concerned, what my inquiry is seeking to do is present new evidence and knowledge at the heart of this fledgling phase of renewal. 2) The crux of this exercise is not limited to a focus on presenting retorts against Orientalist simplification of the politico-religious discourse and practice in KSA. More precisely, the aim is to engage, through the use of discourse analysis, with the discourse of renewal or (*al-khitab al-tajdidi*) in KSA. This I envisage through a systematic use of discourse analysis. The data to be subjected to this exercise will be obtained from texts (written documents, such as religious and journalistic articles as well as interviews). I shall explain this task in detail in the section on methodology. The central focus of this exercise to examine specifically the acquisition of a ‘culture of moderation’ or what is known in Islamic discourse *wasatiyya* (literal meaning is ‘moderation’). There is an almost hidden discourse, gradually giving rise to this culture of moderation, which is yet to be fully explored, analysed and appreciated by students of Saudi Arabia’s politics, society, religion and culture. This is one area where my inquiry can potentially make a significant contribution: at once addressing Orientalist theses and presenting a new thesis on the moderating discursive forces and voices quietly and surely transforming KSA. The significance of this project lies in presenting new knowledge on a topic, which remains ignored, by studying primary materials and exploring indigenous constructions of the field of both political know-how and attendant religious knowledge (and interpretation) in KSA. 3) In examining systematically the nature of the discourse and practice of what I claim to be an emerging culture of moderation, I intend to touch on the dialectics of obscurantism (I shall avoid use of the term ‘extremism’ in the rest of the thesis) and moderation. The aim of this exercise is to give a thorough contextualization of the rise of voices and forces of moderation, political and religious, in KSA. This contextualization supplements the discourse analysis to be used in thesis. In fact, without this contextualization the discourse analysis may not be complete or comprehensive. The reason is that in order to understand one set of new innovative ideas, one must fully understand and appreciate the set of ideas, on the opposite side, which fan the forces of obscurantism.

### *1.2.1 The Problematique of ‘Moderation’: Are there no Moderates in Saudi Arabia?*

At one level, the ‘problematique’ I am trying to address in this study regards the Orientalist one-sided caricaturing of Muslims, including Saudis. Daniel Pipes’ famous

phrase “there are no moderates”<sup>4</sup> demands thorough and systematic response about this assertion. Indeed, if Pipes is correct and there are no moderates, this must be analysed comprehensively. Similarly, if he is incorrect and there are moderates, and the scholarly and policy-making communities of the West and even the Arab and Muslim worlds are not aware of them, then the question must be put to bed. Obviously, I am arguing, through the case study of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that there are moderates, or more precisely that there is an incipient formation and building of an ethos of moderation (which I shall try to define below). Maybe moderates have for so long been marginalized because Arab governments have largely been inclined to accommodate non-moderates, especially on matters regarding Islamic law (which covers sensitive areas such as family law, inheritance law, custody law). The non-moderates, as opposite the moderates, from Algeria to Egypt, and including Saudi Arabia, have formed a powerful lobby and voice that governments listen to from time to time. The reason is that there is a reciprocal dependency: regimes need endorsement of the religious orthodoxy (including *ad-hoc fatwas* or politico-religious decisions) and the religious elite needs the state for rubber-stamping Islamic laws, funding religious institutions and education, and employing the graduates of the Islamic institutions. A very good example is the fact that Arab states’ war along Western armies that ousted Iraq of Kuwait in 1991 required the green light from the religious elite. This happened in Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is true, at least, of the state-dependent side of the religious elite. It does not mean there were no objections from independent and anti-state clerics.

After 9/11 and with the rise of al-Qaida activities all over the Middle East, including in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the state had to look for, fund, and accommodate publics of ‘moderates’ or ‘moderate’ forces and voices. The Kingdom was under fire from the West – critics blamed the rise of global terror on the so-called ‘Wahhabi’ creed.<sup>5</sup> And it was easy to point the finger at bin Laden as a by-product of

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<sup>4</sup> Pipes, “There are no Moderates,” in *The National Interest*, pp. 48-57.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of these are Dore Gold, *Hatred’s Kingdom*; and Stephen Schwartz, *Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror*. For more on anti-Wahhabi and Saudi bias after 9/11, See, Richard H. Curtiss & Delinda Hanley, “Israel-Firsters Wage Negative Media Campaign against the Kingdom,” in Abdul Rahman Al-Zunaidi et. al., *Saudi and Terror: Cross-Cultural Views* (Riyadh: Ghainaa Publication, 2005), pp. 362-372.

Saudi upbringing, culture and Wahhabism.<sup>6</sup> How the acts of small pockets of violent and anti-Western elements became a liability for the Kingdom and for Saudis, more generally, necessitated action on the part of the state to re-shape the public and political culture. This context is important for understanding how moderates and a culture of moderation have been promoted – with both tacit and explicit state planning. Tacitly, the ‘public sphere’ is today characterized by multi-vocal and diverse discourses of public affairs. In other words, the non-moderate voices no longer command the field of speech in the public sphere (I will also try to define this term below). This is one aspect that this study will systematically address by analyzing through discourse analysis samples of the moderate and non-moderate discourses. The abundance of new communication technologies (chat rooms, satellite TV, Internet, blogs, etc.) have all contributed to the rise of diverse, widespread, energetic and continuous discourses amongst the elites (public opinion formulators) and the public at large. What I am interested in is the discourses of the opinion formulators (clerics, official and non-official, scholars, journalists, and ruling elites). Explicitly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has today nearly 100,000 students in Western universities, men and women. This is one method used by the state to help construct a culture of moderation within Saudi Arabia. This is more plausible if one notes that Saudi Arabia is one of the very Arab states not to be subjected to Western colonialism, that is, either by direct processes or internal forces of Westernisation. What Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Morocco experienced about 70 years ago through Anglo-Franco colonial restructuring of their societies had not an equivalent in the Kingdom.

In a way, what Saudi Arabia did not experience through direct colonialism in terms of ‘moderating’ the local publics or socializing them into modes of thinking and acting amenable to acceptance of Western partnership is, more or less, even though through a specific state declaratory policy, is taking place today through the re-educating of Saudis abroad, the explosion of media and Internet revolutions, and the rise of voices of moderation. As yet, these voices are not powerful but they are accommodated and tolerated by the state, including in the leading Saudi dailies (such as ‘Al-Sharq Al-Awsat’), Satellite TV channels, in the Kingdom’s Foreign Affairs

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to the Sunni puritanical creed founded by Shaykh Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It expands on the legacy of the Hanbali School, one of Sunni Islam’s four schools of jurisprudence.

Department, the Diplomatic Academy, the religious elite, the Royal Court, and the Royal family.

My thesis addresses the question of the rise of moderates and a culture of moderation in the Kingdom in the firm belief that the process of socializing Saudis into moderation must be driven from within Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, I think reform and a process of nation-building focused on moderation can be only a gradual, and no doubt a complex, process. Telhami, Hill and their co-authors are correct in this respect:

Yet those Americans calling for reform in Saudi Arabia must bear in mind that political change cannot be imposed from the outside, and especially not by the United States. The process will be slow. In fact, a gradual approach is the only guarantee of political change: no reform process is likely to produce a positive, stable outcome without the cooperation of the monarchy, and only sustained, gradual reforms will be palatable and not immediately threatening to the current government.<sup>7</sup>

It took Western societies and states hundreds of years to realize their own cultures of moderation and sound political management. Since 9/11, there has been a wide chorus of demands from without the Kingdom for reform. Demands for reform from within the Kingdom will be examined in the third chapter. But these have always existed in the Kingdom. However, they intensified after the arrival of US troops and bases in Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s (eventually these were relocated to neighbouring Qatar, which today hosts the largest US base in the Gulf region). The events of 9/11 form the context of the rising external pressure placed on the Saudi state to reform. In this respect, the West and in particular the US applied this pressure in a reactionary way: directly responding to a flashpoint in West-Muslim relations. Plus, security was the key interest behind the push for reform in the Kingdom. This was not a push for reform for the sake of reform or for the sake of Saudi citizens. Rather, it is the security of the US and American citizens, particularly, and of course that of her Western allies, that motivated the call for reform in Saudi Arabia. There are four aspects about the push for reform from without the Kingdom which together capture the security-driven push for reform in the Kingdom. A standard reform demanded by Western individuals, organizations and governments is more inclusiveness of women. I shall return to this aspect when I specify the reforms undertaken since King Abdullah was

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<sup>7</sup> Shibley Telhami & Fiona Hill, "Does Saudi Arabia still Matter? Differing Perspectives on the Kingdom and its Oil," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2002), p. 4.

crowned ruler of the Kingdom in 2005. The other three as Telhamy and Hill explain revolve around the ongoing fear of so-called Saudi youth. Plus, there are the vital oil interests, which the West would like to see privatized, opening share-holding opportunities for oil companies in North America and Europe – in a way largely related to Western capitalist practices in the Saudi oil industry.

The Saudis will need to reform their political, educational, and economic system, not only for their own sake, but also to improve the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. If reform is rejected, then new pressures from the young, restless majority -- many of whom are unemployed and some of whom are increasingly radicalized -- will pose serious challenges internally and externally.<sup>8</sup>

The key phrase here is “increasingly radicalized.” This comes at a time of heightened tension, following 9/11, in Muslim-Western relations. In fact, the term “radicals” or “radicalized” (in some journalistic and academic circles they are described to be “ultra-conservatives”) are terms, which I avoid in this thesis for its imprecision. But as in the case of Iran, it is used to denote the religious and political hardliners in the Islamic Republic. The word “moderate” is attributed to forces that seem to be open to co-habitation and entente with Western powers, stand against terrorism, and on the whole accept social and political reform. I shall give a working definition of my own when I look at terminology below. However, the key point is that in pursuit of its own reform, the West itself, according to close observers of Saudi affairs, is called upon to pursue strong ties with the Kingdom, considered a “radical” state, at the expense of confusing distinction between, more or less, a hostile (such as al-Qaida) and friendly (e.g. the government of Saudi Arabia) “radical.”

It is one thing to have radical non-state groups that advocate and employ violence against the United States; it would be a very different matter to have a radical government employ the pulpit of Mecca, where millions come every year on pilgrimage, to set a hostile tone in the name of Islam. This prospect alone -- which seems quite realistic in Rouleau's portrait of "the most rigorous theocracy in the Islamic world," where Islamic radicals "have called into question the very legitimacy of the al Saud dynasty" -- should be enough to convince Americans that a close U.S.-Saudi relationship is in their best interest.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

I must agree that it must be the motive of self-interest that determines the inevitability of close ties with the Kingdom. However, it would be wrong to think that Saudi Arabia does not wish to sustain strong ties with the US. The Kingdom values her US ties and relations, which are so strong in terms of strategic, economic and political benefits for both. This is one reason why the historic ties with the US means that Saudi policy-makers do respond to American pressure – when cultural and religious sensitive matters are not involved or compromised. The rulers and policy-makers are also mindful of the internal powerful religious lobby and elites that cannot be ignored or totally sidelined. They can be weakened as has been gradually happening under King Abdullah. But they still have the power of the pulpits and today satellite TV, Facebook, blogs, and the Internet more generally to spread religious ideas, including criticisms. These facilities are also made available with tacit government approval to preachers considered “moderate.” These young preachers, some of whom have a technical not religious education, resemble the US Tele-evangelists (such as Ahmad Al-Shugairi).<sup>10</sup> Under the current Saudi monarch there has been increasing response to the call for reform from outside. This is one additional context for understanding the rise of a culture of moderation in the Kingdom. Key reforms by King Abdullah point to a top-down trend to go ahead with reforms that were never expected possible. And these reforms must be seen to be amongst the building blocks of the currently emerging culture of moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

However, it must be pointed out that the criticism that these reforms have not yet been institutionalized is correct. They have, as one analyst correctly states, created a “more open environment.”<sup>11</sup> It is this environment that sums up the crux of King Abdullah’s reform. Certainly when the question is asked as to “what does ‘reform’ mean in Saudi Arabia,” as Neil Patrick has done, the answer, I believe, lies in the increasing “openness”, which I consider to be a necessary condition for a culture of moderation. As Patrick himself answers his own question he notes that “reform in Saudi Arabia does not constitute a clearly articulated programme to reach a defined outcome.”<sup>12</sup> I agree with this sentiment fully. But I also disagree in that an overall

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<sup>10</sup> See the story of the rising star of a Saudi Tele-evangelist Ahmad Al-Shugairi in Bryan Denton, “Preaching Moderate Islam and Becoming a TV Star,” *The New York Times*, 2 January 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Neil Patrick, “What does ‘Reform’ Mean in Saudi Arabia?” in *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 27 July 2010, p. 1.

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

atmosphere of moderation is the centerpiece of King Abdullah's reforms since 2005. For instance, as Patrick himself notes, divergent opinions are more present in the media (owned largely by media barons from the royal house). His criticism that they constitute "different commentaries on the local and regional scene" by the royal media barons stands. However, the fact that there are different commentaries must not be belittled. They are steps towards what Patrick views to be still missing "a true debate."<sup>13</sup> This takes time and requires a supporting network of moderates and a culture of moderation. Examples of these key reforms are listed below:

- In February 2009 King Abdullah appoints a woman to his cabinet and dismisses a top cleric who is considered to be "fundamentalist."<sup>14</sup> Observers viewed this as an attempt by the Saudi monarch "to refashion the religious establishment at a time the country faces the global financial crisis and renewed threats from al-Qaeda militants;" and strengthen "the voices of modern Islamic thinkers."<sup>15</sup>
- Educational reform with new powers, resources, and autonomy given to the ministry overseeing this important sector. Largely, this is due to the fact that the West has been pushing for reform of education. As Patrick notes "the education ministry has become something of a reformist fiefdom;" this involved "some curricula and course book changes" and the creation of a well-funded institution of excellence, the "King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST)."<sup>16</sup>
- Ongoing legal reform and the establishment of a new "Supreme Court, the highest court of appeal." It is charged with re-training of judges and this should in the long term boost rule of law.<sup>17</sup>
- Moreover, steps were for the first time taken to boost the principle of judicial independence. This is viewed by analysts to be "one of the most significant

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Fleishman, "Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah adds Moderates - including a woman - to Government," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick, "What does 'Reform' Mean in Saudi Arabia?"

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

reform moves King Abdullah has made so far.”<sup>18</sup> The Supreme Court to which 9 Court of Appeal judges were appointed, and its separation from the Supreme Judicial Council (comprised of 12 jurists) has consolidated judicial independence. Under the new 2007 law, the reorganization of the judicial system weakened the role of the Ministry of Justice and overall bureaucratic interference in the administration of justice. The Ministry’s prerogatives are now exclusively the domain of the Supreme Judicial Council, and the latter’s prerogatives are transferred to the newly created Supreme Court.<sup>19</sup> Despite these positive reforms there is more that will be done to ensure that the new judicial set up tackles illegal human rights violations by the security forces, which are not approved by the state.<sup>20</sup>

- The gradual empowerment of women with the first woman ever given a ministerial portfolio in February 2009. Another won a seat in December 2009 in the elected board of the powerful Chamber of Commerce and Industry.<sup>21</sup> “Following that, the Ministry of Commerce appointed four women board members” to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.” And thanks to the overall atmosphere of openness in the Kingdom there is currently a well orchestrated campaign by many activists and organizations to secure voting rights for women by the time of the 2011 elections, originally scheduled for 2009.
- Even if they may be considered a tentative step towards reforms, the 2005 municipal elections, held the year King Abdullah was crowned, are a milestone as far as Saudi political transformation is considered. They are the first elections ever in the Kingdom, and Sadiki, for instance, considers them to bode well for future reform even though he rightly dampens optimism. He states that it is unrealistic to expect the first set of elections to herald

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<sup>18</sup> Abdullah Fakhry Ansary, “Saudi Judicial Reform and the Principle of Independence,” *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 5 May 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammed Helmy, “Human rights, Reform, and the Rule of Law in Saudi Arabia,” *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 20 October 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Jafar Alshayeb, “Women’s Rights Gain focus in Saudi Arabia,” *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 12 May 2010.

democratization.<sup>22</sup> What validates his cautioning is the frequent criticism that the partly elected and partly appointed municipal council are weak at the level of decision-making. This inefficiency is put down to three factors: the councilors are yet to understand their duties, the lack of team-work skills amongst the elected and the appointed councilors, and public apathy.<sup>23</sup>

- The creation in 2006 of the Allegiance Committee (or Institution) to vote on the fitness of future monarchs and crown princes to rule is a bold piece of reform. It could potentially develop into a higher and autonomous authority that renders succession not automatic and subject to vetting legal mechanisms. The Allegiance Committee is also empowered to select a five-member transitory council to run state affairs for one week in the event that the three princes nominated by the outgoing king do not win enough votes amongst all the key sons and grandsons of King Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud, the founder of the Kingdom.
- Last, but not least, is the National Dialogue Centre (*markaz al-hiwar al-watani*), which was created a few years ago to broaden Saudi-Saudi debate about all matters regarding public affairs. In a country where there are still no strong civil society or political parties, the centre is a forum for youth and other activists, dissidents, policy-makers, and public opinion formulators to air free opinion without fear of state reprisal. It also serves to transmit ideas from this forum to policy-makers at the highest level of the state.

After this summary, I now move on to the next section where I shall try to explain the key assumptions that inform my thesis. In it I clarify my anti-Orientalist position in this thesis. For this purpose, my second chapter, which examines the wide body of scholarship on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, seeks to focus on the Orientalist nature of scholarly discussion of the Kingdom.

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<sup>22</sup> Larbi Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections without Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), see Chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> Jafar Al-Shayib, "Saudi Local councils Struggling to Produce Results," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 18 October 2006.

### 1.3 Conceptual Framework I: Anti-Orientalism

Directly and indirectly, my thesis seeks to question Orientalist analyses on KSA. Said's work, which first addressed the ubiquity of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab writings amongst some Western historians, colonial administrators, and social scientists in general, did not look at instances of Orientalism against the Arab Gulf. A great deal, for instance, was accorded to how British administrators, such as Lord Kitchener, talked about Egypt. But little or no information is found in Said's fascinating study on KSA or, for that matter, other Arab Gulf states, for instance. Nonetheless, the key point is that Said developed and left behind an important framework for students of the Middle East, cautioning them against both generalisations and reductionisms – the two commonplace 'cardinal sins' of Orientalism as Sadiki points out in his work on Said.<sup>24</sup> For Bryan Turner<sup>25</sup>, it seems that whenever the 'West' and 'East' are coupled, contrast and difference are stressed. This is quite evident in the representations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Western scholarly and journalistic works, which I shall explain further in the next chapter. The 'West' is privileged as the sole source of enlightenment, rationality as well as of knowledge of democracy.<sup>26</sup> Again, as Sadiki remarks in his work *The Search for Arab Democracy*, 'East' or 'Orient' is paired with 'West' only for the convenience of constructing mirror images. 'Orient' is invented to highlight and celebrate, by way of contrast, what the 'West' is and is not. In such mirror images the 'non-West' is marginal to rationality, peripheral to good rule, and on the sidelines of knowledge-making. Most accounts of Muslim thought and practice, especially after 9/11, particularly, and study of the Arab Middle East, generally, expose the survival of this Orientalist line of thinking.

In this regard, one significant reductionism within the wide field of Middle East politics displays the prejudicial position of the 'Occident' as the sole source and, definitely, 'knower' of democracy, moderation, and tolerance, for instance. Examples of this type of Orientalist thinking has been explained elsewhere (e.g. Bernard Lewis, at least as Said views his scholarship). The 'Orient' – and more precisely the Middle East – is largely depicted as a consumer of ideas. That is, the ideas, ideologies, knowledge systems, and the theories invented in and by the 'Occident,' which seem to be

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<sup>24</sup> Larbi Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy: Discourses and Counter-Discourses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 140-197.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy*, pp. 149; 170; 325.

<sup>26</sup> See Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy*, pp. 367-380.

transmitted but with some resistance by Islamic forces (unlike Westernisers who are keen to adopt them, such as Kemal Atatürk in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s). The result is unequal power relations where the ‘Occident’ acquires the means of control over the ‘Orient’, and through these ideas and advocates of Westernisation, seems to sustain and reproduce such advantageous relations. Many scholars have captured the essence of these unequal relations of power, namely, those looking at them by using the postcolonial framework (and the 1980s the proponents in Southern and Latin America of the so-called ‘dependency school’).<sup>27</sup> To an extent, there is ground to argue that the unequal ‘West’-‘East’ relations are comparable with the core-periphery relations mapped out by the dependency school in order to explain processes of exploitation, dependence, and hegemony.

Primarily, the study I am trying to develop here appreciates the anti-Orientalist ontology through which scholars such as Said, Maxine Rodinson (regarding whether Weber’s ‘Protestant Ethic’ has no equivalent in Islam), Bryan Turner (on the question of Western rationality in general, and the question of Marx’s depictions of Eastern ‘modes of productivity) and Sadiki (in relation to Western democracy and democratisation) seek to question the various dichotomies constructed about ‘West’-‘East’ relations. This leads to the production of standard dichotomies, Sadiki points out (modern vs. traditional, democratic vs. authoritarian, civilised vs. barbarian, etc.). This is one reason why he notes that the key Orientalist scholars working on Islam or political Islam tend to search for an essence within either (See Table 1). In relations to my case study – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – I seek to apply Said’s ideas by highlighting Orientalist thinking towards Saudi Arabia. Through this exercise, and by examining the nature of the emerging discourses and counter-discourses of moderation in Saudi Arabia, I aim to show that there is a brand of local knowledge that is unknown to most Western, and even Arab, students of the religion, politics and society in this country. So the type of knowledge that is used to elaborate a new public morality, and a multivocal public discourse, and, subsequently, a new trend of thought and intellectual and political building blocks of a new culture or ethos of moderation relies on local sources, voices, and forces. This is one reason why I argue that the adjective liberal

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<sup>27</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Dagamar Engels & Shula Marks (eds.), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London: British Academic Press, 1994).

(small government, laissez-faire, largely secular politics, etc.) does not resonate well within Saudi Arabia. An American liberal harbours a set of values that do not readily translate well when assessing the value system of a Saudi liberal (still champions role of the state in political and economic management, preference for a mixed economy, acceptance of role of religion in society and politics, etc.). This is one reason why I have chosen to speak of ‘moderate’ discourse or a discourse of ‘moderation’, which I will define in the section on language in my thesis.

**Table 1** Key Islamists’ Understandings of ‘Fundamentalism’/Islamic Movements<sup>28</sup>

Scholar	View of ‘political Islam’	Critique/Evaluation
Eric Davis, 1984 <sup>29</sup>	“Islamic radicalism”: stresses revolutionary zeal	Not nuanced as if radical change is singular for all forces of political Islam, with stress put on ‘militancy’, i.e. negative
R. Hrair Dekmejian, 1985 <sup>30</sup>	“Fundamentalism” used interchangeably with Arabic translation “ <i>usuliyyah</i> ”	Distinction between ‘passive’ and ‘militant’ strands with stress on ‘regenerative’ capacity
Emmanuel Sivan, 1985 <sup>31</sup>	“Fundamentalism” is a continuum with two poles: “conservative” and “extreme” radicals	Continuum idea is innovative and captures nuances but ignores overlap between ‘conservative’ and ‘extreme’ ‘radicals’
Olivier Roy, 1988 <sup>32</sup>	“Fundamentalism” equated with “Islamism” as ‘neo-fundamentalism’: ever changing zealous and revolutionary forces	Dynamism and difference are stressed; tends towards negative labeling: ‘neo-fundamentalism’ is not any clearer than ‘fundamentalism’

<sup>28</sup> Source: Larbi Sadiki, “Political Islam: Theoretical Underpinnings,” paper given at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)/UNDP, 20 March 2009, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>29</sup> Eric Davis, “Ideology, Social Class and Islamic Radicalism in Modern Egypt,” in Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 134-157.

<sup>30</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), pp. 3-7.

<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 49-51; 183-184.

<sup>32</sup> Olivier Roy, “Has Islamism a Future in Afghanistan?” in William Maley, (ed.), *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

Ervand Abrahamian, 1989 <sup>33</sup>	“Fundamentalism” is made up of both liberal and radical forces	Boxes ‘political Islam’ into neat groups of radicals: clerical, lay-religious, and secular. ‘Clerical populism’ ignores historiography of Islam’s learned scholars
Martin Marty & Scott Appleby, 1991 <sup>34</sup>	“Fundamentalism” refers to anti-state politicization	Dilutes spiritual or religious ethos of political Islam
Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser, 1995 <sup>35</sup>	“fundamentalism” denotes “mutual siege”	Lacks contextualization; use of ‘siege’: generalization and imprecise abstraction
Youssef Choueiri, 1997 <sup>36</sup>	“Fundamentalism” denotes radicalized revivalism with totalitarian tendencies	‘Ideologizes’ political Islam in a fixed way; stresses sequential linearity
John Esposito, 1999 <sup>37</sup>	“Fundamentalism” is dynamic; subject to increased ‘radicalization’: “revivalism” to “neo-revivalism” to “neo-revivalism” to extremism	Ignores parallel process of increased ‘moderation’, and the interplay between processes leading to ‘extremism’ and moderation
Barry Rubin, 2002 <sup>38</sup>	“Fundamentalism” refers to oscillation between revolutionary militancy and outright terrorism	Apocalyptic view, that leans towards a ‘martial’ view of all things Islamic
Gilles Kepel, 2002 <sup>39</sup>	“Fundamentalism” <i>qua</i> ‘jihad’-bent movement is dying; transition to ‘post-Islamism’	Captures idea of dynamism; but Kepel’s work is yet to be deconstructed properly for its generalisation and Orientalism

As the above summary in Table 1 shows, the forces of Islam, Muslim discourses or Islamists (forces seeking a role in public affairs by politicising Islam) remain the subject of Orientalist constructions. One critique found in the illustration of Orientalist

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<sup>33</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), pp. 40-49.

<sup>34</sup> Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby, “Foreword,” in James Piscatori, (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991), pp. xixiv.

<sup>35</sup> Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder: Westview, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Youssef Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Washington: Pinter, 1997), pp. xvi-64.

<sup>37</sup> John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Trail of Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); also, see by, Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

depictions of these forces is the tendency to ignore what Sadiki describes “processes of moderation,” which is of relevance to this inquiry. These depictions tend to ‘box’ forces of political Islam into categories such as ‘radicals’. They also stress the ‘martial’ component of these forces and of Islam generally, as shown in the summary. There is definitely a thread that connects the pre and post-9/11 Orientalist renditions and readings of political Islam: namely, proscribing Islamists, an objective that the gurus of so-called ‘Islamic extremism’ or ‘Islamic neo-Fascism’ seem to profess. And as Said points out, the Occident produces Orientalist thinking because it can, and because it is supported and funded by power structures deeply rooted and established in Western political and academic institutions, public and private. After 9/11, this has been heightened owing to the vast increase in Western power establishments in funds allocated to taking care of security – both as a subject of study and measures to counter what Esposito once deftly called the ‘Islamic threat.’

On the intellectual level, little has changed in the ‘covering of Islam’ by Western public intellectuals and establishment (see Table 1). The assertion by Daniel Pipes that what he neatly labels “fundamentalist Islam” should be treated as “a narrow, aggressive twentieth century ideological movement”<sup>40</sup> may already have trickled into the brand of security-driven research of the so-called Islamic ‘radicalisation’ in the twenty-first century, threatening to remain a permanent mantra in the ‘Islam’-‘West’ relations. For instance, the US foreign policy-making apparatus is guilty of this oversimplification and hostility vis-à-vis Islamists.<sup>41</sup> This tendency to paint all ‘political Islam’ with a single brush rekindles the passion for Orientalism. By declaring that “it is misguided policy to distinguish between moderate and extremist fundamentalists,”<sup>42</sup> Pipes reproduces a typical example of generalisation that Edward Said cautions against in his Orientalism.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it is a clear illustration of the bottom line of Said’s work, that is, that generalising is generic to Orientalising. Islamists may share a common objective or aspiration. That is, the drive to emulate the Medina model or city-state polity built by the Prophet Muhammad in the sixth century AD as a community bound together by

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<sup>40</sup> Pipes, “There are no Moderates,” p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur Lowrie, “The Campaign against Islam and American Foreign,” *Middle East Policy*, 4 (September 1995).

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Pipes, “There are no Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam,” *The National Interest* (Fall 1995), p. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

Qur'anic principles of legality, equality, compassion and organised according to ethics of consultation (*shura*).

Orientalist readings produce parallelism when it comes to situating Islamists in relation to democracy. Representations of Islamists tend to denude them of all affinity with humanist values. One observer writes that “Islam does not recognize coexistence as a basic doctrine. Coexistence goes against Islam’s sense of world order.”<sup>44</sup> In the same vein, another notes that “an Islamic state as espoused by most of its proponents is simply incompatible with values and truths that Americans and most Westerners today hold to be self-evident.”<sup>45</sup> The same commentator adds that the Islamists do not have a complete understanding of democracy, specifically as majority rule without minority rights: Islamic law gives minorities “protected not equal status.”<sup>46</sup> This brand of Orientalist ‘knowing’ of Islam and Islamists repeats nineteenth-century binary classifications that used negative terms such as ‘barbaric’, ‘primitive’ or ‘uncivilised’.<sup>47</sup>

Generally, traditional Orientalists maintain that Muslim societies have historically lacked the institutions or the key condition for democracy: civil society. Western political theory stresses the necessary presence of civil society for resistance by society of arbitrary state power and for the birth of democratic institutionalised politics and dispersed power.<sup>48</sup> Traditional Orientalists dismiss politically organised Muslim social forces as being in the main personalistic and informal. That is, absence of the building blocks of ‘civic culture’ necessary for the production of functional and modern and rational political systems. Moreover, according to this view informal and personalistic organisation is incapable of carrying out to the task of challenging authority. To the contrary, the pattern of political and civil organisation in Muslim societies lends itself to promoting “clientage network whose members traded their loyalty for the patronage and protection of some notable.”<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, the resulting political behaviour is bound to an ‘Islam’ in which “despotism” is “implicit in [its] very

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<sup>44</sup> In Lowrie, “The Campaign against Islam in America,” p. 214.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Miller, “The Challenge of Radical Islam,” *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (Summer 1993), p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy*, pp. 140-197.

<sup>48</sup> John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (New York: Verso, 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Yahya Sadowski, “The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate,” *Middle East Report* (July-August 1993), pp.15-16.

core.”<sup>50</sup> The indictment here is clear and categorical: “The totalistic character of the faith seemed to imply that only a totalitarian state could put its dogmas into practice.”<sup>51</sup> This “totalistic character” is generally summed up in the permanence of a culture of political passivity throughout Muslim history. The neo-Orientalists’ take differs. They contend that there had always been a split in medieval Muslim realms between the state and society. The reason, it is argued, is the Muslim learned scholars’ reluctance or objection to endorse political power. This they did on the account that “secular rulers” were prone “to corruption and despotism.”<sup>52</sup> Sympathy to this position amongst the Muslim public meant secular rulers could command only “tepid and intermittent support.”<sup>53</sup> This split, they note, is the hallmark of contemporary Muslim states and societies. Flowing from this is a depiction of Muslim politics as being essentially marked by tribalism, disjunctive state-society relations, passive subjects, and static statecraft except in times of dynastic challenges and change of power-holders. This Orientalist position of Muslim politics, mainly being hostile to state-making, civility, or moderation, finds expression in the work of a number of neo-Orientalists. Patricia Crone is a classic example: “Hence the political pattern that accompanied this disjuncture was one that oscillated between extremes of despotism and anarchy on the part of the state, and ritual avoidance and factionalism on the part of the notables.”<sup>54</sup>

#### **1.4 A Conceptual Framework II: Language and Terminology**

What do I mean by ‘moderation’? This is the key concept that I must define carefully for the sake of clarity throughout my thesis. Aristotle comes to mind. He was one of the first Greek philosophers to place value on ‘moderation’ and to consider it a virtue in its own right. Aristotle was against excesses in anything. A complete life is one that regulates the excesses, for instance, of courage or cowardice according to a given situation. Too much of either leads to deficiency in human character. Moderation is a key idea that modern Western political systems and societies adopted from Aristotle (in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Patricia Crone, *Slaves and Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 88.

Politics) who as Alexander the Great's teacher tried to stress the notion of moderation in political rule. passed on to.

This tradition survives and a brief survey of literature leaves no doubt as to the importance of moderation in politics. B. C. Smith, for instance, argues that the values and orientations found to be associated with the stability of democracy are moderation, co-operation, bargaining and accommodation. He states that moderation and co-operation “imply toleration, pragmatism, willingness to compromise, and civility in political discourse.”<sup>55</sup> Linked to this is the element of time, which Smith considers to be “often... a critical variable here...” in institutionalizing the value of moderation.<sup>56</sup> In her examination of Islamist movements active in the contest of politics, Tamara Coffman Wittes offers a similar definition of moderation. In her view, the determining factor of “relative moderation” is “attitude toward political pluralism.”<sup>57</sup> She goes on to explain what pluralistic values imply in the political game: whether a movement views itself as only one of “a number of different tendencies, and without special prerogatives.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, according to this pluralistic criterion the willingness of a movement to accept electoral defeat is an important attitude. Since a recurring suspicion is that Islamists tend to be exclusivist, there is a question about whether Islamist leaders are inclined to enter into broader coalitions “with non-Islamist movements on behalf of common goals.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, she stretches her description of moderation to include Islamist willingness to respect and be part of a political system in which they have no power. The type of moderation she defines relates to the attitudes needed for democratic politics with stress on the values of “pragmatism,” and “compromise.”<sup>60</sup> Gupta Pushkar argues that one distinction between “moderate religious parties” and “extremist parties” is the former's inclination “towards inclusion and consensus in their relationship with other religious communities or sects.” The latter's tendencies are towards “strong majoritarian impulses and” exclusion “towards other religious communities as well as

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<sup>55</sup> B. C. Smith, *Understanding World Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Palgrave, 2003), p. 265.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Tamara Wittes Cofman (2008) “Three kinds of movements,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3(2008), pp.10; 7-12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

those who do not subscribe to their interpretation of religion.”<sup>61</sup> For this reason, Pushkar distinguishes between ideological and strategic moderation:

We must therefore suggest two kinds of moderation: ideological and strategic. Ideological moderation indicates genuine dilution of core foundations of a political party’s ideology, whether or not it is the result of political learning, recognition of electoral and other constraints or other factors. Strategic moderation is entirely opportunistic in that it does not reflect ideological change within the party in question.<sup>62</sup>

Robert Springborg referring to the situation in Turkey views moderation as accommodation as well as acceptance by others, for accommodation to be based on mutuality.<sup>63</sup> This is one reason he considers moderation to depend on context. In this respect he notes that, to apply Pushkar’s notion of strategic moderation, that what he describes “radical” political forces “are for the most part still present, but sitting on the political sidelines presumably waiting for a return of conditions that will favour them rather than Muslim democrats.”<sup>64</sup> He adds that this weakens moderation, and subsequently reform in general.<sup>65</sup>

To these elements from the previous definitions, one must add a short reference to Habermas. In his well-know classic text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he introduces the concept of “public sphere.”<sup>66</sup> In referring to this term, I do not in any way use it with the kind of historical baggage that goes with it, namely, its European bourgeois origin. No such social stratum exists in Saudi Arabia. I use it simply to denote the realm of public affairs, involving both state and society and the interactions involving the two sides in any environment. But I find even if in a minimalist way Habermas’s concern with democratic politics that offer opportunities for all people to be involved in public debate very relevant to the notion of moderation I

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<sup>61</sup> Gupta, M. Pushkar, “Between Moderation and Extremism: Religious Parties in Chile, India, and Turkey,” first draft, Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, USA, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Springborg, (2007) ‘Political Islam and Europe views from the Arab Mediterranean States and Turkey’, in M. Emerson & Richard Youngs, (eds.), *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy: Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean*, (London: CEPS, 2007), pp.160-184

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: MIT Press, 1989).

want to develop and apply in my thesis. In particular, the stress Habermas puts on the general environment that allows for two political ingredients, which make a public sphere viable: Firstly, “rational critical debate about public issues” by all citizens or “private individuals”; and secondly, the value that “arguments not social status or traditions determine decisions.”<sup>67</sup> The elements of the ongoing public discussion highlights mutual acceptance or acceptance of people whose views, creeds or ideologies differ as well as the idea of equality between private citizens with reasonability of arguments is the criterion of what ideas and decisions are adopted or rejected. This is very important especially in states like Saudi Arabia where still status and tradition determine political identity and political membership.

From the above definitions I adopt the following working definition of moderation. It is made up of four elements: a/ *acceptance of pluralism* (in Arabic *ta'ddudiyya*), not necessarily of political parties, which do not exist in the Kingdom. I mean by this plurality of ideas. b/ *Dialogue*, which I adopt from the idea of public debate being accessible to all developed by Habermas. This is vital for societies still in the process of nation and state-building and where political institutionalization is still limited. c/ from Pushkar I adopt the notion of *ideological moderation* in the sense that compromise is essential for common political values and goals in a stable political system. d/ Coffman's idea of *respect of the rules of the political game* is another value that I consider to be relevant to moderation.

Three of these four components will be used as criteria for evaluating moderation in the discourse of actors from both society and the state. These three criteria are: a/ *acceptance of pluralism*; b/ *ideological moderation*; and c/ *respect of the rules of the political game*. I have dropped dialogue for the simple reason that it seems to recur a great deal in Muslim discourse of all political issues related to reform. It is a term that is widely used in all discussions whether these relate to political participation and inclusiveness or respect of laws. I have left it out to avoid confusion since the term has multiple use in Islamic language and does not require special treatment because multiple and repeated use of it makes it almost ‘ordinary’ as a political value.

So what is text? What is discourse? In this study text refers to meaning embedded in written or spoken forms of communication. The sum of texts or inter-

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-148.

textuality combining constantly evolving significations and meanings embedded within all kinds of texts, written and spoken, in a specific context and including the interpreter or author's own understanding of the meanings communicated to her through informants or through document analysis, for instance. Discourse is therefore complex as Van Dijk argues.<sup>68</sup> And this complexity, which involves a variety of interactions and meanings means that discourse is open to misinterpretation and manipulation for all kinds of reasons -- such as ideological, political or propagandist reasons. In this study, I have mentioned for instance how 'strategic moderation' and 'ideological moderation' differ. The former, for instance, inevitably involves manipulation of spoken or written discourse. The role of the discourse analyst is therefore very challenging in understanding the context of communication and the meanings resulting from it.

I shall now go on to describe my methodology and research design.

## **1.5 Methodological Framework**

I begin this section by revisiting my key questions for the purpose of linking them to my methodology. I have proposed to address three interconnected questions. These are: What is the nature of politico-religious discourse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the post-9/11 world today? How is the process of "reintellectualisation" (the term belongs to Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson) of the public sphere in Saudi Arabia producing discourses of moderation as well as moderates? To what extent it can be argued that current discourses are constructing a 'culture of moderation' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? The common term that reappears in all three questions is discourse. It is through and within discourse that I am seeking to answer these questions which all touch on the question of 'moderation.' The first question defines a Saudi specificity: the fact that religion and politics intertwine. I have explained that this results from the nature of the state, which (Chapter three looks specifically at the politico-religious discourse in relation to reform) had its origins in the skills and leadership in a way of the two 'founding fathers' of Saudi statehood: the religious founder is Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the political founder Amir Muhammad Ibn Saud. No such thing a secular discourse exists in Saudi Arabia. It has no grounds in Saudi scholarship or in the country's history of political thought.

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<sup>68</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, *News as Discourse* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988).

Islam has always shaped the politics of the Kingdom. Hence the use of the term ‘politico-religious’ denotes this specificity in a country which (like the UK) still has no written constitution, and furthermore claims the Qur’an, the Noble Book of Islam, to be its constitution. I am claiming – as the date in my research site suggests – that there is an ongoing process of “reintellectualisation.” The term as used in this thesis refers to the renewal of discourse (*khitab*) in the Kingdom. What is ‘new’ in this movement of ‘renewal’ of discourse is the ‘moderation’ effect that is impacting on debates within the public sphere. Religious forces are gradually accommodating non-religious discourses, and less religious discourses are increasingly becoming respectful of the discourses of religious moderates. Eickelman and Anderson use the term to describe the rising Muslim public sphere by mentioning three important dimensions: a/ to be autonomous of the state, and more relevant to my study case, happening “at the intersections of religious, political, and social life.”<sup>69</sup> b/ The Muslim public sphere (since it is not secular in the Western sense) it tends nonetheless to be “discursive” and “participative.” c/ The “reintellectualisation”, which from my own point of view means the rise of new moderate discourses or new discourses of moderation with messages of renewal, is described by Eickelman and Anderson to also point to “presenting Islamic doctrine and discourse in accessible and vernacular terms.”<sup>70</sup> I add to their descriptions of the new discourses the adjective ‘moderate.’ Even the fact that the language itself has changed and made accessible is a sign of moderation and willingness to reach to wider audiences and connect with as many discourses as possible. Therefore one assumption is that moderation is the key substance of reintellectualisation of public debate within Saudi Arabia.

In line with the above, the stress on discourse makes this study more compatible with qualitative<sup>71</sup> than quantitative methodology. The research site – Saudi Arabia’s state and civil society – poses limitations on quantitative research the dominance of which is today being reduced and challenged.<sup>72</sup> Reliance on polls, surveys, in a country where all records are state-controlled and with no polling traditions and limited

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<sup>69</sup> Dale Eickelman & Jon Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 1-16.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, “Qualitative research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9, (2006), pp. 455-476.

<sup>72</sup> Larry M. Bartels, “Some Unfulfilled Promises of Quantitative Imperialism,” in H. Brady & D. Collier (eds.), *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 69-74.

transparency, is very difficult and unreliable. Permission for these research methods are vetted very closely by the state and most respondents prefer to engage with investigators through debate and discussion. Plus, there is wide-ranging written data to supplement forms of spoken discourse. This has influenced my preference for using discourse analysis. Not less important is the fact that an investigation into the rise of moderate discourses would necessitate an investigation and interpretation into the meanings of moderation in the discourses produced by various actors, whether they are stated-affiliated or autonomous.

Why a qualitative research methodology? Apart from the difficulties described above that would surely pose a major obstacle for the writing of a thesis on a sensitive issue – moderation and reform – there are advantages and strengths that would result from using it. At least four must be stated and they all justify my preference to use a qualitative methodology. Firstly, qualitative research is embedded in historical and interactional mode of thinking according to Denzin and Lincoln. The historical and contextual advantage in applying this method is due to the ability of researcher to interact with the individuals whose ideas and actions, in the private or public sphere, shape “a particular historical moment.” This is one of the aims I have stated in the thesis is to gather data by interacting with select actors whose ideas, actions and discourses today seem to shape the rise of moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, the role given to authorial agency makes the researcher a dynamic participant in qualitative research. The author involves the data through explanation and interpretation of meaning through analysis of that data, whether written or spoken. Moreover, the authorial agency enables the researcher to “draw upon [one’s] own experiences as [an additional] resource in their inquiries.”<sup>74</sup> This appeals to myself as someone who has worked as a royal advisor and have experience of my own, which will help me process the data, interpret it as well as interpret embedded within it with authority since I have a background in state politics (when I served in the Saudi Embassy in London from 2002 to 2005) and private politics (since I have worked as a royal advisor to His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al-Faisal). My work as an advisor gave me unique access to data and personalities, and made me witness to many happenings. So my solid understanding of Saudi politics places me in a position to interact with the interviewees as well as with

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<sup>73</sup> Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (London: Sage, 1998), p. XI.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

the data I collect from the various interviews. By contrast with qualitative research methodology, quantitative methods tend to exclude the researcher whose ideas are not allowed to compromise the data or its analysis. Through the access and knowledge my position offers me, I have already made preliminary assessments of the research site by talking to a number of potential interviewees. I was able to gather written documents and sit in religious seminars by leading learned scholars of Islam. I held similar meetings with learned scholars of Islam, judges, teachers and civil servants whose views would be an important source for this study.

These initial interactions and meetings have been encouraging to continue with this project on the rise of moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I needed to ensure that the research and the research site are viable, and that they can support my work on moderation. Thirdly, and connected with this advantage, is the fact that the qualitative researcher is in a position to “think reflectively ...and biographically.”<sup>75</sup> Lastly, qualitative methodology’s “empirical strategies”, such as interviews which I have planned as one main instrument for gathering a large part of the data for this study, have an important advantage: “to make connections among lived experience, larger social and cultural structures, and the here and now.” The use of written and spoken data in a specific time framework results in informative and solid analysis only when connections are made between them as well as between them and the author. This mixing of different sources of data in this exploratory study of moderation is well suited to the task of making connections through discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis in this study is in a nutshell the interpretation of ‘moderation’ as a public ethos – way of thinking and acting in the public sphere – by looking at written and spoken data obtained from official and non-official actors in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is a methodology that is used by linguists as well as sociologists or political scientists. The work of Fairclough<sup>76</sup> and Van Dijk<sup>77</sup> are amongst the more established. They apply it to the study of media reporting of migration issues and the content of racism in such reporting, for instance. The task of discourse analysis is specifically the interpretation of forms of communication, written documents and

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: the Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995).

<sup>77</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, (ed.) *Discourse as Structure and Process* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

speech such as interviews, by looking at them within their social, political or cultural contexts.<sup>78</sup> Moderation in Saudi Arabia may differ from its various meanings in other contexts. It is in a way an Islamic concept. The aim of the Prophethood or ‘message’ of the Arab messenger Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) is to create a moderate community (*ummatan wasata*) as in the Qur’an.<sup>79</sup> In this study I have defined moderation through the use of criteria I explained above. Its interpretation through discourse analysis will be through an attempt to see how the informants understand moderation in relation to acceptance of pluralism, ideological moderation and respect of the rules of the political game. Through these three criteria I am trying to explore the meaning given to moderation in a variety of discourses within the 9/11 context and the context of ‘reintellectualisation’ of Saudi society and public sphere. I have mentioned that my sample population of informants will come from statist and non-statist sources and actors. Here I want to take this a step further and re-name the two types of (as well as sources of response on moderation) discourse ‘*pragmatic*’ (accommodating of the three criteria) and ‘*puritanical*’ (hostile or understands moderation through reference to another set of cultural or political criteria). The aim is then to find out the meanings given to ‘moderation’ in ‘pragmatic’ and ‘puritanical’ discourses. So the study does not assume that ‘pragmatic’ or ‘puritanical’ meanings are confined within or limited to the official/top-down/state-affiliated and not the non-official/bottom-up/societal discourses. It would be interesting to find out whether ‘moderation’ exists ‘trans-laterally’ or across political and social strata and platforms (official and non-official). Table 2 sums up the map of the discourse analysis task described above.

**Table 2** Map of Discourse Analysis of ‘Moderation’

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Discourse for Moderation</b>	<b>Discourse against Moderation</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>
1. Acceptance of pluralism	✓ Pragmatic	✓ Puritanical	1. Official/statist: Written + Spoken
2. Ideological moderation	✓ Pragmatic	✓ Puritanical	2. Non-official Written + Spoken
3. Respect of Rules	✓ Pragmatic	✓ Puritanical	

<sup>78</sup> Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1983), pp. 2-14.

<sup>79</sup> The Qur’anic verse states: “Thus we have made you a community ‘*wasata*’ [moderate; sometimes translated, justly balanced],” in Qur’an: 2:143.

To solidify the use and justification of discourse analysis I wish to stress once again the relevance of its use in this study for the purpose of “...seek[ing] to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular...perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly...”<sup>80</sup> It is the construction of meaning in relation to the concept of ‘moderation’ and how such constructions are made that this study focuses on. In this case, it is to find out whether the overall meaning given to moderation takes place according to ‘pragmatic’ or a ‘puritanical’ thinking. The context within which meaning is constructed points to power relations, which also must not be overlooked in interpreting meaning. King Abdullah’s reforms represent a top-down and statist type of practices, carrying weight and using language which is not hesitant. They provide an important context for the emergence of the discourses to be analysed in this thesis. Unlike the King, those speaking without the cover of the crown and the state think carefully about what kind of speech and, subsequently, meaning they produce. This dimension of discourse being tied to a system of power relations makes the use of discourse analysis very suited to the objective of understanding the production of meaning and the context of meaning. This linkage between discourse and power results from Foucault’s influence, which discourse analysts have made very good use of.<sup>81</sup> Related to this point about the use of discourse analysis in this study is the two advantages of 1) understanding how social “events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power;” and 2) the ability to “explore how...these relationships between discourse and society [are] a factor securing power and hegemony.”<sup>82</sup> This is one reason why the reflective analysis( in chapter 7) of the discourse analysis of the interview materials in chapters 5 and 6 aims at bringing into the analysis the dimension of language and meaning in order to understand fully the importance of the ‘pragmatic’ and the ‘puritanical’ discourses of moderation.

The authorial agency and the author’s won understanding of how ‘moderation’ is produced as a meaning and as a set of related power relations will be very useful in terms of ending the thesis with theoretical assumptions (grounded theory as opposite applying a specific theoretical framework in the thesis) about ‘moderation’, and a ‘culture of moderation’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the future. The use of very

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<sup>80</sup> R. Batstone, “Grammar in Discourse: Attitude and Deniability,” in G. Cook and B. Seidlhofer, (eds.), *Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 198; [197-213].

<sup>81</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989).

<sup>82</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), p. 135.

minimalist ‘grounded theory’<sup>83</sup> in this study is framed by defining in a general sense the features of two categories (‘pragmatic’ vs. ‘puritanical’) of discourse in relation to ‘moderation’. In particular, it is the extent to which these two categories inform the author about the meanings given to moderation: for or against the acceptance of pluralism, ideological moderation and rule of the political game. How these two categories are embedded in existing power relations is in itself another way of deriving general assumptions about the discourse of ‘moderation’ in the Kingdom.

### 1.5.1 Sources of Data

The above map is suited to the research design I am proposing to undertake this study. I have defined moderation as not to leave this important dimension of the research open-ended. The three criteria noted in Table 2 frames the parameters of the inquiry, helping me develop a precise set of questions for my semi-structured empirical task when during the research fieldwork for the purpose of conducting interviews. The minimalist set of questions for the fieldwork interview on the three criteria will be repeated for all informants. This will help me record the variety of responses for the same questions, and noting down the similarities and differences, and the extent to which they denote ‘pragmatic’ or ‘puritanical’ positions in relation to moderation. As the interviews will be semi-structured, the ‘un-fixed’ questions will be determined by the responses to the ‘fixed’ questions and the overall context of the interaction with the interviewees. Interviews are therefore one vital source of information for the task of discourse analysis. My other data source will be written texts (mostly articles, from newspapers or blogs and speeches) by known intellectuals belonging to the pragmatic and the puritanical trends.

The variety of sources is a good tool for cross-verification of responses on moderation. Since the task will obviously start with reading and analysis of the written data, then that will give me the chance to formulate ideas about where the various informants stand on the question of moderation. Should interviews return a different response, the interview would be the right place to clarify difference in position or response. Interviews are an invaluable source of information in an inquiry like this. However, they can be too staged and risk being unnatural or intimidating means of

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<sup>83</sup> B.G. Glaser & A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (New York: Aldine, 1967).

gathering information. I was obliged by ethics of the research fieldwork to inquire and seek permission as to what is the best way for recording the data from my informants, which preferred note-taking not recorded interviews. There is a tendency in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has an oral tradition, for people to speak more freely when not recorded. There is still fear that recorded information might end up in the hands of the state police when the information discussed may be sensitive. I have years of experiences in public communication and I am familiar with the local and cultural etiquette when it comes to what goes and does not in situations like these. I have relied on this personal experience to ensure access to informants and data.

I have had access thanks to my advisory post. I have had on hundreds of occasions learnt the art of communication with official and non-official individuals and groups. My origins in the Qaseem, in the Kingdom's Northern region, have given me an invaluable experience through the attendance of religious seminars or circles of learning (*halaqat*). I have also attended the activities and seminars of the Tableegh, an apolitical Islamic movement focused on *da'wa* (spiritual reform and religious preaching). This has enabled me to acquire skills specific to understanding religious discourses (*al-khitab al-dini*). Moreover, it has helped me establish relations amongst the community of the religious scholars, which is an important elite in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This in a way has been aided by my relation to one of the top learned scholars of Islam (my maternal uncle) and a high cleric sitting on the supreme religious council, which reports directly to the king and decides the direction of religious reform or its limits. This contact was partly useful when conducting the interviews, as well as in getting advice on which senior clerics to interview and learn about their position towards and discourse of moderation. However, I went about my research and interviews professionally by keeping my identity and relation to my uncle hidden. This was vital to ensure information obtained was not compromised by knowledge of my relation to him.

Lastly, as someone who was highly positioned to obtain access, I benefited a great deal from visits to official religious institutions in the two holy shrines of Islam, places, I visited on numerous religious occasions. I had also visited the special department for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, known by the name of or religious police (*al-mutawwa'*), and having acquaintances there makes this institution, which was relatively weakened under King Abdullah, a potential source of information. Connections in the country's important Supreme Council of Judges, which has

administered over the justice system for a long time. It has recently been reformed and this context is itself a good reason to see how the reforms impacted on the perception and practice of moderation. I have contacts in the municipalities elected in 2005, and including responses from elected municipality would bring into the analysis an important set of ideas and opinions to my study. Lastly, the Consultative Council (*majlis al-shura*), the equivalent of a parliamentary body, has highly educated deputies and a wide cross opinion which proved to be beneficial to the inquiry.

The above mix of indirect (not included in the analysis) and direct (used as source of primary evidence) sources have offered the research a rich range of data to support my empirical inquiry into the meanings of moderation in Saudi Arabia.

## 1.6 Thesis Outline

In addition to the current chapter (*Saudi Arabia after 9/11: A Framework for Exploring the Rise of Moderation in Public Discourse*) in which I define my key questions, problematique, key concepts and methodological framework, I have six chapters. The second (*The 'Orientalisation' of Saudi Arabia: A Critical Reflection on Orientalist Constructions of the Kingdom*) surveys the wide body of scholarship on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, focusing specifically on how it is 'constructed,' paying particular attention to 'Orientalisation' (Said's term) and Orientalism. This exercise sets the scene for the remainder of the analysis and the thesis in general. What is particularly interesting in this chapter is how Saudi Arabia is constructed as a place where there is rigid orthodoxy, hostility to reform and change, and extremism not moderation. As mentioned before, little has been written about Orientalist scholarship on the Arab Gulf. So this chapter adds new knowledge about Orientalism in relation to this region.

Chapter three (*The Impact of Wahhabism on Religion and Politics and Politicisation in Saudi Arabia*) examines the close relationship of politics and religion in the Kingdom, and looks at the politico-religious origins of the Saudi state with its Wahhabi identity. Chapter four (*Reintellectualisation: A Contextualisation of Discourses and Counter-Discourses in Saudi Arabia*) initiates the analytical section of the thesis, focusing on the process of 'reintellectualisation' and its impact on reform and pluralisation of discourse. against the background of 'reintellectualisation'. In this chapter, this background is explained, by highlighting discursive unity and tension, and

the impact of ‘reintellectualisation’ and its attendant discourses. Moreover, through this chapter, I try to explore how reform is sought and validated by dissidents and other groups active in society. Two groups are identified: a/ the loyal opposition and how they validate ‘protest’ and what is the specific content of their demands; b/ the more serious opposition whose demands leads to a state of mutual hostility with the ruling elite and the Saudi state in general. This analysis is important for understanding the dynamics, contexts and language of reform and in the leadup to the discourse analysis of the pragmatist and puritanical discourses in chapters five and six.

Chapter five (*Construction of Moderation in Saudi Arabia: A Discourse Analysis of the Pragmatic Trend*) examines the discourse of the pragmatist, by using primary data obtained from interviews and texts by intellectuals affiliated with the trend. Through the interpretation of what meaning is given to moderation using the three criteria (pluralism, ideological moderation, and respect of the rules of political game), this chapter seeks to understand the perception and content of moderation by this trend of thought.

Chapter Six (*Construction of Moderation in Saudi Arabia: A Discourse Analysis of the Puritanical Trend*) repeats the same exercise done in the previous chapter but this time by looking at discourse of the puritanical trend. Again the exercise uses primary data obtained through interviews and texts by intellectuals or opinion-formulators closely affiliated with this trend. The same three criteria will be applied in the analysis of the written discourses as well as data obtained through the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter seven (*A Reflection on Moderation in Saudi Arabia*) brings together the findings of chapters five and six. The reflection looks at the language and content of the two trends of thought as a summary of the analysis in the previous two chapters. The reflective exercise considers the similarities and the differences in terms of the language used, the various meanings given to key concepts and phrases, and the key ideas communicated in relation to moderation.

The conclusion will sum up the main arguments as well as considers the limitations of the research. It will end with a brief section on future directions for researching the subject of moderation in Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf in general.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

The first chapter has sought to define the conceptual and methodological framework of the study of the discourse of ‘moderation’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is a discussion that relates to the nature of politico-religious discourse in the Kingdom due to the nature of the state and its twofold identity as political and religious at once. It also relates to the ‘reintellectualisation’ of the public sphere in the Kingdom following 9/11 as well as within the context of the key reforms introduced by king Abdullah since his crowning in 2005. Because of the presence of inseparable boundaries between religion and politics, Orientalist bias still exists in scholarship about the Kingdom and the Arab world. For this reason, the thesis has stated an anti-Orientalist position, which will be explored more systematically in the second chapter. Working definitions of a number of key concepts are given in this first chapter. In particular, a three-criterial understanding of ‘moderation’, the key concept around which discussion and analysis revolve in the thesis is stated. It refers specifically to acceptance of pluralism, ideological moderation and respect of the rules of the political game. Following this discussion of key terms, the chapter defined discourse analysis and justified the use of this methodological framework, highlighting the importance of meaning, context of meaning and social events and overall power relations within which discourse is embedded. It also describes the key sources of data collection, including primary sources such as interviews. These will be aimed at official and unofficial types of discourses of ‘moderation.’

The next chapter examines another type of discourse, Orientalist constructions of Saudi Arabia in the wake of 9/11, by reviewing the existing literature on the Kingdom.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE 'ORIENTALISATION' OF SAUDI ARABIA: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON ORIENTALIST CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE KINGDOM

...by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent. The most readily accepted designation of Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed, the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism.<sup>84</sup>

Orientalism is a discourse of difference in which the apparently neutral occident/orient contrast is an expression of a power relationship.<sup>85</sup>

#### 2.1 Focus

I have in the first chapter outlined a research agenda that seeks to understand the ongoing re-intellectualisation of Saudi society and polity. The key questions I will be trying to answer revolve around the new trends of thought and the discourses of the moderates and those advancing puritanical views and ideas of Islam and reform in general in KSA. This exercise necessitates an exploration of the brand of discourses by Saudis. In this chapter I try to give an account of Orientalism about Saudi Arabia in order to contextualize the rise of the new discourses and trends of thought to be explored in the chapters on discourse analysis of moderation. Existing literature on KSA exemplifies what Said calls 'Orientalism'. That is, discourses by the West (or the Occident) on the East (or Orient). As in the above definition by Said, I shall use the term 'Orientalist' to designate an attitude more than a nationality or a regional origin. This is important to explain for two reasons. The first is that Orientalists as analysts, observers, or academics expressing views and producing ideas on the East are not just Western. Said has a special designation, for instance, for Arab or Muslim Orientalists.

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Bryan Turner, "Orientalism and the Problem of Civil Society in Islam," in Asaf Hussain, Robert Olsen, and Jamil Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists* (Vermont: Amana Books, 1984), p. 24.

He calls them “Oriental Orientalists.” There are Orientalists involved in the production of ideas about KSA from within Saudi Arabia, or at least originate from the Kingdom despite being based in Western institutions or higher education or other establishments of power, within and without government. The second designation regards the fact that what ultimately defines an Orientalist for Said, and for that matter in Bryan Turner’s scholarship, is a general attitude. The above quote by Turner captures the essence of Orientalism: the stress of difference and contrast between the West or Occident, on the one hand, and the East or Orient, on the other. This stress on difference taints and misrepresents the East or the Orient. How does this happen? Largely, misrepresentation is done through generalization as well as through reductionism. I will get back to this discussion later.

The analysis in my second chapter has two interconnected objectives. I shall firstly explain what Orientalism is and how it works. I shall through this explication give a critical overview of Orientalism and, briefly, touch upon the relationship between Orientalism and Occidentalism. Secondly, I shall review key select texts on KSA, highlighting the tendency of Orientalists, Western and non-Western, to misrepresent KSA through either generalization, reductionism or both. I believe this exercise is far more beneficial to my thesis than a traditional approach to literature review, which in some cases turns into a descriptive exercise.

In a way, my own approach will account of the body of scholarship throughout chapters two and three. In chapter three where I look at the role of religion and the Wahhabi creed in Saudi society and attempts at reform, I will look at key sources on these questions, including Arabic texts on Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab’s thought and substance of his reform,<sup>86</sup> which is today denigrated everywhere after the terrorist events of 9/11. In terms of Arabic literature, I must say in all honesty that I have found the works concerned with the political system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to be rare. Those which are profound, rigorous and critical are even rarer. The few that broach the taboo subject of reform or politics in the Kingdom are disappointing.

They tend to be written from the perspective of the government, using state statistics and referring to data produced by the government. This data is very difficult to

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<sup>86</sup> For an excellent source by a Saudi scholar on *Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab’s doctrine see, Abd Allah Salih Al-Uthaymin, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: The Man and his Works* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

verify from independent sources but this should not have discouraged its authors from at least cautioning the reader to the pitfalls inherent in such data. Finally, what is most disappointing about Arabic work on the political system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by Saudis is the hagiographic content of this work. Hagiographic as these books tend to revolve around the figure of a king or Saudi figure whose achievements are described with little or no critical input or scholarly distance and objectivity. None of these are really worth using in this thesis. Several examples of these books, most likely written with state blessing and funding, offer no more than tedious description of political and socio-economic ‘achievements’ and meaningless figures.<sup>87</sup> Since local politics and reform, in particular, is often a taboo that Saudis avoid for obvious reasons, Saudi scholars tend to turn their attention to writing accounts of Saudi foreign relations, bilateral and multilateral.<sup>88</sup> These, too, are of little or no relevance to this inquiry.

My use of Orientalism and Said’s work here grounds this exercise theoretically. I consider this to be really significant in that it serves to highlight the tendency of producers of ideas about Saudi society and polity to ignore aspects of change and diversity within KSA. Whether this type of knowledge is due to ignorance or deliberate misrepresentation is not a theme of this inquiry. The inquiry’s key theme is to account for the brand of knowledge that is being produced about KSA and how this knowledge seems to represent an Orientalist attitude typical of those described by Said in his famous work first published in the late 1970s. Precisely, as Turner rightly sums it up in the above quote, this attitude is twofold: not neutral, and represents an “expression of a power relationship.” In that power relationship, the West prevails over the East. Therefore, as Said observes, it does so because it simply can and because it has the means and the resources, including military, to do so.<sup>89</sup> On the whole, the chapter’s objective is to highlight illustrative discourses that provide us with manifestations of bias in the ‘Orientalization’ of KSA in Orientalist scholarship, both Western and Oriental.

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<sup>87</sup> For a good example of this genre, see Fouad Al-Farsy, *Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques: King Fahd bin Abdul Azizi* (St Peter Port, Guernsey: Knight Communciations, 2001).

<sup>88</sup> Shafi Aldamer, *Saudi Arabia and Britain: Changing Relations, 1939-1953* (Reading: Ithaca, 2003)

<sup>89</sup> See Said, *Orientalism*, esp. the book’s brilliant ‘Introduction’.

## 2.2 Understanding Orientalism & Occidentalism

When it was published in 1978, Edward Said's most famous work, *Orientalism*, it did not take long to become literally a 'bible' for all those addressing questions of postcoloniality or working on questions having to do with subaltern studies. It remains today a relevant piece of work. It has transformed the way students of Islam, Middle East, the postcolonial world and its societies and subaltern studies, think and address their subject matters. What is the core message of Edward Said's seminal book? The crux of the book varies from scholar to scholar. As far as my own use and justification are concerned, the central message of Said's book revolves around how discourse of the 'other' can be a powerful medium of maintaining existing power relations in which the 'Occident' and its significant 'other' are never equal. The 'Occident' is evidently the predominant side in that equation of power; the 'other' whether it is Arab, Middle Eastern or Muslim, is misrepresented as the weak side in that power relation of dominance. Said writes that Orientalism is a "body of theory and practice...[with] considerable material investment. Continued investment [turned] Orientalism...[into] an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness..."<sup>90</sup>

The resulting pre-constructions or constructs do not mirror an objective reality out there. They are constructed through discourses which are tainted by all kinds of 'filters'. These 'filters' include the political, culturalist, ethnocentric, racist, and the ideological, all of which are used to designate the Oriental object inferior standing. The 'other', the subject of study by practitioners of Orientalism – whether they are political scientists or colonial administrators – are lumped in categories that produce generalizations and reductionisms. This brand of production of ideas or discursive formations are partly instruments of hegemony, keeping the 'Orient' either 'primitive', 'authoritarian', 'savage', 'barbarian', under-developed', 'fanatic', and 'uncivil'. These discursive formations serve to highlight difference, as Tunrer has observed above. One can say that these designations are necessary: they give opposite descriptions to those that define the 'West'. Generalizations that the 'East' is 'barbarian' or 'backward' are definitions that the 'West' is 'civilized' and 'developed'.

In the heyday of colonialism, Orientalist constructions of Arab and Muslim societies and cultures served the endeavour by traditional powers to penetrate the 'Orient'. In other words, Orientalism worked once upon time hand in hand with colonial

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

designs to impose dominion over the Middle East. This could be achieved only through partial representations of the Arab and Muslim ‘other’. In particular, Islam which shares a monotheistic background with Christianity and Judaism remains misunderstood and misrepresented. This situation has worsened since the terrorist events of 9/11. Maurice Bucaille supports this idea by noting that the type of knowledge produced about Islam has on the whole facilitated further mystification and misrepresentation of Islam: “Anyone in the West who has acquired a deep knowledge of Islam knows just to what extent its history, dogma and aims have been distorted... documents published in European languages... do not make the work of a person willing to learn [about Islam] any easier.”<sup>91</sup> Said introduces many examples of how at the level of knowledge there were misrepresentations of Islam. Nonetheless, this Orientalist knowledge was in medieval Europe, which continues to be the case today in many journalistic and scholarly circles, passed as knowledge. Said states that: “The European imagination was nourished extensively from this repertoire [of medieval Orientalist knowledge]... such major authors as Ariosto, Milton, Marlowe, Tasso, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and the authors of the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Poema del Cid* drew on the Orient’s riches for their productions, in ways that sharpened the outlines of imagery, ideas and figures populating it.”<sup>92</sup> The key idea Said is trying to stress, and this in my view lies at the heart of his project of thorough deconstruction of Orientalist knowledge, is this: “... a great deal of what was considered learned Orientalist scholarship in Europe pressed ideological myths into service.”<sup>93</sup> Roger du Pasquier reluctantly agrees with Said, by acknowledging that some of these myths and misrepresentations have been directed at Islam and the Prophet Muhammad: “... one must unhappily concur with an Orientalist like Montgomery Watt when he writes that ‘of all the great men of the world, no one has had as many detractors as Muhammad... although Europeans today look at Islam and its founder in a somewhat more objective light, ‘many ancient prejudices still remain’.”<sup>94</sup>

What is characteristic of Orientalist knowledge is its binary character, and the binary pattern of its ideas. These binary constructs or knowledge facilitates

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<sup>91</sup> Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur’an and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1978), p. 117.

<sup>92</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 63.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>94</sup> Roger du Pasquier, *Unveiling Islam*, Trans. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), p. 47.

misrepresentation. As in the examples I have given thus far the oppositions between ‘civilized’ Westerners and ‘barbarian’ Easterners misrepresent because they use simple but powerful discursive formations that serve to entrench generalizations and reductionistic ideas about the Arab or Muslim ‘other’. In my view, this is typical of Orientalist knowledge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Said dismisses the Orientalist discourses, which are generally constructed on the basis of false stabilities, binary images or knowledge, and dichotomous assumptions – West vs. East, democratic vs. authoritarian, male vs. female, and public vs. private. These oppositions and dichotomies enabled the dominant ‘West’ to create comparisons which served to empower ‘Westerners’ (in establishments of power) as well as identify the ‘West’ to be democratic or civilized whilst identifying the ‘East’ as being authoritarian, backward, etc. The intention behind the use of such oppositions is “self-other identification” according to Sadiki.<sup>95</sup> Thus discourse is not innocent, and this is where Said’s adoption of Michel Foucault’s ideas about ‘discourse’ has been successful in capturing the essence of Orientalism as a discourse of domination, generally maintaining unchanged power relations between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ in the postcolonial era. These discourses of power create constructs which do not necessarily match a reality that exists in the Arab world or Saudi Arabia. As discursive constructs, misrepresentations of the ‘East’ or the ‘Muslim’ world, consolidate the power relations that are used to structure and restructure the political, social and cultural orders in the ‘Orient’ in the image of the ‘West’.

This amounts to a form of ‘objectification’ of the ‘other’. As I have already mentioned, by reference to Sadiki amongst others, this objectification of the ‘other’, the ‘Occident’ aims at stressing its difference from the ‘Orient’. In other words, it is a method for identifying the Western ‘self’. This is at the heart of Said’s critique of Orientalist knowledge, which is based on a style of thought and discourse that emphasize as well as take for granted the correctness of the assumption that the contrast between ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’ as ontologically grounded. Based on an ontology of difference or one might even say ‘clash’ between Western forms of being and Eastern forms of being or existence. Thus Orientalist epistemology or knowledge production fulfils the prophecy or the assumption of contrast between ‘West’ and ‘East.’ Such an

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<sup>95</sup> Larbi Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy: Discourses and Counter-Discourses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

epistemology becomes the means by which the 'West' knows itself as well as thinks it can know the 'East'. The 'Occident' defines itself by what the 'Orient' is not.<sup>96</sup>

Orientalism serves to identify Europeans, in contrast with non-Europeans. Hence, what Orientalist discourse produces is the "idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all those non-Europeans."<sup>97</sup> This is what 'us vs. them' thinking produces in the realm of ideas.

Today many scholars talk of the continuity of Orientalism. Sadowski uses the term "Neo-orientalism."<sup>98</sup> Sadowski argues that neo-Orientalists look at Arab and Muslim societies as 'weak', unable to develop strong corporate identities and civil associations owing to the prevalence of personalistic tendencies in social and political organisation.<sup>99</sup> Two elements that Tuastad considers to be typical of Neo-Orientalist misrepresentations of Middle Eastern societies are of relevance to my own thesis on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: particularistic tribal loyalties in social organisation, religious submission, and under-development of statism. These elements, as my analysis below shows, are used by Orientalists in reference to KSA. Tuastad states:

Since it is taken as axiomatic that Middle Eastern societies are resistant to democratization, they can, according to the standard tenet of Orientalism, be explained by idiosyncratic cultural factors. Two incompatible ethoses are seen as colliding in the Middle East: the incompatibility between an anarchistic ethos of a segmentary kinship-based social organisation, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the universalism and duty of submission of Islam. The legitimacy of the politics of the nation-state is hence understood as too particularistic for loyalty to the divine, and, alternatively, seen as undermined by the particularism of kinship-based ideological localism. The Arabs are thus on the one side too particularistic, and on the other side not particularistic enough. This represents continuity from Orientalist to neo-Orientalist though, whereby Middle Eastern society is seen as either too weak or...too strong.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 188.

<sup>97</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Yahya Sadowski, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," *Middle East Report*, No. 183 (July-August 1993), pp. 14-21, 40. See also the article by Dag Tuastad, "Neo-Orientalism and the new Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict(s)," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2003), pp. 591-599.

<sup>99</sup> Sadowski, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Tuastad, "Neo-Orientalism and the new Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict(s)," p. 594.

Neo-Orientalism, as a body of discourse produced by academics, journalists as well as policymaking, has adopted the normative and ideological assumptions of traditional Orientalism. The only difference is that Orientalism existed in mostly a colonial context whereas neo-Orientalism is a new version that is suited to postcolonial hegemony. In both, however, the power relations work in favour of the hegemonic establishments of power in many Western countries such as the US, Britain and France. The post-Cold War and post 9/11 eras have contributed to further defining of the scholarly tropes of neo-orientalism. Three interconnected themes are at the heart of neo-Orientalism. This is true especially in relation to Islam, in general, and political Islam, in particular. The three interconnected themes form a common thread that defines the traditional bias that Islam is characterised by fixity, immunity to history as a living human experience, and by aversion to change. These three themes are the following: the 'other', modernity and the West, and violence.

Neo-Orientalism is no less potent than Orientalism. Today its discourses make up a powerful forum, itself maintained by the experts' thinking, opinions, views and language vocabulary of 'expert' views and opinions. These along with the structures of power that maintain them, contribute to the cultural construction of the oppositions and binary knowledge that locates 'the same' and 'the other' as mutually exclusive and incompatible. Expert opinions in the form of articles, books and, for instance, opinion and testimony at US congressional hearings point to the structures of power that make possible the production of misrepresentations of the 'other' and 'mythical' knowledge, as Said has discovered in his original work. Neo-Orientalism is an example of what Said refers to as summational statements.<sup>101</sup> The neo-Orientalists package their biased knowledge as summational statements, statements of authority of knowledge that the expert constructs about the 'other'. For instance, in the post 9/11 era, security has become influential through a brand of knowledge that more or less 'demonises' Islam and those who organize politically on the basis of Islamic platforms. Indeed, the security agenda, which now has reached academia, and writings on Islam are partly influenced by policy-makers and statesmen so fixated on political violence and

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<sup>101</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 255

terrorism.<sup>102</sup> The adjectives Wahhabi', 'radical', or 'fundamentalist' are all bandied about in order to reinforce and propagate the bias that Islam is a dangerous religion.

The construction of 'the other', often as a fanatical 'jihadi' collapses into a world where the 'other' lives within the immediate confines of 'the same'.<sup>103</sup> Neo-Orientalist discourses tend to produce misrepresentations the alleged disingenuousness of Muslims residing in the West and Islamists in the Muslim world as anti-democratic. Dictatorial secular regimes, who deploy ruthlessly the repressive instruments of the modern state to ban political and civil liberties and stifle frank debates in Arab and Muslim societies. The 'securitisation of the assumed threat of political Islam seeks to identify systematically not terrorism as such but the existence of Muslims with explicit religiously informed political views. Daniel Pipes, whom Sadowski considers an example of neo-Orientalists,<sup>104</sup> questions Muslims' failure to develop moderate attitudes.<sup>105</sup> According to his brand of discourse and arguments advanced by other neo-Orientalists the Islamic threat may not be confined to the use of violence. Additionally, the threat is constructed as equally emanating from the absence of western values in Muslim societies, and 'Islamisation' of western societies. This is one reason why after 9/11 there have been strong calls for the ban of religious schools and religious education in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

### 2.2.1 *Between Orientalism & Occidentalism*

Occidentalism was identified by James Carrier as the alternative discourse to Orientalism.<sup>106</sup> Sadiki writes that 'he who orientalise must occidentalise.'<sup>107</sup> It is the so-called 'other half' of this dualistic discourse. Like Orientalism, Occidentalism is a language of essentialism. Just as the Occident constructs the Orient, today the Orient

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Marcuse, 'The "War On Terrorism" and Life in Cities after September 11, 2001' in, edited by Stephen Graham, *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, pp 265 – 6

<sup>103</sup> Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, pp. 20 – 1

<sup>104</sup> Sadowski, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate,"

<sup>105</sup> For an example of the unwarranted hounding and ad hominem attacks of an Egyptian-American Islamic scholar at the hands of a neo-orientalist see <http://www.meforum.org/602/stealth-islamist-khaled-abou-el-fadl>; Daniel Pipes list of questions for Muslims to find out whether they are really moderate or not see <http://www.danielpipes.org/1322/finding-moderate-muslims-do-you-believe-in-modernity>, access: 12/08/2010.

<sup>106</sup> James Carrier, *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>107</sup> Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p. 108.

has the means, mainly through blogs, the Internet, mosque sermons, satellite TV all over the Middle East, to make its own constructs of the 'West'. Carrier identifies two alternative interpretations of the concept of Occidentalism: Firstly, not as a term of concrete reference but as a discourse, which involves criticism of the 'West'. Secondly, a reference to discourse by non-Westerners developing a self image in contrast to the 'idealised' West. In reality, the discourse of Occidentalism has only begun to emerge in the last 20 years and this may account for its lack of true definition. Sadiki summarises Occidentalism by stating that it is a response to 'the monolithic West, desegregated Westerners and selected ideas about Western modernity and culture.'<sup>108</sup>

Whilst Said's seminal book was the first to go a long way in deconstructing the power discourses in the 'West.' According to Said, these discourses seek to understand Arabs and Muslims through generalization and reductionism, as I have stated above. They assume the Arab Muslim worlds to be monolithic and static. However, Said's discourse is incomplete. It has failed to identify discourses of Orientalism in reverse produced by the 'Orient' about the 'Occident.' In these discourses in reverse Arabs and Muslims make the same errors typical of Orientalism. In these Occidental discourses one finds representations of 'otherness', in this instance 'Western', which lumps the 'West' and 'Westerners' together as well as sum up relations with the 'West' by reference to colonialism and hegemony. Sadiki's writing on the nexus between Orientalism and Occidentalism addresses what Said misses out in *Orientalism*.<sup>109</sup> Sadiki aims to highlight what many practitioners have labeled a type of 'Orientalism in reverse.'<sup>110</sup> In the same manner that Said deconstructs the Occident and Occidentals' self-imagining as facilitated through constructs of Orient and Orientals' 'otherness', Sadiki shows that the East is equally guilty of constructing Western 'otherness' for purposes of self-imagining. Thus he highlights how various Islamist discourses, for instance, utilize their own stereotypes and representations of the Occident in order to assert visions of identity (in opposition to the Western 'other') and selfhood often built on ideas of piety, immaterialism, and moralism. Sadiki notes that there are basically two types of Occidental discourses. An earlier wave of Occidental writing, produced within a colonial context, views the 'West' through a negative set of eyeglasses. Sadiki

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>109</sup> Larbi Sadiki "Occidentalism: The West and Democracy as Islamist Constructs," *Orient*, 1, (1998), pp. 103-120.

<sup>110</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, p. 204.

also suggests that a second school of Occidentalism idealized the ‘West’ and sought to emulate its achievements. This second school entertained a sense of amazement in the thinking of the Arab about Western otherness. However, the colonial past and experience have tended to prevail as a prism through which images and stereotypes of the ‘West’ are constructed. Given the staying power of this experience and past – the twin process of Western imposition of colonialism and then modernization – Islamist discourses have used Islam as a rigid and permanent marker of self-other difference. Thus Islam becomes a source of ideas and constructs that stress notions of self-definition and selfhood differentiate between Orientals and Occidentals in the realm of social norms, morality, and political values. from western normative structures. Sadiki thus shows that in this Islamist discourse of self-other definitions, Western political systems, values, and normative structures become subject to criticism, negative deconstruction and rejection. Western ideas about democracy, the nationalist political system, secular politics, and liberalism; amongst others, acquire negative associations all of which become linked to the colonial experience and Western value systems. Occidental discourses mimic Orientalist discourses. They use the same linguistic and epistemological tools, and their monopoly, typical of Orientalism to answer back at Orientalism as well as try to address the power asymmetry in the realm of propaganda, in which the West has enjoyed a clear advantage. What is certain, however, is that language and knowledge in the case of both Orientalism and Occidentalism have birthed stereotypes of otherness and self-other definitions. Thus these two opposed discourses reproduce each. The use of binary knowledge and dichotomies are central to the way both discourses make the existence of each other possible and durable.

The criticism that I find relevant and troubling in this respect concerns the attempts made by Orientalists and Occidentalists, including theorists such as Said, to construct and deconstruct self-other images and accounts of otherness that may be based on selective interpretations. Moreover, the author or authorial agency must be accounted for in this context. Theorists like Said produce multi-layered interpretations of texts used for explaining Orientalism or Occidentalism. This may be inevitable since all texts involve levels of understanding and interpreting by the authors and the readers. Basically, all exercises of discourse analysis involve two levels of interpretation: 1/ the existing interpretation by the author which becomes 2/ the data to which readers or analysts add their own level of interpretation. Both levels of interpretation involve difference of context, experience and values. The common error of treating

interpretation as a starting point of evidence, rather than as a process needing to be continually interpreted according to changed contexts, risk creating knowledge built on the basis of binary and dichotomous foundations, which could reproduce the very ideas, ideologies and assumptions being challenged. The key challenge and this may prove difficult for a long time to come, especially in East-West relations post 9/11, is that the inquiry into understanding the ways in which Orientals and Occidentals construct reciprocal images and stereotypes may inevitably reproduce the fundamental ontological and epistemological differences assumed to be permanent fixtures of either the Occident or Orient. It is legitimate to inquire into the nature of all discourses of otherness, especially, when they contribute to misunderstanding or discrimination. However, the recourse to these exercises other than to clarify the nature of misunderstanding, injustice or unequal and hegemonic power relations may become part of the problem not the solution of how to redress the imbalance in East-West power relations. My aim from understanding the process of ‘Orientalization’ of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aims to highlight the degree to which KSA is misunderstood and misrepresented in Western scholarship. It is a discussion that Said, amongst others, have ignored.

Another criticism regards the monolithic treatment of the ‘West’ or the ‘East’. Neither is a homogenous bloc. This brings me to my own motivation in seeking to understand the discourses and counter-discourses of reform and moderation in KSA. By understanding the nature of these discourses and the elements of renewal and contestation in them, my aim is to contribute to de-mystification of the Kingdom. That is, like all societies, it may have puritanical or conservative forces. But this must be understood side by side with forces and discourses of reform and renewal. KSA is not a monolith. The study of some of the stereotypes in some discourses is necessary for the purpose of this exercise. The challenge for the entire community of Middle Eastern specialists and Islamists is not to buy into the Orient-Occident binary and to refuse naturalizing the assumption that there are always foundational differences between the East and the West. Orientalism itself is not all negative vis-à-vis the Orient and Orientals and it must not be assumed to be itself a monolithic body of scholarship. Moreover, Orientalists include both negative but also positive texts and discourses of the Orient and of Orientals.<sup>111</sup> The world is not always structures according to

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<sup>111</sup> H. Auclert, *Les Femmes Arabes* [Arab Women] (Paris: Société d’Editions Littéraires, 1990).

dichotomies and negative self-other definitions. My own attempt at clarifying how Saudi society is no different to other societies in its aspiration for moderation and reform and its diversity seeks to challenge the stereotype of KSA as a distinct society and polity – run by ‘mullahs’ and so called ‘radicals’. The discussion aims therefore not only refute foundational discourses built on highlighting the self-other contrast, as Bryan Turner thinks, but also as opening a dialogue between KSA and the Western world to which it is tied through a huge volume of trade and finance and important political and strategic alliances..

### **2.3 The ‘Orientalization’ of Saudi Arabia in Existing Scholarship**

For the purpose of this exercise in this section, I will refer to select texts. The impressions and constructs of Orientalists have for so long depicted images of the Orient. This underlines the importance of discourse – negatively and positively – in terms of shaping wider thinking and opinion about otherness.<sup>112</sup> This process began with painting and then moved on from the arts to ethnography and the wider domain of the humanities and social sciences.<sup>113</sup> These constructions of the Orient – Arabs or Islam in this case – have not always been inspired by good intentions. There are those who sought to study the Orient from the viewpoint of philology or linguistics. They have contributed a great deal of invaluable knowledge about key texts which Western readers cannot access in English or French. On the opposite side, the type of Orientalist texts that constructed images of Harem, backwardness or primitive cultures about the Arab and Muslim Worlds, have with the same discursive skill painted images of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Some of these images are given here as examples of how specific Orientalist thinking directed at KSA has worked for a long time. To go back to the opening quotes in this chapter, Turner’s idea of Orientalism as an expression of unequal power relations applies to KSA in the same fashion it did to other Orientalist practices in the past about Egypt, the Levant or India. Edward Said explains further the content of what he calls the construction of the predominantly British and French cultural enterprise that makes up Orientalism. This enterprise as Said describes it is symbolic of

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<sup>112</sup> Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in Susan Sontag (ed.), *The Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), pp. 93-102.

<sup>113</sup> Norman Bryson, “Discourse, Figure,” in *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-17.

...a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms as the imagination itself, the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies and a scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental 'experts' and 'hands', an Oriental professorate, a complex array of 'Oriental' ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality), many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use...<sup>114</sup>

Said's idea of 'domestication' of the Orient and its ideas and objects for European consumption, which is a statement about the unequal power relations, applies to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 'Domestication' of the Kingdom is significant in that it is part of the geography of the ancient world and of monotheistic faiths. A great deal of the interest in Saudi Arabia and its society and polity are to an extent associations with Islam itself. The earliest examples of Orientalist depictions of the Kingdom were inspired by curious individuals who sought to learn all they could about Islam and the land in which Islam was revealed and then evolved under the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions into a global religion. In his book, *In Pursuit of Arabia*, Rashid Shaz has ably documented examples of early Orientalist depictions of Saudi Arabia.<sup>115</sup> As Shaz himself puts it the work he produced was motivated by his intention to show the ongoing demonisation of Islam and the problems of 'imagined history'. Imagined history is the ideas the 'West' produces about the 'East', and the 'East' about the 'West'. In relation to Arabia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which occupies most of the vast geography of the Arabian Peninsula, Shaz echoes in a Saidian fashion how Arabia is 'painted' and constructed in discourse:

A mythical Arabia with snake charmers and flying carpets, inhabited by a whole lot of strange people; the Muslim harem crowded with young damsels perfectly trained in 'Islamic style' sex vagaries, was not a land fit to rule. The travelers who set for Arabia soon became eyes and ears to the Empire...in their depiction of the Arab or treatment of Islam if we find a marked condescending tone for Arabia it was simply because they were exploring the land with a pre-conceived mind.<sup>116</sup>

The early depictions, some by sophisticated minds such as the most accomplished Orientalists, such as Richard F. Burton who was probably the first

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<sup>114</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> Rashid Shaz, *In Pursuit of Arabia* (New Delhi: Peace India International, 2003).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Christian, and first Englishman, to enter the Holy sites of Islam in disguise fascinated the world. Burton's 1855 book *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* has Orientalist depictions. Despite his high learning and endeavour to correct many misconceptions about Islam, Burton showed Orientalist inkling to learn about subjects that have for along time, and continue today, to stigmatize Islam as hostile to women and different from the West. He looked at Islam, harems, the slave trade. For instance, in his examination of the question of women, according to Shaz, Burton claims that "it was Christian influence on Islam which raised the status of woman in Muslim society. In his opinion, it was the Christian concept of the virgin mother which made the Arabs cite two examples of female perfection in Islam [Prophet Muhammad's first wife khadijah, and the Prophet's daughter Fatima]." <sup>117</sup> W. G. Palgrave's *The Personal Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia* is an example of the early Orientalist contempt towards Islam and society in the land where Islam first appeared, modern-day Saudi Arabia. Palgrave does not try to understand or accept the concept of an all-encompassing God in Islam or at least a son-less God. Shaz writes that the "Islamic concept of God as having no son, no companion or counselor leads the author [Palgrave] to conclude that this God is no less barren in Himself than for His creatures and His own barrenness and lone egoism being the cause of His indifferent and unregarding despotism around." Palgrave goes further by stressing the despotic nature not only of the concept of God in Islam, but also the despotic and passive thinking of one of the great doctors of Islam, the Saudi reformist Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, particularly with regard to the reformer's explanation of the keystone of Islamic thought, as Shaz writes, "there is no god but God". Although Palgrave does not hide his respect to Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's analytic skill, he nonetheless finds him to carry the same thinking and attitude of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions in Hijaz: mainly in terms of passivity and autocracy. "...in this one sentence, 'La ilah illa Allah' [there is no god but God] , is summed up a system which for want or a better name, I may be permitted to call the Pantheism of Force, or of Act, thus exclusively assigned to God..." <sup>118</sup> Palgrave states that in Islam "all is abridged in the autocratic will of the one great agent: 'Sic Volo, sic jubeo, stet pro ratione voluntas', which is equivalent to 'Insha Allah', a constantly recurring expression in the Coran." <sup>119</sup> This

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<sup>117</sup> In Shaz, see *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>118</sup> W. G. Palgrave in Shaz, *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

premise of absoluteness in the Muslim God as well in the thinking of the learned scholars of Islam is carried through in themes of Arab and Muslim despotism as well as in the ideas of passive or weak Arab societies, such as in the heart of the land of Islam, Hijaz, around the city of Medina, and by extension the entire Muslim and Arab worlds, in both old and contemporary Orientalism. In other words, passivity and despotism are ingrained in Islam and the Holy book of Islam.

Charles M. Doughty's depiction of Islam and life of families in what is today Saudi Arabia is no less Orientalist. In his travels throughout the country, Doughty adopts the alias Khalil. Two components seem to feature a great deal in Doughty's Orientalist account: the irrationality of Islam and Muslims and violent and ignorant ways of Arabs. In reference to his company of an Arabian merchant, Doughty writes "we chat cheerfully; but such at the Arabs' dish would be very inept and unreasonable behavior! – he were not a man but an homicide, who is not speechless in that short battle of the teeth for a day's life of the body..."<sup>120</sup> In Similarly, Doughty's visit to the chief or Shaykh of the Bessam family in Aneyza (in central Saudi Arabia) results in more generalization and reductionism not to mention condescending description of his Arab hosts and of their faith: "for the... virtues that were in him... cannot amend our opinion of the Arabian man's barbaric ignorance, his slight and murderous cruelty... or sweeten our contempt of an hysterical prophetism and polygamous living... Sword is the key to their imagined paradise... The Arabian religion of the sword must be tempered by the sword: and were the daughters of Mecca and Medina led captive, the *Muslemin* [Muslims] should become as Jews!"<sup>121</sup> The Reverend George Bush, 1796-1859 (related to the Bush family in the US), harbours similar contempt to Islam in one of the earliest books written by an American theologian on Islam.<sup>122</sup> Referring to the story of the Prophet Muhammad's night-journey to Jerusalem, the Reverend expresses skepticism in the fashion of many Orientalists, i.e. through contempt or in a condescending tone. The problem is not expressing skepticism per se as much as expressing assuming Islam to be no more than a set of made-up stories by a delusional prophet – almost a "system" copied from previous religions not a divinely revealed religion:

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<sup>120</sup> Charles Doughty in Shaz, See *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>122</sup> Rev. George Bush, A. M., Muhammad, *Mu'assiss Al-Din Al-Islami wa Mu'assiss Imbraturiyyat Al-Muslimin* [Life of Mohammed: Founder of the Religion of Islam and the Empire of the Sarcens] trans. Abd Al-Rahman Abdullah Al-Shaykh (Riyadh: Dar Al-Marrikh Li Al-Nashr, 2005).

It is by no means improbable that Mohammed had a farther design in forging his extravagant tale than merely to astonish his adherents by the relation of miraculous adventure. The attentive observer of the distinguishing traits of Islamism will not fail to discover innumerable points of resemblance between that system and the divinely revealed religion of the Jews; and it appears to have been an object studiously aimed at by the race...<sup>123</sup>

The instances of early Orientalist accounts from travelogues of known Westerners, who went to the lands of modern-day Saudi Arabia long before it was open to Christians and non-Muslims, collectively sum up the kind of generalizing and reductionistic thinking that motivated Said to write a work on Orientalism as a discourse of otherness. Saudi historian Muhammad Al-Buqa‘i who had occasion to revise the work by French Orientalist Louis Alexandre de Corancez sums up the attitude of Orientalists focusing on Saudi Arabia and in particular its reformer and founder of the Wahhabi doctrine, Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. He observes that their tendency to generalize or engage in reductionism stems mostly from inability to neutralize their bias against Islam. Seeing Saudi Arabia through the prism of a religion that Orientalists either misunderstand or hold in contempt makes the non-rigorous scholar extend these sentiments to the subject of his study, Saudi society and culture, for instance. With regard to the work by de Corancez, Al-Buqa‘i finds his account of Wahhabism to be based on hearsay and secondary sources, making it replete with inaccuracies, mistakes and bias.<sup>124</sup>

The Orientalist endeavour to understand Islam and the status of religion sometimes led to less than the required level of appreciation of religious diversity in KSA. Examples of this common Orientalist flaw exist in several texts. Diversity is somehow treated as an ingredient alien to Saudi society and culture. Russian Historian Alexei Vassiliev comes to mind as a very good illustration of this point.<sup>125</sup> In his well-known work, which has been translated into several languages, including Arabic, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Vassiliev, in my view, did not skillfully interpret the presence of another brand of Islam other than the official puritanical Hanbali-derived Wahhabi

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., pp. 253-254.

<sup>124</sup> Muhammad Al-Buqa‘i, “Introduction” in *Tarikh Al-Wahhabiyin mundhu Nash’atihim hatta ‘Am 1809* [*The History of the Wahhabis from their Origins until the end of 1809*] trans. Muhammad Al-Buqa‘i & Ibrahim Al-Balawi (Riyadh: Dar Al-Malak Abd Al-Aziz, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>125</sup> Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Al-Saqi, 1998).

creed. Establishment Islam or the centre's version of Islam has not entirely oppressed or eliminated what one may call 'non-puritanical' practices or 'folk'/popular Islam (according to Ernest Gellner). The assumption that the historian or the anthropologist should find no diversity in KSA or only a single and fixed Wahhabi creed is the most commonplace of Orientalism practiced by all kind of Saudi-ologists, in my view. Vassiliev is a brilliant historian and manifests deep understanding of Saudi history, and this is shown very well in his description, of the early difficult statist gestation from the mid-1800s to the early nineteenth century and Egyptian and foreign intervention that prevented the emergence of the state. But in the anthropological and cultural sphere I fear that his grasp is less powerful. He fails to appreciate that the presence of diverse religious practices representative of folk or popular Islam were commonplace in the entire Muslim world, and not specific to KSA. Plus, even the powerful reformist Wahhabi movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was not capable of eliminating less puritanical religious practices that may not adhere strictly to the letter of Islam. In the Wahhabi creed, these are considered heretical practices (*bid'ah*) and they include use of magic, worship of saints or rituals practiced in front of tombs of holy individuals or relatives. Vassiliev's somewhat odd assumption, by a Russian and Westerner, that these practices are alien to Wahhabism and that Wahhabism emerged to eliminate these less than puritanical forms of folk Islam is a mono-dimensional view of the rise of Wahhabism. The thesis that Wahhabism's evolution was solely determined by the crisis of religion<sup>126</sup> or its pollution fails to consider more complex socio-economic and political dynamics. There are two reasons why I believe Vassiliev's analysis is in my view flawed. The first is that it adopts unintentionally the official version of history, which views the pollution of Islam as the key drive that led to the rise of Wahhabism. The second reason is that Vassiliev's explanation somehow demotes the agency of the key historical figures and forces that created the Saudi state. So there are issues that relate to structure and matters that relate to agency that Vassiliev misses out in his fascinating historical chronicles of the birth of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I think there are two common Orientalist tendencies, namely the use of religion and of tribe. These two ingredients, I claim, are instrumental in the 'Orientalisation' of KSA, leading to a great deal of mystification about Saudi society, culture and polity. In my view, and in contrast to Vassiliev, Christine Helms demonstrates a more

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-83.

sophisticated understanding of Saudi society and culture, especially in relation to tribalism and even religion. In doing so, Helms shows appreciation of Saudi diversity, and how tribalism is not a raw cultural or sociological material that always functions in a single way. In other words, to refer to the common Orientalist tendency to generalize, tribalism must not be treated as a monolith. It can be diverse, inventive, pragmatic and even industrious, both politically and economically. In her authoritative study of the internal dynamics of decentralization from a geographical perspective, Helms establishes a correlation between segmented forms of socio-economic and political organization systematically practiced by Saudi tribes and thus the presence of diverse non-centralized forms of organization in the hinterland.<sup>127</sup> These patterns of authority based on segmentation and decentralization differ in urban centres where political and socio-economic organization tend towards acceptance of centralized power, authority and political organization. Historically, centralization of power has never been achieved easily in the Kingdom, and the taming of the diverse tribal segmented patterns of authority till this day is achieved through mechanisms of consensus, agreement and loyalty and not compulsion.

The analytical approach used by Helms reminds one of the works by the great Arab Historian Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun whose work in *Al-Muqaddimah* illustrates profoundly the role of pragmatic and industrious tribalism and tribal solidarity in the making of medieval Muslim dynasties, often also implicating geography in the rise of hostility towards centralized political authority and preference of independent tribal self-governance.<sup>128</sup> Helms is unique in my view in her appreciation of the combined ecological and geographical ingredients that, on the one hand, dictate against centralization of state power in KSA, and on the other, play a major role in the cultivation of pragmatic tribalism that thrives on autonomy and self-governance.<sup>129</sup> The focus on the internal dynamics leading to the birth of the state in the book's Part one is sophisticated in that Helms shows awareness of geographical and tribal diversity in Saudi Arabia. This sensitivity to and appreciation of diversity has guided Helms analysis in a unique way to show that the emergence of Saudi statism, political identity and political history cannot be put down to a few individuals or an oversimplification of

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<sup>127</sup> Christine M. Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

<sup>128</sup> See the translation of his work by Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>129</sup> See Part I in Helms, , *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*.

the Wahhabi reformist movement. The role of Muhammad Ibn Saud and Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in the creation of the state did provide eventually the unifying institutions, ideology, and structures upon which KSA was founded. But even this unifying moment, and the historical twin birth of a centralized authority and a reformist ideology/movement did not stamp out diversity. In the Orientalist discourse, the absence of diversity amounts to a negation of the dynamics of socio-political and cultural renewal and dynamism. This is typical of the view social scientists tended to entertain when looking at non-Western societies. These are typically represented as static and monolithic. These assumptions summarize another tendency in the depiction of non-Western societies: aversion to change. Change and transformation are natural historical dynamics which happen according to contexts of time and space, and according to local resources. This aversion to change is a stigma pertinent to my own study. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for instance, is depicted as if it has not undergone any transformation, especially in the religious and political sphere. My inquiry into the diverse types of politico-religious discourse at one level aims to dispel this generalization.

The sophisticated analysis by Helms and particularly her awareness of diversity goes against the general Orientalist take when it comes for instance to the treatment of tribalism. The work by Daryl Champion demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of the labyrinthine complex of the Saudi state, notion the interconnections between state and tribe, religion and politics, tribalism and economic development, and the various forces steering the state, including the royal house, the learned scholars of Islam or the *'ulama* and the formidable forces of business and what Champion refers to "*asabiyya* capitalism."<sup>130</sup> Somewhat his use of tribalism, I argue, is less sophisticated than that described by Christine Helms. Champion gives a weak and dependent assessment of both religious and tribal forces. I believe the relationship between state and religion on the one hand and state and tribal forces is more complex than Champion describes them. The *'ulama* may be dependent on the state, becoming quasi employees of the state. However, the relationship is not without a measure of dependence by the state on the religious establishment. This relationship will be further described in my third chapter. The same applies to the forces of tribalism. Indeed, Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Saud knew with a

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<sup>130</sup> Daryl Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2003).

combination of political skill, force and negotiation how to tame the tribes and direct their loyalty towards the centre. But at no stage have tribal forces, mainly those living outside settled urban centres and zones of state control, been fully subjected to the centre or made fully dependent on the state. They willingly give loyalty to the state, its institutions and through the institution of allegiance (or *bay 'ah*) to the king of the day. Again, tribal forces are part of the fabric of Saudi polity, society and culture and it is very difficult to actually separate them totally from the rise of the state or its institutions. The royal house itself has tribal roots; the National Guard, amongst others, has a tribal dimension; and so does the religious establishment. Treating tribalism as a force on its own as if the rest of Saudi institutions, structures and agents are separated from it is misleading. Champion shows grasp of this factor in the creation and consolidation of state authority and power. But he contradicts himself. He considers the completion of statism over two periods in the 1930s and 1950s spelled danger respectively for the Najdi tribal forces (around the central region and Riyadh the seat of power) and later for the Hijazi tribal forces. He refers to what he calls the 'Najdization' of the state, suggesting the Hijazi sophisticated mercantile classes were disposed of in the new state. Yet he still recognizes the importance "of the more cosmopolitan, sophisticated and technically experienced Hijazis" in the building of a modern economy as well as in the process of bureaucratization of the newly founded national Saudi state.<sup>131</sup>

I think the Najd-Hijaz dichotomy suits the Orientalist formula of binary modes of thinking which produces oversimplifications, either in the form of generalization or reductionism. Both the Hijaz and the Najd are integrated into the state and the evolution of the state, each region, however, according to the skills and strengths it possesses and is able to contribute to nation and state-building. So I reject this dichotomy as over-exaggerated by many Orientalists. I view them more as part of the diverse fabric of Saudi society, and as such they are both enriching. In this regard, I believe the ability of tribalism, religion and modern state institutions and apparatuses to blend coherently and integrate into a sophisticated global political and economic actor attests to Saudi political inventiveness, and this has left a wider mark on the socio-political primogeniture of the Arab Gulf. Where Champion in my view lapses into Orientalism is when he uses the term "*asabiyya* capitalism." Champion defines this to be the total of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

corrupt transactions built on the basis of middle-men, patronage practices, and nepotistic relations and association with the royal house. For instance, he writes that “Najdi domination of Saudi state institutions through the favouring of kin and clients...sheds light on the decline and rise, demise and establishment, of individuals, groups, social classes and patron-client networks as the Saudi state and political economy developed, modernized and changed...”<sup>132</sup> In another instance, he adds to explain more this concept, connecting it to the oil-based economy of the Kingdom. “Bureaucratic favouritism based mainly on kinship and the *wasta* mechanism [this means intermediary to people of wealth and power] fuelled the rise of the new business class... Thus the negotiating of all manner of bureaucratic procedures, such as obtaining various licenses and permits an registering lucrative agencies, were smoothed over the favoured.”<sup>133</sup> The practices Champion describes do exist in varying degrees in most societies. They are not specifically Saudi. Said Aburish documents them at length in his known work *Rise, Corruption, and Coming Fall of the House of Saud*.<sup>134</sup>

My personal worry as a native Saudi and a research scholar is that I find the use of such a composite concept, literally meaning tribal-solidarity-capitalism, to serve only two purposes: oversimplification and stigmatization. We all read about cronyism and instances of vast and corruption in the capitalist world. What one ought to defend is not Saudi nepotism and patronage practices. But what one feels compelled to question is the inherent Orientalist content of the concept. In my view, Maxine Rodinson’s response to Max Weber in relation to the latter’s assumption about the inability of religions like Islam to develop capitalism, for lack of ability to master rational calculation, applies here.<sup>135</sup> The Protestant Ethic type theses have been sufficiently questioned and Champion’s concept obliquely hints at the absence of law and order or rationality in tribal capitalism. Moreover, some of the Saudi sources could have provided additional material in terms of understanding the intricacies and complexities of the inner working of the Saudi system. In particular, one of the rare authoritative and credible books on political science by a Saudi, Faisal bin Mish‘al bin Abd al-Aziz, would have been a good source for Dr Champion and it would have supplemented his work with more

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Said Aburish, *Rise, Corruption, and Coming Fall of the House of Saud* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994).

<sup>135</sup> Maxine Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism*, Trans. Brian Pearce (Texas: Texas University Press, 1979).

balance. The author rightly argues that the prevalence of religion in the Saudi political system does not only function for the sole purpose of legitimation. It also, and perhaps this is the dimension Western Orientalists tend to miss out, is that Islam is genuinely considered as an organic ethical system providing for consultative and juridical mechanisms for accountable and “contractual rule”.<sup>136</sup> In other words, the failure of the government in Saudi Arabia Islam must not be blamed on Islam. Rather, these flaws must be attributed to the governors who fail to institutionalize and implement Islamic ethics and practices.

In the next section, I look at the association of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with jihad (holy war), mostly after the terror attacks of 9/11.

### 2.3.1 *Orientalism and the Template of Jihad*

In the section above, I tried to look at examples of Orientalization focusing on Western sources. Here I try to focus on what Said calls ‘Oriental Orientalists’, Middle Easterners who engage in their own forms of Orientalization about Arabs and Muslims, not always with bad intentions of course. The 9/11 terrorist attacks continue to feed the Orientalist repertoire not only directed at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but also most of the Muslim world. Naturally, there is a reason for this. The activities of Al-Qaida seem to be largely concentrated in Muslim territories. But the lion’s share of the focus has been on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Tim Niblock’s considers Al-Qaida part of the Islamist opposition led by Osama bin Laden.<sup>137</sup> Niblock covers very well the negative impact of these events on KSA. He observes that since 15 of the 19 perpetrators of the terrorist attacks were Saudi, it was logical for the backlash to be mostly directed against the Kingdom. The backlash was both from within the public as well as within the state and affiliated institutions, and think-tanks. The neo-conservatives who acted as the ideological partners of George W. Bush’s Administration did more than criticism of the Kingdom<sup>138</sup>. For instance, Niblock writes “Key elements of Saudi Arabia’s political and

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<sup>136</sup> Faisal bin Mish‘al bin Abd Al-Aziz, *Al-Tatawwur Al-Siyasi fi al-Mamalakah Al-Arabiyyah Al-Sa‘udiyyah wa Taqyeem Majlis Al-Shura* [Political Development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Evaluation of the Consultative Council] (Riyadh: Maktabat Al-‘Abikan, 2000), pp. 103-209.

<sup>137</sup> Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 100.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

economic system were censured. The educational system was criticized for installing in Saudis prejudicial attitudes towards Jews and Christians. It was also blamed for graduating large numbers of students with religious qualifications, who were unemployable within the economy and provided recruits for Islamist radicalism.”<sup>139</sup> These events and the focus on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia set the tone for the rise, in my view, of a new wave of anti-Muslim Orientalism, in this case targeting Saudi society and culture. The obsession with Wahhabism, *jihad* and Jihadists all of which are in some way or another are linked to Osam bin Laden or Al-Qaida, rightly or wrongly. But the consequence of this new wave of *jihad*-focused Orientalism is as dangerous if not more in deepening misunderstanding and generalizing the *jihadi* or *jihadist* stigma, making the entire Saudi population the target of denigration and reductionistic depictions. What Niblock mentions in the above quote about the graduates of the Islamic schools providing the soldiers of terrorism or Al-Qaida is widely held to be true in many Western and non-Western policy-making circles and academic centres and think-tanks. What is dangerous in this is that this misconception is wide enough even amongst Arabs and Muslims. Orientalist generalization and reductionism is dangerous for treating *jihad* out of context, truning what was once a venerable and legitimate religious and cultural institution into a war-like attitude that is widespread amongst Saudis.<sup>140</sup> I would like to note here the absence of an important distinction in Orientalist uses of the terms ‘*jihad*’ and ‘*jihadi*’. That distinction regards the difference between the Qur’anic terms ‘*jihad*’ and ‘*qital*’. The former is general and is not exclusively concerned with use of force. The latter specifically refers to fighting and takes place, according to the Qur’an, only when it is obligated as a form of self-defence necessitating use of force. My use of the term *jihad* in this thesis accounts for this important distinction and does not reflect non-nuanced use as in Orientalist writings.<sup>141</sup> Dominique Sourdél’s well know work *Medieval Islam*, translated by the brilliant Orientalist J. Montgomery Watt, gives an understanding to *jihad* that is grounded in the original Arabian context of Hijaz, before and after the arrival of Islam. Sourdél explains that Islam set out to establish brotherhood amongst the community of believers, thus

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>140</sup> See Abdul Rahman Al-Zunaidi et al., *Saudis and Terror: Cross-Cultural Views* (Riyadh: Ghainaa Publications, 2005).

<sup>141</sup> The verses 2:216, 2:246, and 4:77 are the most cited by Muslim scholars to stress the distinction between ‘*jihad*’ (striving in a variety of ways to further the cause of Allah) and ‘*qital*’ (fighting through use of force).

dropping clan and class distinctions, and to eradicate materialism and fatalism.<sup>142</sup>

However, whilst Islam sought to get rid of features of Arabian society and culture such as these, it also accommodated others by institutionalizing them within legal and ethical framework provided by the new religion. Jihad was one of these areas accommodated by Islam, converting it from a disorderly and violent nomadic practice called *razzia* (the Bedouin raids) into an institution for defending and spreading Islam.<sup>143</sup> By contrast, the jihad practiced by Al-Qaida or constructed by Orientalists looks nothing like what Islam initially preached, and may not even qualify as jihad, which requires legal, ethical and political justification and is not a disorderly mechanism of attack, but rather a self-defense mechanism in times of war to be used solely against aggressors.

Perhaps two of the most known names working on KSA and, between them, having probably the most profound and sophisticated knowledge of Saudi society and polity are Mai Yamani and Madawi Al-Rasheed, both of Saudi origin, have contributed to clarification of the place of violence in KSA.<sup>144</sup> The latter in particular investigates the idea of jihad as pertinent to Saudi society. In my view, this amounts to stigmatization of KSA, a country which has an element of violence, crime and politically motivated violence associated with activists belonging to Al-Qaida. However, to make jihad a fixture or feature of Saudi society, polity and culture in systematic research smacks with Orientalism. It commits the sins of generalization and reductionism. The fact of matter is that *jihad*, first and foremost, is an Islamic institution and not a Saudi one. Secondly, to generalize *jihad* as if it is a Saudi trait is to confuse discursive constructs with 'reality'. Whatever the 'reality' of Saudi culture and society may be, *jihad* is not intrinsic to them. Having now clarified my position on the issue and the specific criticism I level at the work by Yamani and Rasheed, I move now to look at their work in relation to this issue.

Mai Yamani, in my view, introduces a very useful framework which I call pluralist. Yamani distinguishes between three trends or currents of thought within the politico-religious spectrum. These trends are useful for the following reasons: firstly,

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<sup>142</sup> Dominique Sourdel, *Medieval Islam*, Trans. by J. Montgomery Watt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 30-31.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>144</sup> Mai Yamani, *Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000); Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the show plurality and diversity, and thus refute Orientalist theses that treat KSA as a monolith. This approach, which she explores through an anthropological approach, is quite solid and rewarding in that she draws conclusions from interviews and anthropological inquiries carried out with youth. It is on this basis that she comes up with her division of discourse or activism along three strands: ‘liberal modernists’, ‘traditionalists’ or ‘conservative salafis’, and the ‘radicals’.<sup>145</sup> The liberal modernists oppose the state to impose its version of religion and religious interpretations on them. Basically, according to this view personal choice should matter in the realm of religion, which should be privatized. This is the closest one comes to separation of religion and politics. What she calls the ‘traditionalists’, which she adds that they consider themselves to be conservative. These are voices that seek to resist any type of change that threatens identity and religion. They must not be mistaken for opposing all change. For instance, they are consumers of the goods of modernity such the Internet, etc. For them change should be compatible with religion and never in contradiction to it. Therefore change that contradicts with religion should be forbidden. In one sense, stability is an important value and so is tradition and religion-based tradition, which are important for Saudi identity. Like the ‘traditionalists’, Yamani adds, the radicals seem to blame the state for the state of religious degeneration in the Kingdom. They use the products of modernity such as university education and globalization to spread their messages, and organize for the purpose of erasing all Western elements that are seen to pollute Saudi society, Yamani observes. They are prepared to put a fight for Islam peacefully but also violently. Yamani is right in pointing out the overlap in the values held high by these three strands in that they all value Islam. The difference is how they go about implementing Islam and living as Muslims. The radicals are opposed to the West and may be inclined to use violence. The label ‘radicals’ used by Yamani is shorthand in most Orientalist scholarship for ‘terrorist’ or someone who is in favour of the so-called ‘*jihad*’. The three strands more or less mirror divisions of ideas within Saudi society but they are nonetheless inspired by Western political language and values, and the dichotomy between traditionalists and modernists is an Orientalist construct.

Al-Rasheed’s book is fixated on ‘jihad’ and ‘jihadis’, typically echoing Orientalist bias. “In the twenty-first century, Saudi society is struggling over religious

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<sup>145</sup> Yamani, *Changed Identities*, pp. 125-131.

interpretation...” Thus she opens up chapter four called “the struggling in the way of God at home: the politics and poetics of jihad.”<sup>146</sup> She adds that contest of religious interpretations which defines the battle lines between “Sahwi sheikhs, Jihadis, and laymen” does not preclude violence.<sup>147</sup> Madawi explains the context of the 1980s and 1990s as the moment of *Jihadist* resurgence, including from within prisons when most of the leaders and shaykhs of the *jihadi* movement were interned by the Saudi state.<sup>148</sup> Regardless of the globalizing trends that make religious dogma travel afar and unpoliced, Madawi is of the view that what she calls “Saudi Jihadis” have been able to make use of locally produced *jihadi* knowledge and religious interpretations justifying *jihad*. “...regardless of whether the inspiration for, or even the orders to engage in, violence come from outside – for example al-Qaida or other global Jihadi movements – it is certain that there is a strong local dimension to the jihadi trend.”<sup>149</sup> Madawi is here describing what amounts to an explosion of ‘*jihadi*’ practices not only in terms of practical execution, but also of intellectual explosion of the ideational underpinnings and structures of ‘*jihad*.’ It is not clear and she has not made it clear at all why she calls these practices by the label ‘*jihad*’, a misnomer that is widely misused mainly by Orientalists of the ilk of Daniel Pipes, amongst others. She insists on the Saudi-zation of *jihadi* thought and practice:

Religious theoreticians of jihad (for example, some ‘ulama), interpreters (Islamist intellectuals) and those who carry out violent acts such as suicide bombers and other young militants are all Saudis, with the exception of a handful of activists who belong to other Arab countries...To attribute the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century to outside agents such as global terror movement is to miss the fact that this violence has its own local religious codes, meanings, politics, and poetics which resonate in some Saudi circles.<sup>150</sup>

Madawi’s work resonates with these claims about the prevalence of violence in Saudi society without actually giving any other supporting evidence that look at the political economy or socio-economic variables, such as poverty and unemployment, which have led to the deterioration in living standards and loss of self-respect. Madawi

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<sup>146</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 134.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

is engaging in a very important discussion about the rise of violence justified on religious interpreting of the texts of Islam. She makes no attempt to look at the other side of religion which opposes the rise of religion-based violence. In failing to do that, Madawi does not present her readers with nuanced analysis of the situation she describes about 'jihad'. I think the text she produces is very analytical and legitimate in terms of inquiry, but it advances assumptions that generalize about the source of violence and about Saudis as if jihad is more or less a Saudi fixture, as I explained above. Yamani, in my view, is more successful in that her approach is more nuanced and provides the reader with a more complex picture than the oversimplified account given by Madawi. Both suffer from Orientalist assumptions either in terms of dichotomies (i.e Yamani) or generalization and reductionism (i.e. Madawi).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Orientalist constructs and construction of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia typically focus on standard elements such as tribalism, religion and more recently after 9/11 notions of Saudi *jihad* and *jihadis*. I have argued that like the old Orientalism, new forms of Orientalist knowledge tends to generalize and engage in reductionistic description of Saudi society. The latest stigma renders a worrying picture that makes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia almost a 'factory' of '*jihad*' and of '*jihadis*'. What is still missing in contemporary scholarship on Saudi Arabia is sophisticated accounts that account for the rise of reform and moderation to counter against the Orientalist claim that Saudi society is ridden with religious dogmatism and religion-based violence. This is attributed either against Islam or against the Wahhabi movement, which was originally intended to be a doctrine intended to maximize piety and Godly notion of the 'good' or what is known in Islam as *ma'ruf*. In the third chapter, I shall look at the nexus of religion and politics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the central tenets of the Wahhabi doctrine.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE IMPACT OF WAHHABISM ON RELIGION AND POLITICS & POLITICIZATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

Together they [Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad Ibn Saud] forged an irrevocable alliance. Muhammad Ibn Saud pledged himself and his family to uphold and spread the Wahhabi persuasion of Islam. In return, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab promised his dominion. The sword and the political power that went with it would be the realm of Muhammad Ibn Saud and his descendants. The Book (the Qur'an) and the accompanying religious, moral, and educational authority would be the domain of Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the Al-Shaikh, as his descendants came to be known. Each would be supreme but not absolute in its own sphere of authority, because each retained substantive checks on the authority of the other...Today more than centuries later, this alliance remains the key stone of governance in the Kingdom.<sup>151</sup>

...the Wahhabiyya [Wahhabism] brought the notion of the state to replace that of the tribe as the unifying force for the society. That process has been in operation for a long time, indicating that the Wahhabiyya was not an immediate or a coincidental response to the moment. Nor in this sense was the movement [only] a reaction to a phenomenon of shirk [polytheism] or a replay of the old nomadic and tribal game. On the contrary, it continued the state formation process, giving it a new direction, and as such was a new force ushering in a new political era in the history of Arabia. By launching the notion of a central state, the appearance of the Wahhabi movement marked the beginning of the modern history of Arabia.<sup>152</sup>

#### 3.1 Aims of the Analysis

This chapter concludes Part I of my thesis. I have up to now argued that there is a great deal of Orientalism surrounding the 'construction' of the Kingdom of Saudi

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<sup>151</sup> John S. Habib, "Wahhabi Origins of the Contemporary Saudi State," in Mohammed Ayoob & Hasan Kosebalaban (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 58.

<sup>152</sup> Khalid S. Al-Dakhil, "Wahhabism as an Ideology of State Formation," in Mohammed Ayoob & Hasan Kosebalaban (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 35.

Arabia. A very good example of the Orientalist constructions that continue to prevail about the Kingdom is the misunderstanding surrounding the relationship of religion and politics. After 9/11, *jihad* (holy war) is associated with the Kingdom, and very few have tried to look at the link of al-Qaida with the Kingdom and its Wahhabi doctrine critically.<sup>153</sup> The Kingdom's relations with even its most strategic partners, such as the US, have been called into question.<sup>154</sup> Others tended to propagate the view of a Kingdom 'in crisis'.<sup>155</sup> Others, in a typically alarmist tone, put it in terms of a 'battle for Saudi Arabia'.<sup>156</sup> The work of the Egyptian Scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl, which I will comment on in my examination of Wahhabi influence on reform and politics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, provides some of the harshest critique of Wahhabism. He calls it 'puritanism', in a negative way, and blames it and the Kingdom on the violence against the West and other Muslims since 9/11.<sup>157</sup> May be Abou El Fadl's is partly correct in his comparison of the methodologies of the 'puritans' and 'moderates', which I will use in chapter 4.<sup>158</sup> But on his account of the role of Wahhabism in propagating violence, he is subjective and even misleading.<sup>159</sup> An understanding of this relationship is necessary for an overall contextualization of the emerging discourses between a variety of trends and currents. Some of these, as I have explained in chapter two, seem to be challenging the forces that tend to speak on behalf of religion. Other voices represent more or less continuity in the sense that they regard reform, nation and state-building to make sense only within a religious framework.

My analysis in this chapter deals with three specific questions: what is the historical background or origins of the Saudi State and how does religion intertwine with politics, with special reference to the impact on politics by the Wahhabi doctrine? The influence of the medieval Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya will be examined, particularly in relations to his thesis on political rule in relation to religion. Part of this

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<sup>153</sup> Maha Azzam, "Al-Qaeda: The Misunderstood Wahhabi Connection and the Ideology of Violence," Briefing Paper No. 1 (2003) Chatham House Publications/Papers, United Kingdom.

<sup>154</sup> Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold our Souls for Saudi Crude* (New York: Crown, 2003).

<sup>155</sup> John Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

<sup>156</sup> Asad Abukhalil, *The Battle For Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism and Global Power* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004).

<sup>157</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (New York: Beacon Press, 2003).

<sup>158</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 276-279.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

discussion examines processes of politicization as well as of the voices calling for either reform or challenge. What kind of ‘political culture’ has this politico-religious identity given to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? How does this shaped dissent, in the pursuit of reform, in Saudi politics? As part of this discussion ‘advisory’ and radical forms of dissent are described. In the final section I reflect on the specificity of ‘reform’ is examined which will be divided in to ‘advisory’ and radical voices. The analytical task makes it vital to look at concepts such as ‘Wahhabism’, *tawheed* (Unity of God, monotheism) ‘salafism’, ‘*taqleed*’ (imitation), ‘*tajdeed*’ (religious renewal or innovation), *da’wah* (call for Islam), and *sahwah* (Islamic resurgence). I will start the analysis with a conceptual discussion

### **3.2 A Conceptual Discussion: Wahhabism**

What I call here the ‘Wahhabi moment’ opens up the gates of innovation as far as the Arabian Peninsula’s history of jurisprudence and intellectual engagement with Islam are concerned. The year 1703/1704 when Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born carries significance not only in terms of the birth of the founder of the so-called today ‘Wahhabism’ or the ‘Wahhabi School’ of jurisprudence, but also for the eventual birth of the Saudi state, and, obviously, the role of religion in its founding. I shall use these terms despite reservations on this reductionistic terminology. It is reductionistic because it tends to suggest some kind of break with previous corpus of Islamic jurisprudence. ‘Wahhabism’ or the ‘Wahhabi School’, which are also terms widely used by Western Orientalists, does not in any way break with preceding Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab are an extension of the Hanbali School. Within Sunni orthodoxy, this school is associated with a literalist tradition in the practice of exegesis (*tafseer*). Regardless of whether this position is correct or incorrect, which is not the aim of the analysis here, Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703/1704-1792) remains an important figure in the historical Islamic current of renewal. In fact, it is not at all out of place of to claim that the movement often referred to as Islamic resurgence or awakening (*sahwah* in Arabic) was launched by the renewal and reformist ideas of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab This reformist movement, which started in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and

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<sup>160</sup> For a thorough text on this doctrine see, Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (New York: Islamic Publications International, 2002).

extending into the third millennium, must be partly credited with Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's innovative ideas about what type of Islam the *ummah*, Islamic community, must adhere to and what type of practices and ideas must be avoided. I think that establishing this link between Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's renewal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the contemporary state of politico-religious affairs is significant for two reasons.

Firstly, the movement of religious awakening and reform sparked by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thinking eventually translated into political reform, namely, the founding of the Saudi State. Secondly, that history and tradition of reform has not ceased at all. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the 'constructions' of Saudi Arabia post-9/11 cannot be separated from misunderstandings that the terrorist attacks on the US has fuelled for a decade now. These constructions tend to associate the acts of Osama bin Laden with the puritanical creed developed by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Al-Rasheed makes this claim when she notes the support given to Bin Laden by the Kingdom's leading learned scholars such as Shaykh Ibn Baz.<sup>161</sup> Al-Rasheed does this without caring to distinguish between the kind of support he was receiving even from the White House at the time in support of an occupied Muslim State, Afghanistan, by the Soviets. That support was not unconditional. It was not intended for all Bin Laden's activities and in all contexts. What is forgotten that the origins of al-Qaida is partly American, during the presidency of Ronald Reagan when the Afghan Mujahideen and so-called Arab-Afghans were funded and supported by the US in their war against the former Soviet Union whilst occupying Afghanistan. Those who were keen on spreading the Shaykh's reforms beyond the borders of the newly founded state were eventually constrained by the time of the centralisation of the Saudi State in the early 1900s, as I shall argue below. Plus, the ideas and teaching of Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab were intended to 'purify' Islam as both thought and practice from widespread heresy. To an extent, Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's original mission was purely religious – religious reform by a pious Muslim learned scholar (*'alim*) from the Hanbali tradition of jurisprudence. The central objective was moral, educational, and concerned matters of correct practice of Islamic *aqeedah* (faith). Eventually, this extended to the realm of politics. I think this extension of reform to the political sphere underlies the significance of Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reformist movement as one that is holistic in nature. In

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<sup>161</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 106.

fact, it confirms the Muslim hardened adage of Islam being at once *deen wa dawlah* (religion and politics). This tendency to combine religion with politics is a Muslim practice that is not shared with the Western heritage of separation of the two under a model of secular politics. I will go back to this issue below.

The awakening<sup>7</sup> or *sahwa* opened up in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's innovative thinking aimed at rekindling the role of religion in the building of an Islamic community able to undertake the Godly commands of enjoining the good, and preventing wrong-doing' (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar*).<sup>162</sup> For this purpose, the crux of Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reform focused on the obligation to return and refer to the key sources of legislation in Islam or the foundational texts of religion: the Qur'an and *hadith* (the Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad). In initiating this trend to restore the place of the sacred text and the Tradition of the Prophet, as well as the example of the Prophet's apostles, and the *salaf* (righteous forebears) of Islam, Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's key innovation was to promote Muslims in Najd, initially, and then the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, not so much to re-read these texts as much as simply read them as models worthy of imitation in all matters regarding Islam. So his innovation can be primarily equated with observing the texts of Islam with the aim of correcting deviations, which he saw as a source of social, moral, and, even political decay. The example of the Prophet whether in upholding marriage as social venerable institution or looking up to his example in the management of non-spiritual affairs is at the heart of the renewal called for by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. His renewal, then, can be summed up in a rekindling of the institution of *da'wah* (call to the cause of Islam). This call is not so much about proselytisation to Islam, at a time and in a place where the entire community was already Muslim. The concept of *da'wah* has outlived Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's movement. It was eventually adopted by Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Using this concept, the Muslim Brotherhood has always had the ambition to spread its message of the 'call to Islam' beyond Egypt's borders. By contrast, the origins of *da'wah* in Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message was intended to reform the existing thinking and practice of Islam prevalent then, and primarily within Najd and Hijaz (i.e. Saudi Arabia). Thus Shaykh

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<sup>162</sup> Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's movement can be considered a corrective movement coloured by the specificity of time (18<sup>th</sup> century) and place (Najd initially and eventually Hijaz).

Its significance also lies in it being a local movement completely untainted by outside forces or dynamics. Generally, the 'cycles' of decline and renewal, of decadence and reform in the Muslim world have historically been triggered by outside forces (rivalry with Christendom, the Crusades, invasions, etc.). In this case, the movement of reform attributed to Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is indigenous and, generally, is in response to local dynamics (e.g. 'pollution' of Islam by heretical practices). Commins notes two elements that made this localized trend of renewal strong. Firstly, it faced no 'doctrinal contamination' from outside the Kingdom. It acted in a quasi isolationist paradigm of jurisprudence at a time when the only visitors to the Peninsula would be the short visitations by Muslim pilgrims. Secondly, Wahhabism, adds Commins, purged the 'old scholastic' system of religious learning and jurisprudence, thus attaining full monopoly over the production of religious dogmas and canons, especially after many learned scholars left and sought refuge in neighbouring Ottoman Iraq.<sup>163</sup> Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's movement enjoyed such monopoly for two additional reasons. Its renewal remained immune to Ottoman intervention. The same applied to European modernization. Indeed, it predated the influx of Westernisation and its impact, either in the form of direct ideological impact (colonialism, ideas of modernization such as parliaments, secularization) or in the form of technological impact (modernizing techniques, systems of development and associated technologies).

As an early revivalist and a reformer, Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab may be said to be motivated by response to heretical practices and deviations from Islam, namely polytheism, within the Arabian Peninsula rather than response to outside ideas and Western innovations. Al-Dakhil challenges and refutes a proposition by Bernard Lewis that Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's renewal was in response to the "expansion of Christendom."<sup>164</sup> This is why Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reform must be viewed as

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<sup>163</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. v-ix.

<sup>164</sup> Al-Dakhil notes on the failure of Bernard Lewis to back up his explanation: "So if for the Wahhabis the reason was the spread of shirk [polytheism], for Lewis it was the expansion of Christendom: 'The rise of Wahhabism in eighteenth-century Arabia was in significant measure a response to...the retreat of Islam and the corresponding advance of Christendom.' Lewis, it should be pointed out, was the first to come up with such an explanation. Yet he could not provide any evidence for it." See Khalid S. Al-Dakhil, "Wahhabism as an Ideology of State

encompassing within it a religious drive for the sake of reforming fellow Muslims' practices of Islam at a specific time and in a specific place. This makes Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reformist movement unique amongst revivalist movements that came after him (Al-Mahdiyyah, for instance). Generally, their *sahwah* or religious awakening was intended to counter or respond to the influx of invaders and ideas they brought with them. A good example was the ideas and the renewal introduced by Mohammed Abdu in Egypt years after Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition there and the entry into Egypt of Westernising ideas and systems. For instance, Egypt's Muhammad Abdu, like other revivalists who came after Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab initiated a radical rethinking of the tradition.<sup>165</sup> By comparison, the reform undertaken by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not. But it would confirm Orientalist constructions to associate Wahhabism with an absence of dynamism, as Commins rightly observes.<sup>166</sup> Abdu, like other 19<sup>th</sup> century religious reformers were motivated by the urgency to find answers the unfavourable state of Muslims and Muslims realms in comparison with European states, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was concerned with the internal decline of Islam, and not decline in relation to Europe. Abdu's renewal promoted textual re-reading; Basically, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's renewal was about re-enacting the Prophetic path he viewed at that point of time to be impure and polluted by heretical practices (e.g. polytheistic types of Sufi practices that tended to believe in the intercession by saints).<sup>167</sup>

The type of *tajdeed* or renewal<sup>168</sup> adopted by Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is characterized by a paradox. On the one hand, it is renewal but is not intended for the sake of innovation. Rather, it was kind of a process of 're-Islamization'. On the other hand, because it urges a return to the foundational texts of Islam it is not renewal in the sense of exegetical re-reading of the foundational texts. The substance of Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's renewal is a return to the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet as a means to purification of existing forms of worship and moral behaviour not in line with the teaching of religion. His trend of Islamic renewal seeks a moral and not an exegetical intervention. It favours imitation (*taqlid*) in the sense of following the

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Formation," in Mohammed Ayoob & Hasan Kosebalaban (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 30.

<sup>165</sup> Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 23.26.

<sup>166</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, p. viii.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>168</sup> John Voll, "Foundations for Renewal and Reform," in John Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 509-547.

righteous forebears of Islam and their exegetical canons, which revered the foundational texts. Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in comparison with the trends of Islamic renewal that came after him may be considered a literalist and not a rationalist. This is primarily determined by the pious substance of the new trend of renewal brought about by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. He did not view and define the problem affecting the *ummah* during his time to be a problem with or within Islam or exegesis of Islam. He viewed and diagnosed the problem within the community of Muslims. It is therefore them that his reform primarily targeted. There is an agential dimension to this trend of renewal in that it threw the weight of reform back onto the public of learned scholars and the community of Muslims. The main interpretive innovation in this respect that Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab introduced was the stress of the Unitarian substance of Islam. That is, he conceives of Islam as fundamentally a religion of *tawheed*, whereby monotheism or Unity of God is a given, the non-negotiable tenet of the Islamic faith. The context of 18<sup>th</sup> century Arabia is one where Sufi practices, misunderstood and ill-practised, led to what the learned Shaykh conceived of as a polluting agent. So here the agential dimension is displayed in the lead-role taken by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in re-teaching Islam as a religion of *tawheed* in which there is no place for polytheistic activities or deification of saints that he saw to be one of the flaws within Sufi Islam. Primarily, his intervention as a learned scholar aimed at re-tipping the balance back towards orthodoxy and literalist theology. A Sufi mysticism that takes Muslims away from the fundamental acts of faith was, in his estimation, harmful to a proper understanding and practice of religion. Saints were not entitled according to his Unitarian theology to any reverence or worship that undermined the Unity of God and as the sole divinity worthy of worship, reverence and authority. Thus Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's new trend of thought and message of renewal is marked by two additional characteristics. Firstly, its agential zeal in that *da'wah* was adopted as the strategy of reform in the initial stages followed by more active and even use of violence against polytheism, which qualified as forms of apostasy. Secondly, it was marked by clarity of purpose in that Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not only assert the primacy of the foundational texts, but also through his Unitarian exegetical trend of thought he had no doubt as to what formed true orthodoxy in points of faith (*aqeeda*) and religious

practice: exclusive worship of and belief in one God, and all *'ibadat* (forms of correct worship) that uphold and manifest such exclusivity of belief.<sup>169</sup>

### **3.3 Religion and Politics & Ibn Taymiyyah's Influence on the Wahhabi Doctrine**

Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab stands as the leading voice and agent of reform as far as the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is concerned. His reform, which eventually, spilled over into politics when he joined forces with Al Saud clan, must be critically qualified. It was not intended to cover the political realm for the sake of politics but for the sake of founding a centralized order, religiously and politically. However, it did inevitably intertwine with politics. In the previous section I looked at the renewal undertaken by Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the concepts relevant to the Wahhabi doctrine. In the next section, and in order to understand the impact of Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, one must briefly consider at the influence left on him by Shaykh al-Islam Taqiyy al-Din ibn Taymiyyah who is one of the leading Sunni & Hanbali jurists of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *3.3.1 The Influence of Ibn Taymiyyah*

Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's purist reform preaches a return to the sacred texts of Islam. It is purist in tendency as well as juridical. No Sainly intercessions and other heresies should overshadow the primacy of the holy Qur'an and the example of the Prophet – the *Sunnah nabawiyyah*. In the formulation of the body of Godly laws that make up *Shari'ah* Law, the sacred sources additionally require the example of the righteous forebears, or the *salaf al-salih* (one reason why Wahhabis are considered Salafis), and the *ijtihad* of the jurists. Thus Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's system of jurisprudence, whilst is primarily reliant on the Qur'an, it accords the Prophetic exemplary practice and sayings a foundational status where Islamic law-making is concerned. Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's purist accent and stress on Qur'an and *hadith* are derived from the eminent Sunni Hanbali jurist Taqiyy al-Din Ahmad ibn

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<sup>169</sup> Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, p. vii.

Taymiyyah (1263-1328).<sup>170</sup> Like him, Imam Ibn Abd al- Wahhab had some association with Sufism. Like him, he eschewed his association with Sufism; and like him, he found Sufism to deviate from Islam through the status it accords to Sainly worship and belief in Sainly intercession. Hence his methodology placed stress on monotheism (*tawheed*) primarily through sole reliance on the Qur'an and the *hadith*. But as in the case of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Ibn Taymiyyah does not separate between religion and politics. The focus of the following discussion will be on this aspect of his political thought. At least, four aspects of Ibn Taymiyyah must be summarized here as having impacted on the Wahhabi doctrine: a/ the task of purification of Islam from all additions, namely, from any influence by Greek philosophy, especially its tendency to promote agnostic thinking. Ibn Taymiyyah was a devout Muslim and someone who learnt the Qur'an at an early age. So his faith was strong and part of his jurisprudence is aimed at preserving and defending the Islamic faith and stressing its *tawheedi* content. So any ideas, from within or without Islam, that undermined the Unity of God or *Tawheed* were rejected by Ibn Taymiyyah. b/ opposition to Sufism on the basis of its pantheistic tendencies, especially regarding the question of incarnation (*hulul*) through which man become one with God, which he regarded to be confusing and even polytheistic. Ibn Taymiyyah's response to some of the key figures of Sufism, such as Ibn Arabi, is indication of Ibn Taymiyyah's objection to some aspects of Sufism. Ibn Taymiyyah himself had Sufi sympathies, namely toward Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jaylani. So the brand of Sufism he opposed was the one that preached the unison of God and man and passivity in life, which Ibn Taymiyyah regarded to be against the key teaching of the Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings of involvement in the ummah's affairs. c/ Ibn Taymiyyah revived the institutions of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) through seeking knowledge directly from the key sources. This belief in independent reasoning caused him difficulty with political rulers acting on the jealous advice of Sunni scholars whose imitation of the legal heritage was exactly the opposite of what Ibn Taymiyyah championed. Ibn Taymiyyah was a free interpreter who did not fear thinking against the conventional wisdom of Sunni scholars opposed to *ijtihad*,

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<sup>170</sup> Harran – more or less between Syria and Turkey – was Ibn Taymiyyah birth place. But most of his scholarship and jurisprudence were completed and practised in Syria. He learnt the Qur'an at an early age, and is said to have encyclopedic knowledge. He was not even twenty years of age when his stature as jurist qualified him to hand down judgments and juridical opinion on Islamic matters. At the age of 21 he began lecturing jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Hadith in Damascus. At around 1296 he held the chair of jurisprudence in al-Madrasah al-Hanbaliyyah in Damascus, which is the most prominent college of the Hanabali School.

especially Ottoman-affiliated scholars. Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab inherited this tendency to disregard the texts of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence, preferring new interpretations taken directly from the Qur'an and the *hadith*, that is, unpolluted. Ibn Taymiyyah's saw the role of the scholar or the jurist to be on the side of God's law and against injustice and tyranny. He counselled resistance against both, tyrannical or unjust local rulers and unjust invaders such as the Tatars against whom he called for holy war (*jihad*). This is one reason why justice was central to Ibn Taymiyyah's political thought.<sup>171</sup>

The key ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah's political thought are found in his major work, *Fi Al-Siyasah Al-Shar'iyah fi Islah al-Ra'i wa al-Ra'iyyah* (On the Principles of Legal Government). Ann Lambton defines the key ideas that make up his political thought. Firstly, total commitment to Godly rule and the place of Islamic law or *shari'ah* in any legitimate Islamic government.<sup>172</sup> Lambton argues that association,<sup>173</sup> political and religious, is central to Ibn Taymiyyah's political project, which explores the question of rule.<sup>174</sup> On the question of sovereignty, we can see the direct influence of Ibn Taymiyyah on Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Sovereignty belongs to God.<sup>175</sup> The primacy of the state and rule is non-negotiable for Ibn Taymiyyah: the state is a necessity. This is so to the point that even rule under unjust ruler is better than disorder or no rule at all.<sup>176</sup> This is due to the influence of Islamic political theory, which has traditionally feared disorder and disintegration. Moreover, this tendency to prefer unjust rule to no rule, argues Lambton, is tied to the inseparability of religion and politics in Islam. Rule is to ensure faith is continuous and defensible. Here one finds another theme that binds Ibn Taymiyyah and Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Al-Dakhil argues that the Shaykh's reform had a number of objectives: creating a central government as well as fighting against disintegration trends in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Arabia.<sup>177</sup> Here the two elements of association and necessity of government can be seen to have influenced Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own religio-political thought. Like Ibn Taymiyyah, God's

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<sup>171</sup> The summary is taken from the Arabic link to all of Ibn Taymiyyah's works and treatises, which can be found on: <http://www.ibntaimiah.com/index.php?pg=books&ban=3>, access: 08/01/2011.

<sup>172</sup> Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and government in medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 144; 146.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>177</sup> Khalid S. Al-Dakhil, "Wahhabism as an Ideology of State Formation," p. 28.

sovereignty according to the *shari'ah* shapes Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's political thought. Plus, the Wahhabi notion of state, especially after it joined with Saudi protection and might, was motivated by defending religion from heresy and polluting influences. This belief in the principle of religion and politics as joined not separated, as Lambton states, is thought to be for the good or the 'welfare' of Islam. Without this, that is, a non-religious political order where rule by man for man, would harm the populace through disorder and in the case of Islam, *fitna* (discord). Therefore a prime role of Godly rule is "obedience to God and his Prophet" which results in the "wellbeing of a country and its people", and this, in turn, can be done "enjoining the good and forbidding evil" (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar*).<sup>178</sup> This latter Islamic principle is of huge importance in Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's political thought. Finally, all of this points to a strong impact of Ibn Taymiyyah's political theory on Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and Wahhabism. Ibn Taymiyyah's notion of the state is not at all far from that championed by Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and eventually co-founded with his political backers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Arabia. Lambton gives a concise definition of Ibn Taymiyyah's state, a state whose dutifulness to God and religion, resemble that Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab helped create:

The state of Ibn Taymiyya was no longer the ideal Caliphate. Politically one to the time of the early ancestors, it had become fragmented during the course of time into a number of independent states. The state which he envisages has, nevertheless, a shari'i base and seeks Qur'anic sanction for the principles of government he puts forward. The aim of the state is the triumph of the word of God and the establishment of a society devoted to the service of God.<sup>179</sup>

The above quote can be easily said without modification to apply to the state championed by Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. It is a state in which God is sovereign, and the Qur'an is its constitution. The notion of state knows no separation of religion and politics. Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's project may be religious but it may also have been driven, at least according to one interpretation, by political motives, which are largely thought not to form the reason of why his reform came about. In this interpretation, Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab might had been committed to the ideal of a central government. All he lacked was political backers. That is what Al-Dakhil suggests, basing his view on an interpretation given by

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<sup>178</sup> Lambton, *State and government in medieval Islam*, p. 145.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Ibn Bishr and Ibn Ghannam, that “the sheikh...was pushing for a central state. According to both ibn Bishr and ibn Ghannam, the sheikh was carrying the political project of the state, looking for a sponsor from among the rulers of the Najd’s autonomous towns.”<sup>180</sup> Therefore Wahhabism seems not only to encroach on politics, but also had since its beginnings the makings of politics and of politicization.

### 3.3.2 *The Contemporary Period: Politicization & Voices of Challenge and Reform*

The crux of the argument below is that Wahhabism intertwines with the State and inevitable with politics. As mentioned above, this view of non-separation of religion and politics comes directly from of ibn Taymiyyah and therefore counts as one of his influences on Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. But the blurring of the political and the religious in the Kingdom does not at all mean the relationship does not experience differences in opinion. There increasingly evidence of tension between the political leadership and the religious authorities, bearing in mind that the religious authority in the Kingdom comes under the command of the monarch and his ministers. But the state-funded Council in which sits the country’s top clerics serves as a sounding board for any difficulty, ironing out problems in a way that makes state work smooth. The fascinating dynamic being introduced today, and which is increasingly more apparent since the 1990s owing to new media, blogs, Satellite TV, and generally more freedom of expression and protest, is represented in the emergence of bottom-up voices amongst the clerics. These bottom-up voices are used here to describe autonomous religious scholars. They may be employed by the state at various universities. But they are not direct clients of the state as the case may be with the Kingdom’s leading learned scholars. One facet about these non-state affiliated learned scholars is their role in politicizing religion far more than ever before since the 1990s. I believe there are three positive outcomes from the phenomenon of bottom-up clerical voices of peaceful and discursive protest. Firstly, they communicate to the state a different set of opinions about clerical and sometimes societal concerns about all kind of issues. In the 1990s the burning issue was the presence on Saudi soil of US troops and bases. Secondly, their communication, even if publicly dismissed, privately it is taken seriously and studied by the State and its officials, including the state-affiliated clergy. Thirdly, these peaceful communications partly empower society to seek dialogue and the search for a common

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<sup>180</sup> Al-Dakhil, “Wahhabism as an Ideology of State Formation,” p. 27.

ground with the King, his ministers and the state clergy. For instance, the popularity of petitions, (see the following chapter) in seeking dialogue and sending messages of counsel to the state is popular in the Kingdom.

### 3.4 Understanding Saudi Political Culture

First I shall try to formulate a simple working definition of this complex and controversial term as Michael Hudson and Lisa Anderson find out in their works on political culture.<sup>181</sup> The definition provided by Anderson is a good guide for the examination of Saudi political culture. According to Lisa Anderson, the term means “precisely the values that might support or undermine a particular set of institutions.”<sup>182</sup> Quoting Almond and Verba, she defines the term further: “the particular distribution of patterns of political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system.”<sup>183</sup>

As mentioned above, little or no work has been undertaken on Saudi political culture. One exception is a good piece of work done by two American scholars. It approaches the topic of ‘political culture’ from the perspective of a practical field of research, health. The article by Eugene Gallagher and C. Maureen Searle recognizes the importance of Islam and the people’s religious norms of behaviour, which tend to influence how they see the world, and this has inevitably affected even a domain such as medicine.<sup>184</sup> However, the article is not deeply concerned with the kind of inquiry a political scientist would examine. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the article tends to fall in the trap of repeating stereotypes about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For instance, the idea of Saudi Arabia having a culture that segregates males and females, large family units often with extended membership, and the nature of the political system viewed as monarchical and autocratic. Even if some of these features mentioned

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<sup>181</sup> Michael Hudson, “The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratization: The Case for Bringing It Back In, Carefully,” in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), pp. 61-76. Lisa Anderson, “Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach,” in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), pp. 77-92.

<sup>182</sup> Anderson, “Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach,” p. 78.

<sup>183</sup> Almond and Verba quoted by Lisa Anderson, in *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>184</sup> Eugene B. Gallagher & C. Maureen Searle, “Health Services and the Political Culture of Saudi Arabia,” *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1985), pp. 251-262.

seem to exist in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they do not, in my view, tell the reader much about deeper links to Wahhabism, which I shall try to conceptualize here. Plus, they do not tell us about non stereotypical features such as positive features. As in Orientalism, male-female segregation, the extended family or the type of government discusses in relation to Arab Muslim countries and societies are used to highlight negative and not positive features. The discussion below initiates a different type of discussion about Saudi 'political culture'. The aim is to look at features that come from Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thought as well as stressing their positive role in transformation and reform.

What is of importance here is the parallels between the state and these bottom up voices seeking dialogue with the state. They tend to share one significant political value, in fact a feature of Saudi political culture on which confirms what has been argued thus far. That value is the tendency to use religion in politics and apply religious arguments in support of political positions. The bottom-up voices of Islamic protest defend their positions and justify their counsel and arguments on religious grounds. And the state itself has adopted the Wahhabi doctrine as its guiding politico-religious framework. It is important here to stress the strong linkage of Wahhabism and politics from the beginning when Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab began his renewal in Arabia in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Al-Dakhil credits Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab with the early rise of nationalism in Arabia. "The Wahhabiyya initiated the process of nation-building in eighteenth-century Arabia. Indeed, this was declared objective of the shaikh all along. That the movement embarked on such a mission is related to the fact that it was the product of a *hadari* (urban) movement."<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's central message regards the issue of *tawheed*, Oneness of God or Unity of God. It can be argued that the Kingdom is still shaped by a *tawheedi* political culture. The concept has religious and political meaning. Religiously, it means that God's sole authority – through stress of reference to the Qur'an – is final and sacred. Al-Dakhil suggests, and I agree with him, that there is also a *tawheedi* political culture based on obedience to a single ruler or system. So the religious and political notions of Oneness in Wahhabism "come together, with the political unity being a precondition of the divine unity. If worship is to be directed

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<sup>185</sup> Al-Dakhil, "Wahhabism as an Ideology of State Formation," p. 28.

solely to God, then political obedience is to be unconditionally given to one...ruler.”<sup>186</sup> I agree with Al-Dakhil but I also disagree. The other side of this *tawheedi* religio-political culture is that of equality before one God. Politically, this should mean equality of all before the central figure or central ruler. Obedience may, however, be reflected in the allegiance voices of reform have generally given to the central government or the monarchy. As I will argue below, most reformists support the state and therefore produce a discourse of reform that prefers an advisory approach not an oppositional role in a Western sense. I would claim that instead of obedience, which has negative meaning, Saudi political culture tends to be deferential. They recognize and respect the importance of the Saudi royal house and central government and tend to accept their role as rulers of the Kingdom. Deference is found even in Western political systems such as the UK. But again I agree with Al-Dakhil that perhaps the stress on Oneness in Wahhabism has led to a non-participatory political culture:

The catch phrase in the Wahhabi literature says: ‘There is no religion without a jama’ah [community], and no jama’ah without an imam [a ruler], and no imam without obedience.’ One sign of being faithful to God is to be faithful to the community. And to be faithful to the community is not to indulge in its public affairs for this could lead to disobeying the ruler, something that could lead to fitna, or disorder.<sup>187</sup>

However, one must be critical towards this and not read it outside the historical context. The Prophet’s hadith, which Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab treats as sacred, offers so many examples enjoining the ummah to participate and be interested in public affairs. What worked for Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in his time when there was a high level of illiteracy may not apply to modern-day Saudi Arabia. What Al-Dakhil ignores is the Wahhabi notion of community, which gives Wahhabism a strong communitarian content.

Regardless of how one interprets Wahhabism, it has a vision in which all aspects of the political include the religious, and this is reflected today in Saudi political culture and society: support and opposition, communication and dialogue, protest and advice. All find expression in religious form and religious logic. Basically, in line with the state’s reliance on religion in seeking political legitimacy, society or at least the autonomous religious intellectuals use the same technique. They use religion not in

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

order to oppose the state as much as to contest some of its decisions and policies as a way of initiating dialogue with the state, especially a 'strong state'.<sup>188</sup> Thus informal political channels of state-society communication are created. These lines of informal and indirect communication may look 'dissident', but they are also interactive and inquisitive and above all else peaceful. This assessment speaks to the ideas of Eickelman and Piscatori in Muslim politics about the 'fragmentation of religious authority' and the various bottom-up forms of 'Muslim politics' that seek to contest 'power' in a variety of ways given the changing nature of both politics and religion.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the rise of the bottom-up voices of Islamic peaceful protest, the state-affiliated clergy is faced with some a degree of contest over religious authority. This is positive both for the official clergy as well as of the state, giving both opinions that would otherwise not be available without this new phenomenon of political protest. The upshot of this is making both political and religious life more entangled and more engaged with one another. This process of non-systematic politicization, as the Kingdom has no political parties although it has today a parliament, creates a shared arena, even if informal and non-continuous, between the state and society. Closing or inhibiting these channels can lead to crises of confidence in the state and even the rise of radical voices not interested in dialogue with the state. Al-Qaida is a good example of how terrorists take advantage of the absence of peaceful communication between state and society. Perhaps it worthy observing here is that the innovations undertaken by King Abdullah as noted in the previous chapters, namely, the creation of a National Commission for Dialogue, may be considered an effort to make communication more organized, official and continuous. Also, the increasing role given to the Consultative Council, especially in its questioning of the policies of various ministries is another sign of how the monarchy is being responsive to society and widening the margin of state-society dialogue and communication. It can therefore be said that politicization is itself adopted by the state and used in an organized and centralized way, increasingly, to allow for some kind of 'loyal opposition' but from within the system. In varying degrees, issues ranging from education to military affairs get to be debated. However, and this is the facet all Saudis share with their state. The

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<sup>188</sup> Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Transform and Constitute one Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 58-96.

<sup>189</sup> See Dale F. Eickelman & James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 72.

contest is not to take place outside the framework of God's law or the *Shari'ah*, which is state law in the Kingdom.

Even the so-called 'liberals' do not seek to undermine the *Shari'ah* law as law of the land. I will show this when I begin the discourse analysis in chapters 5, 6 and 7, by looking at state and society's prominent types of discourses in Saudi Arabia. What is contested is never the place of Islam. It is the way Islam is understood as my analysis in chapter four will show.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest patterns of opposition do exist in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. That would be misleading and incorrect. The Kingdom has yet to develop a political system that fully accommodates fully-fledged opposition, whether in the form of political parties or other constitutional institutions.<sup>190</sup> Another feature of Saudi political culture is incremental and gradual transformation. What must be always stressed is the fact that the emergence of a Saudi centralized state involved progression over a long period from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early twentieth-century. This progression involved even collapse in 1818, and unification of Najd and Hijaz took sometime before it was realized. This preference for gradualism is also a reflection of the gradual renewal led by Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Al-Rasheed argues that Wahhabism is not without pragmatism,<sup>191</sup> which I will return to when discussing dissidence during the 1991 Gulf War. But the point I want to make here is this pragmatism is evident in gradualist approach to the spread of renewal, and the whole Saudi-Wahhabi project to create central government. A third feature of Saudi political culture, which derives from Islam as well as the Wahhabi doctrine, is the institution of consultation (*shura*).<sup>192</sup> Cohesion and stability have been largely driving forces in the evolution of the Kingdom's still new and evolving political system.<sup>193</sup> In this system there are informal channels of political communication through which the mercantile and middle and upper classes get their messages across to the state. These classes share

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<sup>190</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis* (London: Routledge 1993).

<sup>191</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 2.

<sup>192</sup> Amin Sa'ati, *Al-Shura fi al-Mamlakah al-Arabiyyah al-Saudiyyah* [Consultation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] (Cairo: al-Markiz al-Saudi li-Aldirasat al-Stratigiyyah 1992).

<sup>193</sup> Christine Helms, M. *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (London: Croom Helm 1981).

with the state the concern for stability.<sup>194</sup> It is not as if the pattern of political communication is entirely top-down and from the state to the society. The *majlis* (meeting forum, council for meeting) of the various governors and royal officials, for instance, have for a long time established the practice of direct contact with these societal representatives and interests. Already, as mentioned in chapter 1 major reforms under King Abdullah which were unthinkable before have been introduced. Instead of ‘opposition’ one finds evidence mostly of peaceful protest or ‘dissent’.<sup>195</sup> The exception, of course, is the terrorist attacks on civilians and the state by al-Qaida. This protest, mainly by bottom-up religious voices unaffiliated with the state, forms the substance of the drive or the process of politicization in the Kingdom. Examples of these with focus on the Gulf War will be given below. The question of how political culture influences political discourses, of both dissent and loyalty to the state, is looked at through examples since the occupation of the Grand mosque in Mecca in 1979 up to the 1991 Gulf War period. The key feature is the predominance of ‘advisory dissent’ but without the absence of types of ‘radical dissent’.

### 3.4.1 *The Gulf War and Rise of Dissent in the 1990s*

When considering politicization, the illegal invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 and the war to liberate it in 1991, in which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributed logistical support, troops and funds, no modern event since the founding of Saudi Arabia has probably contributed as much to this process. The contests, dissent, and mostly debate displayed by society, and even from within the state and the royal family, are unprecedented. These contests, dissent and debate were not aimed at toppling the existing system. They were instead intended at engaging with the state for the purpose of reform. I am of the view that had not for this period of dynamic debate and dissent the Kingdom would not have resulted in the current reforms under King Abdullah. Therefore the kind of process of politicization I am trying to conceptualize revolves around the idea of *istinsah* and *nush* (counsel-seeking and advice). This is one Islamic value revered and practised widely since the time of the Prophet. It is noted by voluntarism: voluntary advice-seeking and giving, and informality of communicating

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<sup>194</sup> Mark Heller & Nadav Safran, *The New Middle Class and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia*, Paper No. 3 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, 1985).

<sup>195</sup> Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

such advice. My argument here is that officials in the state, even they acted at times to limit or ban dissent and debate, they have mostly and deliberately allowed them a role in expressing views from below. This is vital in that the state knew how to benefit from these un-official societal inputs as well as having a form of informal ‘public opinion’, which Orientalists call ‘Arab street’ according to Sadiki.<sup>196</sup> This dynamic is still under-researched as it tends to escape the attention of scholars who tend to assume the monarchy to act through oppression and proscription, missing these subtle instances of engaging with society.<sup>197</sup> In the Kingdom’s still undocumented ‘political culture’, for which I am piecing up features I happen to be familiar with, this brand of communication may be categorized as ‘voluntary advocacy’. More correctly, one may point out two other Islamic traditions, practised by the learned scholars, official and unofficial, of *maw‘idah* (religious reminding) or *irshad* (guidance). They are means, which are not binding on those who receive them. The learned scholars are bound to practice guidance. But the guidance received is not obliging on those in the seats of power, for instance, to act according to its content. Of course, in the case of the Kingdom, since this guidance is unbinding, un-official, and largely coming from voices and forces that do not counsel an overthrow of the existing system, it gets some reception, be it informal and never confirmed. This is, as the analysis below will point out, one reason why petitions have become vital in registering in a semi official way that communication of guidance has taken place, and that the obligation of guidance has been observed. So the aim of dissent is not entirely about agenda-setting on behalf of political ends *per se*, such as changing policy, but also on behalf of religious dutifulness of through the enacting of guidance. Nonetheless, through these activities politicization is widened and deepened, opening an informal arena, almost a ‘drop-box’, where society leaves messages to the state.

The analysis now turns to the Gulf War of 1991, which was the main event that led to some dissent by establishment or state-affiliated Wahhabi scholars as well as voices from within society. This ‘dissent’, as I have mentioned above, is both guidance and protest. Nonetheless, it has provided a form of ‘loyal’ challenge. Overthrowing the

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<sup>196</sup> Larbi Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections without Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 252-256.

<sup>197</sup> In making this claim, I am relying on personal expertise and observation acquired through advisory work done in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with His Royal Highness, Prince Turki Al-Faisal. Private discussions with aids and advisors working in the Royal Court confirm this assessment.

monarchy, for instance, was never one of its political objectives in spite of presence of US bases in the Kingdom.<sup>198</sup> It is the US bases that mobilised religious voices against that particular policy. What must be understood here is that very policy became at the time a convenient tool for airing criticism of the government and a number of other unrelated policies, communicated as part of the duty of religious guidance. Here religion and politics are mixed. Justifying criticism as guidance to the political rulers made it difficult to punish, ban or reject. However, some of the leading voices leading the movement of dissent were jailed or fired from employment, especially at the Saudi state-funded institutions of higher education.

What is noticeable here is not only that there was a blurring of the political and the religious, which was accepted as a long practice inaugurated by Ibn Saud and bin Abd al-Wahhab in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but also the opening of a window of opportunity from which to push a reformist agenda. That is, the agenda of *islah* (reform) and even *tajdeed* (renewal). There is a subtle message in this agenda: reclaiming the mission of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself. Thus the state cannot turn against this agenda without in a way rejecting Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own message of renewal, and the resulting Wahhabi puritanical creed and persuasion that shaped the state's won identity, or the marriage of politics and religion concluded by the early founders of the Saudi State.

I wish to make a few observations here about the nature of dissent and how it intertwines with reform.

The notion of reform can mean different things in different contexts and different types of political systems and states. Advocacy of reform in the Kingdom is largely focused on the aim of communicating guidance and, in many examples, valid criticism. Dissent itself can be divided into two types. The first one is *radical*, and this is the least prevalent in the Kingdom, and aims at questioning the entirety of the political monarchical system led by Al-Saud. The second one is '*advisory*', and it aims at establishing dialogue and channels of communication for giving guidance to the rulers. One observation that must be made here is that the second type is accepted,

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<sup>198</sup> These bases preceded the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and eventually they became vital in the US-led effort to wrestle Kuwait back from Saddam Hussein in 1991. The UN issued the right resolutions for the liberation of Kuwait. The criticism of the US bases was not about their role in liberating Kuwait, was backed up by religious *fatwas* or legal opinion, but by the presence of non-Muslim troops in the land of Islamic revelation, which is considered forbidden by many scholars of Islam.

contrary to the views of many Orientalists who dismiss the Kingdom as a closed and unresponsive and authoritarian system. Moreover, this second type of ‘dissent’, which is ‘advisory’ in nature and even ‘loyal’ since it shares with the state the value of gradual reform, has had tremendous success and influence. Were it not for this type of advisory dissent, the Kingdom would not have had a parliament today and other important reforms introduced gradually under King Fahd and after him King Abdullullah. Plus, one must not fail to mention the increasing participation of business elites in state affairs in the Kingdom, another reform introduced quietly and through gradualism.<sup>199</sup> I must recall my own observation about reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia being incremental. The Kingdom’s ‘political culture’ is not in any way ‘revolutionary’ in terms of transformation. Indeed, the input of the Kingdom’s founder<sup>200</sup> who was successful in moderating in the 1900s the early zeal, fanaticism and revolutionary way of the Wahhabi Ikhwan (brothers) forces points to a historical appreciation of gradual transformation.<sup>201</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed makes the point that Wahhabism can be both ‘quietist and revolutionary’.<sup>202</sup> I would argue that the revolutionary phase in the 1800s during the short expansionism that was ended by the Egyptian-Ottoman invasion and the end of the first ‘Saudi-Wahhabi’ state, which lasted from 1744 to 1818. Central to this ‘revolutionary zeal was the joint Saudi-Wahhabi effort to spread Wahhabism outside the Arabian Peninsula, and well into Iraq and Syria. Habib describes the early zeal with which the Wahhabi persuasion was spread in these conquered territories. He says that they “...destroyed mosques and shrines, punished practices that were anathema to Wahhabi teachings, and imposed Wahhabism with a zeal that surpassed anything the region had known before or has known since.”<sup>203</sup> The quietist period began properly after the founding of a centralised state in the 1900s combining Najd and Hijaz.

Radical dissent was used by forces who were not interested in a dialogue with the state. Their aim was to change the system completely. Those who planned and implemented the terrorist occupation of the Grand Mosque in the late 1970s are a good example of the type of radical dissent that does not hesitate to use violence against the

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<sup>199</sup> Alexander Bligh, “The Saudi Religious Elite...Participants in the Political System of the Kingdom,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 17, No.1 (1985), pp. 37–50.

<sup>200</sup> David Howarth, *The Desert King: A Life of Ibn Saud* (London: Collins, 1964).

<sup>201</sup> Joseph Kostiner, “On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the formation of the Saudi State,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21 (1985), pp. 298-323.

<sup>202</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation*, p. 2.

<sup>203</sup> Habib, “Wahhabi Origins of the Contemporary Saudi State,” p. 58.

state. Al-Rasheed uses the term ‘jihadis’.<sup>204</sup> Today, and after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia itself came under terrorist attacks by yet another form of radical dissent but this time by Bin Laden’s al-Qaida, the same group that attacked the US on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2001. Of course, the 9/11 events showed how the Kingdom was allied with the US, its leading strategic and economic partner, as well as with the Taliban.<sup>205</sup> What we know about this type of radical dissent is that they do not hesitate to use violence, that they blame the Saudi rulers for corruption, and that they use *takfeer* (practice of excommunication)<sup>206</sup> to justify fighting the state, fellow Muslims, non-Muslims and, in the case of the Kingdom, Saudi citizens. This was demonstrated both in the occupation of the Grand Mosque in 1979 and the attacks done inside the Kingdom from the 1990s. So what was the justification given by Johaymen Alotaiby, the man who masterminded the occupation of the Grand Mosque?<sup>207</sup> Amongst Alotaiby attacked the learned scholars, the class of ‘*Ulama*’ associated with the state as well as the state itself. His accusations included the whole question of the learned scholars being dependent on the rulers. He mentioned to blame them for turning a blind eye to the rulers’ ‘impiety’. For him this constituted corruption of the class of religious leaders whose role was to guide the rulers not work with them and depend on them. Thus the learned scholars are accused of not doing their job properly, by ignoring corruption, alliance with the ‘infidel’ Western powers as well as financial corruption.

All Muslim rulers must be from the Quraish. Present Muslim rulers are co-operating with infidels and those who deny God...The royal family is corrupt. It worships money and spends it on palaces not mosques. If you accept what they say, they will make you rich; otherwise they will persecute and even torture you. The ulama have warned the royal family about its corruption but Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz is in the family’s pay and has endorsed their actions.<sup>208</sup>

What can be taken from the above quote is the stress placed on the elements of piety, corruption, the Western alliance, the squandering of the Kingdom’s wealth that seems to occupy the forces of radical dissent, in the past but also currently as similar

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<sup>204</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, pp. 152-156.

<sup>205</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London: Pan Books, 2001).

<sup>206</sup> For more on the question of excommunication in Wahhabism, see Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 102.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>208</sup> See the excellent article by James Buchan, “Secular and Religious Opposition in Saudi Arabia,” in Tim Niblock, (ed.), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 106-124.

challenges have not faded. However, the state is engaging with its own radical plan to eradicate radical dissent, and the process of ‘reintellectualization’ of Saudi society which I will be discussing in chapter 4 will focus on this aspect in a focused way.

But no event politicized religion like the 1991 Gulf War when Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam’s holy shrines fought alongside the US in support of Kuwait, a neighbouring Gulf state invaded by Iraq in 1990. The politicization created lots of space for ‘advisory’ dissent, which made non-state affiliated scholars more outspoken about reform than ever before. In particular, the phenomenon named as ‘fundamentalism’, which I avoid using in this thesis, and the participation within it of voices of ‘Islamization’ is at once a by-product and a producing dynamic of this politicization.<sup>209</sup> But it eventually also mobilized the forces of radical dissent against the state in the early 1990s, especially after the US and its Arab and Western allies succeeded in defeating Saddam and freeing Kuwait. In particular, the fact that the US forces failed to keep its bases in the Kingdom after the ousting of Saddam became a focus of challenges against the state from a new phase of radical dissent that showed its will and capacity for using terrorist attacks against the Kingdom to send political messages to the rulers. This politicization must be critically assessed in two ways. At one level, it was positive in the sense that it enabled peaceful, moderate and concerned voices of ‘Islamization’, or ‘political Islam’ according to Dekmejian,<sup>210</sup> to participate through guidance, mild criticism, and petitions, which I will look at in this chapter. In my view, the state itself gained some kind of un-official but loyal opposition. It needed to hear views from outside the state and its official arms and institutions. This eventually paid off even if the mid-1990s the state faltered and did not know who to react and many of the leaders of this highly politicized segment of the voices of ‘advisory’ dissent and ‘Islamization’ were banned, jailed or punished but never with death or banishment. At a second level, the phenomenon of politicization by the forces of radical dissent was not genuinely interested in political solutions. It lacked pragmatism and the skill for negotiation. All it was interested in was issuing accusations, threats or acting on its threats through terrorist attacks. In terms of ‘politicization’ there was no participatory value gained through their actions. To an extent, the term ‘puritan’ used by Abou El Fadl more or less applied to

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<sup>209</sup> Hrair R. Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

<sup>210</sup> Hrair R. Dekmejian, ‘The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia’, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 4 (1994), esp. pp 635-45.

them as they tended to misuse the Qur'an and the *Hadith* to justify killing and violence. This practice of politics must not be associated with Wahhabism, which has pragmatic elements that are ignored by many Orientalists and observers of the Saudi state and society.

### **3.5 Reflection: Specificity of 'Reform' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

This section is important as it ties together ideas from the discussion coming before and the discussion of the 'Islamization' and reform movements of the 1990s in the next chapter. Discussion of specificity aims at understanding reform or discourse of reform as constructions happening within a broader historical/political context (since the 18<sup>th</sup> century) as well as an intellectual context (the influence and impact of Wahhabism on nation and state-building). When discussing 'reform' in the Saudi context, one must keep in mind the historical and intellectual backgrounds that continue to shape how Saudis understand, talk about and practise reform.

Religious reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia may be seen by Wahhabis themselves as well as by other Muslims as a form of Islamic rebirth,<sup>211</sup> one which sought to eradicate heresy and decadence, two of the ills Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab blames for the decline in puritanical worship of Allah alone. I argue here, is marked by conservatism. In fact, it is this conformism, even conservatism, that defines the Kingdom, socially, politically, and religiously. Therefore when addressing the question of specificity of reform in the Kingdom one cannot ignore its conformist nature conservative tenet and constant of the politico-religious and social orders. What Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's legacy has been is that orthodoxy is the framework within which reform itself is conceived, contested, and adopted or discarded. In other words, there is no reform outside religion. As I noted above, the renewal initiated by Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab has produced a puritanical exegesis. This purist position has had spill-over effects into the political realm. As a result the notion of political reform that may or may not be possible in the Kingdom is shaped by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's legacy. I argue that this legacy is defined by five tenets:

- a) reverence of God's power as the sole source of authority and its exclusive centre; this is related to the idea of Oneness of God, *tawheed*;

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<sup>211</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*, p. 3.

- b) a purist understanding of Islam, favouring literalist reading of the textual sources of Islam;
- c) a practice and reasoning in the realm of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that accords the sayings and the deeds, the *Sunnah*, the Prophet's example, as unquestionably foundational;
- d) the *Shari'ah* or Islamic Law as a foundation for law-making; and
- e) gradualist-pragmatist approach to nation-building

Thus Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab defines a fivefold system of Islamic authenticity that for him represents for a genuine Muslim a non-negotiable set of commitments, obligations and acts central to true faith. Nowhere does Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab apply a historicist approach or methodology to the corpus of *hadith*, for instance. Post-colonial trends of renewal, in the Muslim world have produced many forms of exegetical reasoning via *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) that tend to treat the Prophets' sayings, *hadith*, as historical texts that must be re-read within their specific context. In a way, this is the problem Abou El Fadl attacks most about Wahhabism.<sup>212</sup> No invitation to scrutinize the *hadith* as a text of lesser sanctity and reliability than the Qur'an exists within Wahhabi practice of jurisprudence. Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's fivefold system, in my view, results in a normative framework that since the 18<sup>th</sup> century continues to define the balance of religion and politics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This system's implications for the rules that govern reform remain deep-rooted in Saudi society and polity. The question is how?

Firstly, the overall 'political culture' may be considered to be non-Secular. The language, the messages, and the political objectives, even of the so-called today 'liberals' in the Kingdom, do not seek secularization of politics and society even if they tend to advocate a less visible and intrusive role by religion in the public sphere. Separation of religion of politics would lead to a crisis of identity for the Saudi state, which since its founding has worked in partnership with Wahhabism as a legitimating ideology and creed. This politico-religious identity can be directly attributed to the Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's legacy and impact on state formation, legitimation and survival from the first alliance back in the mid-1700s in Dir'iyya with Muhammad Ibn Saud. As Habib argues, the partnership has been inseparable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during three phases of state formation as well as in the 1700s:

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<sup>212</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, pp. 276-279.

...the period 1902-1932, when the territorial conquests were completed and consolidated and the Saudi-Wahhabi hegemony was imposed upon them; the period 1932-1945, when the tasks of forming a rudimentary Saudi-Wahhabi central government, unifying the disparate regions of the country, and creating a national Saudi-Wahhabi identity were undertaken, and the period 1945-1953 when the Kingdom defined its strategic foreign policy objectives in the context of its Wahhabi mission.<sup>213</sup>

Again, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance must not be understood in terms of political use of the Wahhabi creed, which endured after the overthrow of the first state in 1818. It was a genuine commitment between two forces that complemented each other: “Had the Saudis intended to exploit Wahhabism only as a vehicle to expand their political power in the Arabian Peninsula, they would not have, they would not have continued their conquests, or riding the crest of Wahhabism, they would have extended their conquests beyond the peninsula while imposing Wahhabism only nominally or not at all.”<sup>214</sup> The bond between religion and politics is an historical continuity, which is very hard even for the liberal voices, who may be sympathetic with secularism, to challenge. It would be a challenge against the state’s own identity.

However, and related to the question of Politico-religious identity of the state and opposition to secularism, is an important political feature that still defines Saudi reform: moderation and pragmatism, two traits which are hardly associated with Wahhabism. Al-Rasheed notes how Wahhabis have learnt to be pragmatic since the Egyptian invasion and destruction of the first state and its Wahhabi partners in Dir‘iyya in the early 1800s. As a result Wahhabis, Al-Rasheed says pragmatically chose survival over confrontation with the superior invading forces. From this point in time, Wahhabis have learnt to accommodate political power and live with it. Moreover as Al-Rasheed points out “it seems that Wahhabis learned a serious lesson from the Egyptian annihilation...in 1818: they learned to be pragmatic. Wahhabis survived afterwards because they supported political power, which meant moderating religious zeal. Since then, Wahhabi scholars have accepted a subservient position. They lived in the shadow of the sultan.”<sup>215</sup> This moderation, and against some of the more excessive Orientalist accusations against Wahhabism, is the moderation or *wasatiyya* that made Shaykh

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<sup>213</sup> Habib, “Wahhabi Origins of the Contemporary Saudi State,” p. 57.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>215</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 2.

Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab preach co-existence even with non-Muslims. He did not preach killing them or getting rid of them (as for instance, some ‘jihadis’ do as Madawi Al-Rasheed describes in her book). Delong-Bas argues that Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab distinguished between a *kafir* (infidel, non-believer) and a *mushrik* (polytheist); did not make the death penalty automatic against non-believers who must be given guidance and the opportunity to correct their ways; objected to collective punishment, stressing that the individual responsible is to be punished; and did not support declaration of holy war against infidels. He went even further than this by accepting the principle of Muslims living amongst them if their rights to free worship are not threatened: “Not only did Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab not automatically declare Jihad against *kuffar*, but he also permitted Muslims to live among them under the condition that the Muslims were permitted to practice and study their religion.”<sup>216</sup> The stress of tolerance by Delong-Bas is a good response to Abou El Fadl, for instance, who blames holy war and violence against the Western world and Muslims on Wahhabism, which he considers a ‘heresy’.<sup>217</sup> This value of tolerance is upheld by Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in line with his belief and advocacy of ‘public interest’ (*maslaha a’amma*).<sup>218</sup> Delong-Bas adds that this belief made Shaykh Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab more interested in truce (*houdnah*) with infidels than war.<sup>219</sup>

Finally, it must be remembered that all of the elements of non-secularism, gradualism, pragmatism, tawheedi culture, advisory tendencies, traits that find strong roots and practice in Wahhabism, have all shaped the evolution of the Wahhabi creed as well as of the rise of the ‘Saudi-Wahhabi’ state. These have in turn shaped the type of discourse of reform found in the Kingdom and provided an important background to the advent of the ‘reintellectualization’ of Saudi Arabia. In chapter 4 I try to examine these questions.

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<sup>216</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, “Wahhabism and the Question of Religious Tolerance,” in Mohammed Ayoub & Hasan Kosebalaban (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>217</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, p. 286.

<sup>218</sup> Delong-Bas, “Wahhabism and the Question of Religious Tolerance,” p. 13.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

## CHAPTER 4

### REINTELLECTUALISATION: A CONTEXTUALISATION OF DISCOURSES AND COUNTER-DISCOURSES IN SAUDI ARABIA

A new sense of public is emerging throughout Muslim-majority states and Muslim communities elsewhere. It is shaped by increasingly open contests over the authoritative use of the symbolic language of Islam. New and increasingly accessible modes of communication have made these contests increasingly global, so that even local disputes take on transnational dimensions. These increasingly open and accessible forms of communication play a significant role on fragmenting and contesting political and religious authority. Muslims, of course, act not just as Muslims but according to class interests, out of a sense of nationalism, on behalf of tribal or family networks, and from all the diverse motives that characterize human endeavour. Increasingly, however, large numbers of Muslims explain their goals in terms of the normative language of Islam.<sup>220</sup>

#### 4.1 Focus

In this chapter which opens up section two of my analysis, including discourse analysis in chapters five and six, I have two aims. Firstly, I argue here that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been undergoing a quasi ‘revolution’ of intellectual renewal. I have here used the term ‘reintellectualisation’ coined by Dale Eickelman to describe this phenomenon. The discourses and counter-discourses and the intellectual contests taking place in the Kingdom are not only shaped by this phenomenon, but they equally shape and construct reintellectualisation. The first section of my analysis considers the dynamics behind the emergence of this process. In particular, I look at the new media and technologies as well as the dynamic of education and how they have refashioned Saudi society, in particular leading to fragmentation of religious authority. Following analysis of the dynamics behind reintellectualisation, I shall in the second section attempt explain three moments, communicative, interpretive and fragmentary, which I consider to be inherent to the process of reintellectualisation in the Kingdom of Saudi

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<sup>220</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, “Redefining Muslim Publics,” in Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 1.

Arabia. The aim of this exercise is to provide as a contextualisation in a comprehensive way about the rise of new currents of discourse in KSA. It is impossible to understand the variety of ideological contests in the Kingdom without understanding the overall context within which they take place. In particular, I examine reintellectualisation in a twofold fashion: as politicisation of intellectual discourses in the late 1980s and the 1990s, and as discursive contests, that is, discourses and counter-discourses amongst the Saudi intelligentsia. Prior to this analysis of this new-found process of reintellectualisation, I begin my analysis with an a brief analysis of the dynamics of education, new media and technologies in order to to understand the cultural and intellectual evolution of Saudi Arabia in the late twentieth-century and at the turn of the new millennium.

#### **4.2 The Dynamics of Media, New Technologies and Education in the Saudi Context**

I shall begin this section by returning to the above quote, which is from *New Media in the Muslim World*, co-edited by Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson. A few ideas advanced by Eickelman and Anderson are useful for describing the emerging ‘public’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. May be, and given the focus of my thesis, even talking today about ‘one public’ united by ideas in KSA may be inaccurate. It is not at all imprecise to refer to diverse ‘publics’ with diverse ideologies and debates as how the Kingdom should develop religiously, culturally and politically. Whether one is discussing the ideological line battles between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘modernists’ or ‘conservatives’ and ‘liberals’, the idea is that it is no longer appropriate to talk of a single ‘Saudi public’. There is today a degree of sophistication and diversification derived from the process of reintellectualisation as I will be explaining in this chapter. In this respect, I find in the work of Eickelman and Anderson evidence of how kind of ‘new publics’ are emerging not only in KSA but also in the Muslim World at large. There are four connections, which explain the emergence of ‘publics’ or ‘discourses’ in the Kingdom. These are relevant for the analysis I am trying to develop in this chapter. These four connections are also relevant to the idea of ‘reintellectualisation’ I am using in the analysis.

First, there is today in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contests and disagreements over the use of ‘the symbolic language of Islam’. The history of discourse whether

religious or political has been predominated by the use and may be even over-use of the symbolic language of Islam. As I have explained in the preceding chapters the link between religion and politics has defined a large role of religion in terms of legitimisation of politics and justification of the state's birth and continuity. That role has in return meant that politics itself is coloured by religion at least in terms of language in matters such as education, law, media, and public morality. Under this paradigm the learned scholars of Islam have, as employees of the state, doubled up as preachers and, at the same time, defenders of the state and the Kingdom – in times of peace and war, in discussion of private and public matters. The defenders of the state from the religious hierarchy have thus earned protection, livelihood and, more significantly, monopoly over the use of the symbolic language of Islam. The scene was then one of unity and uniformity and not diversity. Of course, there were those who adopted different views, even before the arrival of new media. Largely, these different discourses have remained marginalised, which is changing today. This is exactly where the connection made by Eickelman and Anderson between increasing contests over the use of the symbolic language of Islam and the emergence of new media has relevance to the Saudi context – and of course to the Arab context as a whole. The Internet, Satellite TV, private new media, including print media, have diversified the 'public' and empowered new discourses to compete by disseminating their own ideas about religion, politics, culture, gender issues, relations with the Western world, and about public morality. The dimension of new media and more open communication is the second idea I borrow from Eickelman and Anderson. Education has a role too. I shall go back to this point when I discuss the dynamics of reintellectualisation in Saudi Arabia.

So what is the relevance of these new media? The answer leads me to stating the third idea which is important for our understanding of the nature of the 'public' and of 'discourse', in relation to religion and politics in KSA. This third idea is that of 'fragmentation' of authority, politically and religiously. We cannot understand the different ideological and intellectual debates in the Kingdom without understanding this new dynamic. The Kingdom used to have one type of discourse heavily influenced by religion and the input of the country's clerical authority. This is no longer the case. This contest is today visible in the Kingdom and my own study of two ideological and intellectual currents in the Kingdom attempts to describe and understand the content and the nature of contest. So the fragmentation of authority is at the centre of the discussion and analysis I am trying to develop by comparing two trends of thought in KSA. The

final and fourth idea I find useful in the above quote is the relevance of Islam in these opposing contests as a normative framework. This is really important in explaining how the new ideological trends of thought contest each other and get entangled in all kinds of debates of how to address public issues and affairs with reference to Islam. The religionists do this; so do those advocating intellectual trends of thought inspired by secular thinking. Thus Islam is both a subject of debate in which the traditional religious authority is being fragmented and a source for the references of those seeking to influence public debate.

#### *4.2.1 Education and Media in the Saudi Context*

It is impossible to understand the emergence of contests and challenges to religious authority without understanding two key factors that, in my view, have made all of this possible: the revolution in education and the media revolution.

Firstly, by the revolution in education I am referring to the massive development that has been registered in higher education in the Kingdom. Contests and challenges must be linked to advances in this field. Literally, we cannot talk of ‘reintellectualisation’ of KSA without considering education advances. Higher education has become the centrepiece of State welfarism in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the state is still the main provider in all domains ranging from housing to health. But the area where state public investment manifests itself in society, culture and politics is in educational acquisition. The ongoing contests one sees today in KSA, in the discussion of religion and politics, point to the increased role of education and educated publics. This increased visibility does not come from a vacuum. It results from two decades of huge investment in the upgrading of education. Today KSA has the largest Middle Eastern and Arab graduate population overseas. According to a figure given in 2010 by the Saudi Higher Education Minister there were 109,000 bursaries allocated to Saudi graduate and postgraduate students in overseas universities, mostly in the Western world.<sup>221</sup> This prompted the Kingdom’s Minister of Higher Education, Khalid Al-Anqari, to describe the thousands of Saudi citizens studying abroad through government bursaries and loans as “ambassadors of their country.” Given the huge number of Saudi

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<sup>221</sup> See, “Overseas Scholarships Serve 109,000 Saudi Students,” in <http://www.edarabia.com/16660/overseas-scholarships-serve-109000-saudi-students/>, 7 May 2011.

graduates abroad he additionally views them as obligated to “portray their country’s religious, cultural and national values” in the countries where they may be receiving their university training.<sup>222</sup> This is precisely what I am trying to argue here: the fact that Saudi officials miss the point about these students acting as what I might describe here as ‘double ambassadors’. I mean by this that these students are at once agents of representing and exporting Saudi values, as claimed by the Saudi Higher Education Minister, and of the values of the countries where they go for university education or other graduate training. Thus they become agents (not in a negative or conspiratorial sense) of dissemination of culture from the ‘West’ (where they live and study for a number of years) to the ‘East’ (in this case the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). I am not here insinuating that they disseminate, as claimed by some religious leaders, negative cultural values that threaten local culture and religion. To the contrary, what I am trying to express here is the fact that these graduate students bring along, when they return home for good, new systems of thought, management techniques, innovative and critical thinking skills that are not necessarily hostile to the local culture or religion. To the contrary, educational know-how allows for a quiet ‘modernisation’ of society. My reference here to ‘modernisation’ is not based on the ‘modernisation school’. I do not agree with its assumptions such as “the passing of tradition” or increased secularisation as a result of influx of ideas and systems of technical and intellectual know-how that lead to the transformation of tradition.<sup>223</sup> Nor do I agree with its stress of sequential phases of development.<sup>224</sup> I think society as a whole benefits from the influx of innovation, and this includes even religious discourses which make full use of high-tech, new media, satellite TV, new ideas and modes of critical thought. I do not agree with the assumption by the modernisation school’s argument that ‘tradition’ passes and that is the area where modernisation gains ground, publics, and transformative momentum. The works by Ronald Inglehart *The Silent Revolution* and *Culture Shift*, mostly written based on research done in the industrialised countries of the West. In the

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<sup>222</sup> See report of Al-Anqari’s statement in “Saudi Students Abroad are Kingdom’s Ambassadors,” <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=20110513100554>, 02/06/2011.

<sup>223</sup> One of the most representative texts of this thesis written about the Middle East is by Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1958).

<sup>224</sup> Christian Welzel & Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

latter he makes a good case for intergenerational change as younger population learns and applies new ways and take its place in society instead of the older population.<sup>225</sup> In the former, published in 1977, he advances the thesis that younger generations close the cultural gap, moving societies upward along the path of cultural transformation.<sup>226</sup> To an extent, and further studies in the future, could address whether there is a ‘silent revolution’ of a ‘cultural shift’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In this study I am proposing ‘reintellectualisation’ as an important dynamic that is taking KSA along the path of discursive, cultural and intellectual shift as a result of higher levels of education acquisition amongst the country’s youthful population, and a more open media scene. The link between higher education and social capital or citizenship has been affirmed in research such as by Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry.<sup>227</sup> In a way this is what is happening in Saudi Arabia, and which I consider to be an important factor in the process of ‘reintellectualisation’, the social capital in terms of greater know-how of critical inquiry, in spite of censorship, is today resulting in increased contestation by Saudis of the way religion is represented and managed and in the way they view government. These contests are positive as they are creating new discourses and new trends of religious and political thought, which no longer limit their roles to deference towards authority, whether religious or political. To the contrary, the new trends of thought through the aid of the new media and satellite TV are creating a kind of ‘new public’ according to Marc Lynch in his work on the impact of Al-Jazeera on Arab audiences.<sup>228</sup>

### **4.3 Explaining ‘Reintellectualisation’ in the Saudi Context**

I shall stress the idea of ‘moments’ in my explanation of the concept of ‘reintellectualisation’. Generally, and from what I can glean from my reading of Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, my take on this concept is that it is tied to what I describe here as three important ‘moments’. The discussion here of these moments and of reintellectualisation in the Saudi context is at the same time conceptual in that it is based

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<sup>225</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 41-92.

<sup>226</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles amongst Western Publics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 200-283.

<sup>227</sup> Norman H. Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry, *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), for instance see pp. 144-187.

<sup>228</sup> Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 5-21.

on definitions provided by Eickelman and Anderson. I call these moments as follows: ‘communicative’, ‘re-interpretive’, and ‘fragmentary’. In describing them thus I am not in any way assuming that these moments are independent of one another. To the contrary, reintellectualisation makes sense only when understood in terms of co-dependent moments beginning with a revolution in the sphere of communication which in turn gives rise to dissident discourses, in the spheres of politics, religion and culture, and as a result of dissidence intellectual authority, especially religious, becomes fragmented. I use the adjective ‘fragmented’ here in a positive sense with emphasis on the pluralising effect of the ‘fragmentary moment’.

#### 4.3.1 *The ‘Communicative Moment’*

I shall begin this section with a quote from the book *New Media in the Muslim World*, by Eickelman and Anderson:

Some new media seen as innovative even in the 1980s are now almost taken for granted. In countries such as Saudi Arabia, the same fax machines that rapidly disseminate criticisms of the regime are also essential to the conduct of business. The state is powerless to limit their use without disrupting the economy. Audiocassette tapes spread the sermons of Ayatollah Khomeini and others in the pre-revolutionary Iran of the 1970s, just as videotapes of anti-regime preachers and demonstrations today circulate in some countries of the Arabian Peninsula. One such video, showing employees of the Saudi embassy in London videotaping masked demonstrators while the demonstrators videotape the embassy (1994), indicates both how commonplace and how flexible the new media have become.<sup>229</sup>

The above quote underscores the end of state monopoly over the use of new media. The new media, even in their early and more elementary forms, were used by dissidents and the public at large to counter information fed to society by the state. Eickelman and Anderson give a powerful example of how the same media used by the state to spy on demonstrators is used by the public to challenge state authority. That was in the 1990s, and in the 1980s when the audiocassette tapes were in fashion. Moreover,

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<sup>229</sup> See report of Al-Anqari’s statement in “Saudi Students Abroad are Kingdom’s Ambassadors,” <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=20110513100554>, 02/06/2011, p. 3.

they correctly make the point of how states are increasingly powerless to control the availability and use of these new media. To do so would hamper economic activity as well as have dire consequences for economic development and modernisation in general. So what I consider to be central to the new media's communicative moment is the kind of 'parity' created by the new media. The state, which in the Arab context, is a non-democratic state, has been weary of presence of rival ideas, information or political projects within Arab societies. This 'parity' – and I am not in any way claiming Arab societies to rival their states in access or use of the new media – looks more credible after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions of 2011. This is one reason why some analysts have called what happened in both countries 'facebook revolutions'.<sup>230</sup> To an extent, this shows the extent to which this intellectual contribution by Eickelman and Anderson has been 'visionary' and correct. Thus the communicative moment heralds a challenging context for state and society, leading not so much to tension as to greater ability of societies to discuss taboo subjects, oppose false information, disseminate rival viewpoints, and open up all kinds of debates between those who advocate the state's political and cultural project and those who oppose them. In this sense, the communicative moment refers to two dynamics. One is the dynamic of social media (facebook, twitter, blogs) and other new media (satellite TV, offshore press, media cities) being more widespread and accessible to the wider publics. This empowers these publics to have the means to contest states and their policies and overall information. The second dynamic is the actual counter-discourses (often rivalling state information and discourses) that enrich public debates and provide new viewpoints. I want here to stress how these debates are not necessarily between the state and society only. They also take place within states as well as within societies in addition to being between them. As a result, the communicative moment can be described as a discursive moment, producing lots of debates as well as enriching them through diverse contributions – liberal, religious, traditional, radical, feminist, postmodernist and extremist.

In the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it must be pointed out that the media outlets owned by Saudi media tycoons in the Middle East region as well as in Europe, particularly Great Britain, have strengthened this communicative moment. This has prompted Saudi-born academic Madawi Al-Rasheed to call the phenomenon of

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<sup>230</sup> See "Egypt's Facebook Revolution: Wael Ghonim Thanks the Social Network," [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/11/egypt-facebook-revolution-wael-ghonim\\_n\\_822078.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/11/egypt-facebook-revolution-wael-ghonim_n_822078.html), 21/06/2011.

Saudi media expansion, along with global political and religious influence, “Kingdom without borders.”<sup>231</sup> Madawi and her co-authors makes a good case for Saudi expansionism through the global media network owned by Saudi media barons and found in Europe, North America and the chief media centres in the Middle Eastern, that is, Beirut and Dubai. The key argument that the three elements of religion, politics and media push the Saudi project of spreading influence across some kind of a ‘global *umma*’ may be true. However, by focusing mostly on the global frontiers they have missed the point that the real transformation is happening locally, within the national frontiers of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and not necessarily without. The second oil boom has enabled KSA to expand globally. But the same boom has produced forces of change, and this is touched upon only marginally in the book by reference to the rise of local leaders and voices inside KSA. For instance, Al-Rasheed’s authors talk about how Saudi expansionism through media, money and politics. One co-author is of the view that these factors have contributed to the “Arabisation” of Islam in Indonesia.<sup>232</sup> Another describes the ‘export’ of Saudi Salafi trends in Yemen a kind of form of “Saudi-isation”.<sup>233</sup> In the tradition of post 9/11 Orientalism about KSA, one contributor to the volume edited by Al-Rasheed speaks of “transnationalisation of Saudi jihadism.”<sup>234</sup> In spite of these perspectives with a global focus, often critical of Saudi Arabia seeking influence through use of money and religion in the Muslim World on the grounds that it leads to ‘radicalisation’ of Muslims, there is an element of truth in the questioning introduced in al-Rasheed’s volume by Noha Mellor. Particularly, she raises the question as whether the Saudi vast media empire has a liberalising effect.<sup>235</sup> Mellor’s analysis is not conclusive at all but correctly asks a very important question of relevance to my own analysis, but she does this by reference to the context outside Saudi borders. The point to be stressed again is that the communicative moment has far

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<sup>231</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia’s Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>232</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, “Saudi Expansion, the Salafi Campaign and Arabised Islam in Indonesia,” in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia’s Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, pp. 263-282.

<sup>233</sup> Laurent Bonnefoy, “Salafism in Yemen: A ‘Saudisation’?” in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia’s Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, pp. 245-262.

<sup>234</sup> Roel Meijer, “Yusuf Al-Uyairi and the Transnationalisation of Saudi jihadism,” in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia’s Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, pp. 221-244.

<sup>235</sup> Noha Mellor, “Bedouinisation or Liberalisation of Culture? The Paradox in the Saudi Monopoly of the Arab Media,” in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia’s Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, pp. 353-372.

more implications for the reintellectualisation of the Saudi domestic context that has been recognised by scholars so far.

Furthermore, the communicative moment cannot be split into global and local. Al-Walid bin Talal's media empire, which includes some of the most liberal media outlets in the Muslim and Arab World, impacts on how people behave and think, and this is becoming more obvious within KSA. The media then is less and less playing a role in responding against threats from overseas, hostile intellectual trends, and crises of legitimacy. In addition to doing these, even if marginally as they are privatised media geared more towards entertainment, they address the local audiences, Saudi and Arab. Thus post the second Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait, the existing Gulf and particularly Saudi media empire changed in terms of function and role.<sup>236</sup> For instance, the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), one of the first private TV outlets created in the early 1990s became more entertainment-focused. When it was first launched by King Fahd's brother-in-law, Waleed al-Ibrahim, it had a different agenda as an arm of the Saudi state's propaganda. Now it is a leader in entertainment. The same today applies to the Orbit TV network. Al-Waleed bin Talal has expanded his media propriety, now owning the Arab Radio and Television entertainment network (ART) in addition to Rotana, Arab MTV, and part ownership of major TV networks, including Murdoch's Fox network. Similarly, Prince Khalid bin Sultan owns the liberal London-based 'Al-Hayat'. His cousins, Riyadh governor Prince Salman's sons, own 'Al-Sharq Al-Awsat', the other liberal newspaper produced from London. The extensive media outlets owned by Saudis and Gulf Arab media tycoons almost led to the production of "instant nationalism" and "McArabism", according to one observer.<sup>237</sup> The satellite TV revolution, using the medium of Arabic, and benefiting from petrodollar largesse, expanded through use of state of the art new technologies, linking Arabs living in 22 countries. Andrew Hammond's fine article on the Saudi media empire analyses how these media outlets more or less keep the masses entertained and "at home" to be precise.<sup>238</sup> "At home" I believe carries a double meaning: firstly, sitting in their entertainment rooms in front of television screens consuming Western music, films,

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<sup>236</sup> Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalisation and the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), pp. 4-23.

<sup>237</sup> Khalid Rinawi, *Instant Nationalism: McArabism, Al-Jazeera & Transnational Media in the Arab World* (Boulder: University Press of America, 2006).

<sup>238</sup> Andrew Hammond, "Saudi Arabia's Media Empire: Keeping the Masses at Home," in *Arab Media & Society*, Issue 3, October 2007.

talk-shows and comedy; and secondly, meaning in their place away from politics, basically apathetic. Hammond in another article advances the argument that KSA has built an extensive media empire to “counter opposition” against the monarchy.<sup>239</sup> There is an element of truth in this, and the state uses the media to ‘sell’ its own values, and package a positive image within the Saudi public. However, the media revolution has impacted on the political and the intellectual: The communicative moment largely made possible by the media revolution, whether producing news and current affairs or entertainment, has partly contributed to the process of reintellectualisation of Saudi society in a way that has made it today less apathetic, more vocal and even more political as can be gleaned by the debates and counter-debates about all matters religious, political and cultural in the Kingdom. Hence one must consider the second ‘interpretive moment’.

#### 4.3.2 *The ‘Interpretive Moment’*

The post-colonial tendency of the state to unify society around a set of centrally designed policies, moral edicts or interpretations of Islam have become difficult to sustain in the present time. Mass education and the spread of new social media and new communication technologies have weakened the capacity of the state to command monopoly over ideas. In Saudi Arabia, as I will explain in chapters six and seven, even the previously loyal clerical class dependent on the state for income and existence is no longer united. The rise of opposite discourses by dissident clerics has led to diversification of points of view and interpretations of religious orthodoxy. As Eickelman and Anderson argue, the old order of total state monopoly over the fashioning of “a publicly expressed code of competencies that all citizens or subjects should assimilate and practice in order to achieve modernity”<sup>240</sup> is much weaker today. Instead, one finds – again thanks to the revolution in new media and communication technologies as well as mass education – challenge to the “legitimacy of state claims to monopolize” interpreting the ways of achieving of modernity or what should modernity mean.<sup>241</sup> In another book Eickelman and Piscatori make a similar point, linking the role

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<sup>239</sup> Andrew Hammond, “Interview – Saudi Media Empire Tries to counter Opposition,” *Reuters*, 9 August 2007.

<sup>240</sup> Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, “Redefining Muslim Publics,” in Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World*, p. 2.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

played by new communication technologies in the production of challenges to centralised religious and political authority. This explains today the diversity of views, such as in Saudi Arabia, and the Muslim World as a whole, which point to Muslims' ability to air difference of opinion, but also enter into dialogue over it in some instances. In others, societies face conflict because of the rise of multiple interpretations that often contradict with formerly authoritative views monopolising the task of explaining modernity, Muslim identity or the right moral conduct in a given Muslim society.

The greater intensity of open communications, combined with higher levels of education, also challenges and confronts local religious ideas and practices long taken for granted and understood as Islamic. It has also led to the increased scrutiny of received ideas as Muslims realize the diversity of the Muslim world and the multiple "Islamic" ways of doing things. New communication technologies play a major role in the foregrounding and questioning of local practices, so it is not just traditional religious scholars who have a say in debates over how to be a Muslim and live a good life – although such voices remain strong and have resilience in adapting to the modern world and civic debate and public life.<sup>242</sup>

Again, the elements of education and technology are put forth by Eickelman and Piscatori as originators of diversification of opinion and of diversity in the sphere of ideas and interpretation of Islam. This new model whereby Muslims are producing challenges to central authority be it religious or political is today found in the Saudi context as it is in the context of countries such as Egypt or Turkey, and these are societies where a higher level of development is always assumed to exist because of the history of the state and state institutions.<sup>243</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed presents an innovative thesis of contests and counter-contests within the Saudi state as well as between it and the various centres of power who operate locally and globally, and address both local and global audiences. For instance, she gives the examples of billionaire and global financier, Al-Walid bin Talal, as one face of the ongoing dynamism of the Saudi State and the late Osama bin Laden as another. Both address through their activities and ideas

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<sup>242</sup> Dale Eickelman & James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>243</sup> Scholars such as Al-Rasheed take 1932 as the date of state creation. Prior to that only limited forms of rule existed. For instance, in the 1800s the towns of Najd were ruled autonomously by local *amirs* or princes. This is one reason why Egypt's Muhammad Ali tried to invade Hijaz and Najd, failing in the latter, where some form of rule existed, making it difficult to control or invade, according to Madawi Al-Rashid, *History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

local and global audiences, becoming effectively, in the 1990s, new centres of influence and challenge to central authority. According to this analysis, Al-Rasheed does not see the contests and discourses within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in terms of centre-periphery. Rather, for her, and owing to the reign of King Fahd (1982-2005), the state was consolidated in such a way that new centres, that is, state actors (princes, financiers, state-affiliated networks) and non-state actors (media barons, charity organisations, unofficial preachers, terrorists, etc.) operating more or less autonomously and sometimes serving opposing agendas. Accordingly the multiple discourses and counter-discourses are active in ways that have the potential to both support state dogma and vision as well as oppose its policies and interpretation of political or religious competencies, as noted above. In this sense, Al-Walid bin Talal is a prince who has vast wealth that would have been unachievable without connections with royal house and the state. Yet this global figure's activities, financial and entrepreneurial, have political implications, for and against the state, as Al-Rasheed explains: one the one hand Al-Walid "consolidates the new model of the Saudi businessmen, and promotes the economic liberalisation adopted by the state. Yet he can thwart state ideology and vision with satellite television promoting Western programmes, pop culture and female emancipation, in defiance of strict Wahhabi preaching condemning such innovations."<sup>244</sup> Al-Rasheed is right in pointing out the example of bin Laden who at one phase of his activism more or less represented the policy preferences of the Saudi state with regard to realisation of Muslim solidarity through organising Arab and Muslim fighters against Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Yet in another phase in the 1990s, after the mujahideen's victory in Afghanistan, he called for autonomy from the US, which contradicted official royal policy.<sup>245</sup> Even the materials used by Saudi preachers to global audiences tended to reflect local political configurations within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for and against the state. For instance, Al-Rasheed argues, the materials used by these preachers sometimes "carried the official Saudi religious interpretation to distant cultures"<sup>246</sup> and at other times they "developed dissident religious tradition that challenged official Saudi Islam."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, "An Assessment of Saudi Political, Religious and Media Expansion," in Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, p. 18.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The result is that, even if somewhat exaggerated, but original, Al-Rasheed's view of Saudi society sums up the emergence of diversity and challenge as an inherent dynamic within Saudi society: "...there is no one Saudi state, one Saudi religious establishment or one Saudi media empire. Today there are multiple actors with contradictory agendas within Saudi Arabia itself."<sup>248</sup> Robert Lacey paints a very Orientalist view of this diversity, unlike Al-Rasheed's sophisticated sociological analysis. However, Lacey also provides many examples of the forces that pulls the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in opposing directions, modern and traditional, liberal and puritanical. Nonetheless, despite the oppositions one finds in his book, there are examples pointing to the diverse influences in a country not solely ruled by a single dogma or thinking despite sustained Saudi control over the Kingdom.<sup>249</sup>

#### 4.3.3 *The 'Fragmentary Moment'*

These aforementioned challenges and contests are now embedded within Saudi society, both at the top and amongst the non-state sphere of activism and discourse. As my analysis in chapters five and six will show Saudi society, amongst the elite, the learned scholars, officials, and journalists, is in the midst of a dynamic experience through which there are multiple discourses about religion and politics. This brings me to the impact the communicative and interpretive moments are having on Saudi society. That impact is one of fragmentation. I fully agree with the argument advanced by Eickelman and Anderson that the media such as desktop publishing and video and audiocassettes, and today new media through use of the Internet or facebook or cable TV, "contribute to the fragmentation of political and religious authority by bypassing established channels. When recast as differences between senders and receivers, distinctions between centre and periphery become far more ambiguous and porous as the senders become multiple and shifting."<sup>250</sup> In their much acclaimed work, *Muslim Politics*, Eickelman and Piscatori argue how higher levels of literacy amongst Muslims, including access to new technologies and travel, have led to fragmentation of religious

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>249</sup> Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia* (New York: Viking Adult, 2009).

<sup>250</sup> Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World*, p. 3.

authority, amongst other types of control over Muslim societies.<sup>251</sup> This caused monopolies over interpretation, which has for a long time been monopolised by elites of learned scholars, to cease and shift from the trained *'alim* (scholar of Islam or judge) to the literate and educated Muslim anywhere. In their words, these processes of challenge of central authority, religious and political, has enabled Muslims to engage in new processes of protest, bargaining and redefinition of authority, diminishing the status of single and authoritarian channels of information dissemination.<sup>252</sup> So textual access and, more pertinently to my study, educational and media access, has similarly contributed to breaking monopoly over how Saudis understand and interpret not only the discourses coming from multiple formulators of opinion and knowledge producers but also the very agents of dissemination and knowledge production. In this sense, the link of knowledge production and power that Michel Foucault describes so well is relevant here. According to Foucault, “what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.”<sup>253</sup> When knowledge production itself stops to emanate from a single centre, then power itself stops being monopolised by one discourse, a single ideology or a single authority. The fragmentary moment is not used here as a negative force. To the contrary, and I refer to Al-Rasheed here, contesting authority in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, religious and political, is a new dynamic, empowering in that it diversifies the source of information, and its agents. Moreover, the passive recipient has closed the gap with the traditional sender of information or producer of knowledge: as Eickelman and Anderson point in their quote the receiver has been able through use of new media and new technologies to reverse the role thus rendering the distinction, as they put it, between the centre and periphery porous and ambiguous. This is the central benefit for public debate and the rise of new voice and a new public, to paraphrase Lynch. Again, quoting Eickelman and Anderson, I agree with the view that “asymmetries between senders and receivers, and between producers and consumers, are reduced as more

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<sup>251</sup> Eickelman & Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, pp. 3-44.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108-134.

<sup>253</sup> Michel Foucault quoted in Stuart Hall, “Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse,” in Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon Yates (eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (London: Sage & The Open University, 2001), p. 77.

people participate in religious and civil discourse.”<sup>254</sup> One might call this the democratising effect of the new media and wider access and participation. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is no exception in this respect. Further to this benefit, one finds the interpretive value embedded in the new media, itself a democratising value:

In this sense, the new media are more participatory, whether by the access they give for the uninitiated to join the conversation or by the implicit invitation to interpret that accompanies more generic, less personalized messages bound to particular contexts. This incompleteness that invites the further interpretation of messages is the mirror of more symmetrical, more interactive sender-receiver relations that characterize the newer media to which these messages migrate.<sup>255</sup>

It is thus, these new interactions increase the interpretive input of the various publics, intellectual, religious or political, fragmenting them whilst bringing them together into a common arena of public debate, thus “transform[ing] the social imaginary and the idea of the public.”<sup>256</sup> In order to understand much more deeply the process of reintellectualisation, I shall in the analysis below look at two inherent trends, firstly looking at reintellectualisation as ‘politicisation’ in the 1990s, and, more pertinently to more recent times, as a more sophisticated phase of discourses and counter-discourses.

#### **4.4 Reintellectualisation as Increased Politicisation, the 1990s**

The usual stereotype held about Arab Gulf societies in general and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular is that there is no politicised public or opposition. If politicisation and opposition are measured in terms of political parties, and institution-building, then the stereotype holds true. However, if these terms are not associated with such institutions, then one can find many examples of how KSA is indeed a country where politicisation and forms of ‘informal’ opposition have always existed. But the 1990s is particularly productive for politicisation. This is due to two factors: the first is the arrival on Saudi soil following the liberation of Kuwait of thousands of US troops who were redeployed with the purpose of strengthening the Saudi-US strategic alliance

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<sup>254</sup> Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, “Redefining Muslim Publics,” in Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World*, p. 4.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

against Saddam Hussein in Iraq as well as giving the Saudi state and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states a sense of added security. The second factor is linked to the redeployment of US troops from Kuwait to Saudi Arabia, causing a huge reaction amongst the intellectual elite, namely, the religious scholars, who were totally opposed to American presence in KSA, considered to be sacred Islamic territory forbidden to non-Muslims. This second event opened up a huge debate amongst the elite, eventually involving the non-religious elite as well as state officials and the public at large. The communicative moment facilitated such large scale discussion about the US base in the Kingdom as well as the nature of government. With the availability of new media technologies from desktop publishing, fax machines, computers and cassettes, the public debate took larger proportions than in previous periods when the Kingdom was still 'traditional' and aversion to use of modern gadgets was widespread. The resulting reintellectualisation and its manifestation in public was through the emergence of early forms of organised, but not licensed, politicisation, opposition or more appropriately dissidence against the state. This dissidence was interesting in the sense that it realigned both establishment and non-establishment scholars for and against the state's approval of the presence of US troops in the Kingdom. This is one instance where one finds the earliest forms of opposed discourses amongst the elite – initiated primarily by the work of non-establishment scholars' petition of the central authorities.

This context is very significant when understanding the roots of reintellectualisation as specifically politicisation in the 1990s. Indeed, Saudi society seemed to be undergoing a shift from passive approach to public affairs to one of active participation and even dissidence. The communicative, interpretive and fragmentary moments all combined in the 1990s in the most obvious signs of reintellectualisation that contributed to tension in state-society relations as well as to elite-elite relations, causing a rift in the interpreters of religion and producers of information, those allied with the state and those opposing it. Here the notion of the "social imaginary and the idea of the public", referred to by Eickelman and Anderson, undergoes tangible transformation. This transformation is manifest in the attempt by society to assume the role of "sender", as opposite "receiver", of information or messages from those in a position of authority, be it religious or public. Through wider interaction and participation in public debates, society formulates positions of approval and disapproval towards all kinds of issues concerning the public. Thus the 'public' becomes more than deferential subjects onto whom messages, discourses or information are relayed and

disseminated. Additionally, this transformation takes the form of more systematic approach towards political organisation and expression. This is evident in the early forms of associational and civil life. A very relevant example is the organisation created to defend public liberties, which features in the public domain in the 1990s.

#### 4.4.1 *Reintellectualisation as Opposition, Questioning or Guidance*

Historically, Saudi state-society relations have sought quiet channels in order to consult over controversy, disagreement or tension in general. These relations have never been marked by equality. The state maintained the upper hand in control over society through expenditure and social welfarism (the state is the key employer and distributor of welfare goods, including subsidies of education, health and housing). This is the function of most rentier states, which redistribute to society a portion of income from oil rent in the international market.<sup>257</sup> To an extent, this factor might have caused society to engage with the state through political deference, given the dependency of the populace on the state, and thus delay the rise of a new public capable of participatory politics. No doubt the role of religion, as I discuss below, has for the greater part of Saudi history of state and nation-building a restraining force for concerns over national unity, religious solidarity and, no doubt, patronage-clientelism dynamics that have rendered the religious elite loyal to the state. Even if patrimonial in nature, there is has always been a degree of mutuality whereby the Saudi state on its turn depended on society for support. From this regard, the Orientalist notion of “client feudalism” ignores the complexity and even subtlety of the two-way relations of support and dependence.<sup>258</sup> Saudi Arabia is not ruled by the Qur’an, money and guns. The role of tribal alignments is important. The internal politics of the royal house is another dynamic not easy to research or gauge. And as Fred Halliday, through his Marxist perspective, correctly argues there is the supportive and stabilising role of the American umbrella or “US imperialism” as he calls it in his work *Arabia without Sultans*.<sup>259</sup>

However, the order of total deference that marked state-society relations since the founding of the state by bin Saud in 1932 has gradually weakened in the 1980s and

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<sup>257</sup> Hazem Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” in Hazem Beblawi & Giacomo Luciani (eds.), *The Rentier State* (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1987) pp. 49-62.

<sup>258</sup> This idea has its origins in the work of Geoff Simons, *Saudi Arabia: The Shape of a Client Feudalism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 5-34; 143-144.

<sup>259</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 49.

1990s.<sup>260</sup> The entry into the Kingdom of US troops more or less opened wide the possibility of challenge from society. The 1992 *mudhakkirat al-nasihah* ('Reform Memorandum')<sup>261</sup> was the first society-based discourse questioning the state, and by extension, casting doubt about the existing state-society relations, which allowed for little or no expression of autonomous political opinion, much less political organisation. In one sense, the 'Reform Memorandum' marked a new political departure, with higher degrees of tension, for state-society relations. Legally, the system's theological underpinnings have framed a very loose or weak contractual relationship between the subjects and the monarchy. Royal decree and royal whim govern all aspects of the regime of governance of the modern state to the detriment of development.<sup>262</sup> The 'Reform Memorandum' or *mudhakkirat al-nasihah* primarily marks the rise of a new type of interrogative discourse directly addressing the monarchy, namely, the king of day, Fahd. It is akin to the kind of leaks that take place in a modern democracy when top-ranking civil servants wish to embarrass the government of the day over an issue of utmost concern to the whole of society. This is one way of looking at the 'Reform Memorandum': a call to the king to revise or rethink his permission for US troops to be stationed in the Kingdom. In taking that decision, not a light one by any standards, the King most probably acted as the 'Custodian of the two Holy Shrines', a reference to his role as defender of the faith, Islam. However, in so doing, he ignored the counsel of society, including public opinion formulators and non-establishment scholars or even low-ranking establishment learned scholars.

Here lies one important factor: the blurring of the boundaries of the religious and the political in the content and text of the 'Reform Memorandum'. Again, this underlies the significance of religion in the shaping of public affairs, if not quasi interplay of the two. Textually, *mudhakkirat al-nasihah* is noted for its Islamist style and content. The signatories more or less have Muslim Brotherhood leanings, and tend to display avowed sympathy for an ethos of reform or *islah* (reform). The drive is politico-religious, literally not separating between politics and religion as two separate compartments or realms. This is one reason why the signatories of the 'Reform Memorandum' provide counsel to the state, be it unsolicited counsel. In particular, there is reference to the

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<sup>260</sup> David Howarth, *The Desert King: A Life of Ibn Saud* (London: Collins, 1964).

<sup>261</sup> 'Reform Memorandum', published in Arabic as *mudhakkirat al-nasihah* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: July 1992, n/p).

<sup>262</sup> Peter Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm* (New York: Sharpe Publications, 1994), pp. 195-203.

state's obligation towards Islamic law or *Shari'ah*. They also disclose a discourse which views the state as having a missionary obligation, that is, undertaking or at least helping with spreading the message of Islam, so-called *da'wah*. What is noticeable here is that "opposition" per se is not part of the Saudi political lexicon and *mudhakkirat al-nasihah* is carefully worded not to read as a manifesto of regime opponents. Rather, the reliance on religious language and idioms is intended to soften the oppositional contest while at the same time legitimising societal questioning of the state elite on a specific sensitive issue of great relevance – even embarrassment – to the religious establishment and religion as a whole. It could never be conceived under King Faisal or King Khalid that US troops enter Saudi territory. That would be sacrilege or desecration of the status of Mecca and Medina as sacred territory in Islam. Of course, traditionally, from the time of the medieval Shafi scholar Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (1058-1128), the fear of *fitnah* (civil war or disorder within the House of Islam) or schism, has played a restraining role, almost confining Muslim scholars to non-political duties, sometimes in the service of tyrants.<sup>263</sup> This is what the signatories of the memorandum had in mind: advise the rulers without being seen to foment disorder or *fitnah*.

There is a political significance. The 'Reform Memorandum' met with wide public interest and may be even endorsement. Its primary significance lies in two factors: first, society does not need the state's permission to engage in political discourse. Hence it symbolises an important date in Saudi political development. Dekmejian is correct in his reference to higher levels of politicization of Islam in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which by any means was limited to this country in the 1990s, following the first Gulf War of 1991.<sup>264</sup> In fact, one notices the intensification of politicisation in the 1990s when one compares the 'Reform Memorandum' with the earlier mild petition, *Khitab Shawwal* of 1991, adopting a softly approach of voluntary advice by establishment religion to the King. At the heart of the heightened politicisation lies an intellectual shift or a gearing up of reintellectualisation in the service of higher political participation and expression. The shift is from loyal advice to serious questioning, verging on an undeclared oppositional role. The 'Reform Memorandum' contains between its lines messages of reproach along communicated as

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<sup>263</sup> See Bilqis Rahman, *Revival and Reform Islam* (Oxford: One-World Publication, 2006), pp. 102-131.

<sup>264</sup> Hrair R. Dekmejian, 'The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia,' *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 4 (1994), pp. 635-45.

guidance, the obligatory role of religious scholars. However, harsh criticism or identification of whole list of politico-religious flaws related to the presence of US troops in the Kingdom never rises to the level of outright questioning of the monarchy's legitimacy.

The same goes for the earlier petition mentioned above. It is in this comforting knowledge that they were not questioning the King or the royal family's legitimacy that the two highest learned scholars in the land signed So when the highest learned scholar in the land signed *Khitab Shawwal* – the two-page petition is named after the month of *Shawwal*, the tenth month in the Islamic Calendar. What is significant here is that petitions, which are rare occurrences, often came from forces unaffiliated to the state. Establishment scholars, as in the case of the Shawwal petition, have channels of communication with the state. Perhaps the petition was intended as genuinely providing counsel while at the same time, more tactically, serving to silence or prevent non-establishment criticism of the king. The country's senior scholar and mufti, the late Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, and the man coming second in ranking to him, Muhammad Assalih bin Uthaymeen endorsed the Shawwal petition, which carried their signatures along with another fifty scholars, intellectuals and reformers. The intention behind *Khitab Shawwal* is to serve a gentle reminder to the rulers, by supportive high-ranking religious bureaucrats of the state, of the urgency to implement reform. What they set in motion, of course unwittingly, is a process of competition amongst the learned voices and forces in the Kingdom over how to relay messages of guidance and reform: Ibn Baz and his fellow scholars sitting in the country's High Council of Religious Scholars from within the state-affiliated bureaucracy; and the signatories of the 'Reform Memorandum', a year later, from outside the system. A relevant observation is that petitioning the state was also establishment religion's method of commanding good and preventing evil, namely, instability or *fitnah*. By contrast, the 'Reform Memorandum' signals a new phase in state-society relations, almost testing the ruling family's reaction to greater politicisation through expression of overt dissidence that stops short of political opposition.

#### 4.5 Reintellectualisation: Discourses & Counter-Discourses, 1990s Onwards

The *Shawwal* petition and the ‘Reform Memorandum’ represent two different grades of upgrading political expression and politicisation. Both seek guidance or practice criticism within a religious framework. But their significance primarily lies in their difference. The first is a loyalist brand of discourse, shielding the king from outside criticism by enacting it from within. The second raises the pitch of political opposition, religious but also secular, as Buchan observes.<sup>265</sup> The emerging opposition has since the early 1990s been voicing more serious and harsher criticism, even if so far the nature of Saudi opposition does not seek the overthrow of the ruling house. This is a Saudi specificity of most opposition seeking transformation via political, peaceful and discursive methods. But the discourse of the *Shawwal* statement and the ‘Reform Memorandum’ represent a prime example of the onset of opposing tendencies intended, respectively, for guidance and protest. These discursive moments derive from intellectuals and knowledge producers, and thus contribute to reintellectualisation in the sense of greater politicisation of Saudi society and at the same time deepen such a process by making openings for open public debate and intellectual dissidence. Fandy credits the “politics of dissent” with making these openings, which have transformed Saudi politics since the early 1990s.<sup>266</sup> Noteworthy in this context is the fact that establishment religious scholars came in the early 1990s pressure of political mobilisation by a younger and dissident elite of religious scholars. This pressure compelled the older establishment religious clergy to enter into the political arena by issuing a petition or memorandum of advice – *khitab shawwal*. They viewed this not as political engagement; rather, they saw it as part and parcel of carrying out their duty of *wa‘th* or guidance. This phase of politicisation in the early 1990s was itself the by-product of communicative and interpretive moments: religious cassettes were being circulated secretly all over the Kingdom. They contained the sermons of a new generation and religious elite not dependent on the state and therefore not weary of loss of income. The scene was set for discourses and counter discourses. Such discourses pitted establishment views, messages, knowledge and interpretations of religion in

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<sup>265</sup> James Buchan, “Secular and Religious Opposition in Saudi Arabia,” in Tim Niblock, (ed.), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 106-124.

<sup>266</sup> Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 6-18; 28-57.

relation to political matters, namely US troops in the Gulf and the Kingdom, Saudi-US links, and the conduct of the Gulf War against Iraq against non-establishment knowledge producers and religious and civic dissidents. Formerly singular religious authority was reconfigured through counter discourses, thus fragmenting religious authority and religious monopoly over interpretation of religion.

This can be illustrated through examination of the antagonism between establishment and non-establishment petitioning of the king: two diametrically opposed discourses in terms of politics even though both use religion to justify their discourses. That is, in both, religion is the framework within which *guidance* or *quasi opposition* are the intended messages communicated to the king. I explain this antagonism below.

#### 4.5.1 *Establishment Religion's Response to the 'Reform Memorandum'*

As the Kingdom's highest scholar at the time, Ibn Baz did not have the manoeuvring capacity to put his weight behind *mudhakkirat al-nasihah* of 1992. There are many reasons for this and one of them was that he would not be supporting a rising elite of younger and dissident scholars not only questioning the state, but also his own authority. More importantly, this Saudi learned scholar, a man who was during his life close to the ruling elite, took the traditional approach of withholding support for the petition on the grounds that it was dividing society and contributing to disorder. The 'Reform Memorandum' goes farther than the Shawwal petition in its critique of the ruling house. This assessment was dangerous and saw in it the potential for disorder and instability. Note here the position taken by Ibn Baz resembles the traditional approach of Sunni scholars throughout history to fear disunity or *firqah* (division). This is puzzling of course for the simple reason that some of the ideas found in the *Shawwal* statement or petition were similar to those presented in the 'Reform Memorandum'. Ibn Baz did not sign the memorandum as sign of displeasure at its radical style and the kind of division between state and society and, consequently, lead to chaos it in the Kingdom. One call this approach Ghazalian, after the medieval scholar Hamid al-Ghazali who was one of the chief proponents of the idea that unity under even a tyrant ruler capable of defending Islam was favourable to disunity within the Islamic community and civil war or antagonism. Ibn Baz was attempting to stop fragmentation of authority and perhaps he objected to put his signature on the 'Reform Memorandum' as a statement of disapproval of having interpretation of religion shared with the 109

young *Ulama* or scholars, who initiated and endorsed the petition. At one level, his disapproval is along the traditional lines of Sunni thinking that fragmentation and division undermine Islam, which he represented through his office as the country's highest-ranking religious leader, apart from the king who was the 'custodian of the two holy shrines'. At another level, his disapproval was calculated to send a message to his political masters that he would not support opposition, even if mild and peaceful, against the royal house and the monarchy. Even the context of the second Gulf War, which contributed to the petitioning activities of the establishment and non-establishment scholars, did not justify the scholars' departure from the tradition role of guidance into a new one of political engagement and opposition.

Thus one of the charges Ibn Baz advances against the 109 young scholars in support of the 'Reform Memorandum' was their failure to see things objectively. The '*bayan*' or response written by Ibn Baz as his feedback on the 'Reform Memorandum' articulates this position clearly. For instance, he accuses the young scholars of not mentioning the positive aspects of governance. He notes that advice or counsel coming from religious scholars must be balanced, looking at both the pros and cons of government or rule in the Kingdom. Thus he questions their failure to make any reference to *mahasin al-dawla* – i.e. the positive aspects of governance in Saudi Arabia. In his *bayan*, Ibn Baz states that "Despite the fact that I and the senior scholars Council condemn the Memorandum...we engerain no illusion that *al-waqi*' [the reality of life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] is perfect."<sup>267</sup> Ibn Baz's feedback effectively does two things: firstly, it gives advice in the *bayan* to the young scholars to adopt critical objectivity criticism; secondly, he does not only send the young non-establishment scholars a veiled warning about dividing Saudi citizens and causing *fitna*, but also casts doubts on Islamic grounds on the soundness of the counsel they provide in the 'Reform Memorandum'.<sup>268</sup> Nonetheless, Ibn Baz's response was a sign of the trend to strengthen and take root in Saudi society, and which this thesis is attempting to address and analyse, through the emergence of multiple discourses and voices and a new public. Hence considering the early roots of this 'cultural shift' towards voicing criticism is relevant to the contextualisation I am trying to do in this section in order to explain how reintellectualisation of Saudi society has progressed through communicative,

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<sup>267</sup> Ibn Baz's *Bayan* or Statement can be found in the appendices of the *Mudhakkirat al-Nasihah*, July 1992, p. 123.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-125

interpretive and fragmentary moments. At the beginning of the 1990s, and in the height of the political, religious and even cultural crisis that unfolded in Gulf states following the Gulf conflict, the communicative moment, as Eickelman and Anderson have shown, witnessed extensive use of desktop publishing, audiocassettes, in particular in KSA, to spread the sermons, discourses, speeches and viewpoints of a new breed of religious scholars and activists such as Salman Al-‘Awdah. Plus, the discourse no longer treated politics, which establishment religious scholars more or less treated as taboo, as an arena not open to criticism or debate. State affairs, defence, human rights, and the whole question of governance were subjected to public discursive scrutiny. Below I give two examples of these types of activism and reformist discourse, focusing on the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights.

#### *4.5.2 Shift from Guidance to Criticism & from Discourses to Counter-Discourses*

There is a context, which must be understood, in order to represent properly how the activism of the 1990s deepened reintellectualisation of Saudi society and public. In brief, the royal house’s management of the Gulf crisis, which was costly in terms of autonomy, divided the Saudi public, thus leaving themselves vulnerable to levels of criticism unprecedented in Saudi history.<sup>269</sup> In fact, the entire GCC region was teetering under the pressure of the invasion of Kuwait, the war against Iraq, US and US-led forces presence in the Arab Gulf, and the hefty bill of the war, economically. There were questions about why this region spends so much money on armament and yet fails to protect itself. It led to questions about the absence of citizen rights and incompetence of some ruling houses – the Kuwaiti ruling family had to escape and leave the Kuwaiti people to face the invasion without leadership.

This is how the ‘Reform Memorandum’ had to be invented to suit the context of crisis. But the ‘Reform Memorandum’ went further than the context of the US-led Gulf War, in which GCC states, Egypt and Syria fought against a fellow Arab state. The impact has over- lasted the war. The 109 non-establishment scholars who signed the memorandum did not intend this. The interpretive moment and subsequent fragmentary moment were both part and parcel of ongoing reintellectualisation Saudi society was undergoing profoundly. The interpretive and fragmentary by-products led to

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<sup>269</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

consolidation of reintellectualisation. Thus the interpreting and fragmenting of information, consensus and debate which initially pitted the old religious establishment with the younger autonomous religious elite spilled over into other issues and other agents of reform. The signatories of the memorandum were concerned with government or mis-government. The discourse which evolved from the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights expanded public debate into other pressing issues: human rights. This is a significant development at the time in a society where human rights were taboo. Their discussion in public carried many risks since even the state did not adopt such a discourse, which international covenants covered thoroughly and spread to most parts of the world. I consider it to be a qualitative shift in Saudi society. Even if the ruling elite reacted angrily to this discourse and banned it, the ‘cultural shift’ was already noted in the public domain. So the boundaries of what the public can experiment with in terms of rights did originate in that context of the early 1990s. Despite original denial by the state, single discourse and information decided either by the religious or political elite was henceforth no longer possible in the Kingdom.

To a large extent, the credit for this returns to the ‘Reform Memorandum’. They spoke against the state; and they challenged the state-affiliated clergy. For instance, by initiating questioning of Saudi foreign policy and alliance with states “undeserving of trust”, they were not only questioning the political elite, but also inviting the Saudi public at large to consider these issues as legitimate items of public concern.<sup>270</sup> The memorandum was oppositional, in a country without civic bodies and official opposition. It questioned the huge expenditure on armament, dependence on foreign powers, and placed this into the centre of the country’s political crisis: royal greed and the use of national resources, namely petroleum and oil wealth, by those princes who are corrupt (note that the ‘Reform Memorandum’ in its language does not generalise and directs criticism at corruption as a problem without naming princes). There is a great deal of corroboration of corruption in the Kingdom in the work of Aburish even if his style tends in parts to be sensational and lacking in objectivity.<sup>271</sup> What the ‘Reform Memorandum’ does is to criticise the judiciary or politics and political management, which led to corruption or misuse of national wealth, and then place them in a religious framework for the purpose of critical assessment. The purpose of the memorandum,

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<sup>270</sup> See the *Mudhakkirat*, July 1992, pp. 94-98; 114-119

<sup>271</sup> Said Aburish, *The Rise, Corruption and Coming Fall of the House of Saud* (London: Bloomsbury 1994).

which is written by religious scholars, is to oppose policy by judging its conformity with Islam. The memorandum shows the opinion of the 109 signatories to agree on their judgement that rule was not compatible with Islamic law. The intention is to ‘remind’ the rulers of their obligation to refer to Islam in order for rule to be accountable and just. This is a reason why there is a chapter in the memorandum on financial affairs and economic matters in which the signatories stress the necessity of public scrutiny of finances, seeing these to be public not private wealth. There is a concern in the memorandum with social justice, and a call for rulers to eradicate discrepancy of income and poverty in the Kingdom.<sup>272</sup>

Reintellectualisation is pertinent for understanding the new breed of activists from the middle class. They received tertiary training in the traditional curriculum, learning the Qur’an and the Hadith or the Tradition of the Prophet, and in modern specialisms. Many also had dual education inside Saudi Arabia and in foreign universities, which is now more typical of the new middle class in Saudi Arabia. Generally, the middle class in the 1980s was still pliant and did not threaten social or political stability.<sup>273</sup> In the 1990s dual education has made their exposure to modern ways of thinking instrumental in the evolution of their activism, interpretive skills and their belief in diversity, which explains their initiative to address the rulers without deference to the Shawwal statement. Whereas the Shawwal statement stresses guidance, the ‘Reform Memorandum’ combines both guidance and protest, which has paved the way for more radical approaches in political debate and behaviour, namely informal opposition. Informal opposition was the stance assumed by the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights. Dekmejian is correct in noting that despite their high level of education in the Kingdom and abroad did not provide them with the opportunity to participate politically.<sup>274</sup> In one sense, what the ‘Reform Memorandum’ of the protest activism and discourse displayed by the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights was assertion of the right to criticise government and have public debate on matters of concern to all citizens. The background of the new elite of upcoming activists helps explain the emergence of the counter-discourses, debates and information against the official discourse of politics, coming from society in the early 1990s. These activists

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-92.

<sup>273</sup> Mark Heller & Nadav Safran, *The New Middle Class and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia*, Paper No. 3 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, 1985).

<sup>274</sup> Dekmejian, ‘The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia,’ p. 638.

learnt their politics and their civil awareness and activism in local mosques, neighbourhood centres for charity, qur'anic schools where voluntary teaching was undertaken, and newspapers. This elite made of proactive individuals and professionals such as Salman al-Awdah or Safar al-Hawali managed to create a following in these local arenas of activism, including universities like the Islamic University and the Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University. The same applies to other activist scholars or intellectuals such as Abdullah Al-Jabreen Abdullah al-Hamad Al-Jalali who both supported the 'Reform Memorandum' and signed it. These individuals and their fellow activists in a way led the way of protest and began a tradition of counter-discourse and opposition, causing them personal difficulties with the state. All had to spend time in jail. What they defied was the will of the politicians and the religious establishment to decide matters of politics or religion un-opposed. However, one point is worth re-stressing here: protest and opposition for the emerging anti-systemic elite in the early 1990s was to rely on religious interpretation of Islamic law, Qur'an and Hadith to justify opinion given on politics or the state.<sup>275</sup> So it is an opposition from within Islam, not through reliance on European ideologies. This of course changed much later as I shall point out in chapter five and six as some began to refer to 'liberalism', for instance.

The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (*Lajnat al-Difaa An Al-Huquq Al-Shariyya*) raised the pitch of protest and opposition even further. Again, just like religious scholars fragmented when new more vocal and autonomous scholars challenged established scholars, so did the Committee, one of the first civic bodies to launch a project of human rights in the Kingdom. The two co-founders Mohamed Al-Masaari and Saad Al-Faqeeh did not see eye to eye as how to organise the committee and mobilise the Saudi public to their cause. Eventually, two opposed discourses emerged, leading to the committee to split. This mode of fragmentation, I think, was a driving force in the strengthening of Saudi society, making it more diverse in views and politics. Al-Faqeeh moved on to create Islamic Reform in Arabia, and this on its turn led to further splits. But all of these tendencies to fragment produced a dynamic of diversity in the bigger number of public scholars, types of discourse and organisations contributing to the creation of a new public in the Kingdom. Both the function of

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<sup>275</sup> Joshua Tietelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).

politics and of religion was forced to begin gradual transformation. Religion no longer limited itself to *guidance* (except for establishment scholars) and included discourses of protest and even opposition, be it still unorganised in the Kingdom where legalising these activities is very bureaucratic involves vetting by many departments, including the Interior Ministry. For instance, Al-Masaari wrote a treatise which he called Bringing Rulers to Account - *Muhasbat Al-Hukkam*.<sup>276</sup> This is a departure from the mild style of guidance used historically by establishment religion. At any rate, the result is consolidation of politicisation unlike before in the Kingdom's history, a view supported by the work of Mamoun Fandy. Fandy also notes that the transformation in the use of religion in politics is aimed at greater capacity for public recruitment by the same counter-discourses emerging in the public arena.<sup>277</sup> Moreover, the use of religion became more nuanced and sophisticated. The discourse of human rights or of rights in general, which is akin to an emerging discourse of citizenship, departed from the traditional Hanbali-Wahhabi position which avoids Western borrowings. Al-Masaari who was a physicist accepted degrees of Western democratic methods such as elections and talked of accountability. However, he did so because he used a religious interpreting of religion that stressed good government and public good or *maslahah amma*. This emerging style at the time neither excluded Western ideas nor discarded Islamic law or ideas amenable to just and good government.

Al-Massaari's treatise values the Qur'an, the Tradition of the Prophet and Islamic Law, relating his views on good government and his ideas about social justice to these texts and sources of Islamic legislation. He also upholds, for the purpose of justice and government compatible with Islam, the Godly command for Muslims to practice the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy ani al-munkar* (seeking the good of all members of the community, and preventing evil and disorder).<sup>278</sup> This is one of the key contributions of the committee for the Defence of Rights to politicisation and to the consolidation of this process and that of reintellectualisation: seeking a mix of Muslim and non-Muslim ideas in order to institute Islam's principles of just rule that conforms to the Qur'an and to Islamic law. This is one reason why he saw no problem with the adoption of political parties,<sup>279</sup> something Hanbali-Wahhabi religious scholars would

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<sup>276</sup> Mohamed Al-Masaari, *Muhasabat Al-Hukkam* (London: Muassasat al-Rafd Linnashr, 1997).

<sup>277</sup> Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*.

<sup>278</sup> Al-Masaari, *Muhasabat Al-Hukkam*, pp. 10-64.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-77.

not find support for in their interpretations of religious texts, for instance. He saw in political parties models of organisation not too different from Islamic idea of *jamaat* or associations.<sup>280</sup>

#### 4.6 Conclusion

What I have argued in this chapter goes against the type of “mythology” Westerners seem to have about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Christine Helms refers to this mythology with its many stereotypes, which include association of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with tribal existence, extremism and with the Saudi royal house.<sup>281</sup> In this chapter, I have indirectly sought to question some of this mythology. I looked at the process of reintellectualisation as an important dynamic in the change of the Kingdom into a more sophisticated society where one finds diversity of ideas, protest, and informal opposition. The examples I gave of this transformation through my explanation of three interrelated moments thanks to change in communication and social media, bolder and diverse interpretation of ideas, which have produced positive fragmentation in religious opinion and in political thinking. Literally, talking in the context of the 1990s of the counter discourses trend is not an exaggeration. It was the trend that has today resulted in the emergence of various trends of thought, all of which contest public issues, including religion, politics and culture, and use the media, amongst other forums such as blogs, to express these trends of thought and seek followers for them. A remarkable specificity about the emerging trends in the 1990s was the use of religion by the activists calling for either limited or radical political reform. The two most opposed discourses, liberal and ‘traditional’ which I will be focusing on in the following two chapters, are no exception.

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-71.

<sup>281</sup> Christine Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONSTRUCTION OF 'MODERATION' IN SAUDI ARABIA: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE 'PRAGMATIC' TREND

#### 5.1 Focus

I have set as my doctoral task the study of the emerging discourses of trends I have called 'pragmatic' and 'puritanical'. The aim is to look at the extent to which these discourses are producing a 'culture of moderation'. At one level, the aim indirectly attempts to respond to Orientalist discourses, which have after 9/11 reduced the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into some kind of 'factory of terrorism'. I have addressed these in chapters one and two. At another level, my study examines under-researched discourses, which I believe remain 'hidden' or 'inaccessible' to outsiders. My survey of scholarship on the Kingdom has shown that there is a tendency to associate Saudi Arabia with extremism and religious fanaticism or extremism. My intention by accessing indigenous discourses, written and spoken, is to provide through a different angle the 'transition' happening quietly in Saudi Arabia. So my aim in this chapter is focus solely on the emerging discourse of 'moderation'. In the previous chapter I have shown the onset of this discursive 'transition' aided by the process of "reintellectualisation", the term used by Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson. In that chapter I showed that the beginning of a process of 'contestation' and, relative to Saudi Arabia, the emergence of a discourse of 'political opposition'. The emergence of this discourse of political opposition or contestation, I added, fragmented and diversified religio-political discourse in the Kingdom. Thus it is no longer appropriate either to ignore this trend in the study of the Kingdom or to assume there is only one type of discourse. These trends of 'opposition' and 'contestation', which have their roots in the process of reintellectualisation, which I have tied to advances in mass education, diversification of media outlets, social media, and the fragmentation of the 'public sphere', specific to Saudi Arabia. That is, the sphere of religio-political debates and counter-debates, discourses and counter-discourses. The moderating effect of this reintellectualisation needs more following up. This is what I am trying to do in this chapter: following up that discursive 'transition' with its moderating effects. To do this I want to deepen understanding of this discursive 'transition' in order to grasp the very discourses producing moderation and moderates.

### 5.1.1 Searching for Discourses of 'Moderation': Evidence from 'Khaymas'

Very generally, my empirical analysis is concerned with the question of the nature of politico-religious discourse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after 9/11. We are told, as I have shown through samples of Orientalist works, that Saudi Arabia and 'moderation' are opposites. I am not satisfied by this oversimplification. Saudi Arabia is not monolithic in terms of discourse, and the nature of the religio-political discourse can no longer be confined to the evidence used by Orientalists and others, such as those fixed on security issues and agendas. This is not specific to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. If discourse was single in Europe and the US we would have had a different type of international relations run solely by realists whose politics stress use of force. Similarly, if discourse was single in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we would have had only one voice by religious fanatics who wish 9/11 repeated everywhere thought to be infidel or anti-Islam. So my task of finding the evidence about my position that there is a process of construction of a 'culture of moderation' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was challenging. Evidence is vital here. But my problem was not the scarcity of such discourses. To the contrary, it was the diversity of such discourses, which today include users of social media such as facebook, blogs, chat rooms and all kind of Internet sites to communicate the kind of 'moderation' and 'moderate' discourses, ideas and positions I set out to gather for my PhD. I was advised by my supervisor to go after solid information which did not go against ethical rules and standards of credibility.

Since my qualitative methodology seeks to find answers through the use of discourse analysis, the challenge I initially confronted was to determine the 'corpus' of my evidence and its source. The biggest challenge of all was that I had to abandon my preference for observational methods. But since there 'is life after the PhD', I can pursue this later when this method will in the future meet with trust from hosts of the traditional forums we call in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia '*khayma*' (literally large tent which serves as a gathering place for males and to an extent resembles the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya*). The same forum is known by the more common name *majlis*, which sometimes translates as 'council' when it is very formal. My initial research fieldwork was all conducted in *khaymas* and the *majlis* in cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, and my own region, particularly in the city of Buraydah. At the end, I was not able to use of the material I gathered in these forums for one reason: no one was comfortable with my

using of the technique pertinent to observational methods: watching every move, and trying to record every idea. I was prevented from doing so given the culture of distrust in KSA, as in the rest of the Middle East. Recording what people say is a difficult task often associated with intelligence gathering activities. Ethically, of course I could not make use of information the hosts of the *majlis* or the *khayma* forbade me from recording or using outside. The observed were too conscious of my presence seeking data that the natural pace and content of information completely changed in some occasions. Nonetheless, I found the directness of this method, including participant observation, very beneficial and attractive. Basically, one is presented with vast corpus of ‘live’ evidence.<sup>282</sup> This explains the popularity of this qualitative method amongst anthropologists, and others schools of social sciences, etc. Despite being time-consuming, the data I found here but am not free to use served to confirm one thing: Saudi Arabia has diverse discourses, including in informal gatherings, of moderation and led by moderates. Yet the association, as I mentioned earlier, is the stress on fanatic religious discourse, which itself has become so diverse, fragmented and undergoing its own type of ‘moderation’. I found the ‘*khayma*’ or ‘*majlis*’ atmosphere very natural, and without a doubt a ‘real world’ of information where one comes so close to public sentiment and opinion. Jorgensen talks about the benefit of “the World of everyday life.”<sup>283</sup> Without permission to record I was told by my supervisor to abandon this method as it posed an additional problem, on top of the ethics of getting approval from the hosts of the *khayma* or *majlis*, of validity or reliability of data. There was massive flow of information, debate, discussion, exchanges and contests that it was impossible to memorise them and therefore their systematic use was out of the question. However, it was my dozens of visits and hundreds of hours in *khayma* and *majlis* that made me confident in my choice of topic. In these forums in the capital and provincial cities of the Kingdom I found moderates and discourses that point to a ‘cultural shift’ of sorts towards ideas of dialogue, diversity of opinion, and acceptance of opposed views. The evidence I found in these forums suggested that the Kingdom had entered in a new phase of nation-building. For a long time, the prevalent culture has been described in derogatory terms as *thaqafat al’m’tawwi* ‘, which in Saudi colloquial language refers to the religious police practices and activities that have left an impression of religious

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<sup>282</sup> Danny L. Jorgensen, *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies* (London: Sage, 1989), pp. 12-23.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

extremism and intolerance. The feelings, attitudes, and deeds, especially, in terms of the high levels of toleration, orderly contests, and opposing views I observed in these informal forums of Riyadh and Jeddah confirmed my ‘hunch’ or intuitive thinking about the ‘transition’ of discourse from a state of *ghuluww*, in Arabic meaning hard-line thinking and speaking, to the state of *wasatiyya*, moderate stance towards politics, religion, culture, gender, good government and the West, for instance. Whilst informative, the discourses of these informal gatherings were not sufficient for me to build a credible thesis if I could not use evidence from the *khayma* or *majlis* to back up my arguments and prove or disprove my hypothesis about the move towards a moderate culture in the Kingdom. These discourses will remain hidden. But this does not take away from their role in deepening dialogue and moderate exchange of ideas. My strategy, then, had to change in search for discursive forces and voices, which I can document and use as a source of data, data that has validity and credibility.

#### 5.1.2 *Searching for Valid Data on ‘Moderation’: Texts & Interviews*

In the second phase of my fieldwork, I moved towards a more structured exploratory phase. My aim was to catch up time wasted in testing an observational strategy that failed as was not able to observe and document data. I learnt from informal observation. But in this phase I needed pre-structure in locating a corpus of material that could help me examine the emergence of moderate discourses. For this purpose, interviews became very attractive. I was initially considering to use a questionnaire with fixed questions. But this is another method that makes Saudi respondents very conscious of the content and method, and initial inquiry showed that I would not find enough participants to gather sufficient data. Plus, there is the ethical issue of having the questionnaire vetted and approved by the Interior Ministry. This would mean providing a list of individuals and organisations targeted as respondents by the questionnaire. Again, discussion with the supervisor encouraged me to use my experience within the country’s political society and aim for interviews instead. The use of interviews for collection of data would mean one-to-one and face-to-face exercises for asking a set of questions, and I did not plan them to be ‘depth interviews’. I was aware of the cultural setting and knew that I had to do with minimum structure (or semi-structured) in order to allow interviewees more freedom to speak and give their ideas with maximum honesty. Saudi culture is largely oral – in its use of poetry, recitation of the Qur’an, and

social interaction. My strategy was to be sensitive to these traits and conduct my interviews with minimum intervention, only when necessary for clarification, further evidence or making connections between ideas stated during the interview. I also had to deal with the issue of names as I had to ensure whether the respondents wished their names withheld. Most preferred their names not to appear in any publication, commercial or otherwise, which could become a library resource and this includes PhDs. I will in this study mention names only where prior permission was given by my interviewees. My interviewing strategy was somewhere between the two extremes of 'depth interviews' and 'non-directive interviews': some structure coupled with informal approach, in my case making advantage of the cultural environment.<sup>284</sup> I was not in any way interested in the "fixed-item, precategorized-response survey interviews",<sup>285</sup> as Weiss Describes them, because my aim was from the beginning qualitative not quantitative. I was not interested in proportions or percentages. It was meaning that I planned to be central to my exploration of evidence of moderate attitudes and thoughts in Saudi Arabia.

One observation must be mentioned here: even the ability to conduct interviews is indicative of a new environment which is but reluctantly accepting questioning on issues regarding questions of 'moderation', acceptance of tolerance or opposing views. Until recently there were taboos in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and clearance is difficult to receive and respondents practised a form of self-censorship, not accepting invitations for interviews. This knowledge made me sensitive to how I approach my respondents. Having made sure that my research environment is 'low risk' to me and my respondents, I set out on a first exploratory fieldwork and used my connections to meet very informally potential interviewees. The context is as important here.<sup>286</sup> I did not limit myself to a single category or a specific sample population. I had to 'slot' my respondents for both the 'pragmatic' and 'puritanical' strands according to my knowledge of their types of discourse on religion, politics, gender, tolerance, and good government. It took one month of visits to introduce myself and make my research known to the interviewees. I was surprised by the positive response. The two lists of ideal interviewees I planned to visit were slightly longer than the final lists of those I

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<sup>284</sup> Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 2004), pp. 1-14.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>286</sup> Elliot Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Interviewing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 9-33.

ended up interviewing. Those who dropped out mentioned objection to ‘the artificial divisions’ I created. A few objected because they viewed the research with suspicion, perhaps along the lines of information needed by ‘foreign powers’. A few of course objected because they did not wish to be recorded at all. That was useless for my research and it was easy to drop them from the list. One invited me for an informal discussion which I benefited from but still without approval to use the information in my thesis, not even note-taking was allowed. The first meetings were beneficial and I must confess they gave me badly needed confidence as I started to despair at gathering any information, despite the fact that I conducted a handful of interviews back in 2006. The ‘risk’ factor in relation to censorship or government intolerance with free research was an inhibiting factor for a dozen interviewees not used in the end.

Once I was able to surpass this first hurdle, my strategy turned towards the design stage which was easy as my ‘semi-structured’ questions were minimal, revolving around questions about definitions of moderation, principles and values of moderation, and implications of moderation in thought and practice. The remaining questions varied from interview to another, largely clarifications about the three criteria ideological moderation, acceptance of pluralism, and respect of rules. My plan was to withhold from guiding the answers as I was interested in honest responses – with minimum influence by my role. I limited my intervention to cases where I felt I needed to know whether one or all of the criteria were not covered properly. The other side of the interview design stage focused on manageability of data and time. I had to think through because my intellectual curiosity about my topic led me to study the question of moderation. However, absence of information or lack of co-operation by respondents led me to despair. But I did not wish to gather mounds of data that hamper my task of transcription, and selection of key excerpts or quotations. To an extent I was successful with this as I knew how to handle the interviews and prevented my respondents when I felt they were changing the subject or explaining irrelevant aspects. The risk was always there because I planned to conduct the interviews with minimum interruptions. The interviews varied in length, and some were more difficult to transcribe than others. Some were impossible to transcribe because of length. I simply did not have the time resource to do that. I had to make do with using the tape counter numbers precisely at the points where I thought I needed to listen again to usable statements. The texts I read on interviewing in preparation for the interviews were all helpful and some

fascinating.<sup>287</sup> Of the seven tasks ‘thematising’ was the easiest, and transcribing and analysing the most challenging. In my case, the interviews added knowledge on the subject. The written documents, by actors from the ‘pragmatic’ and ‘puritanical’ trends were a very rich source of information. However, I needed the additional material obtained from interviews to consolidate analysis and knowledge on the topic of moderation derived from written texts, i.e. speeches, articles, books, and treatises.

### 5.1.3 *The Task: Discourse Analysis*

The methodology of discourse analysis is demonstrated using a corpus comprising transcripts and/or recordings of interviews and supplementary texts by opinion formulators from the two trends, ‘pragmatic’ and ‘puritanical’. One challenge was how to make good use of the data obtained without the risk of over or under-interpretation of the written and spoken texts or data. My objective was to record my interpreting of the set of data with maximum representation of the ideas used, whether interviews or articles. To reduce these risks my task was to follow a framework based on three dimensions which I consider vital for interpreting the understanding of moderation and its creation in the discourses of ‘pragmatic’ and ‘puritanical’ trends of thought in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Very generally, moderation stands for attitudes of toleration, compromise, pluralism, inclusion, consensus, and civility in political discourse. I have varied this understanding of ‘moderation’, by narrowing it to three specific criteria or dimensions. So my strategy is then to extricate meanings related to ‘moderation’ via authorial interpreting through use of discourse analysis strategy. My aim, more clearly, is to gain understanding of how the informants understand moderation in relation to: i/ acceptance of pluralism, ii/ ideological moderation, iii/ respect of the rules of the political game. My stress in the analysis will be on acceptance of pluralism as the main criterion of moderation. It is the construction of meaning in relation to the concept of ‘moderation’ and how such constructions are made that this study focuses on. This methodological strategy of analysis and interpreting aims at helping me answer the key question of my thesis: To what extent it can be argued that current discourses are helping construct a ‘culture of moderation’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? I raise this query against the background of a Saudi

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<sup>287</sup> Another text I learned much from is: S Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1996).

emerging 'public sphere' (not secular in the Western sense) which is today moving slowly towards more discursive and participative practices, in both traditional forums where males gather such as the *khayma* or *majlis*, or in the new more modern space created by the Internet and new social media. To repeat an idea from the previous chapter, the background of my analysis is the process of reintellectualisation thanks to the spread of higher education, including overseas, and the media revolution which Saudi media tycoons have helped flourish all over the Arab region especially in the Gulf region. Without this process of reintellectualisation, I have argued, the rise of new moderate discourses or new discourses of moderation with messages of renewal would not have been possible.

#### *5.1.4 A Discourse Analysis of 'Moderation' in the Discourse of the 'Pragmatic' Trend*

In the following section, where I try to analyse and interpret these discourses, I mix evidence from the written and spoken texts. I have selected the written texts from about 175 texts, all of which are suited to the task of discourse analysis in this section. However, given the limitation of scope and time, I have chosen two dozen texts in total. Eight of the texts chosen are written by women. This to an extent makes up for the impossibility for a male enquirer to conduct interviews with Saudi women. Only one interviewee is a female, a diplomat at the Saudi Embassy in London. The difficulty with obtaining interviews with women relates to cultural restrictions and not political bans. The chosen texts all record in a very relevant way arguments which make a strong case for 'moderation'. They additionally provide a very credible supplement to the interviews I conducted for this task. The following analysis is divided according to the three dimensions.

## **5.2 Acceptance of Pluralism**

A term that is bandied out frequently by my interviewees is that of *i'tiraf*, meaning recognition. The root verb of the term is *'arafa*, which means to know, and as one interviewee notes: "In the Qur'an we have a moral code about people knowing one another. This obligation to know does not simply mean to 'get acquainted with'. It goes beyond that: it refers to a Godly command to recognise 'others' around us, and

recognition of others extends to their values, ideas, politics, faith, and free choice.”<sup>288</sup> The statement sounds very liberal for a Saudi audience. But this short statement is full of meanings which characterise the stand adopted today in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by the ‘pragmatic’ trend. When the Honourable member of the Consultative Council (*majlis al-shura*), Ibrahim Al-Belehi, speaks in these terms about recognition, he is speaking for entrenching a new moral code for accepting pluralism. For him ‘pluralism’ is not limited to politics. He says “pluralism is too broad a value to limit to politics, religion. It cannot ignore the realm of ideas, and knowledge-making.”<sup>289</sup> Al-Belihi uses a number of synonyms when speaking about ‘pluralism’ – see Table 3. He uses terms such as *tanawwu* ‘ and *ta’addud*, and for him there is a Qur’anic ethical basis for this attitude, and this is why he views ‘moderation’ as strongly linked with pluralism. He describes moderation in two ways. Firstly, he says how it should not be narrowed: “those who view ‘moderation’ as ‘liberalism’ know neither ‘moderation’ or ‘liberalism’. I personally find the term ‘liberalism’ to reflect historical values and progress, and its economic basis is not found in Arab history of political ideas and development. Further, those who use the ‘term’ liberalism’ they misuse it as a label to exclude others and accuse them of betrayal of faith, country, etc. Moderation, I want to stress this point, is not only Western. It is a human value. Hasn’t our Prophet and the Holy Qur’an talk about the ‘moderate umma’ (*ummatan wasata*).”<sup>290</sup> Al-Belihi’s definition of moderation rejects the label liberal, used by some extremists to attack advocates of reform in the Kingdom. This is one reason why he rejects the use of the term. As he says in the same interview: “I oppose being represented as a liberal when a more appropriate way is to call me ‘*wasati*’ [moderation as an Islamic moral trait].”<sup>291</sup>

I have deliberately opened the discourse analysis section with the ideas of Ibrahim Al-Belihi who is a well-known public intellectual, author and parliamentarian. What is unique about Al-Belihi is his history of struggle for moderation and reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His philosophical work *Husun al-Takhalluf: Mawani’ Al-Nuhudh* (*The Citadels of Backwardness: Constraints against Renaissance*) is the leading work in which he tries to advocate acceptance of pluralism as a precondition of

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<sup>288</sup> Author Interview, Ibrahim Al-Belehi, parliamentarian in the Saudi Consultative Council, 16 December 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Author Interview, Ibrahim Al-Belehi, parliamentarian in the Saudi Consultative Council, 2 July 2011, Riyadh.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

freeing citizens, the Saudi and the Muslim nation from obscurantism and under-development.<sup>292</sup> This work which reworks ideas he has been contributing to the Arab and Saudi press through feature articles can be considered as a quasi ‘manifesto’ of pluralism and moderation, stressing the need for new ways of thinking and renewal in knowledge-making, culture, the sciences, religion and politics. Al-Belihi in this work attacks ‘extremism’ and obscurantism as the basis of intellectual and physical violence. He calls this negative tendency which is the exact opposite of pluralism *al-fikr al-iqsa’i* (the exclusionary mentality).<sup>293</sup> Al-Belihi thus defends pluralism through a set of intellectual propositions: firstly, elimination of ‘the exclusionary mentality’. He secondly advocates two interconnected values, which for him, are vital for consolidation of pluralism and are fundamentally attitudes of moderate thinking: self-criticism (*ru’yat ‘uyub al-dhat*) and respect of the ‘other’ (*tahtarimu al-akhar*).<sup>294</sup> Thirdly, Al-Belihi voices strong support for a culture of moderation built on commitment to and respect of rights (*ihitiram al-huquq*), including human rights in my first interview with him.<sup>295</sup> Again, Al-Belihi who is a champion of a dialogue of civilisation with the Western world views the respect of rights not only as the secret of Western renaissance, but also as a value which has a basis in the Qur’an and Islam. Al-Belihi as the leading voice of pluralism and moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attempts one of the most coherent attempts of synthesis between Islamic and Western values. Central to his belief in renewal and creating a culture of moderation is in addition to respect of pluralism, as he explains it above, is also openness to opposing ideas and continuous revision of ideas. Through this synthesis Al-Belihi asserts his strong belief in the tenets of Islam and at the same time his confidence in the Western and Greek philosophical traditions which reject ‘possession of truth’, as he says in his book (*yamliku wahdahu al-haqiqa al-mutlaqa*) [man cannot possess truth], requiring pluralism of ideas and exchange of ideas between human civilisations and cultures.<sup>296</sup>

Echoes of Al-Belihi’s thinking can be found in the new generation of opinion of formulators who voice similar views courageously, despite the risk of being labelled

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<sup>292</sup> Ibrahim Al-Belehi, *Husun al-Takhalluf: Mawani ‘ Al-Nuhudh [The Citadels of Backwardness: Constraints against Renaissance]* (Beirut: Al-Kamel Manshurat, 2010).

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 474.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>295</sup> Author Interview, Ibrahim Al-Belehi, parliamentarian in the Saudi Consultative Council, 2 July 2011, Riyadh.

<sup>296</sup> Al-Belehi, *Husun al-Takhalluf: Mawani ‘ Al-Nuhudh [The Citadels of Backwardness: Constraints against Renaissance]*, p. 11.

‘libreal’ by some of the religious voices still standing against pluralism of ideas and reinterpreting of Islam. Yahya Al-Amir’s widely-read piece ‘*Afkar li al-Hayat Al-Sa’udiyya...Tatallu‘at al-Mustaqbal al-amin*’ (Ideas for Saudi Society: Aspirations for a Safe Future) advances values of dialogue as conditions for a culture of moderation, which for him is the key to better Saudi life and sound development in the future. Three fundamentals are of importance for this to happen: a project of renewal that champions pluralism (*tanawwu’*), discourse and counter-discourse (*niqash*), and openness to new ideas (*ma huwa jadid*).<sup>297</sup> Al-Amir’s stress on pluralism as the route to Saudi development encourages legal renewal and the fight against corruption. For him corruption stands in the way of genuine pluralisation of Saudi society. Firstly, different ideas especially of renewal and moderation are prevented from making an impact. So long as there are laws that threaten punishment of dissidence, then diversity can be inhibited. Corruption, on its turn, stands in the way of plural institution-building, a condition that he views to be necessary for consolidation of pluralism.<sup>298</sup> Al-Amir is of the view that pluralism can be organised around the value of national solidarity (*al-mihway al’fi’li li al-watan wa huwa al wihda*). However, national solidarity does not deny “belief in diversity and difference of opinion, rights, [prerequisites] for a better future and protection of such a future”<sup>299</sup> Like al-Belihi, al-Amir expresses respect for the cultural heritage and within it Islam. This is the part that links with the politico-religious discourse within which these discourses of pluralism take place. It is a condition for promoting renewal and the new values of pluralism, rights, difference of opinion to declare respect for either religion and/or patriotism. Having made his point clear about national solidarity, al-Amir moves on to criticise the forces of obscurantism, just like al-Belihi. Thus he notes that the task of renewal requires a kind of transformation, in all developing societies, including Saudi Arabia. In such societies, and by extension the Kingdom, the “pre-state traditional and conservative culture and mentality had as a trait *mumana’a* (rejection/boycott) of all innovation.”<sup>300</sup> This criticism carries so many meanings. One of such meanings is directed at the discourses of religious conservatism in society which seem to stand as an obstacle towards the renewal required for development in the Kingdom. Historically, in the pre-state and

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<sup>297</sup> Yahya Al-Amir, ‘*Afkar li al-Hayat Al-Sa’udiyya...Tatallu‘at al-Mustaqbal al-amin*’ (Ideas for Saudi Society: Aspirations for a Safe Future) in ‘*Al-Watan Online*’, 8 March 2011.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

early phase of state-making in the Saudi Arabia, innovation was treated almost as a heresy. Another aspect of al-Amir's championing of pluralism and developmental, legal and educational renewal is directed at religious authority. This links with the ideas explained in the previous chapter about the reinterpetive dynamic of reintellectualisation, which seeks to propose new ways at looking at the role of religion as well as reinterpreting religious dogma.

The ideas of discourse and counter-discourse, difference of opinion, rights, dialogue and renewal are equally expressed in the thinking of female reformers and members of the 'pragmatic' trend of thought in Saudi Arabia. Halima Mudhaffar who writes widely in the Saudi press on issues related to reform highly regards dialogue's place in the process of shifting politics, society, youth and culture towards dialogue. Being herself a practitioner of dialogue, she gives one example of the importance of this value in any moderate society. In her March visit to the International Book Fair held during that month in Riyadh, she criticised the attempt by some members of the Salafi or religious-literalist trend in the Kingdom to cause some temporary disruption to the book fair, making the point that these youth are easily influenced by the forces wanting to cause division and disorder in the Kingdom. This is due to their fair of the influx of foreign books and obviously the ideas contained within them. Halima Mudhaffar took this as an opportunity to engage with some of the Salafi youth. She was encouraged by the disposition of many them to engage in peaceful dialogue and even accept difference of opinion. Her advice for further promotion of dialogue with this trend is by spreading the message the best defence against extremism and method for its eradication is "to instil the principle of dialogue and enlightenment..." noting that "diversity of opinion does not impede dialogue."<sup>301</sup> One female diplomat I was able to interview at the London Embassy makes a direct link between plural ideas and pluralism in culture and moderation. Dr Ilham Yousef argues that the diversity of views has a moderating effect. It "gives society a wide range of ideas about all issues of concern to the citizenry. This range of ideas thus exposes the community to new ideas and interpretations which were not previously available. It is only through different and diverse ideas individuals and organisations in a plural society can adjust their thinking on the basis of the availability

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<sup>301</sup> Halima Mudhaffar, "Ma Jara fi Ma'radh Al-Kitab la Yubasshir," [What Took place in the Book Fair is not a Good Sign], in *Al-Watan Online*, 10 March 2010.

of better arguments and courageous thinking.<sup>302</sup> There is a very powerful gender content to the positions of members of the ‘pragmatic’ trend of thought in KSA. Hence they tend to accept and defend pluralism. Moreover, they assume a moral position, which I find to be courageous, by defining pluralism in terms of inclusiveness of women in political, social, cultural and economic affairs. As Dr Ilham notes in her interview “it would be morally wrong to speak of reform (*islah*) and ignore women.”<sup>303</sup> She finds no opposition whatsoever between inclusiveness of women and the position of Islam, in both the Qur’an and the Hadith (sayings) of the Prophet. I will go back to this point about the reference to Islam in the discourse of the ‘pragmatic’ trend when I discuss the third component of moderation, ‘respect of rules’. This notion of inclusiveness of women is part of the type of pluralism that the ‘pragmatic’ trend is trying to clarify, develop and promote. All of the fifteen (15) interviewees discussed gender inclusiveness in three distinctive terms: i/ as an important component of pluralism, and that pluralism would be incomplete without inclusiveness of women in Saudi society; ii/ all find gender inclusiveness as compatible with Islam, blaming the slow pace of including women in all facets of social, political and economic life on ignorance and the dogmatism of some religious scholars, but they do not blame all learned scholars for the status of women in KSA; iii/ and all view inclusiveness as a precondition of reform or *islah*. An interviewee, serving as a judge in Jeddah, who despite his religious training and background, thinks that the inclusiveness of women is not only a requirement for reform, but also a condition for speedy development in the Kingdom. His view gives further support to the pragmatic trend’s championing of the cause of women as worthy of equality. He states:

My experience as a judge has taught me that social custom has contributed in a very negative way to the absence of inclusiveness in Saudi society. I preside over so many cases where even educated women are made victims of social custom that has nothing to do with Islam, the Qur’an or the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. If the Prophet, peace be upon him, married a businesswoman from Mecca, why should not his example send a message to those standing against inclusiveness of women that their wives, sisters, and female relatives ought to be given the same equal opportunity and right. The problem is social custom and not

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<sup>302</sup> Author interview, Dr Ilham Yousef, Diplomat, Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 20 November 2006, London.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

so much the state. Reform has to come from society because you can legislate as much as you wish about inclusiveness but if society does not practise inclusiveness in their daily life, nothing will change.<sup>304</sup>

Al-Belihi agrees with this position and offers a philosophical angle on the above. He argues that the state of inequality of women is part of a wider problem: absence of respect of the rights of the individual for equal participation from which society as a whole suffers. He links this idea of human rights for men and women with the Qur'anic notion of Godly ennoblement or *takreem*. Thus in the same interview he poses the question of “why males obey stupid social customs and disobey God’s Holy Book, the Qur’an, which ennoble men and women equally.”<sup>305</sup> His Royal Highness Prince Turki al-Faisal agrees with these views. He stresses that “for a reform package to be successful in bringing speedy and systematic inclusiveness to all Saudi women must begin with society but without excluding legal, educational and economic reforms by the state. The combination of the two approaches creates an irreversible momentum favouring inclusiveness.”<sup>306</sup> He also agrees with other interviewees from the ‘pragmatic’ trend that seriousness on the path of pluralism must address women’s inclusiveness. He adds that “a genuine notion of pluralism must treat gender inclusiveness as it does other items pertinent to pluralism such as national dialogue, municipality elections, free press, financial and economic reform, and equal state-society relations through legal and representative institutions such as the Consultative Council (*majlis al-shura*).”<sup>307</sup> Noting how women have overtaken men in higher education in terms of numbers, Prince Turki views this development as conducive to granting more rights to women than has so far been the case. Known for his democratic stand amongst the royal family, Prince Turki advocates giving women voting rights, “adding that if and when elections are introduced for the Consultative Council women should be part of the voting population.”<sup>308</sup> These rights are for him central to pluralism: “Women form half of Saudi society, and to exclude this important half from rights to inclusiveness is to shut the door of reform and genuine pluralism.”<sup>309</sup> This championing

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<sup>304</sup> Author interview, Saudi Religious Judge [name withheld], 12 November 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>305</sup> Author Interview, Ibrahim Al-Belehi, parliamentarian in the Saudi Consultative Council, 16 December 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>306</sup> Author interview, His Royal Highness, Prince Turki al-Faisal [when he was Saudi Ambassador to the UK], 21 October 2006, London.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

of women's rights meets with full and unanimous support by all of the interviewees and most of the articles addressing the question of pluralism by the 'pragmatic' trend.

Similarly, the eight female intellectuals, including Halima Al-Mudhaffar, and reformers from the 'pragmatic' trend of thought express similar ideas linking gender inclusiveness as pivotal to genuine pluralism. Their articles stress reform, and champion pluralism unequivocally. The concepts found in the articles or statements of members of the 'pragmatic' trend are present in their articles. Their arguments, like the ideas by Dr Ilham Yousef, advocate inclusiveness as a Godly right. None of these women take a radical feminist view of the status of women in KSA. They enter the public debate on female inclusiveness from the angle that is necessary reform not opposed to Islam, and that the fault so far belongs to society and not Islamic law and traditions. Hence Dr Yousef states that "Islam is the religion of democracy."<sup>310</sup> For her what is needed in KSA is "application of the value of independent reasoning on the part of the learned scholars (*'ulama*) so that society moves forward on the path of reform in the legal, educational, financial, and democratic areas so that women benefit from these reforms and enjoy their full rights, including voting rights when elections become part of the political scene in the Kingdom."<sup>311</sup> For her it is a negative attitude to be going back to the fact that women were not given the vote during the 2005 municipality elections. She says that "what matters is for reform-minded organisation, individuals, educators, judges and ministers to make the case for future inclusiveness. What matters in reform is positive thinking and focus on the future not the past."<sup>312</sup> Hatun al-Fasi, another woman who has voiced courageous ideas in favour of reform, social welfare, better education and facilities for youth, and over all participation for Saudi society, looks at gender inclusiveness from a human rights angle. In an article she wrote in 2010 about problems of youth and lack of equal opportunities, she views inclusiveness as a right whether for men or women, and for youth in particular. She argues in this way as absence of equal opportunity radicalises youth, and this is one problem linked in the Kingdom to recruitment of excluded young men by terrorists such as al-Qaida. Al-Fasi's legal approach and her stress of the human rights agenda places obligations on

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<sup>310</sup> Author interview, Dr Ilham Yousef, Diplomat, Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 20 November 2006, London.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

both the state and society to respect laws which have now become universal.<sup>313</sup> For example, she mentions the human rights conventions banning all forms of discrimination against women.<sup>314</sup> This legal and anti-discrimination approach adds moral edge to the discourse of female inclusiveness. Al-Fasi also uses this argument to support the country's two main human rights organisations, the first is a civic body entirely autonomous of the state (*al-jam'iyya al-wataniyya li huquq al-insan*), and the other is state-led (*al-hay'a al-wataniyya li huquq al-insan*).<sup>315</sup> Fatima Faqih contributes critically and through many articles to support the reform trend and the 'pragmatic' trend of thought in the Kingdom. She advances ideas more generally about the values of honesty, equality and ennoblement of human beings that she sees compatible with Islam and essential for pluralism. She takes the issue of female inclusiveness in many of her feature articles which have wide readership in the Kingdom. In a critical article called 'It is not Disorder' (*laysat Fawda*) she follows in the footsteps of al-Fasi, arguing that rights today are the value organising them have become universal laws that Muslims cannot under the excuse of specificity reject or ignore.<sup>316</sup> Of these values she adds are those concerning "the international conventions for the protection of rights for children, women, minorities and human beings" in general.<sup>317</sup> Again the legal-universal approach looks at pluralism and inclusiveness from the perspective of rights. These rights as they exist in international conventions, al-Faqih notes, which Islam contributed to by banning slavery, have become part of "a universal culture" of rights.<sup>318</sup> Thurayya al-'Aridh, a well-known female critic speaking for renewal, sees a place for human rights in any project that claims to 'modernise' and transform the Kingdom. Her many articles enter this debate from many angles, social, economic and political. The status of women is for her inseparable from pluralism. She champions the rights and the inclusiveness afforded women so far King Abdullah, noting the visibility of women in forums such as the National Dialogue Association, human Rights organisation, state-led and

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<sup>313</sup> See Hatun al-Fasi, "Huquq al-Insan wa al-Sa'udiyya al-Jadida," [Human rights and the New Saudi Arabia] in *Al-Riyadh*, 14 November 2010.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> The two human rights organizations are: 'The National Association for Human Rights', created in 2004 by reformists without state interference. The state however ended up copying this association and in 2006 King Abdullah gave his support for forming a state-run human rights watchdog called "The National Agency for Human Rights". The 12-member board is elected by the Consultative Council. See Hatun in Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Fatima al-Faqih, "*Laysat Fawda*," [It is not Disorder] in AlWatan Online, 14 March 2011.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

independent, chambers of commerce and consultative bodies increasingly becoming proactive in Saudi Arabia. But for her true pluralism is not only what is given to women through the institutional channels, which are opening their doors to women's membership and participation. Rather, it is "when women themselves begin to accept the responsibilities [that go with an active role], by displaying equal capability through performance at all levels of administration [in the Kingdom]...Only thus can women prove to assert their worth and measure up to the challenges facing them as well as the new roles assigned to them [by the state]."<sup>319</sup> For al-'Aridh this is the only way to answer at those who oppose inclusiveness of women. Basically, for her women have to work for inclusiveness not just be given it by either the state or society.

Addressing pluralism in a different way, Badriyya Al-Bishr, takes umbrage from the fact that there is absence of inclusiveness such as in the country's municipality elections of 2005. She expresses women's offence at women-less participation in those elections. She states that "...There are those [campaigners] who promised to pay attention to libraries of the youth, to cleanliness in the suburbs; all promised to serve except for one segment of society: women. The reason, of course, is that women do not have the franchise, and therefore carry no voting weight. Do you know now that women are absent from [electoral] planning, she also misses on the [promised] services and [opportunities] of growth, and are simply dropped [from all calculations] as a worthless thing."<sup>320</sup> This explains why she described the Kingdom's first elections in which women were excluded "*intikhabat al-rijal*" (men's elections). Al-Bishri contributes to the debate about pluralism by alerting society to the flaws of ignoring women. When she mentions growth she specifies how could men engage in a process supposedly concerned with widening participation and representation and yet ignoring women. She thus observes that women were practically turned into a "minority" through their exclusion: "Justifying [the non-inclusion of women] on the basis of lack of time is an unconvincing excuse to control anger [at]...not recognising a large social segment representing nine million women, called [in this case] a minority."<sup>321</sup> This position is supported by another female thinker and a strong voice of pluralism in Saudi Arabia. Hasna Al-Qan'eer finds the roots of exclusion and exploitation in social custom. Her

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<sup>319</sup> Thurayya al-'Aridh, "al-Mar'a al-Sa'udiyya wa Khidham al-Tahidhiyat" [Saudi Women and the Huge Challenges] in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 9 March 2010.

<sup>320</sup> Badriyya Al-Bishr, "*Intikhabat al-Rijal*," [Men's Elections] in *Al-Riyadh*, 1 February 2005.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

famous article of January 2011 shocked the nation in the way she breaks taboo to talk about the practices that de-enfranchise women and keep them under the control of men. In her article ‘Two Desires Devour Women’s Body and Soul’ Hasna Al-Qan‘eer openly discusses how many Saudi men exploit their mothers, sisters and wives by literally wanting to possess them, often through the desire to receive the women’s income to the point that thousands of fathers prevent their daughters from marrying for this purpose.<sup>322</sup> The idea behind her critical article is that these social practices do not make for a pluralist society since women live under the mercy of men. On observation must be made in this context. Of course, this kind of guardianship that Hasna Al-Qan‘eer describes is forbidden by Islam and has nothing to do with Islamic law. The practice is a social custom prevalent in some regions and social strata of the Kingdom, and Al-Qan‘eer’s article met with wide interest, sympathy and support, opening much debate in chat rooms all over the Kingdom. Her approach looks at pluralism from the angle of the dynamics that stand as obstacles against gender inclusiveness. Fawziyya Al-Bikr focuses on similar issues regarding inclusiveness in the Kingdom. Like other female voices of reform and renewal in Saudi Arabia she is for equal inclusiveness of men and women in all sectors of the economy as well as in politics and the social and the cultural spheres. For her these are essential for any ‘just society’, in the sense of having the right balance to move forward and achieve higher levels of growth and social cohesion. This is one reason why she gives pluralism even a wider definition, not limiting herself to the debate of gender issues which she addresses in many of her press articles which are widely read in the Kingdom.<sup>323</sup> She views socio-economic differences and the question of distribution of wealth or absence of equal opportunity as a key obstacle to development. She questions a problem that remains almost a ‘taboo’ in Saudi society and that is the question of poverty in rich Saudi Arabia.<sup>324</sup> By discussing poverty, Al-Bikr is not only raising awareness about this social ill, but is also forcing a debate on the serious obstacles against political and economic development, and overall participation.

The focus in the above analysis was on the interpretation of moderation in the discourse of a number of female reformers in the Kingdom. The male reformers who

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<sup>322</sup>Hasna Al-Qan‘eer, “Shahwatani Tanhashan Ruh Al-Mar’a wa Jasadaha,” [Two Desires Devour Women’s Body and Soul] in *Al-Riyadh*, 16 January 2011.

<sup>323</sup> Fawziyya Al-Bikr, “*Al-Mar’a wa al-‘Aqliyya al-Dhukuriyya*,” [Women and Male Mentality] in *Sahifat al-Jazeera*, 4 October 2008.

<sup>324</sup> Fawziyya Al-Bikr, “*Matha Ya’ni an Takuna Faqiran fi Mujtama’ Ghani*,” [What does Mean to be Poor in a Rich Society], in *Sahifat al-Jazeera*, 18 October 2008.

also belong to the ‘pragmatic’ trend share these views. Not a single interviewee expressed reservations about the inclusiveness of women. This includes Prince Turki Al-Faisal, one of the prominent statesmen and diplomats in the Kingdom, who sees no contradiction whatsoever between gender inclusiveness, Islamic teachings and the role of religion in the political administration in Saudi Arabia. They are all in favour of women gaining the vote, and view this as a pluralising step as well as a mark of the ability of Muslims to build moderate societies, plural, peaceful and participatory.

A specific aspect about the ‘pragmatic’ trend is its role of mediation between the old and the new, the Islamic and non-Islamic. Here one notes the conciliation of the old and the new as well as of the Islamic and the global. This conciliation is central to the project of *wasatiyya* or moderation promoted by the ‘pragmatic’ trend. Ten interviewees associate moderation with conciliation. They mention the term ‘bridge’ as a medium internally for connecting the forces of religion and the forces of modernity. This idea of ‘bridge’ in a communicative sense is for respondents such as Salem bin Fahd Al-Zamam, Muhammad Al-Hassoun, Ahmad Al-Matroodi, and Riyadh Hamdan vital for “deepening dialogue” and making it as a “political and moral project” all over the Kingdom. They all agree that without dialogue no progress can be made on the front of renewal, politically, socially, and culturally. All four consider dialogue to be an Islamic ethic used during the time of the Prophet and after him.<sup>325</sup> One notes here how respondents from the ‘pragmatic’ trend find legitimating force in reference to the Qur’an and unlike the discourses of protest and quasi opposition in the early 1990s, they do not see any gain in attacking the King or the government of the day. The ‘pragmatic’ trend is not confrontational in this sense, wanting to gain presence in society through the various media outlets, including social media such as ‘Facebook’ and chat rooms, for the purpose of sustaining its presence in making the case for reform and moderation through discourse and not oppositional political rhetoric as it is not a realistic agenda at a time when the Kingdom has a long way to go along the path of institution-building. But whilst the institutions are absent or being created, it is useful to have a ‘pragmatic’ discourse as one way of pushing the limits of public debate about all kind of issues Saudis have until recently avoided, ignored or simply had little courage to face up to and discuss. So as a ‘bridge’ between the ruling and the intellectual elites, the

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<sup>325</sup> Author interviews with Salem bin Fahd Al-Zamam, Muhammad Al-Hassoun, Ahmad Al-Taroudi, and Riyadh Hamdan, Riyadh, 16 November 2010. All four are prominent voices of renewal in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

‘pragmatic’ trend facilitates discussion in an unprecedented way in the Kingdom. Through their discourses, which tend also to respond to radical religious trends, such as the Salafis, the ‘pragmatic’ trend contributes to making ‘moderation’ a cultural trait in the Kingdom by offering alternative views to the Saudi public and the emerging Saudi ‘public sphere’. Thus the idea of ‘conciliation’ is hugely popular amongst the trend’s intellectuals and the interviewees I was able to speak with. Four Interviewees from the civil service and two Islamic judges argue that conciliation goes hand in hand with moderation. One of the judges specialising in Islamic law puts value on conciliation for its pluralising effect: “Reform and renewal aim at moderation, but for us and given the novelty of public debate we do not wish to disrupt this process by making it against some ideology or another, a group of another, or against any side in our country. The main thing is to understand moderation as conciliation (*tawfeeq*) between our heritage which we need always to renew and know closely and the human heritage that offers us opportunities for learning new things. This gives us additional view points and makes plurality of ideas and discourses possible in a moderate society aspiring for development and justice.”<sup>326</sup> Al-Zamam, another voice of reform from the ‘pragmatic’ trend, agrees: “I teach this to my own students. The idea of conciliation is what we academics do, bringing ideas together to pluralise perspectives and widen our intellectual horizon as researchers for ‘truth’. We want the same for our society so that it lives up to the God’s instruction to Muslims to build moderate communities and to value moderation.” Another academic, Al-Hassoun, says that “pluralism does not develop in extremist societies. When people fear for their lives, family property, intellect and for their dignity, they develop into a silent society that loses the ability to think openly and to speak openly. We do not wish this society to grow in our country. We want Saudis to be intelligent citizens who exercise choice through awareness of various views, ideas, ideologies and discourses.”<sup>327</sup> Al-Belihi has even gone further by championing the idea of *Tanafus hurr* (free competition). He does not limit this to the conventional idea of competition in elections. He means by it the competition of ideas too. However, this competition according to Al-Belihi ought to respect the standards of respect, peaceful debate, honesty, and the free speech. The fact that the very notion of free competition has entered the language of the ‘pragmatic’ trend and the Saudi ‘public

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<sup>326</sup> Author interview with an Islamic Law Judge [name withheld in respect of the interviewee’s wish], 2 December 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>327</sup> Author interview with Muhammad Al-Hassoun, 16 June 2010, Riyadh.

sphere’ is testimony to the role played by these advocates of renewal and reform from the ‘pragmatic’ trend in the Kingdom. I believe that have not only championed moderation in Saudi Arabia, but they have also ‘modernised’ the language of political debate (See Table 3). The terminology of difference, diversity, competition, or tolerance is new to KSA. Here one can say that the ‘pragmatic’ trend has worked at the level of discourse but also the language they use for expressing their views on many political social, economic, cultural and religious subjects.

This belief in pluralism suggests that the type of moderation promoted by the ‘pragmatic’ trend in their discourses is ideological and not simply strategic.

**Table 3** Summary of Language of Pluralism: Meaning & Source

<b>Language/Concepts</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Source/Basis</b>
<i>Ta’addudiyya</i>	Pluralism/ diversity	Islamic & Western
<i>Tanawwu’</i>	Diversity	Islamic & Western
<i>Tasamuh</i>	Tolerance	Islamic & Western
<i>Al-ra’y al-akhar</i>	Other opinion	Islamic & Western
<i>Al-ra’y al-mukhalif</i>	Opposing opinion	Islamic & Western
<i>Al-Hiwar</i>	Dialogue	Islamic & Western
<i>Niqash</i>	Calm debate	Arab & Western
<i>‘lakum dinukum wa liya dini’</i>	Freedom of religion	Qur’anic verse
<i>Mujadalah</i>	Discourse and counter-discourse	Qur’anic concept
<i>Munaqasha</i>	Debate	Islamic & Western
<i>Ikhtilaf</i>	The right to differ	Islamic & Western
<i>Mukhalafa</i>	Difference of opinion	Islamic & Western
<i>Hurr fima yudeen</i>	Rejection of compulsion	Islamic & Western
<i>Hurriyyah</i>	Freedom	Western
<i>Ta’ayush</i>	Coexistence	Arab & Western
<i>Tanafus hurr</i>	Free competition	Western

### 5.3 Ideological moderation

All fifteen interviewees express commitment to the idea that moderation is a precondition of reform, politically and religiously. In answering two questions of whether “moderation is an end in itself” or “where in the scale of political values they place moderation” all interviewees agree on the following:

- A part of King Abdullah’s ongoing process of reform, moderation is definitely an end in itself. It is descriptive as a new instrument of including all of the forces of peaceful dialogue amongst Saudi citizens, and pluralising the public arena so that diverse discourses can get fair exposure and hearing by the public. So it stands for the public behaviour of how Saudis think collectively about reform. It is prescriptive in that all interviewees consider to it to be a value in itself. For the interviewees moderation as a value, which has Islamic roots, defines the principle of peaceful cohabitation. This principle of cohabitation is important for the interviewees given their opposition against the use of force by al-Qaida and radical forces which could give excuse to the hardliners to abort King Abdullah’s reform in the name of a security agenda for fighting the terrorists. But part of the idea of working to deepen moderation in Saudi society as a value is to promote all of the other standards the ‘pragmatic’ trends believe in: the respect of different and opposed opinion, conciliation of old and new as well as Islamic and global ideals, respect of open and peaceful dialogue, inclusiveness of all the diverse discourses, ideologies and actors that contribute to pluralism in Saudi society.
- All of the interviewees contextualise their commitment to moderation. First and foremost for them moderation must consolidate as well as respect the principle of political solidarity. In this respect, what they mean is that solidarity supersedes self-interest. The interest of groups or ideologies must not cause chaos and lead to instability. King Abdullah has tolerated open and public debate so long as debate is not defamatory, subversive and not used to recruit Saudis for violence against one another or against non-Saudis. The principle of national solidarity is therefore the guiding principle and the framework within which Saudi *wasatiyya* is defined. Political solidarity entails among other things the various actors, trends of thought, politicians, not only know certain limits of ‘self-censorship’: such as to abstain from

wilfully speaking and acting in a destructive way against the interests of others who hold different views and positions, including the religious trend.

- There is a discourse of moderation as the public skill to join with others, including those holding opposed views, in the awesome task of advancing the King's agenda of renewal. This renewal consists not only in deepening the process of socialisation, through education, the media, etc. of pluralism or dialogue, but first of all in reconstructing a tolerant society that does not fear pluralism such as the inclusiveness of women or exposure to other ideas. This will only succeed if the heritage of Islam and its laws and rules are accepted. The acknowledgment of the principle of moderation is tied to the appreciation and even re-interpreting and re-learning of Islam's traditions of moderation, peaceful dialogue, and toleration of different ideas.

Many of the interviewees affirm commitment to ideological moderation as an irreversible type of 'cultural shift' in Saudi society. Al-Azam, Al-Belehi, Prince Turki al-Faisal, and Al-Hassoun, for instance, express the idea that moderation for Muslims ought to be "a way of life".<sup>328</sup> They do not see any contradiction between being moderate in Saudi Arabia and the host culture which is hundred per cent Muslim. Prince Turki Al-Faisal goes even further by noting that those who are opposed to moderation or do not practise it must "re-learn Islam" and they will find in both the Holy Book, the Qur'an and the Hadith so much evidence that moderation or *wasatiyya* is the way of Islam. The idea of Islam as an entire system in which Muslims are instructed to adopt balance of thought and action in their private and public lives is stressed time and time again by the 'pragmatic' trend. All interviewees for instance mention the Qur'anic verse in which Islam is described to be the religion of the 'middle path': "Thus We have appointed you a middle nation."<sup>329</sup> For them the idea behind this Godly wisdom is firstly a refutation of extremism in thought, speech and action, secondly a direct instruction to Muslims to practise compromise or *i'tidal* at all levels of the Muslim experience, and this for them extends to politics and religious behaviour, and thirdly to strive always to maximise balance as a priority in Muslim life when organising all

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<sup>328</sup> Author's interviews with Ibrahim Al-Belehi, 16 December 2010, Riyadh; with Salem bin Fahd Al-Zamam, and Muhammad Al-Hassoun, 16 November 2010, Riyadh; and with His Royal Highness, Prince Turki al-Faisal [when he was Saudi Ambassador to the UK], 21 October 2006, London.

<sup>329</sup> The Holy Qur'an: (*Surah Baqarah*, Chapter 2:143).

aspects that affect the public's life. Shatawi al-Ghaythi uses the term "thaqafat al-Taghyeer" (the culture of transformation) to describe the attitudes such as compromise, awareness and dialogue. These traits for him can be very potent when combined with the modern technologies of communication making socialisation into the 'culture of transformation' widespread and not limited to elites.<sup>330</sup> Hamad Al-Bahili agrees that transformation, upon principles of moderation, produces "a momentum to deepen a genuine culture of dialogue in society on the basis of mutual respect..." Further on, he makes the point how this momentum towards transformation produces gains in the realm of "human rights, civil culture, and advancement in general."<sup>331</sup>

Al-Belehi states that whether moderation is ideological or tactical depends on the belief and practice of independent reasoning or *ijtihad* in any Muslim society. He takes independent reasoning to be one of the most important indices of cultural shift towards a permanent culture built on the principle of moderation. He views the openings in the Saudi 'public sphere' today as a good direction made possible by the toleration of debate on all issues by the state under King Abdullah. Increasingly, he says, Saudi intellectuals are diversifying public discourse and many are becoming courageous in the way they address many 'taboo' areas. He says that "the tendency to break and demolish taboos is the first step a society takes on the path of *ijtihad*. Today our intellectuals talk freely about corruption, call for the inclusiveness of women, point to the necessity of a modern understanding of Islam and Islamic texts, and are openly championing elections, the right of voting for women, and many even direct polite criticisms at religious authorities. These are all positive signs that Saudi society step by step believes in the necessity of independent reasoning in the discussion of public issues."<sup>332</sup> Even the question of religious legal pronouncements has been put into question. This questioning relates to whether they are binding or not. Were it not for the increasing reference to independent reasoning, this would not have been the case today. Al-Belehi gives this as an example of how innovative, interpretive and inquisitive the wave of moderation has been in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He pointed to the fact that even the leading religious authority in the Kingdom made a statement in 2010 to tell the Saudi public that any fatwa, given to an individual or an institution, is not

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<sup>330</sup> Shatawi Al-Ghaythi, "Al-Thaqafa Al-Haditha wa Su'al Al-Taghyeer," [Modern Culture and the Question of Transformation] in *Al-Watan Online*, 18 March 2011.

<sup>331</sup> Hamad Al-Bahili, "Na'am Nahnu Nanmu," [Yes, We are Growing] in *Sahifat Al-Yawm*, 9 January 2011.

<sup>332</sup> Author interview with Ibrahim Al-Belehi, 16 December 2010, Riyadh.

binding. The Mufti, Shaykh Abd Al-Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Shaykh made it clear that a *fatwa* or religio-legal pronouncement by a learned scholar of Islam aims at clarifying to Muslims what is compatible or not with God's Law. Such a fatwa is not according the Mufti binding on the individual or institution receiving it. Hamza Al-Mazini took this issue further to argue in a widely read article he wrote in 2010 that "religious authorities are humans and have no sacred quality, but like all citizens they have the right to express their views [from a religious perspective]."<sup>333</sup> For him religio-legal pronouncements should not be binding since they are man-made. Al-Mazini's position would not have been possible to state much less say openly in the media even ten years ago. Here lies the importance of the ongoing work done by the 'pragmatic' trend to widen the scope of critical debate, including in their re-interpreting activities even the religious authorities which for a long time were above criticism. Back in the early 1990s, one of the most important treatises arguing for independent reasoning, dialogue, tolerance of difference in opinion was written by the late statesman, novelist and intellectual Ghazi Al-Qusaybi. His treatise "*Hatta la Takuna Fitna*" (In Order to Fend off Division), argues that no one posses the truth, including religious scholars and other learned societies, unless they use independent reasoning, verify and substantiate what they say, exercise moderation in thought and speech, and remain open to alternative views. This treatise by Al-Qusaybi according to Al-Belehi "kind of encouraged everyone to think about what kind of Saudi society is required for the purpose of genuine renewal and reform."<sup>334</sup> Al-Qusaybi argued then, in response to a religious scholar and academic who accused him of disregard for Islam, that moderation compels Muslims to be careful about excommunicating those with whom they differ, not to rush to judge before ascertaining the full evidence, and to practise independent reasoning in light of the change of time and place as instructed by the Prophet Muhammad and God."<sup>335</sup> His treatise continues to inspire many scholars and intellectuals, including the 'pragmatic' trend.

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<sup>333</sup> Hamza al-Mazini, "Al-Fatwa laysat Mulzima," [a Religious-Legal Pronouncement is not Binding], in *Al-Watan Online*, 2 December 2010.

<sup>334</sup> Author interview with Ibrahim Al-Belehi, 16 December 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>335</sup> See Ghazi Al-Qusaybi, *Hatta la Takuna Fitna* [In Order to Fend off Division] (Riyadh: Dar Al-Nadwa, 2006).

**Table 4** Summary of Language of Ideological Moderation: Meaning & Source

Language/Concepts	Meaning	Source/Basis
<i>Ijtihad</i>	Independent reasoning	Islam
<i>I'tidal</i>	Compromise	Islam & Western system
<i>Ta'ddud dhimna Wihdat al-Watan</i>	Plurality within unity	Islamic & Western roots
<i>Tadhamun al-Watani</i>	Political Solidarity	Islamic & Western roots
<i>Tawfiq</i>	Conciliation	Islamic & Western roots

The analysis now very briefly considers the last criterion of moderation in the discourse of the 'pragmatic' trend.

#### **5.4 Respect of the Rules of the Political Game**

All interviewees list one or two rules that they value as central to the overriding principles of moderation. When asked about their response as to what they take to be illustrative of their 'respect of the rules of the political game', they mention two: sanctity of Islam as an eternal frame of reference for religion and politics; and political solidarity as an inviolable principle that must be maximised as part of the quest for moderation, at the ideological level, and the more pressing general quest for advancement and reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I summarise these two points below.

- All interviewees hold Islam to be part of the identity of the state and of Saudi citizenship. For them, no notion of legitimacy outside it, religiously or politically, is possible. Thus they see no contradiction whatsoever between their quest for moderation, and basing such moderation on pluralism, respect of alternative arguments and discourses, dialogue, and even peaceful competition to openly address the Saudi public by peaceful means to argue the case for reform according to their ideological preferences. The language they use is not overtly religious. However, they justify certain guiding ideals as to be compatible with the Islamic faith. In particular, they take their *wasati* or moderate ideas to be Islamic, and to this end they advance many arguments

to substantiate this. One way they do this is to mention Qur’anic verses or *Hadiths* (saying by the Prophet Muhammad) to make their case. They even claim to be practising Islam as the ‘middle path’. It is the notion of the middle way that they relate to Islam and repeat when making their case for moderation. This position does not also defy the identity of the state which is built on religious modes of legitimacy. Some interviewees even said that they practise and think of moderation from the angle of respect for majority rule, and majority rule for them in the case of the Kingdom is the religious content of politics, and the overall identity of political institution and citizens.

- Political solidarity is in one way almost an unwritten contract with the rulers or the state that certain rules of political play will be respected by the ‘pragmatic’ trend, namely, the sanctity of national unity.

These two rules of the political game that define the parameters of debate by the ‘pragmatic’ trend are also evident in the literature published online or in the press by intellectuals, activists and voices from within this political group who speak for reform on the basis of moderation, pluralism, dialogue, diversity, women’s rights and peaceful participation. Their literature talks about *al-watan* (the Motherland), *al-wihda al-wataniyya* (national unity), and the primacy of Islam. Khalaf Al-Harbi,<sup>336</sup> Sa‘ad Al-Suyan,<sup>337</sup> Mansour Al-Nqidan,<sup>338</sup> Muhammad Ali Al-Mahmoud,<sup>339</sup> Turki al-Hamad,<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Khalaf al-Harbi writes regular columns and has wide readership in the Kingdom. His articles are varied and discuss with clarity and high level of criticism all kinds of social and political problems. His article “Limatha Antakhibu?” [Why do I Vote] is one example of how he promotes patriotism and encourages Saudis to vote so that they become active members of their city; in *Sahifat Okaz*, 4 April 2011.

<sup>337</sup> Sa‘ad Al-Suyan is a very creative writer, using various media outlets and he also has wide readership. His article “*Al-Iman wa Al-‘Aql*” [Faith and Reason] is a philosophical take on al-Qusaybi’s early treatise. He stresses the compatibility of the two and shows how conciliation is practiced and done. Here he defends Islam as a religion of reason and, by implication, gives further proof of its status as the Kingdom’s main frame of reference in politics, religion, culture, social affairs, etc. See *Sahifat Al-Iqtisadiyya Al-Iluktruniyya*, 19 September 2006.

<sup>338</sup> Mansour Al-Nqidan has an open and critical mind and his articles promote the principles of moderation, dialogue, women’s rights, diversity and tolerance as necessary for genuine reform in the Kingdom. His articles promote also patriotism, national unity and the sanctity of Islam; See for instance his article “*Khadimu Al-Haramayn Yulhimu Sha‘bahu*” [The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Inspires his People], in *Al-Riyadh*, 17 November 2008.

<sup>339</sup> Muhammad Ali Al-Mahmoud is a well-known critic and writes on Saudi and Arab affairs, earning himself a wide readership. He speaks against radical views and criticizes extremism in all of its forms, especially intellectual extremism as well as the practical side to it, terrorism in the Kingdom and in the rest of the World. He is a strong advocate of moderation, and the values that go with it such as human rights, gender equality, and dialogue. He stands for national unity

amongst others, demonstrate through their writings that it is possible to work on the basis of an agenda of political renewal and reform, use a great deal of criticism of many aspects of Saudi rule, religious management, corruption, discrimination, or lack of pluralism and yet conform. Their conformism is proof that reform in the Saudi context must be conditioned by overriding principles of respect for Islam and for national unity. In relation to patriotism, a number of interviewees refer to the idea of “plurality within national unity”. This plurality for Al-Belehi, for instance, accepts diversity within the common homeland, the Kingdom.<sup>341</sup> All views and ideologies so long as they are debated through open media and its advocates are peaceful, then they uphold the unity and stability of the nation. The same plurality for him regards the question of diversity of interpretation of Islam. This is possible so long as these diverse interpretations supplement one another and use open discussion to argue or modify their differences. The homeland is thus the ‘umbrella’ that unites all Saudis no matter how different their ideas, politics, religious understandings may be.

## 5.5 Conclusion

I have shown through the discourse of the ‘pragmatic’ trend that there is evidence that a cultural shift of sorts is under way. The Kingdom is often depicted as some kind of a place without any hope for change or political renewal. Through the interviews and articles by discourses from the ‘pragmatic’ trend I have shown that there are three types of shift. Based on the discourse I have read and analysed, written and spoken drawn on interviews, advocates of pluralism promote dialogue, diversity of opinion, tolerance of difference, and even free competition. Ideological moderation indicates genuine dilution of rigid positions from the past. What can be deduced from these interviews and articles used here is that moderation is adopted as a genuine value

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and his articles show respect for the Islamic faith, which he views to be compatible with reform and renewal. See his article “*Al-Insan wa al-Sulta fi Al-‘Alam Al- Arabi*” [The Individual and Authority in the Arab World] in *Sahifat Al-Riyadh*, 17 March 2011.

<sup>340</sup> Turki al-Hamad is an excellent writer with a very accessible style. He is a critic of the existing regimes in the Arab World, often taking particular interest in questions of institution-building, laws, and the conditions of advancement. As an intellectual most easily associated with the ‘pragmatic’ trend, his articles contain much evidence on the necessity of moderation, diversity, inclusiveness, and dialogue. He is staunchly patriotic and supports King Abdullah’s reform process. He also accepts and respects Islam as a frame of political and religious reference for Saudis. See his article, “*Wa lakin la Nanmu?*” [However we do not Advance?] in *Al-Watan Online*, 14 November 2010.

<sup>341</sup> Author interview with Ibrahim Al-Belehi, 16 December 2010, Riyadh.

and an end in itself seen by the 'pragmatic' trend as necessary for the process of political reform and renewal under King Abdullah and beyond. There is no political opportunism evident in the explanations and answers given by the fifteen interviewees. Similarly, the articles used confirm this conclusion. Lastly, moderation as understood from the discourse of the 'pragmatic' trend plays by two chief rules that shape the identity of the Saudi state and its people: national unity and its religious framework. The discourse of the 'pragmatic' trend is rich not only in evidence of how the Kingdom is being transformed from a quasi 'religio-political' state to a 'civil-religio-political' state in which the learned societies are becoming active, inquisitive, critical, and more and more participatory. One can say a new Saudi identity is being produced. For students of democracy these developments at the level of society offer so much evidence of political learning. This political learning and the 'cultural shift' that is happening in the Kingdom remains hidden from both the studies carried out on Saudi Arabia by students of the Middle East as well as from the Western public in general. The 9/11 events have ingrained a particular view of the Kingdom as a source of terrorism, religious obscurantism, and fanaticism. Only by looking at the 'puritanical' trend can one have a full picture of the state of political debate and in particular of moderation in the Kingdom. This is the subject of my analysis in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONSTRUCTION OF 'MODERATION' IN SAUDI ARABIA: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE 'PURITANICAL' TREND

#### 6.1 Focus

The study of state and society in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as explained in the previous chapters, is noted for the mix of politics and religion. Even trends of thought driven by a reformist agenda, such as in the early 1990s after the Gulf War and more recently at the turn of the new millennium, have not fully shaken off religious idioms, considerations and overall influence from their discourse and thought. I have shown this to be the case in the discourse of the 'pragmatic' trend. In this chapter I use discourse analysis to understand the 'puritanical' trend's thought, which points to a clear difference between the 'pragmatic' and 'puritanical' trends. The latter's continuous defence of religion and use of religious arguments, sources, and idioms is even more sympathetic to the religio-political framework within which the Saudi state, politics and identity are defined and legitimated.<sup>342</sup> This serves to stress one fundamental idea about the Kingdom: the beginning of a modest 'cultural' shift' one notices in the innovative themes, language, arguments and intellectual commitments to pluralism, gender inclusiveness or moderation is not fully matched in the discourse of the 'puritanical' trend. Nonetheless, these two trends as I shall briefly explain below are not necessarily opposites on everything. They have similarities as well as dissimilarities, which I will explain more deeply in the comparative section in chapter seven.

#### 6.2 Introduction

Politics in the Kingdom is without a doubt changing and the discourses found today pay attention to issues of reform and renewal, refuting the long-held Orientalist idea of the Kingdom and its ruling and intellectual elites opposing change or reform.<sup>343</sup> Since the publication by Abd Al-Aziz Al-Khidr of his important 'biography' as he

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<sup>342</sup> Abd Al-Rahman Al-Ruwaishidi, *Al-Wahhabiyya Harakat Al-Fikr wa Al-Dawla Al-Islamiyya* [Wahhabism, The Movement of Islamic Thought and State] (Cairo: Dar Al-'Ulum li Al-Tiba'a, 1977), pp. 5-52.

<sup>343</sup> Many of the earliest records of Western travelogues to Saudi Arabia are not free of Orientalist assumptions, see for instance Robin Bidwell, *Travellers in Arabia* (London: Hamlyn, 1976).

called it in Arabic in 2010, *Al-Sa'udiyya: Sirat Dawla wa Mujtama'* [Saudi Arabia: A 'Biography' of State and Society], we have learnt more about two fundamentals which seem opposed but nonetheless are complementary.<sup>344</sup> At one level there is the unchanged identity of the state's religio-political canvas and identity. This continues to be important for as long as politics and religion are wedded in the Saudi state. To change this is more or less a call for a new identity, direction and rationale for the Saudi state. Thus no one is yet courageous enough to suggest an alternative to this arrangement created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. All discourses that can be described as innovative and reform-focused do not try to separate state and religion or put an end to the arrangement first worked out by Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad Ibn Saud in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. What is attempted instead is a mode of re-thinking ways of 'modernising' the arrangement, by introducing new idioms such as of pluralism and gender inclusiveness amongst other things in the case of the 'pragmatic' trend. The 'puritanical' trend by contrast is loyal to the original arrangement and what it seeks to do is to find ways to boost it by revamping its relevance in two interconnected ways: it re-uses the old religious idioms to suit change in time, and recognise the validity of new themes and questions but still ground them in old interpretations.

To understand this style one must consider the continuous power of the religious discourse as explained by Al-Khidr.

I begin this chapter with two brief observations. The first regards my use of the term 'puritanical' to describe the discourse of this trend. The second is about the difference between the pragmatic and puritanical trends, which I will explain more profoundly in chapter seven. But the brief summary here serves to connect the previous analysis with the ensuing section on the type of ideas produced by the puritanical trend on moderation.

In the language that has emerged within the circles of intellectuals and in the media in general in Saudi Arabia there is reference to 'liberals' and conservative in reference to the two trends studied in this thesis. In fact, there is an additional term used in reference to the 'puritanical' trend: *usuli*, meaning fundamentalist and this is a term that does not translate well in Arabic. One reason is the fact that fundamentalism has

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<sup>344</sup> Abd Al-Aziz Al-Khidr of his important 'biography' as he called it in Arabic in 2010, *Al-Sa'udiyya: Sirat Dawla wa Mujtama'* [Saudi Arabia: A 'Biography' of State and Society] (Beirut: Al-Shabaka al-Arabiyya li Al-Nashr wa Al-Bahth, 2010).

Christian origins. Moreover, the term *usuli* in the Saudi context of al-Qaida terrorist activities has very negative connotations, namely the use of violence in the political process. By using this term my intention has been to avoid the dualism found in Orientalist assumptions that there are only two groups or two discourses pitted against each other one accepting modernity and liberal values and the other is traditional and tries to apply it to all aspects of life. In addition to this I was concerned about the reductionistic nature of competing terms and in the absence of a better term ‘puritanical’ makes sense in that the discourses of this trend maintain loyalty to religious values but without being fixed. They are dynamic in the way they understand religion, at least in some areas which they debate recognising the need for change and reform. A puritanical in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arabia is vastly different from a puritanical in the Arabia of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The latter maintain part of the religious purity they view as fundamental to the identity of the Saudi state and its citizens.<sup>345</sup> However, these are not *ikwan*-type (the brotherhood of fanatics who interpreted religion in a literalist way and tried to impose Islam in Arabia using force) literalist religious voices that exclude others from the public arena or from the Islamic faith. This qualitative difference is very important to note in order to have clarity about the language used and the discourse I shall be studying below in order to find out about its understanding of moderation.

The second point regards the difference between the pragmatic and puritanical trends. Theoretically, there are no values and ideas shared by the pragmatic and the ‘puritanical’ tendencies and types of discourse which are competing for influence of the Saudi public and the state. Part of what I am attempting to do in this chapter is primarily analysing how the puritanical discourse looks at moderation. At the same time this exercise allows for the highlighting and explanation of the differences between the ‘puritanical’ and pragmatic discourses. This analysis is significant in that it helps put things in order according to the predefined criteria of moderation I have outlined for the thesis. The basic assumption of the criteria is that there is a basic core of organising political positions according to which moderates produce discourse and can be understood within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The differences between the pragmatic and puritanical discourses cannot simply be reduced to two broad social and political

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<sup>345</sup> For a good account of the deep connection between religion and politics as well as the lasting influence of religion in the Arab Gulf States see James Dougherty, “Religion and Law,” in Alvin Cottrell (ed.), *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 281-313.

groups, the former speaking the language of ‘liberal politics’ and the second the language of politics from the perspective of ‘religious orthodoxy’. In practice, however, they both maintain religion as a frame of reference for their positions on numerous social and political issues which are debated frequently in the Kingdom such as the question of reform, gender relations, and relations with the West. The puritanical discourse, however, uses religion more systematically. There is not a single position they take on social, political, economic and cultural matters which does not make reference to religious orthodoxy. All of this will become apparent in the following analysis. The individuals from whom I was able to obtain interviews occupy various positions in academia, religious bureaucracy, and the judiciary.

For ethical reasons I cannot name the individual interviewees who did not give me prior permission for publicising their names in this thesis. Members of this trend are very sensitive to criticism and understandably the interviewees wish to remain anonymous. I have given them pseudonyms as one way of respecting their wish for anonymity. The previous several years since King Abdullah has come to power have seen the fortunes of the pragmatic trend take a turn for the better, gaining more presence in the media, academia, and the public service in general. The puritanical trend has more or less been always part of the dominant religious current that has historically shaped the politico-religious debate in the Kingdom. However, during the same period of King Abdullah, whilst this trend has enjoyed the support of many members of the royal house, it has generally come under more intensive and wide scrutiny from both the government and the public. This has made interviewees from this trend hesitant, and this is justifiable, in giving approval for the publication of their names. They are confident about the ‘correctness’ of their beliefs and arguments. However, they prefer to keep a low profile, preferring more prominent jurists and learned scholars working for state institutions to take the lead in explaining the key premises of their thinking. It is my intention, therefore, to suppress the names of individuals interviewed from the puritanical trend. The only names that appear in full are of those established writers and public opinion formulators, male and female, whose columns and writings are widely read throughout the Kingdom.

As an introduction to the discourse analysis, I look at the so-called ‘fatwa society’ (society of religious counsel). This is important in two ways. Firstly, it introduces an idea Al-Khidr introduces in his ground-breaking work, which goes the

longest in terms of explaining the role of religion in politics, society and culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I make use of his work here for the first time, and in so doing I am introducing an important reference which remains ignored in English and Western scholarship on the Kingdom.

### 6.2.1 *Discourse and the 'Fatwa Society'*

What Al-Khidr calls '*mujtama' al-fatwa*' or fatwa society, a phrase that he uses to explain two interconnected aspects of Saudi society and religious life. The first relates to the heavy reliance on religious counsels amongst Saudis. Al-Khidr observes that the context of this type of quasi deep religious reintellectualisation of Saudi society is the emergence of the so-called *sahwa* (Saudi religious revivalism) and *shabab al-sahwa* (revivalist youth). Saudi society had to cope with this context through the powerful return to religious life and pious behaviour. This is not to say that there was never any kind of reform.<sup>346</sup> I have used the term 'reintellectualisation' to describe the deep religiosity and religious observation as well as religious learning that resulted from the *sahwa* phenomenon. The Islamic universities and institutions grew in importance as a result of the powerful rise of religious education. The *sahwa* movement is a movement that came into existence in the 1970s and its re-emergence in the 1990s is to an extent tied to the period of time when Western presence, namely military, became stronger in the Kingdom.<sup>347</sup> This period set out the ground for a number of subsequent developments, strengthening the linking of religion to social life, culture, the media and politics. This explains the second facet of the fatwa society: abundance of religious *fatawa* (plural of fatwa, religious counsels and opinions). This religious revival and the abundant production of religious knowledge and opinion within it have shaped the politico-religious framework within which private and public behaviour and thinking are defined. All social, intellectual and political thinking during this period interact with one another and within themselves through the *sahwa*-orientated cultural framework. This gave rise to a specific type of Saudi religious identity. This identity resonated with the religious forces' preference for a *shari'a*-based society that is tied very closely to the thinking and interpreting of religion through the Wahhabi creed.

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<sup>346</sup> Chapman, Richard A. "Administrative Reform in Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Administration Overseas* Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 1974), pp. 332-347.

<sup>347</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Al-Khidr identifies five features of this the fatwa society which is a significant background for understanding the puritanical trend's intellectual orientation. He recognises the importance of the 'fatwa society' at a time when Saudi society underwent a period of quasi deviation. As a result there was a rise in delinquent behaviour amongst the youth and there were manifestations of simplistic and even incorrect religiosity. Al-Khidr observes the rise of the *sahwa* and of the fatwa society played a role in correcting many of these social and religious ills. It strengthened religious devotion and based it on proper teaching of Islam. It entrenched within the country's youth aspects of Islamic religiosity such as strong work ethics, punctuality, good use of free time, voluntary work, and spreading of values of learning. A great deal of this corrective trend was possible thanks to the role of *fatawa* and religious guidance through counsel such as against use of drugs, idleness or ignorance. The first impact of the 'fatwa society' was positive.<sup>348</sup> This however changed, and the five prominent features of the 'fatwa society' sum up Al-Khidr's criticism of it in relation to Saudi Arabia. They are the following:

- Reducing the religious experience and knowledge to the body of *fatawa* produced by the growing number of muftis all over the Kingdom. Religious knowledge is far wider and deeper than the thousands of brief *fatawa* produced by the graduates of the Islamic universities and institutions.<sup>349</sup>
- The rise of *fatawa* as simple and ready-made type of counsel to limit the more profound and serious work done by the solid religious elite of learned scholars. The *fatawa* did take the public away from serious learning of Islam, turning instead to superficial opinion and religious guidance. Al-Khidr even uses the term '*muhasara*' to describe literally the 'state of siege' more established and solid scholars found themselves in as a result of the dominant position of the *sahwa* youth and their prominence in the fields of religious guidance and counsel.<sup>350</sup>
- The *fatawa* did much damage to the practise of two important institutions within the house of Islam: a/ the practice of independent reasoning or *ijtihad* as the *fatawa* became an easy substitute for more reasoned and argued

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<sup>348</sup> Al-Khidr, *Al-Sa'udiyya: Sirat Dawla wa Mujtama'*, p. 130.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

religions counsel and opinion; b/ the practice of religious pluralism in the domain of religious interpretation. The ‘*fatwa* society’ entrenched the *sahwa* youth as the dominant source of religious opinion, excluding inputs from non-Wahhabi Sunni and Muslim schools of jurisprudence.<sup>351</sup>

- It prevented society’s capacity for spontaneous thinking, making the *sahwa* youth’s *fatawa* the major frames of reference in all matters regarding religion, society and culture. Al-Khidr goes even further by stating that this loss of capacity prevented religious reform or innovation.<sup>352</sup>

The significance of the above for the analysis of the discourse of the puritanical trend is very important. There are two reasons for this. One is the fact that the puritanical trend, religious as it might be, does not uphold the notion of the *fatwa* society. To the contrary, it represents a reaction against it for its belief in the practice of *ijtihad* by the learned scholars of Islam and for its belief in religious pluralism within Islam. The *sahwa* youth and the fatwa society closed Saudi society to opinions by non-Wahhabi learned scholars of Islam. My own use of the term reintellectualisation is justified in light of what Al-Khidr says about the ‘*fatwa* society’. In his opinion, that the body of *fatawa* produced during this period was meant to be “the foundation of a cultural revolution.”<sup>353</sup> The aim of this revolution according to him is to re-acculturate the Saudi society in line with a traditional vision which was enabled by huge financial resources and political support. He claims that the ‘*fatwa* society’ opposed any alternative rational thinking and debate of religious and political matters.<sup>354</sup> It is this domination that of the politico-religious scene for so long that has given rise to the puritanical trend, a trend which is keen to open up debate and oppose domination by a single trend of thought – as was the case when the *sahwa* youth were able to deny alternative thinking in Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

### **6.3 A Discourse Analysis of ‘Moderation’ in the Discourse of the ‘Puritanical’ Trend**

The methodology of discourse analysis I use here is a repeat of the exercise done in chapter five. The key issue is that of data and evidence. Again, in my discourse analysis I am relying on a body of evidence made up of interviews and additional texts by key people from the ‘puritanical’ trend. The approach I follow is to record my interpreting of my evidence by protecting the integrity of the discourse of moderation by the puritanical trend in both its written and spoken forms. My concern is to ensure that the ideas contained within them are given maximum representation. The analysis looks into the three dimensions which are considered in this thesis as integral to my understanding and interpreting of moderation. Stress is placed on attitudes towards values such as pluralism and inclusion, and this where I begin the discourse analysis. The other two dimensions regard the issues of ideological moderation, and the value of respect of the rules of the political game. The meaning given to ‘moderation’ through these three dimensions is what I try to extricate in the following section through the exercise of discourse analysis.

In the following section, where I try to analyse and interpret these discourses, I mix evidence obtained from the written and spoken texts. I have selected nearly a dozen written texts from about 100 texts, all of which are suited to the task of discourse analysis in this section. However, given the limitation of scope and time, I use only a limited number of these texts in this section. Eight of the texts I use here are written by women. This to an extent adds an important component of opinion by Saudi women. Six interviewees are also female, and a seventh, a diplomat at the Saudi Embassy in London did not wish her material to be included in the thesis. The difficulty with obtaining interviews with women relates to cultural restrictions and not political bans. However the females’ names are made anonymous using pseudonyms to protect their identity and comply with their choice to remain anonymous. The chosen texts record in a very relevant way arguments which make a strong case for ‘moderation’. They additionally provide a very credible supplement to the interviews I conducted for this task. The following analysis is divided according to the three dimensions.

### 6.3.1 *Acceptance of Pluralism*

The ideas that shape and inform the thinking and practice of the puritanical trend all derive from the canons of Islam, namely, the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. No idea is perhaps more relevant than *tawheed* or monotheism, the concept that sums up the primacy of the unity of God, and to an extent it also explains a major theological framework and concept upon which Wahhabi doctrine revolves. As an anchor of identity for Saudi Sunni Islam and a framework for the understanding of divine scripture and Islamic traditions, monotheism partly refutes the long-held view that the Wahhabi doctrine opposes human input and interpretation of texts. Nothing proves human capacity to engage with scripture and to offer a type of renewalist or revivalist thinking on religion than Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's notion of monotheism. It is part of the body of interpretive accretions that over hundreds of years necessitated the practice of *ijtihad* (use of human independent thinking) to ensure Muslims know how to make most of use of their religion according to change of time and place. There are those who hold a condescending and even Orientalist view of the Wahhabi doctrine, considering it to offer no more than a literalist interpretation of Islam. Regardless, the monotheistic input of Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is informed by his skill to interpret how Islam should be lived, practised, and comprehended. Partly, and more relevantly for my analysis here, it is the normative significance and substance of monotheism that matters in this context. Shaykh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's interpretation of the Qur'an and the tradition informs how Muslims in general and Saudis, since Wahhabism affects them more directly, the question of *should be* in Islam: the practical, moral and legal substance of Islam that on its basis Muslim identity should be maintained for the purpose of proper existence in this life and the accounting awaiting Muslims in the hereafter. Central to this normative system produced by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine is the place of Islamic law or *shari'a* in Muslim life and for Muslim identity. The central idea here is not only that legal government is important, but also that legal government through the implementation of Islamic law is vital and binding for the rulers and the ruled. Well-known puritanical intellectual Nasser Al-'Amr explains this in a typically religious way: "If [Muslim] communities did not implement Islamic law, not only at the level of government, but also at the level of individuals and peoples, [Godly] punishment befalls them."<sup>355</sup> This emphasis on the primacy of the Islamic law

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<sup>355</sup> Nasser Al-'Amr, "*Ya Ahlana fi Tunis, Tahni'a wa Tadhkira,*" [Our People in Tunisia: Congratulations] in <http://almoslim.net/node/139434>, access: 25/06/2011.

is universal amongst voices belonging to the puritanical trend of thought. This emphasis is tied to the idea of *al-dawla al'adila* (the Just State). Abdallah Al-Hamid considers this type of state charged with the function of maintaining justice to be a precondition for Muslims' ability to fulfil their role of vicegerency, governing as Allah's shadow on earth.<sup>356</sup>

Hence, Abu Hamad clearly and eloquently refers on the normative content of Islam and the primacy of *shari'a* to explain his reservation about pluralism, which he views as a hollow Western luxury. He states that

In Islam the key frame of reference is tawheed or unity of God. To borrow a Western system of pluralism interferes with the Muslim duty to know Allah as single, absolute and eternal and to live by that system as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and later on codified in the Holy Qur'an, and then explained over time in the canons of Islam and the body of fiqh (jurisprudence) and tafseer (interpretations of the Qur'an). To identify any other system which deviates from the monotheistic teachings and substance of the tawheed as revealed to the Prophet is to confuse Muslims. I believe this would be sending the wrong message to Muslims, by telling them that man-made ideologies which worship the Gods of power or money or human intellect are equal in terms of value to the message of the Prophet and the word of Allah.<sup>357</sup>

Discussion of pluralism for the voices speaking within the puritanical trend this *tawheedi* normative system is binding. It does not allow for consideration of alternative sources of morality, identity or legislation. Thus monotheism is viewed narrowly as a fixed substance. For all interviewees from the puritanical trend this fixity is not negotiable. The reason behind this for most of the interviewees relates to the whole idea of faith or what is called in Islam *aqida*. Any system of thought or practice that interferes with *aqida* is opposed as a polluting factor that can destroy the community of Muslims built around pillars of belief the compromise of which is a dilution of faith and of the whole system of the Islamic religion. They are binding, and closed – they are not open to modification by human input through independent reasoning into the texts of Islam. Historically, the Muslim community and its traditions of scholarship and

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<sup>356</sup> By the famous dissident Islamic scholar, in prison when his lecture was published; Abdallah Al-Hamid, "*Arrahbaniyya al-Jadida*," [The New Priesthood] lecture published on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>357</sup> Author interview with Abu Hamad, 16 September 2010, Jeddah.

jurisprudence have varied in the extent to which they debate and contest each other's interpretations of Islam. The Shafi'i school of jurisprudence for instance is considered to be more rational than the Hanbali school which informs the Wahhabi creed. However, this does not mean that the former has abandoned monotheism as normative to Islam. Rather, in countries where the Shafi'i school operates, Godly monotheism is maintained but without for instance opposing political pluralism or the presence of political parties and competing political ideologies. In our case, the rigid understanding of monotheism within the puritanical creed views the unity of God as a foundation upon which they assess political ideas, practices and accept or oppose them. It can be said that the way they view both the realm of *'ibadat* (matters of worship) and of *mu'amalat* (profane dealings) is based on a strongly theo-centric view of life and its purpose. The theology they adhere to, in this instance Wahhabism, preaches and revolves around monotheism, largely through suspicion of human systems of morality or legislation. There is no circumvention of this issue. One interviewee from the puritanical trend offers this view:

The search for other ideas has always to come from within Islam and that, when necessity arises, Muslims can turn to the Muslim rites of jurisprudence for additional sources of moral, legal or political guidance. But to turn to Western liberals or communists or their mouthpieces in Muslim countries is to compromise the monotheistic substance of Islam. I am not against pluralism because I find plenty of it in Islam where our jurists give guidance and example of how Muslims can adopt pluralism within their own religion. I have four rites of fiqh (jurisprudence) to refer to, and all four share the value of monotheism. So I do not comprehend why a Muslim would turn to communism, a God-less creed for political or moral inspiration.<sup>358</sup>

Another interviewee, Abu Iman, shares this argument finding it to be logical and reasonable. He notes that "there is nothing wrong with looking for pluralism within Islam instead from outside Islam. The problem is not that Islam is not pluralistic, and this is a view held by Muslims who describe themselves as liberals and communists. Rather, the problem is that these public activists insist on ignoring pluralist formulations within Islam, and furthermore find it easier for some reason to borrow all kinds of non-Muslim systems than to re-work existing formulations to make their fellow Muslims pluralist. There is a big difference between borrowing Western and foreign pluralism

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<sup>358</sup> Author interview with Abu Omar, 1 September 2010, Riyadh.

and developing Muslim pluralism (*ta'adduiyya Islamiyya*).”<sup>359</sup> The interviewee expresses a very important idea. He does not reject pluralism altogether. He opposes pluralism when it means borrowing it from the West. Moreover, he is of the view that there exists a form of pluralism within Islam which has four different schools of jurisprudence. He prefers Muslims to make use of the Muslim heritage instead of seeking Western forms of pluralism whether they come for Western liberalism or communist ideology. A female writer from the puritanical trend writing in the ‘Medina’ newspaper criticises Saudi liberals for failure to articulate a clear set of ideas on what they mean by liberalism in the Kingdom. She states that they “repeat all of the references to the known liberties...thus denying a role for religion...as well as ignoring the flaws of Western liberalism” which, in her view led to conflict and exploitation all over the world. Her criticism points to wholesale adoption of Western ideas that denies the local culture and the Islamic faith a place in society or in political affairs.<sup>360</sup>

Abu Salman, a legal expert from the puritanical trend, views this tendency to look within and to rely on the juridical insights and intellectual resources of Islam as relevant today as it were during the time of the Prophet. Additionally, for him this exercise in turning to Islam and not to liberalism or any other foreign ideology for ideas of how to organise Muslim life, spiritually, politically, socially or culturally must not be narrowly viewed as rejection of pluralism. As he puts it “I do not selfishly and arrogantly accuse the American or the Japanese for rejecting Islamic pluralism since neither of them knows much less uses the resources of Islam, discarding an alternative way of how to go about nation or state building or the organisation of spiritual life, for instance. To the contrary, I respect them for using their national resources and borrow from the rest of the world only ideas that do not threaten their identity. Here in the Kingdom we already do that and borrow a great deal from the rest of the world in the organisation of our economic, industrial and technological systems. But to borrow liberalism in the name of pluralism is to turn our back on our religion. My religion is my identity and the way through which I know Allah and relate to my community here in the Kingdom and in the entire Muslim world.”<sup>361</sup> The operative term introduced here is the idea of indigenous cultural or intellectual resources and indigenous identity.

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<sup>359</sup> Author interview with Abu Iman, 3 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>360</sup> Suhayla Zine al-Abideen, “*Al-Liberaliyya al-Sa’udiyya*,” [Saudi Liberalism] in *Sahifat al-Madina*, No. 17602, 3 July 2011.

<sup>361</sup> Author interview with Abu Slaman, 15 September 2010, Jeddah.

Whilst there is a point here that must not be underestimated about this tendency to argue for indigenous identity, there is equally the historical tendency of manipulation of this argument to oppose change in the name of this type of self-determination. In fact, this applies to most Arab societies where in the name of cultural and religious self-determination the state rejects all reform and pluralism in general. This remains in my view an obvious weakness in the defence by the puritanical trend of their position towards pluralism. However, one must not, on the other hand, reject this argument since there is some value in the argument that pluralism must be sought from within Islam in order to produce a type of Islamic pluralism or *ta'adduiyya Islamiyya* both within the Kingdom as well as within the entire Muslim community or *umma*.

For another legal expert, Abu Omar, this debate over pluralism and where to find it is not new and has always marked the defining of Muslim identity and its discussion since the time of the Prophet. He is right in defining the problem more clearly when he points out that these debates and counter debates occur within all transitional societies where quarrels over the right mix of local and borrowed ideas never end. He is of the view that this is not only the case in Islam. He even considers this to be proof that Islam has always witnessed discussion over these matters from the time of the Prophet and the beginning of revelation in Arabia in the 600s. He presents a powerful viewpoint by saying that:

Muslim identity is more important than pluralism. Monotheism is its foundation and to turn to other sources of ideas or ideologies in the name of pluralism will never succeed. Nasser, Bourguiba, Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi, the Ba'athists and Arab communists all tried this path. All produced dictatorship in the name of secular politics and Western liberalism or socialism. All ignored Islam even if they manipulated it when it suited them. They missed one thing: authenticity does not come from overseas. Authentic pluralism is not a product one easily borrows or buys in the international market. This is a quality that has to be found by sifting through the traditions and renewing the local religious and cultural heritage.<sup>362</sup>

To an extent, the idea of Muslims opening up a debate about their claims and counter-claims of authenticity and looking within the religious heritage and canons to create Muslim pluralism has some appeal for other interviewees within the puritanical

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<sup>362</sup> Author interview with Abu Omar, 1 September 2010, Riyadh.

trend. Several express the view that this is one way of creating a debate within the Muslim *umma*. The disagreements, debates and counter-debates become enriching, noting how this was done in Europe itself before Western societies created their own local forms of pluralism. This for the interviewees from the puritanical trend would make the resulting pluralism authentic and local instead of being a fashion that is borrowed for a short time and then abandoned once local and external audiences are manipulated. They find in the history of Arab national-secular regimes plenty of evidence to produce rhetoric against secular politics and their false pluralism as well as against adopting any type of pluralism that they consider being contradictory to *tawheed* and unity of God. What they object to, with some justification, is adopting outside pluralism or looking for models of pluralism from outside without actually giving Islam a chance to develop its own pluralism. With his long experience in the field of Islamic law, Abu Majid argues that the Holy Qur'an and the Islamic faith with its monotheistic norms must guide the exploration of pluralism. For him this must be done by considering the rationale for which pluralism is adopted and under what circumstances and in what context. Along these lines he says that "if by adopting pluralism in name only is all that is required to enter into the club of the so-called civilised or the liberal, then Muslims do not need this superficiality. I wonder about this pluralism when Islam is mostly denied the right to provide Muslims with ideas of how to go about their spiritual lives and the organisation of their worldly affairs. The context of seeking pluralism and adopting foreign ideologies and these are mostly secular has been used since the attacks of September 11 to limit the influence of Islam not in America or Europe, but here in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as in other Muslim countries. This has caused unnecessary bloodshed, divisions amongst Muslims, and even conflict between Muslim states and their peoples."<sup>363</sup> This is where the idea of *tawheed* is given an interpretation or reformulation, which makes it conducive to pluralism, political reform and stability as well as religious piety. Hence the notions of *tawheed ruhi* (spiritual monotheism) and *tawheed madani* (civic monotheism) try to harmonise between the political/mundane and the religious/sacred spheres.<sup>364</sup>

Six female interviewees, working in the field of education, criticise the narrow focus on gender equality as pertinent to pluralism under all circumstances. They express

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<sup>363</sup> Author interview with Abu Majid, 7 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>364</sup> Author interview with Abu Hamad, 16 September 2010, Jeddah.

the idea that this is not a local agenda championed by all Arab and Muslim women, and that this focus on gender inclusiveness is due to Western influence. All six refused to address the issue of pluralism from the angle of gender inclusiveness. The reason for them is that this focus is not only Western, but it also ignores more important issues that if dealt with properly would lead to gender inclusiveness without Western meddling in Arab and Muslim affairs. Their responses can be divided into three broad themes. The first theme is that the Western focus on gender inclusiveness never goes far enough to consider the Muslim heritage. All agree that if this heritage is properly used and referred to the conditions of women as mothers or citizens would be much better than is currently the case, including in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All six are of the opinion that the fault lies with the legal system and the misuse of Islam by states and by establishment scholars. Umm Khalid and Umm Muhammad argue that both have not known how to manage the women question. Instead of genuinely activating Islamic values of equality, protection of women's rights and enhancing their security as citizens, the establishment scholars tended to respond in reactionary and defensive ways. Through defensiveness to the Western agenda which pushed unrealistic programmes of gender inclusiveness which many Saudi and Arab women were not ready for, establishment scholars tended to react by subjugating women to the protection of men, husbands, brothers and fathers. They all argue that this type of protection which left women at the mercy of the private sphere undermined both Islam and the quest by states to realise even development for men and women. In any case, for these women the losers of this defensiveness, which was in response to aggressive Western promotion of liberal gender programmes, continue to be women, especially illiterate women who do not read the Qur'an and are not familiar with the Hadith of the Prophet. Raqiyya al-Muharib is a very well established writer known for her gender stance from an Islamic perspective. She views the gender positions of secular women are not suited to females practising Islam. The agendas differ, according to her. The secular agenda is concerned with government on earth. By contrast, the religious agenda pays attention to two intertwined elements: a/ government on earth by striving for justice and the common good, and b/ to life after this world through equipping Muslim women with knowledge on theological matters.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Raqiyya al-Muharib, "Asr Jadeed," [A Dawn of a New Age] 14 March 2011, in al-Muharib's Homepage, <http://www.dr-roqaiya.com/view/132.htm>, access: 20/06/2011.

The second theme for these women is that there are more important issues that the notion of gender inclusiveness overlooks. They argue that genuine pluralism does not begin with the form, that is, equality or gender inclusiveness when women are not empowered in practice. One of the respondents, Umm Naïf, states the following idea: “You can declare all Arab and Saudi women equal and that you have your ideal pluralist society. But declarations are something, and the reality is something else. How do illiterate women fare through these declarations of liberal policies? How do women who do not work fit into these declarations? Pluralism is starting by more urgent questions and programmes so that women and men find themselves living in a pluralist society that they both build through active programmes where they work for the same goals, build the same nation with the same convictions and the same effort. This is how Islam works by starting with the people, the community of Muslims through education, hard work and self-change.”<sup>366</sup> Her colleague, Umm Badr, agrees with this idea and prompts a very useful discussion that reveals that women from the puritanical trend are not “enemies of gender inclusiveness, this is built in the spirit of Islam.”<sup>367</sup> What is at issue is rather the many problems that make women live unequal lives with men: the question of security, through education, employment and participation in society as they do within the Saudi family. For this interviewee, Umm Mariam, the question of security goes to the heart of Islam’s moral compass, in that it recognises that women are “*shaqa’iq al-rijal*” (women are equal to men in the eyes of God) and are accorded the same dignity, strengths and abilities that should be used to enhance their security. “When I mention *amn* (security) of the Saudi women I am talking about the obligation to make women use their potential in nation and state-building but this potential cannot be realised until women are first secure in education, in the family, and above all else secure in their understanding and practice of their faith. Through knowledge and practice of such knowledge they can empower themselves and their communities. The aim is not gender equality as a pluralist condition, but rather Islamic faith should be the aim. It is this faith that can be turned into a force to upgrade women’s security as a precondition for communal security and equality in security of life, intellect and worthiness for men and women.”<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Author Interview with Umm Naïf, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>367</sup> Author Interview with Umm Badr, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>368</sup> Author Interview with Umm Mariam, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

The third theme that these women raise concerns what they regard as the cliché reference to gender inclusiveness that does very little in practice to reduce or eliminate the insecurities that stand as obstacles against real inclusiveness. And for them this hollow “liberal ideology” is imposed not to serve genuine equality of men and women, but rather to show that Islam is inferior to Western values. For these Muslim women this line of argument ignores the ethical principles of Islam which they consider not to divide equality along lines of gender, colour or status. As one interviewee notes “*musawat* (equality) in Islam is *musawat*. It is one and the same for men and women. Those who pretend they know better and can teach Saudis about the value of inclusiveness do not pay attention to other insecurities that prevent men and women from fulfilling their duties towards God as good Muslims and their duties to nation and country as good citizens. These insecurities partly stem from the unequal economic system Western countries have imposed on developing countries like Saudi Arabia.”<sup>369</sup> Another female interviewee notes that real equality that leads to real inclusiveness is possible only when Muslim women are treated as equals. In her view “that would mean that women are intelligent enough to choose Islam and its core ethical values for seeking inclusiveness, and not an alien form of equality that finds full fulfillment only in specifically Western social, political and economic power relations that capitalism and the inequality it causes are not open for discussion.”<sup>370</sup> The opposition is not against gender equality but against gender equality as a component of Westernisation.

For these women, what ultimately upholds women’s right to inclusiveness is a God-given right that cannot be issued by a politician. At the core of this right to inclusiveness is to serve the cause of *da’wa* (preaching, call for Islam) in Islam, which is central to puritanical thinking as will be shown in the following section.<sup>371</sup>

Two themes come up in the discussion of pluralism by the puritanical trend: the notion of freedom of worship in Islam, and the concept of *muwatana* (citizenship of Muslims and non-Muslims in an Islamic state) in Islam. They discuss both as two core principles that define the position of Islam in relation to pluralism. All the informants value these two as an arena where Islam led the way in asserting the God-given right to

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<sup>369</sup> Author Interview with Umm Loay, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>370</sup> Author Interview with Umm Khalid, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>371</sup> See Larry Poston, *Islamic Da`wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

free worship under an Islamic state and the right to protection under the system of *muwatana*.

The first point explained here regards freedom of worship and how the puritanical trend considers it to be fundamental to Islam's system of pluralism. Members of the puritanical trend all agree that there is a doctrinal content to any religion. Monotheism or *tawheed* is, for instance, a fundamental principle of the Islamic faith. Under this *tawheedi* system of belief, God's message to the Prophet Muhammad through the medium of the Qur'an has been to promote the principle of religious non-compulsion (*la ikraha fi al-deen*). Various Qur'anic verses mentioned by the interviewees confirm the importance of this principle in Islam. Abu Iman and Abu Hamad, for example, repeat the sanctity of this principle by making numerous references to a verse in the Holy Qur'an and a Hadith (authentic saying) by the Prophet, in particular.<sup>372</sup> To them this is a freedom of religious choice that Islam accords to all people living under an Islamic state, Muslim and non-Muslim. This freedom is never interfered with so long as the well-being of all is not threatened, such as working to offend Islam or other faiths or undermine their core values. "To you be your religion, and to me be my own religion."<sup>373</sup> This is a direct reference to a verse that sums up the idea of the freedom of respecting people's choice of religion. Umm Mariam links this to the Qur'anic reference '*la ikraha fi al-din*' (there is no compulsion in Islam). Like Abu Abdullah and Abu Nasir, she finds this principle which Muslim rulers respected 1400 years ago proof of how advanced Islam is over religions which during the same period lacked Islam's tolerance and protection of free worship.<sup>374</sup> In agreement with her, other interviewees from the puritanical trend express how Islam's support of pluralism is not new and yet is never taken seriously or researched deeply enough to show how historically Islam upheld principles of tolerance long before Western systems of political pluralism were practised.<sup>375</sup> What the puritanical trend is not prepared to defend freedom of religion if it means worship of satanic objects or objects of nature. Equally, and in accordance with Islamic teachings they do not extend their interpretation of freedom of choice in religious matters to Muslims leaving the Islamic

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<sup>372</sup> Author interview with Abu Hamad, 16 September 2010, Jeddah; Author interview with Abu Iman, 3 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>373</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of 'Alkafiroon', verse 6 [Qur'an, 109:6].

<sup>374</sup> Author Interview with Umm Mariam, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>375</sup> For instance, in author Interview with Umm Muhammad, 4 September 2010, Riyadh; in Author interview with Abu Nasir, 7 September 2010, Riyadh.

faith as all agree that this is sinful under Islam. Their understanding is a doctrinal principle of Islam is that Muslims remain in the Islamic fold and renouncing the Islamic faith takes on public significance as it could send the wrong message to other Muslims. In this way, this act of ‘apostasy’ (*ridda*) defies freedom of worship as it threatens the unity and cohesion of the entire community of Muslim adherents. When and how this becomes a public matter to be referred to the judiciary or remains a personal matter of no consequence to the public is another matter beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, what is at issue here is the fact that freedom of religion or of worship and Islam’s insistence on non-compulsion has relevance to the promotion of pluralism, at least in theory. The history of Muslim government, of course, is different from what the theory of Islam is. There have always been violations of these principles and possibly this is one reason why Islam’s image is tarnished. Of course, Orientalist scholarship is another factor that contributed to this image. The main thing is that as Abu Abdullah notes: “Islam rejects the use of force in the building of a harmonious Muslim society in which peoples of the book may exist. This spirit of tolerance comes directly from Allah’s commands to the Prophet and the *umma* to champion freedom of worship and allow non-Muslims peaceful existence. This command obligates Muslims to protect a system of pluralism demanded by Allah.”<sup>376</sup> Umayma Al-Jalahima’s writings stress the ideas of tolerance through the exercise of dialogues amongst the world’s cultures and civilisations, and inter-faith dialogue, considering it to be perfectly compatible with Islam’s morality of co-existence.<sup>377</sup> Umm Naïf makes the additional point that throughout its history this tolerance never threatened Islam. She states that threats to Islam never came from freedom of worship or tolerance, saying that “the abode of Islam was prosperous and strong when it knew high levels of tolerance and religious pluralism (*ta ‘addudiyya diniyya*).”<sup>378</sup> However, one aspect of this debate where the puritanical trends tends to regress in relation to acceptance of pluralism is the excessive fear of Shi’ites. Hassan Al-Huwaymal, one of the key writers representative of the puritanical trend, speaking about the 2011 Arab revolts, expresses reservation that they could lead not so much to pluralism as much as to divisions that Shi’ites and neighbouring Turks

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<sup>376</sup> Author interview with Abu Abdullah, 17 September 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>377</sup> Umayma Al-Jalahima, “Al-Tahaluf ma’a Hiwar Al-Adyan Wajib,” in *Al-Watan*, No. 3495, 25 April 2010.

<sup>378</sup> Author Interview with Umm Naïf, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

would exploit to impose their ways on the Arab world.<sup>379</sup> In particular, the oversensitivity by the puritanical trend's sensitivity to sectarianism within the Kingdom and without, more generally in the Arab world as a whole, is a particular flaw in their position towards pluralism when it concerned Shi'ites. This is a position that the interviewees did not wish to explore at any length except by stating that they did not mind Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia so long as their loyalty was with Saudi nationalism and Islam in general.

On the second issue regarding *muwatana*, Abu Majid, Abu Ibrahim, and Abu Iman note the following on the question of *muwatana*. They affirm that *muwatana* in Islam has its foundation in the obligation expressed throughout the Muslim faith to co-exist with *ahl al-kitab* (peoples of the book). They explain that this concept is found only in the Muslim faith, which is distinguished by the commitment to allow non-Muslims to be part of a Muslim society. They observe that the only condition of *muwatana* is the respect of Muslims and to desist from the same actions Muslims forbidding Muslims from doing in order for society to function without harming social peace, faith, and unity of the Muslim community and those accorded protection in its territory. Umm Loay, Umm Mariam and Umm Naïf add an important idea in this respect: the concept of *muwatana* in Islam is closely tied with the whole system of monotheistic divinity. This means that Muslims are obligated to share their societies with the followers of the three monotheistic faiths. This co-existence may not mean they all live as equals since Muslims have the added citizenship of the Islamic faith; and this gives them the special status and right to free (or un-taxed) protection under any Muslim ruler.<sup>380</sup> However, Umm Mariam and Umm Naïf explain that because *muwatana* is tied with divinity in Islam it does two things: a/ allows non-Muslims to expect and receive special protection in any Muslim realm as they are believers and not heathens; and b/ makes them and Muslims worthy of the same right to protection in Islam.<sup>381</sup> Abu Abdullah goes further by stating that the relationship between *muwatana* and divinity in Islam means protection cannot be refused to non-Muslims, obligating the

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<sup>379</sup> Hassan Al-Huwaymal, "Istibaq Al-Safawiyya wa Al-Othmaniyya ala Al-Mutaraddiyya al-Arabiyya," [Itanian-Turkish Race to Exploit the Revolting Arabs] in *Al-Jazeera*, No. 14061, 29 March 2011.

<sup>380</sup> In the interviews cited above with the three female informants from the puritanical trend of thought.

<sup>381</sup> According to interviews on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2010 with Umm Mariam and Umm Naïf as cited above.

Muslim community to accept pluralism.<sup>382</sup> This notion of pluralism for all of the respondents from the puritanical trend is not a function of politics: it is a God-given right that Muslim rulers withdraw only if serious breach of the community's rules takes place. Abu Salman, Abu Majid and Abu Omar agree with this interpretation, noting that what counts in the Islamic view for pluralism to function is piety and communal obligation to mutual tolerance, and mutual respect which do not oppose God's laws.<sup>383</sup> Abu Nasir distinguishes between the Western concept of pluralism and the notion of *muwatana* in Islam. He states that *muwatana* in Islam is simply an affirmation of Allah's creation of all people as equal and worthy of the gift of life. The "only discrimination is determined by acts and faith; if the acts are Godly and if the faith respects God's law then *muwatana* is a sacred right."<sup>384</sup> Umm Badr observes that the fact the Holy Qur'an uses the term *insan* (human being without stress of gender or colour) is the best affirmation that *muwatana* is a God-given right and gift to all. The notion of *insan* has no gender, and may be a man or a woman, may be white or black, and may be Muslim or non-Muslim. It sums up the commitment to plural co-existence under God's law. She says "this is not the same as the pluralism the Westerners talk about, and which has many flaws: rich and poor are not the same, the black and white are not the same, and men and women are not the same despite the fact that liberals claim they have such as system of non-discrimination."<sup>385</sup> Abu Ibrahim mentions an important term which is also prominent in the Holy Qur'an: ennoblement or *takreem*. "When we mention the word *muwatana* in Islam we should remind all that human beings are honoured by the Almighty who gives them the gift of life, equally to Muslim and non-Muslim. If Allah created life in a pluralist way, no one can deny that *sunna* of life (God's way). Therefore *muwatana* goes with God's design of life and of humans are different."<sup>386</sup> In this respect, interviewees such as Abu Abdullah, Abu Majid, Abu Hamad, Abu Nasir, Umm Mariam, Umm Loay, Umm Badr and Umm Naïf mention the Qur'anic verse: "O mankind, We have created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Truly, the noblest of you in the eyes of Allah is the believer who possesses piety."<sup>387</sup> Umm Naïf stresses that

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<sup>382</sup> Author interview with Abu Abdullah, 17 September 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>383</sup> In interviews with Abu Salman, Abu Majid and Abu Omar as cited above.

<sup>384</sup> Author interview with Abu Nasir, 7 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>385</sup> Author Interview with Umm Badr, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>386</sup> Author Interview with Abu Ibrahim, 19 September 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>387</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of the 'Hujurah', verse 13 [Qur'an, 49: 13].

*muwatana* is the way of Islam since one of Islam's chief Godly *maqasid* (divine sanctions) is for religion to ensure dignity and well-being for all. All agree that *muwatana* is a God-given right amongst Saudi compatriots. They give a nationalist and pragmatic meaning to citizenship, and this meaning supplements the predominantly religious meaning. According to the nationalist meaning citizenship obligates citizens to direct loyalty towards the motherland. Failure to do so, states a high-ranking religious learned scholar from the Saudi establishment close to the puritanical trend, justifies stripping "traitors" of their nationality.<sup>388</sup>

#### 6.4 Ideological moderation

The puritanical trend expresses views that place moderation at the centre of its ideals and values. Here too the concepts of moderation and divinity are linked. Moderation is viewed as a chief tenet of Islam and without it the Islamic community would not be what it is: a community obligated and expected to practise moderation and champion it for the well-being of its members. Thus all interviews use the term 'wasatiyya' (moderation) and the adjective 'wasati' (moderate) in reference to their position towards ideological moderation. One thing is established in the thinking of this trend and that is moderation being Islamic or religious and not ideological. They have preference for a usage that describes 'moderation' as 'Islamic'. Abu Hamad and Abu Majid assert this by noting: a/ Islam equates with moderation, and b/ moderation comes from Islam. To an extent, this is a view held by all interviewees. They argue that this moderation is possible to be exercised today and emerge to the surface of Saudi politics instead of being hidden. They are optimistic that this is possible because there is a highly educated society receptive to *wasatiyya*, arguing that the changes introduced by King Abdullah help the trend towards moderation. These changes promote moderation and moderate engagement with the Saudi public.<sup>389</sup>

One observation must be made. Moderation is strictly defined as a "capacity to strike a balance between worldly and spiritual matters and lives in a way that ensures continuity of the Islamic community, within the parameters of God's law."<sup>390</sup> This

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<sup>388</sup> Al-shaykh Abdallah bin Sulayman al-Mani', "Al-Jinisyaa Wathiqat Ithbat," [Nationality Confirmation], Lecture given on 6 April, 2011, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>389</sup> In interviews with Abu Hamad and Abu Majid as cited above.

<sup>390</sup> Author Interview with Abu Ibrahim, 19 September 2010, Jeddah.

needs to be clarified further. Abu Abdullah, Abu Majid, Abu Nasir, Umm Mariam, Umm Loay, and Umm Badr convey the idea that Islamic moderation is not the same as the type of moderation exercised for the purpose of short-term benefit. Umm Loay states that Islamic moderation “does not compromise God’s law and the imperatives of maintaining the unity and well-being of the Muslim public in a given context. The pillars of Islam do apply. The morality of Islam applies too. And the values of justice and equality cannot be compromised because Muslims are commanded to adhere by them and implement them.”<sup>391</sup> Umm Naïf, Abu Salman and Abu Omar, for instance, speak of the confusion of moderation with “making deals”.<sup>392</sup> They all agree their interpretation of moderation carries a meaning that neither negates nor dwells on the idea of “making deals”. Rather, the idea is to further the Godly instruction to build the just society, that is the idea of *wasati umma* (just and balanced nation or community) described in the Qur’an. According to this notion, Abu Salman explains, the principles that must guide the Islamic community’s work and morality are the practice of justice, and he notes how “justice is Godly and is placed amongst the top objectives for man’s vicegerency [*khilafa*] on earth or in life.”<sup>393</sup> In the design of God, human beings are charged with the task of instituting justice on earth according to His law. The value of justice is repeatedly affirmed in the Holy Qur’an and the Prophet’s *Sunna* (ways of the Prophet, sayings and deeds). Ziad Aldriss, a known Saudi journalist from the puritanical trend, sums up the nature of Islamic government, by stressing justice and dignity. This he ties to divinity: “Islam represents [the values of] justice, trust (*amana*) and dignity (*alkarama*), however these ideas about good government are not served by empty slogans, but with practical and detailed programmes that can realise the objectives of Islam, just government.”<sup>394</sup> Abu Ibrahim notes how Islamic moderation is embedded in divinity because “Allah is the Just and the institution of justice is one way of affirming Allah’s law and His attribute as the Giver of Justice.”<sup>395</sup> This idea is not the same, she says, as the widespread common meaning given to ‘moderation’ in today’s world, which implies compromising important values for the sake of short term-benefit.

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<sup>391</sup> Author Interview with Umm Loay, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>392</sup> From interviews with Umm Naïf, Abu Salman and Abu Omar cited above.

<sup>393</sup> Author interview with Abu Slaman, 15 September 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>394</sup> Ziad Aldriss, “*al-I ‘lam huwa al-Hall*,” [Information is the Solution] in *Al-Hayat*, 16 February 2011.

<sup>395</sup> Author Interview with Abu Ibrahim, 19 September 2010, Jeddah.

What is of importance here is the fact that the interpretation of ideological moderation for the puritanical trend is based on moral substance. At the heart of this moral substance is the stress placed on justice as a divine attribute obligating Muslims to uphold, practise and preach. Reference by the interviewees to various Hadiths and Qur'anic verses is used to stress the moral basis of moderation in Islam as they understand it. For instance, Abu Hamad, Abu Abdullah and Abu Nasir refer to the verse "When you do judge, judge between people justly. Allah likes those who are just."<sup>396</sup> All three, and there is a general agreement about their viewpoint, express the opinion that justice in Islam comes first as the value most relevant for the organisation of all affairs from politics to economic management. They point to the prosperity of the Muslim community during the golden age of Islam thanks to the prevalence of justice, noting at the same time that absence of justice wrecked havoc in the lives of Muslims and Muslim communities over hundreds of years because of the absence of justice and its regression as a value in Muslim rule everywhere. For them the fundamental question is that 'moderation' as a moral value of practising and implementing '*wasatiyya*' is about justice-giving.<sup>397</sup> Abu Hamad puts it clearly: "a moderate Muslim, citizen or ruler, is the one who is just. That is the message of Allah and his Prophet. I cannot be a moderate if I turn away from upholding justice in my society."<sup>398</sup> Abu Omar agrees: "the only criterion of moderation in Allah's eyes is justice. Moderation in this sense cannot mean compromise on such an important Godly value. God's law preaches justice and a '*wasati*' Muslim community is moderate only if it gives justice and lives by justice."<sup>399</sup> Abu Salman gives a similar opinion that "in Islam there is moderation for the sake of Allah's cause in the pursuit of justice, and not superficial moderation for the sake of moderation. For us this is a question of observing God's law and living by the teachings of our religion, and the cause of justice in our religion is noble and no one can deviate from it. Plus, all cultures support the idea of justice."<sup>400</sup> His reference to the acceptance of justice in all cultures reveals a form of Universalist thinking.

This notion of moderation as a Qur'anic and Godly value has echoes in the ideas expressed on this theme by the female interviewees. Umm Loay, Umm Naïf and Umm Mariam refer to another Qur'anic verse to further stress the centrality of justice as the

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<sup>396</sup> [Qur'an, 5:42]

<sup>397</sup> From interviews with Abu Hamad, Abu Abdullah and Abu Nasir cited above.

<sup>398</sup> Author interview with Abu Hamad, 16 September 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>399</sup> Author interview with Abu Omar, 1 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>400</sup> Author interview with Abu Slaman, 15 September 2010, Jeddah.

way of moderation in the thinking of the puritanical trend. The verse is from ‘Surat Al-Nisa’ and it is, in their view, further evidence of the divinity of justice in Islam. “O believers! Be supporters of justice, witnessing for Allah alone, even if against yourselves, your parents and relatives. Whether they are rich or destitute, Allah is able to look after them. Do not follow your own temptations and negate truth, if you deviate, Allah is aware of your deeds.”<sup>401</sup> Umm Khalid observes that the kind of moderation that may be possible in a secular order does not apply in an Islamic order. For her the divine obligation is clear that moderation is to be upheld via the practice of justice and for the sake of justice. To compromise on such a value is to deviate from a Godly command which is clear as in this verse which instructs the believers not to give in to the temptation to corrupt the pursuit of justice even when it harms them or their family.<sup>402</sup> Umm Khalid says that Islam’s concern is to prevent harm to the entire community and that harm can be prevented only by upholding justice. She says: “If justice is compromised according to interest or ideology or political party of king, then there will be harm for the entire society and that is the one thing Islam instructs us to avoid.”<sup>403</sup> Abu Ibrahim sums up this argument by stating that “what counts in moderation in Islam is the *qeema* (the value) and not *al-maslaha al-khassa* (private interest). In Islam values of justice reveal Allah’s wisdom in desiring for the believers an order where *al-maslaha al-‘amma* (common interest) is above all other interests.”<sup>404</sup> Having said this, he adds by drawing a comparison with the West. He states that “in the Western system, moderation may happen to advance the public interest but it is always done through ideas, ideologies, institutions, political players or parties who have their own interest in wanting to see moderation prevail. This comes from Islam’s moral order and the importance of moral decency in Islam.”<sup>405</sup> The concern with morality is one feature that stands out in the interpretation of moderation by members of the puritanical trend. The notion of moderation they have in mind is based on understanding of Islam as a system of morality intended for the wellbeing of the entire community and not as tactical instrument which may be used to realise short-term benefits.

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<sup>401</sup> [Qur’an, 4:135]

<sup>402</sup> Author Interview with Umm Khalid, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Author Interview with Abu Ibrahim, 19 September 2010, Jeddah.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

## 6.5 Respect of the Rules of the Political Game

The thinking of the puritanical trend on this issue is equally based on the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (Prophet's Tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad. In this respect, the interviewees express how important to look at the Tradition of the Prophet and the glorious Qur'an in order to have clarity as to what are the most important values that should organise the political game. One idea that seems to enjoy wide support amongst the interviewees is the obligation to have such rules documented and agreed upon. The example most have referred to is the so-called *saheefa* or agreement (some take it to be the first Muslim constitution) that the Prophet devised after his victory the battle of Badr in 622 in Medina.<sup>406</sup> Abu Majid, Abu Salam and Abu Omar explain the importance of "rules of the political game". They stress that the example of the Prophet who authored the charter or constitution of Medina is evidence that rules and laws in any political community must be clear and agreed upon as a condition of stability, order and legitimacy (*shar'iyah*). Note that any claim to *shar'iyah* by the Saudi state is put down by an intellectual from the puritanical trend to the "long history of commitment to the true acts of religion, by following it strictly in government, political development and social affairs not through the borrowing [foreign] ideas."<sup>407</sup> A puritanical intellectual agrees with this view, criticising the tendency of Saudi Westernisers's blind faith in Western civilization. Mohsen Al-'Awajy argues they have a tendency to "worship Western civilisation despite its values failed the tests of Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib..."<sup>408</sup> Further to this in the same article, he adds that "we do not oppose openness, freedom of publication, but they must conform to Islamic law."<sup>409</sup> Abu Iman, Umm Mariam and Umm Khalid note how rules of the political game is an old Muslim tradition since the time of Prophet, and therefore all Muslim rulers and communities should follow this example.<sup>410</sup> Basically, as Umm Loay explains this strongly "the first

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<sup>406</sup> A good work on this constitution or the 'Charter of Medina' which documents the legal tradition in Islamic government is by Michael Lecker, *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document* (N.J.: Darwin Press, 2004).

<sup>407</sup> Zine al-Abideen Al-Rukabi, "Ihya al-Sira' al-Sunni al-Shi'i..." [Reigniting Sunni-Shiite Division] in 'Al-Sharq Al-Awsat,' 9 April 2011.

<sup>408</sup> Mohsen Al-'Awajy, "Ghazi Al-Qusaybi am Yahya Al-Barmaki? Al-Tarikh Yu'idu Nafsahu," [Al-Qusaybi or Al-Baramki? History Repeats itself] in <http://www.mohsenalawajy.com/ar/index.php/2009-12-04-19-54-43/83-2009-12-10-07-24-07>, access: 01/07/2011.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> From interviews cited above with Abu Iman, Umm Mariam and Umm Khalid.

rule of the political game is to have rules clarified and documented. This is the whole point of Godly revelation to all messengers and prophets: to lay down rules and laws to tell people about their rights and their obligations. The constitution of the Prophet is the best example of this practice in Islam.”<sup>411</sup> According to Abu Iman the Prophet prepared the document “so that social peace prevails amongst Medina’s mixed population, the various feuding tribes, Muslims, Christians, Jews and Sabians. The Prophet wanted all of them to know their rights and their duties towards their community which they shared in order to maintain order.”<sup>412</sup> Umm Khalid presents a similar argument based on the idea of rules and laws organizing inter-community relations being proof of “*dusturiyyat al-hukm al-islami*” (the notion of constitutionality in Islamic government).<sup>413</sup> Umm Naïf argues that this has been the case in the Kingdom since King Fahd introduced in 1992 “*al-nizam al’amm* (The Basic Law) to commit Saudis to common rules for organising politics.”<sup>414</sup> She thinks that this is a practice that points in the right direction and that the responsibility of “Saudis is to follow the steps of King Fahd, which King Abdullah is precisely doing through modernisation of laws, economic affairs, culture, administration and education, to set the Kingdom on the path of rule by God’s law.”<sup>415</sup> This notion of devising rules of the political game is again explained within an Islamic framework through reference to the example of the Prophet and the first charter devised to formulate laws for the mixed population of Medina. What is noticeable here is the fact that the interviewees from the puritanical trend do not express any kind of criticism against the presence or absence of laws governing the political game in Saudi Arabia. They support efforts made so far, since the time of the late King Fahd, to institute a legal framework for the political game. But they only indirectly point to the desirability of consolidation of King Fahd’s form of elementary constitution, since the Kingdom does not have a constitution. This perspective sheds a thinking that finds the example of the Medina nearly 1400 years ago to have relevance in terms of having rules or a *kitab* (document), *saheefa* or *watheeqa* (charter), that is, a

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<sup>411</sup> Author Interview with Umm Loay, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>412</sup> Author interview with Abu Iman, 3 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>413</sup> Author Interview with Umm Khalid, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>414</sup> The ‘constitutional’ reforms introduced by King Fahd at the time consisted of a number of Acts concerning the following areas: Basic Law of Government , Consultative Council Establishment Act, Consultative Council Statute, Consultative Council Membership Statute, Council of Ministers Statute, Regional Authorities Establishment Act. They all became law in 1993 and are considered in Saudi modern political history the most far-reaching reforms to be introduced by a single king since the founding of the Kingdom.

<sup>415</sup> Author Interview with Umm Naïf, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

form of constitution resembling that of the Prophet.<sup>416</sup> The idea is that they express support for a form of ‘constitutionality’ but from an Islamic and not a Western perspective.

The element of *da‘wa* is given strong support in the views by interviewees from the puritanical trend. For them *da‘wa* is binding on all Saudis as a an important institution that cannot be ignored or compromised. It is considered to be part of the *tawheedi* or monotheistic theological programme of the Wahhabi movement. Thus the Oneness of Allah is considered as a fundamental rule of any political game. This is relevant at two levels. The first – views expressed by Umm Khalid, Umm Mariam, Umm Muhammad, Umm Loay, Abu Majid, and Abu Ibrahim – is the obligation to ensure that propagating Islam is a common value on the basis of which the unity and viability of the Islamic community and of Saudi society and state can continue to progress and consolidate. Abu Majid views “the love of Islam and the love of the motherland (*al-watan*) to be inseparable, and commitment to Islam in the Kingdom is related to commitment to the wellbeing of the motherland.”<sup>417</sup> The idea of *al-watan* or motherland is related to Islam and commitment to the practice of *da‘wa*. The two are considered to be intertwined. Umm Khalid states that “Islam gives us the *umma* which is for every committed Muslim the big *watan* and loving and serving one’s small *watan*, the motherland, Saudi Arabia.”<sup>418</sup> For her patriotism for a Muslim citizen is part of the same ideal of seeking the wellbeing of Muslims so that they can worship and fulfill their duties “as Muslims and as Saudis in the best conditions of freedom, safety, respect, tolerance, unity, morality and piety.”<sup>419</sup> Umm Muhammad explains this further by pointing that the place of *da‘wa* as a common norm is that it functions “as an institution and a value for renewing the believers’ contract with Allah.” In her opinion, the aim of *da‘wa* is to ensure Allah’s law is supreme. Plus, she sees a further value for *da‘wa*, a means through which Muslims “renew their contract of community amongst the society of believers” to help and protect their faith and one another as well as committing to “respecting just-giving rule.”<sup>420</sup> Umm Naïf observes that without the moral system provided by the practice of *da‘wa* and the obligation to seek to establish a moral order through the institution of *da‘wa*, the whole project of politics would be incomplete. As

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<sup>416</sup> Author interview with Abu Iman, 3 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>417</sup> Author interview with Abu Majid, 7 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>418</sup> Author Interview with Umm Khalid, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Author Interview with Umm Muhammad, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

an important norm, it cannot be left out of the main rules that govern the political game in a Muslim society.<sup>421</sup> For Abu Omar it is *da'wa* that teaches Muslims the values of neighbourly behavior, mercy, tolerance, non-violence, respect of different opinions which do not harm community, moral obligation, love of one's country and solidarity.<sup>422</sup> This idea of nationalist patriotism religious patriotism as part of the rules of the political game is unique to the puritanical trend of thought. On the subject of just-giving rule, one of the most prominent puritanical intellectuals, Salman al-'Awda, in a treatise he wrote under the title "Causes behind the Fall of States," gives a twofold interpretation of this norm.<sup>423</sup> Firstly, there is an obligation on a Muslim state to "enjoin the good and forbid all evil" (*al amr bi al-ma'ruf, wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*). This function serves this life and the hereafter. This is at the heart of the whole idea of 'moderation' for the puritanical trend, finding the balance between the two so that Muslims find fulfillment for the mundane and sacred aspects of life. Secondly, there is the duty to rule by Islamic law, and this he ties to the politic-religious nature of the Saudi state. In addition to this, he refers to the practice of consultation (*shura*) as the norm that must be used in the organization of political activity, considering "despotism, singularity of opinion, and the absence of consultation in government" to be detrimental to the viability of politics as a whole.<sup>424</sup> According to his thinking on *shura* he argues that it is part of the norm of free thought and expression.<sup>425</sup>

The other issue the interviewees link with *da'wa* is the obligation to seek socio-moral renewal under an Islamic order, and this is a function which cannot be upheld without calling the believers to the cause of Islam through education. A female blogger from the puritanical trend, Asma bint Rashid Al-Ruwayshid, writes that true "reform must be built on solid ground: righteous education which is vital for the Muslim family."<sup>426</sup> The political dimension of *da'wa* is to use education as the best means for the realisation of reform in a gradual and peaceful manner. In this way, *da'wa* is double-edged: it targets the general community of the believers in order to maintain close links

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<sup>421</sup> Author Interview with Umm Naïf, 4 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>422</sup> Author interview with Abu Omar, 1 September 2010, Riyadh.

<sup>423</sup> Salman al-'Awda, "*Asbab Suqut al-Duwal*," [Causes behind the Fall of States], sermon-lecture given on 14 August 2001, Buraida Grand Mosque, Al-Qaseem, Saudi Arabia, pp. 3-5.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>426</sup> Asma bint Rashid Al-Ruwayshid, "*Man dha Alladhi Yastahiqqu al-Sijn wa al-Qayd?*" [Which Individual deserves Prison and Shackles?] 21 February 2011 in <http://www.asyeh.com/ArticleDet.asp?Articals.aspx=3632>, access: 28/06/2011.

between private and public morality. The general rule is that which harms the individual harms the public, and the role of *da'wa* is help the Muslim public maintain a balance as citizens and as believers. At the same time *da'wa* is used to indirectly remind and pressure Muslim rulers of their obligation to commit to socio-moral renewal and reform so that Islamic teachings inform political activity and policy-making. It is this link between faith and politics as well as other aspects of life that makes *da'wa* a natural norm to be included in the rules of the political game. Feminist Intellectuals belonging to the puritanical trend such as Raqiyya al-Muharib accords *da'wa* high importance and insists on a role for women in the propagation of Islam in society.<sup>427</sup>

## 6.6 Conclusion

The thinking of the puritanical trend on moderation makes use of Islam's language and institutions. Moderation in this trend is holistic and looks at moderation as part of a wider socio-moral scheme that conforms to the politico-religious nature of Saudi society. However, this interpretation must not be mistaken for a traditionalist literalist tendency specific to groups and forces who were not open to sharing the social and political arenas except on the terms of their strict Wahhabi dogmas. Their discourse points to an incremental rethinking of Islamic orthodoxy and not a departure from its chief tenets and foundations, namely the *usul al-din* or dogmas of Islam. Their discourse gives rise through this gradualism to a synthetic process. In this synthesis they mix revelation and reason through some use of *ijtihad* or independent reasoning . they clearly privilege Islam and its dogmas in thinking about moderation. In this scheme God's law or *Shari'a*, justice or *'adl*, and *da'wa* are fundamental to how they reformulate Islam's dogmas in a way that opens up ways for values that exist within Islam but not so pronounced and practised to be adopted in order to reconcile faith with Muslim societies in which tolerance, pluralism, and justice have been largely absent from politics. In rethinking these dogmas they use *tawheed* as an anchor that solidifies Muslim identity and Islamic values of equality, ennoblement and Godly justice. This tawheedi framework is in the puritanical discourse constructed not only as an anchor, but also a kind of line that separates out the Islamic way from the Western way whether in thinking about moderation or the whole project of political community. There are

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<sup>427</sup> Raqiyya al-Muharib, "*Tawjeehat wa Nasa'ih li al mar'a al- da'iya*," [Directions and Advice to da'wa Women/Female Preachers] 14 March 2011, in <http://www.dr-roqaiya.com/view/131.htm>, access: 14/07/2011.

signs of renewal or innovation but components of the Islamic orthodoxy still dominate, grounding political practice and political thinking clearly within the Qur'an and Tradition of the Prophet. But what is clearly emerging is the beginnings of an exposition of ideas which are seeking flexible mu'amalat (human relations and dealings) that make use of the immutable tenets of Islam order to build a *wasati* or balanced socio-moral order.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE PROBLEMATIC OF ‘MODERATION’ IN SAUDI ARABIA: A REFLECTION

#### 7.1 Focus

This is a chapter that attempts to reflect on the problematic of moderation, which has been analysed in this thesis through the discourse of two types of discourse: ‘pragmatic’ and ‘puritanical’. The main objective is to reflect by comparing and contrasting the positions of these two discourses. This is aimed at understanding what the two types of discourse tell us about moderation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Two sections will be used to meet this objective. The first looks at the language used by the two discourses. The second reflects on the content of the interpretations of moderation. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of moderation and reform in the Kingdom.

#### 7.2 The Problematic of Moderation & Reform

Moderation is not a term that is associated with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The most frequently used term by media in the West when describing Saudi Arabia is conservative. It is an adjective that sums up the Orientalist view of a country, whose image will not recover from the 9/11 fallout for a long time. The idea of ‘confrontation’ is prominent, and Fred Halliday was one of the very few this criticised this Orientalist tendency.<sup>428</sup> This direction in research is part of a general undertaking to explain the phenomenon of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, which Lebanese scholar Ahmad Moussalli addressed very critically.<sup>429</sup> It is the idea of opposition to change most Orientalists writing on Saudi Arabia highlight when writing about the Kingdom. In the writing of a Western ‘Saudi-ologist’ the country appears to be outside ‘history’, expressing amazing how it still exists. “In theory Saudi Arabia should not exist – its survival defies the laws of logic and history. Look at its princely rulers, dressed in funny clothes, trusting in God rather than man, and running their oil-rich country on principles that most of the world has abandoned with relief. Shops are closed for prayer five times a day, executions take

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<sup>428</sup> Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1996). For works that explain the source and content of ‘Islamic threat’ see Jochen Hippler & Andrea Lueg (eds.), *The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam* (Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1995).

<sup>429</sup> Ahmad Moussalli (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism: Myth & Realities* (London: Ithaca, 1998), see pp. 1-7.

place in the street – and let us not even get started on the status of women. Saudi Arabia is one of the planet’s enduring – and for some, quite offensive – enigmas...”<sup>430</sup> The mix he presents in this quote is intriguing to most Westerners and even Arabs. The ‘funny clothes’, ‘God’, ‘oil’, ‘prayer’, ‘executions’, ‘status of women’ and ‘enduring’ nature. Nothing in these elements communicates the idea of moderation. That is one reason that the word that comes to mind is ‘enigma’, as the Robert Lacey states. This is precisely the problematic of seeking to understand ‘moderation’ in a country never associated with such a value. To use Robert Lacey’s words, ‘one of the planet’s enduring’ stereotypes is the idea of Saudi Arabia is not a place of ‘moderation’. One notes that in the mix of ingredients mentioned by Lacey there is ‘God’ and ‘prayer’. To go back to the excerpt with which Lacey begins his book, ‘man’ and ‘God’ are presented as central to another stereotype: the two are mutually exclusive. They are not meant to co-exist in the modern world. The evidence I have tried to analyse in the previous chapters points to a different direction: trust in God does not exclude the trust in man. If there is any definition for the Islamic notion of moderation, it is precisely this: reconciling the trust in God and the trust in man. It is the challenge of finding a balance in the relationship of God and man that defines the quest for moderation in this Islamic context. Once upon a time this was the same challenge faced by religion in the West; defining acceptable balance for Caesar and for God. In Islam of course, the two realms are not thought of as ‘separate’, a discussion initiated more than 30 years ago in a solid article by the well-known Middle East scholar R. Stephen Humphreys. His key finding was that in countries such as Saudi Arabia politics was thought of as a matter of religion, not separate from it.<sup>431</sup> They form two components of the same scheme that combines the religious and the political, or the sacred and the mundane. This is the meaning of *wasatiyya* (from *wasat*, which means the middle) the middle path that medieval and present jurists of Islam consider to be the way of Islam. But as Enayat discovered some time ago, the way of Islam is diverse when it comes to responding to modernity.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia* (London: Arrow Book, 2009), p. xix

<sup>431</sup> R. Stephen Humphreys, “Islam and Political Values in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria,” *Middle East Journal* (Winter 1979), Vol. 33, No. 1, pp.1-19. Another relevant source in this regard is by Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam* (New York: Random House, 1981).

<sup>432</sup> Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi‘i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

Edward Said warns against making sweeping generalisations about the ‘Orient’, which is not unitary.<sup>433</sup> In my attempt to address moderation, I have tried to get away from generalisation, by discussing two prominent discourses of moderation. Moderation is not itself unitary. There are various ways of thinking and practicing it. This moderation does not always look like the moderation known in the West to be the opposite of ‘extremism’ or ‘terrorism’ or politics of ‘radicalisation’.<sup>434</sup> When and if the subject is at all considered it is in relation to security.<sup>435</sup> I sought through three criteria (pluralism, ideological moderation, and respect for the rules of the political game) to address ideas that do not reinforce the stereotypes through a defence of Saudi Arabia against accusations of being a hotbed of fanatical extremists or a medieval backwater in politics and democracy. Saudi Arabia has its share of extremists, fanatics and forces that understand *jihad* only as ‘holy war’ against Muslims and non-Muslims they do not approve of their ideologies, politics, or cultural outlook.<sup>436</sup> These facts, which exist in many other countries around the world, did not compel following a stereotypical research agenda which understands ‘moderation’ as the opposite of ‘militancy’<sup>437</sup> or a discussion that should take place in relation to ‘terrorism’. Stephen Schwartz’s work represents a good example of works that discusses Saudi Arabia by linking Wahhabism and terrorism. This leads him to make subjective observations about the “fascistic” nature of Wahhabism. It is the kind of work that leaves the reader thinking that moderation has no place in the Kingdom.<sup>438</sup> I sought to get away from this type of gloomy and biased accounts about so-called Saudi ‘fundamentalism’. My intention was to indentify and follow a more creative and broader research agenda, an agenda that would indirectly address Orientalist stereotypes of the Kingdom by looking at aspects that point to ‘change’, not the endurance of negative features that have been so widely debated since the tragic events of 9/11. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first

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<sup>433</sup> Alexander L. Macfie, *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), see pp. 1-14.

<sup>434</sup> Rik Coolsaet (ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation challenge in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 2008); and George Joffé, *Islamist Radicalisation in North Africa: Politics and Process* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2011).

<sup>435</sup> Joseph Malone, “Security: A Priority for Gulf Council,” *Journal of Defense and Diplomacy*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (September 1983), pp. 15-17; William B. Quandt, “Saudi Arabia: Security and Foreign Policy in the 1980s,” *Middle East Insight*, 2, No. 2 (January-February 1982), pp. 25-30.

<sup>436</sup> A good source is the work by Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002).

<sup>437</sup> Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam* (New York: Touchstone, 1986).

<sup>438</sup> Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2020).

century is not the same Arabia ruled by the 19<sup>th</sup> century fanatic brotherhood or *Ikhwan* of Najd.<sup>439</sup> Many aspects may have resisted change but others have changed or are in the process of dealing with change. This includes politics where ‘moderation’ or *wasatiyya* is gaining a wider public. In one way, the problematic of ‘moderation’ addressed in this thesis looks for additional ingredients for understanding the transformation of political identity in the Kingdom. The good work done by Christine Helms in her book from the early 1980s relies too heavily on ingredients of ‘tradition’ in its account of political identity in the Kingdom.<sup>440</sup> Moreover, the examination of moderation opens up debates concerning Saudi society and not the House of Saud’. This is another type of writing about the Kingdom that communicates different types of stereotypes concerned with the rulers and not the people of the Kingdom.<sup>441</sup>

My approach is to seek evidence from Saudi activists’ views on moderation is also intended to show that there is a dynamic of change, politically and culturally. The existing library of books on the Kingdom does not suggest that scholarly attention is concerned as yet with this issue. This is despite the fact this dynamic of change is obvious today through the increased lobbying capacity of the Saudi public such as the professionals to express disaffection, political preference and even criticism. This is no doubt different from institutionalisation of change or of reform at least in politics. It is the fact that moderation is being deepened in Saudi society that even the ruling house pays attention to pressure from scholars for sweeping reforms.<sup>442</sup> As part of this pressure, the call for a constitutional monarchy has become widespread, but not of course as yet taken seriously by the rulers. Part of that pressure is produced by the type of discourses I have sought to analyse in this thesis. Change in the Kingdom has always

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<sup>439</sup> John Habib, *Ibn Sa‘ud’s Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Saudi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1978).

<sup>440</sup> Christine Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

<sup>441</sup> A good example is the book by David Holden & Richard Johns, *The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981); Brian Lees, *A Handbook of the Al Saud Ruling Family of Saudi Arabia* (London: Royal Genealogies, 1980); and the book by David Howarth, *A Desert King: Ibn Saud and His Arabia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). Compare with the edited volume by Hopwood, Derek (ed.), *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1972); and Ralph H. Magnus, “Societies and Social Change in the Persian Gulf,” in Alvin J. Cottrell (ed.), *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 369-413.

<sup>442</sup> Mohamed Elshinnawi, “Saudi Arabia Nervous about Domestic Discontent,” in <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Saudi-Arabia-Is-Nervous-About-Domestic-Discontent--117669328.html>, 28/07/2011.

come gradually. For instance, of late and in the context of the Arab revolts seen in countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, public expenditure was raised to create stable employment for thousands of unemployed Saudi graduates, and employees of the public sector had their contracts converted from temporary to permanent contracts. But more importantly, women were given the vote in September 2011 by the King not only as a response to Arab revolts, but also because women, such as those whose evidence of political activism on behalf of equality, citizenship, dialogue and just government have made themselves heard.<sup>443</sup> Orientalist scholarship ignores the role of these discourses in the gradual transformation of the Kingdom.

There has been an undercurrent of tension simmering for a long time in the Kingdom, since the 1980s when the first petitions for reform began. However, the current context in which there are plural discourses and types of activism who seem to be moderating their views of politics helps the agenda of reform and transformation. Discourses of moderation are important in this context where pragmatist and puritanical groups and forces seem to acknowledge the need of reform even if they do not agree about the pace and substance of reform. However, the fact that they seem to be directing the various publics towards accepting formerly unthinkable ideas and positions (e.g. equal forms of *muwatana*, just government, and pluralism) about how to organise politics in relation to man and in relation to God may be considered a form of preparing the right background for sustained reform. In one way, this is a form of continuous social pressure and lobby to be considered by the rulers in the present and the future. This is a major gain for the Kingdom and the discourses of moderation have become so prominent in this regard that they cannot be excluded from the public sphere when reform policy is considered and made. In the past, Saudi Arabia had petitioners who lobbied the rulers only in times of crisis such as during the first and second Gulf wars. This pressure is now sustained as well as coming from different sources: the puritanical forces, the pragmatic groups, and the hard-line clergy. This is a new trend in itself, allowing the Kingdom to follow a new route in its development as a political unit and as a society. It can no longer be claimed that Wahhabism is the only dynamic that defines Saudi Arabia.<sup>444</sup> Or perhaps, it is not easy today to make the case that Wahhabism does

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<sup>443</sup> “Women in Saudi Arabia to vote and Run in Elections,” in <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-15052030>, 26/09/2011.

<sup>444</sup> George Rentz, “Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia,” in Derek Hopwood (ed.), *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics*. (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), pp. 54-66.

not produce different ways of thinking or it stays fixed. The presence of various trends of thought in the Kingdom such as the two under study in this thesis points to change, which remains slow when seen from outside. But for those viewing it from the inside, it is cause for optimism.

### **7.3 Reflection I: The Language of the Pragmatist & Puritanical Discourses**

The analysis in the previous two chapters of the pragmatist and puritanical discourses produce two styles of language. Each style is typical of the worldviews considered in this thesis. It is the meanings that produce the various expressions and concepts used by the pragmatists and puritanical speakers. Therefore the language is not incidental here but rather deliberate. It is characterised by the use of very specific phrases or concepts. Some are Qur'anic, the puritanical trend, and some are derived from non-religious sources, in the case of the pragmatists. By reading these concepts and phrases used by the two trends one can discern two processes of thought about moderation. Each makes use of different sources and tools. These sources and tools in some instances belong to the same Islamic tradition, and this is common. What differs is the interpretation each trend gives to the concepts and language used. Other times, they use different sources. The pragmatists, for instance, rely in some instances on Western sources. However both are motivated by the same socio-moral imperative to reform Saudi society and politics.

In terms of language, content and the prospects of change, the discourse of moderation is part of this overall gradual movement for redefining or reinterpreting the values, Islamic and Western, of constructing community, politically, socially and culturally in the Kingdom. The pragmatists' political language points to an attempt to reach a synthesis between the traditional repository and the Western repertoire of ideas and values. They use terms very carefully and in a way that makes them sensitive to the context of place and time. In terms of place, Saudi Arabia today is undergoing a profound process of 'reintellectualisation', which I introduced and explained in chapter four. The capacity of the Saudi public to receive and accept, or at least consider, the ideas communicated by this language is greater now than any other time in the past. King Abdullah's own speeches speak of national dialogue, reform, tolerance and the

drive to fight corruption, until 2005 a taboo subject.<sup>445</sup> His initiatives include as I have mentioned above new laws which allow women to vote and run as candidates in future elections. There is a context which makes these reforms acceptable now thanks to higher levels of education, and deeper connection with the rest of the world and the neighbouring Arab region which has seen greater reforms, politically, culturally and economically. Some argue that there is a middle class which did not exist before.<sup>446</sup> The pragmatists' language is timely too. It builds on a foundation of struggles, which are not researched thoroughly by students of Saudi politics and society, and pressure of reform begun in the 1980s and continued through the 1990s, culminating in the famous *Mudhahikkart al-Naseeha* or Memorandum of Advice from scholars to the King of the day.<sup>447</sup> Fandy has documented how these struggles involved dissent which led to increasing social pressure for reform on the state.<sup>448</sup> I have mentioned these in my background chapters. If anything the emergence of this type of synthesis in the language of moderation and reform is the result of gradual pressure and change. The timing is a logical result of this gradualism, which is a major feature of Saudi political culture. It is evolution in social, political and cultural arenas that define the Saudi approach to change. This synthesis today has a public which did not exist in huge numbers a decade ago. Moreover, the relaxation since 2005 of censorship by the religious police and authorities has facilitated the emergence of this discourse into the public arena. As mentioned in the discussion of 'reintellectualisation' the media and Internet revolution have been important factors in the rise of new political communication and language. It is less censored and may be even more complex to police or ban. Censorship of the Internet has implications for overall development that perhaps explains the reluctance of the state to rely on it for interfering in the political evolution of society and groups not directly affiliated with the state. Under King Abdullah there is an atmosphere of ease with these new groups and their political discourses, which he contributed to as well as capitalised on to introduce his own reforms. In this respect, one can say that there is a two-way communication of political ideas, and language itself is part of this flow of information in Saudi Arabia today.

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<sup>445</sup> *Khitab Al-Malak Abdullah ila al-'umma* [King Abdullah's speech to the nation], 18 March 2011.

<sup>446</sup> William A. Rugh, "Emergence of a New Middle Class in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (Winter 1973), pp. 9-20.

<sup>447</sup> *Mudhakkirat Al-Naseeha* (petition to the King by dissident scholars and professionals), July 1992.

<sup>448</sup> Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia & the Politics of Dissent* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

The puritanical trend's own language points to making use of the inherited repertoire of another generation of petitioners and struggles for reform on behalf of religion, in particular the moderate *sahwis* whose forebears were the likes of Shaykh Naser Al-Omar, Shaykh Salman Al-‘Awda and Shaykh Safar Al-Hawali.<sup>449</sup> These forces of resurgence<sup>450</sup> of a quasi Muslim Brotherhood trend in the Kingdom must be distinguished from the radical *sahwis* which took this trend into a different direction under the influence of Osama bin Laden and others. Their language reflects a degree of the moderation found in the transnational Muslim Brotherhood movement, which stresses today full political participation and acceptance of many civic values and the principle of *muwatana*, citizenship of non-Muslims under an Islamic state (see Table 5). However, the synthesis attempted by the puritanical trend is internal: mixing specifically Saudi politico-religious values and features with Muslim Brotherhood values. The pragmatists' synthesis is external, by trying to marry Saudi specificity with Western democratic values and ideas. For instance, the idea of *shari'a* or Islamic law is still accorded a major place in the language of puritanical trend. There is no consensus within the Muslim Brotherhood movement today about the idea of *shari'a* in politics. North African Islamist movements tend to delay it or ignore it, and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood since the time of Hassan Al-Hudaybi, who tried to minimise the influence of Sayyid Qutb and radical political Islam, has differed on the question.<sup>451</sup> The pragmatists by *contrast* seem not to be concerned with the institution of Islamic law. It is as if they have moved beyond it as an item on their agenda. The chief concern for them has more to do with the approach to institute moderation. Thus they stress the values that organise moderation: respect of difference, dialogue, religious diversity, tolerance, deliberation, pluralism, competition, co-existence, and freedom. The terminology they use (*Ta'addudiyya*, *Tanawwu'*, *Tasamuh*, *Al-ra'y al-akhar*, *Al-ra'y al-mukhalif*, *Al-Hiwar*, *Niqash*, *lakum dinukum wa liya dini*, *Mujadalah*, *Munaqashha*, *Ikhtilaf*, *Mukhalafa*, *Hurr fima yudeen*, *Hurriyyah*, *Ta'ayush*, *Tanafus hurr*) is only partially religious. Of the phrases and concepts listed here only the phrases “*lakum*

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<sup>449</sup> These are amongst the most well-know voices of reform in the 1990s in Saudi Arabia. All three have academic training in Islamic sciences. Al-Omari was part of the Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University and the School of Islamic Foundations. Al-‘Awda worked in the Muhammad bin Saud University too. Al-Hawali was a professor of religious studies in the University of Umm Al-Qura, in Mecca.

<sup>450</sup> Ronald R. MacIntyre, “Saudi Arabia,” in Mohammed Ayoob, (ed.). *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp. 9-29.

<sup>451</sup> Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan Al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2009).

*dinukum wa liya dini*” and “*Hurr fima yudeen*” have religious source. In particular, “*lakum dinukum wa liya dini*” is a Qur’anic verse, and incidentally this is the only phrase common to the discourses of by interviewees from the puritanical and pragmatist trends of thought. The influence of religion is still present in the pragmatists’ language of moderation. But overall their language seems to reflect concern with civil matters and values, which to an extent can be considered part of a global platform of values shared by groups and discourses whose political activisms are about pushing the agenda of equal citizenship and democratic government. As in the discourse of modernisation by their intellectual forebears,<sup>452</sup> the notion of ‘free competition’ (*tanafus hurr*) has no place in the language of the puritanical trend. Just as the notion of Islamic law is absent from the pragmatists’ language. In the context of Saudi Arabia, the concept of ‘competition’ is so new given that the country has no political parties and municipality elections are very recent having been introduced by King Abdullah. What is striking about the pragmatists’ language of moderation is the emphasis of respect of difference. They use six different terms to make the point about their commitment to this value: *Al-ra’y al-akhar* (the opinion of the other), *al-ra’y al-mukhalif* (different view), *Al-lakum dinukum wa liya dini* (to each his/her religion), *ikhtilaf* (difference) *mukhalafa* (right to disagree) *hurr fima yudeen* (freedom of belief). This is an important feature of the pragmatists’ discourse. In a way, this perhaps reflects their defensiveness and the effort to defend their outlook and project of moderation as the basis for reform. Another value which is represents an important feature in their language is dialogue. For this purpose they use four different terms to emphasise this idea: *hiwar* (dialogue) *niqash* (discussion), *mujadalah* (argumentation), *munaqashha* (exchange of ideas). There is a kind of logic in the pragmatists’ thinking. They stress the role of difference and the right to differ and then establish the values that allow different of opinion to be communicated peacefully through dialogue. In this logic, the values of pluralism, diversity and co-existence, respectively *ta’addudiyya*, *tanawwu’*, *ta’ayush*, make for an order in which moderation is about a civil order where politics are organised to include competing ideas. So in this order, again it is logical for *hurriyya* or freedom, an important concept in the pragmatists’ language, to be a vital condition for diversity, and dialogue to allow co-existence.

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<sup>452</sup> ‘Awadh Al-Qarny, *Al-Hadatha fi Mizan Al-Islam* [Modernity In the Islamic Framework] (Cairo: Hajir, 1988).

The puritanical trend embeds its language in an outlook in which the divine order is primary and non-negotiable. Their interpretation of this divine order is facilitated through a set of terms, concepts and phrases (see Table 5) that confirms and supports their commitment to Islamic identity and affiliation within the Islamic *umma* of believers as well as patriotic belonging to Saudi Arabia. Here they are loyal to the Wahhabi vision which sees no clash between the nation-state and Islamic identity. In a way this reflects commitment to the politico-religious political culture of Saudi Arabia. The normative Islamic community supplements the normative nationalist community. It follows then that their language of *muwatana* or citizenship in an Islamic state, for instance, serves both the morality of Islam as well as the nationalist imperative for worldly order and co-existence with Christians and Jews, peoples of the book (*ahl al-kitab*). In a way, using the language of *muwatana* reflects the principle that the morality of the normative *umma-ic* order intended for the community of believers everywhere presupposes the form of citizenship within nationalist borders. That is if *muwatana* is a good made binding and moral in the *umma*, then it is relevant in any type of community where believers form a majority. The language of the puritanical trend is therefore defined by *umma-ic* moral imperatives which they extend to the definition of the moral imperatives that should govern nationalist community. The importance of the divine order in the thinking of the puritanical trend is extensive in scope and meaning. Monotheistic morality is central to its conceptualisation. The set of terms used by the puritanical trend all revolve around monotheistic divinity. This monotheism, however, has a spiritual as well as civil relevance for moderation. Unity of God in spiritual terms requires adherence to the teaching of Islam by Muslims. In civil terms Islam's laws are binding and applicable to Muslims whereas through *muwatana* people's of the book are bound by their own teachings and laws. In addition to this, in civil terms monotheistic morality does not forbid organisation of civil matters and political affairs through pluralist channels so long as these do not undermine the Unity of god. Even pluralism itself takes its meaning from religion: *ta'addudiyya diniyya*. They accept pluralism but it is not the type of pluralism that would allow atheism for instance. It is a pluralist vision tied to fixed set of beliefs about the supremacy of God and his laws, and man's obligation to enjoin the good and prevent evil according to the moral imperatives of Islam. Man's special role in the form of vicegerency (*khilafat Allah ala al-ard*) makes moderation rigidly defined by religious duties: institution of justice through *al-dawla al-'adila* (the Just State) and of God's law, *shari'a*, but without getting into the

complexities of its implementation.<sup>453</sup> In the same manner they do not pick a fight with secular ideology in the way language was used by advocates of the religious trend in the early 1990s.<sup>454</sup>

There is interpenetration between these concepts as all of them revolve around commitment to monotheistic morality and God's law. This is the condition of moderation in the puritanical trend's thinking. However, the language of justice or legality in general, and citizenship are key terms that are pivotal for the institution of order, and are used repetitively in this language. The prominence of these terms can be compared by the absence of the term *jihad* (spiritual struggle), and this is indicative of the kind of agenda the puritanical trend wants to advance in Saudi Arabia. It is concerned with internal reform in a context where the Kingdom has since the invasion of Kuwait witnessed a rise in violence and use of terrorism by local groups, including al-Qaida. Dropping the term from the puritanical trend's language is deliberate and some interviewees refused to address this important concept, brushing it aside as not relevant to reform and moderation. They do not complicate the language and refer to Ibn Taymiyya's concept of *al-wilayah al-kubra* (Godly rulership).<sup>455</sup> They avoid involvement in complicated matter in order to present their thinking in flexible and appealing terms. The notion of *da'wa*, by contrast is given a special place in the order of values and concepts used by the puritanical trend. It is considered to be amongst the chief normative institutions of Islam. Therefore in their conceptualisation of moderation it obligates Muslims to preach God's message by enjoining the good (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf*). This good is primarily concerned with *islah*, such as those before them in the religious trend,<sup>456</sup> or reform, interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and lobbying for justice. The reference to *insan*, the human being with the attributes of equality as a creation of God, regardless of gender or colour, points to a form of Universalist morality in the thinking of the puritanical trend. This humanity as they see it is part of the monotheistic order intended to advance the *maqasid* or divine sanctions (respect of life, respect of different

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<sup>453</sup> Muhammad Qutb, *Hawla Tatbeeq Al-Shari'a* [On the Practice of Shari'a] (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Sunna, 1992).

<sup>454</sup> Safar Al-Hawali, *Al 'Almaniyya: Nash'atuha wa Tatawwuruha* [Secularism: Its Roots and Development] (Cairo: Altayab, 1999).

<sup>455</sup> Fuad Abd Al-Mun'am Ahmad, *Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya wa Al-Wilayah Al-Siyasiyya al-Kubra fi al-Islam* [Ibn Taymiyya and the Supreme Political Rulership in Islam] (Riyadh: Dar Al-Watan, 1987).

<sup>456</sup> Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabreen, *Risalat al-Islah* [The Letter of Reform] (Beirut: No publisher, 1992).

faiths).<sup>457</sup> Moderation in its entirety is interpreted, to serve reform and forms of inclusiveness that do not undermine the normative divine sanctions. A major aspect in the language of this discourse is the reference to *ijtihad*, rationalism, which hints at a kind of shift in the *Wahhabi* creed known for a long time for its literalism. Moderation requires the freedom to interpret divine texts and without this capacity the puritanical trend cannot push too far its agenda of religious renewal. Again, the reference to *ijtihad* points to the concern with internal reform and renewal. To accept political pluralism and adopt it as a value, the condition is to give the learned scholars freedom. The same goes for the ideas of competition or the value of freedom, which the pragmatists who are not bound by a religious agenda speak about openly. Probably, the term most indicative of this yet un-declared thinking is the use of the concept of *wasatiyya*, which I will examine in the following section. The preference for ‘the middle path’ is motivated by the desire to strike a balance between the worldly and sacred realms. Whilst the puritanical trend does not adopt a language that suggests adoption of separation of religion and politics, they nonetheless recognise that adopting *wasatiyya* in order to balance the realms of God and of man are required.

**Table 5** Puritanical Trend’s Language: Meaning & Source

<b>Language/Concepts</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Source/Basis</b>
<i>Tawheed</i>	Monotheism	Islamic
<i>Ijtihad</i>	Independent thinking	Islamic
<i>shari‘a</i>	Islamic law	Islamic
<i>al-dawla al‘adila</i>	The Just State	Islamic
<i>Khilafat Allah al al-ard</i>	Vicegerency	Qur’anic
<i>ta‘adduiyya Islamiyya</i>	Muslim pluralism	Islamic
<i>Umma</i>	Muslim community	Islamic
<i>tawheed ruhi</i>	Spiritual monotheism	Islamic
<i>tawheed madani</i>	Civic monotheism	Islamic
<i>shaqa‘iq al-rijal</i>	Equality of women	Islamic

<sup>457</sup> Allal Al-Fasy, *Maqasid Al-Shari‘a* [The Divine Sanctions] (Beirut: Dar Algharb Al-Islami, 1993).

<i>da'wa</i>	Preaching, call to Islam	Islamic
<i>Muwatana</i>	Right to citizenship of Muslims and non-Muslims in an Islamic state	Islamic
<i>shar'iyya</i>	Legitimacy	Islamic
<i>wasati umma</i>	Just and balanced nation or community	Islamic
<i>Wasatiyya</i>	Moderation; middle path	Islamic
<i>Maqasid</i>	Divine sanctions	Islamic
<i>Insane</i>	Human being, without stress of gender or colour	Islamic
<i>ahl al-kitab</i>	Peoples of the book	Islamic
<i>ta'addudiyya diniyya</i>	Pluralism based on religious teaching	Islamic
<i>la ikraha fi al-deen</i>	Non-compulsion in religion	Qur'anic

#### **7.4 Reflection II: The Content of the Pragmatist & Puritanical Discourses**

This section seeks to compare the content or substance of the two trends in relation to moderation. Generally, the two discourses' content follows in the footsteps of the Saudi forebears in terms of maintaining solid faith to the identity of the Saudi state. This identity elaborates a close relationship between Islam and politics, and between God and man. This relationship remains a 'given': there is no direct challenge to it. It is, however, indirectly, that the challenge is mounted but in a very subtle fashion that requires close analysis of the substance that one reads in the two discourses. This challenge is one of degree. The challenge never seeks total break with the politico-religious tradition. Rather, it tries to reconcile the indigenous politico-religious heritage with liberal values (in the case of the pragmatists) and with indigenous accumulated thinking and practice of reform. The pragmatists rely less on less on defending their propositions by reference to Wahhabi dogma *per se*. What they do, however, is to pragmatically declare loyalty to the religious establishment and to Islam. They know they need their support or at least indifference to be able to reach a wider public and compete with rival projects of reform. Saudi pragmatists do not reject the dogmas of religion. They pay attention to ingredients of moderation that do not clash with Islam without necessarily dressing them in Islamic language. By contrast, the puritanical

trend's notion of moderation uses the very content of religion working out its project of reform in general. They adhere to the dogmas of Islam and rely on its concepts and tools to elaborate a trend of thought whose assumptions do not depart far from the fixed heritage of the forebears. However, this must not be mistaken for renouncing renewal. To the contrary, they do not, and the way they go about this has its own form of subtlety. They drop *jihad* from their discourse and do not include it when speaking about moderation. This is despite the fact that they still show strong attachment to *da'wa*, and to *shari'a*. There is a reason for this. They take *da'wa*, and *shari'a* to be part of the normative repertoire that they take also to be a given: not negotiable. Plus, it is intended for the internal renewal and internal development and wellbeing of the Muslim community. Unlike them, *jihad* has been shown its controversial and even dangerous potential in Saudi society. The context does not help. Saudi Arabia's rulers and even clergy in a context of terrorism and extremism that targeted fellow Muslims and Saudis is not a 'popular' or 'easy' item to adopt in one's moral project of change and reform. Both trends of thought in fact show areas of silence – the pragmatists, generally, do not talk about *da'wa* or *shari'a*, and the puritanical discourses leave *jihad* out. Both are in different ways helping reformulate and pluralise the Wahhabi creed from within: their discourses through what is mentioned and what is left out challenge the existing politico-religious tradition. This is the element missing in analyses of the politics and society of the Kingdom. These subtle and not so subtle challenge against and reformulations of the existing Wahhabi dogmas by the pragmatists and the puritanical trend differ in one regard. The former utilise Western concepts and ideas for modelling reform, in general, and moderation in particular. The latter maintain tension with the Western heritage, rejecting its premises as the only ones worthy of emulation by Muslims. Hence the two trends somewhat 'clash' on gender inclusiveness. The pragmatists have no problem whatsoever with women being included in order to strengthen pluralism, and showing commitment to equality with women. This notion of gender inclusiveness as part of pluralism is not accepted fully with its Western terms and conditions. The puritanical trend's thought on the question does not reject equality as a principle. However, they reject it principally as a specifically Western principal. Female interviewees from the puritanical trend are not fussed about equality as such. For them, equality happens in others fields where substance matters most than the superficial label of 'gender equality': they give priority to equality through the substance of safety, protection, and education over what they view as 'gender equality'

for the sake of gender equality. The pragmatists more or less follow the route of other Arab reformers including from the 19<sup>th</sup> century: looking to the West for ideas of reform but not renouncing loyalty to the Islamic faith. This is the agenda of Rifa't Tahtawi amongst others, as thoroughly documented by Albert Hourani.<sup>458</sup> It repeats itself in various Muslim territories with different emphases. In the Saudi context sensitivity to religion never leads the pragmatists to claim a different culture. They can only claim a subculture of rights, competition, political parties, gender equality, diversity, dialogue and respect of difference. The tools of Western democracy are used to define the outline of their moderation. By comparison to the pragmatists, the puritanical trend's thinking is insistent on use of Islam as the main frame of reference. This is the only furnish the framework they consider to be legitimate for realising the spirit of Islam, and only through it the tools that furnish moderation. Thus for this group cultural and intellectual self-determination is an issue of the utmost importance. Their reference to the Qur'an and Hadith is based on a solid conviction that divine texts are themselves a moral text of how to reconcile sacred and worldly affairs. The meanings they give to moderation all confirm one thing: that Islam is a purposeful politico-religio-moral framework that no man-made programme of reform or morality can compete with. Thus imitation of the Western outlook is unthinkable.

This tension that exists in each trend highlights to two types of separation on which its followers base their ideas. The pragmatists prefer separation of the religious and the worldly but never renounce God. Their thought makes cohabitation of the two acceptable and possible by seeking the instruments of democratic competition, institutionalisation of parties, difference of opinion and ideology, and means of political deliberation and discussion. However, they never use the label '*almaniyya* (secularism). It is a type of *de facto* secularism, which goes without a name or declaration. This looks like another type of fragmentation within the puritanical trend whose advocates do not in any form separate the religious and the mundane. Separation for them is internal, a way to seek a civil order subsumed under the religious order, and this is the substance of their reference to spiritual monotheism and civic monotheism (*tawheed madani*), seeking a civil order in which laws, justice, tolerance and the practice of the obligation to enjoin the good and prevent the evil all take place within Islam's normative

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<sup>458</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

parameters. Thus justice, God's law, *da'wa*, tolerance of difference and acceptance of other religions obtain their legitimacy for Islam, intertwine with it, and never become ends in themselves above the *maqasid*, the divine socio-moral order of Islam. These *maqasid* or Godly sanctions are not negotiable either as argued by Al-'Obaydi.<sup>459</sup>

I wish to elaborate the point about the similarity and dissimilarity between the pragmatists and the puritanical trend, by referring to excerpts by leading figures affiliated with each. The similarity is that they both declare openly loyalty to Islam. The dissimilarity is that they use different techniques for clarifying their positions towards the role of religion in relation to ideas and values related to moderation or reform in general.

The late Ghazi Al-Qusaybi is one of the most well-known faces of Saudi diplomacy and officialdom, having served the state for most of his life until his death in 2010. He was known for his solid advocacy of reform and the kind of ideas that sums up the pragmatists' notion of moderation. The ambiguity in his discourse is documented in a famous treatise he wrote in 1991 and he called '*hatta la takuna fitna*' [So that Discord Does not Take Place].<sup>460</sup> The treatise is written in a self-defence in the height of the first Gulf War in 1991 against his accusation of being secularist by a known Islamist, Naser Al-'Omar, and warns prominent religious scholars against causing social discord. The treatise is a good indicator of the sensitivity of the pragmatists to labels such as 'secularist'. This they take to be more offensive than liberal. In the context of Saudi Arabia a secularist carries a particularly negative meaning as it refers to rejection of the existing politico-religious order in the Kingdom. The pragmatists may have adopted the language of political parties, competition, diversity, etc. But they have not openly put a label on their adoption of values or ideas that may be interpreted as associations of secularism. In a very ambiguous discourse al-Qusaybi's 100-page treatise defends himself against the charge of secularism by using the language the Qur'an and the Hadith. He intended this to be proof that the values of renewal, reform, and moderation are all found in the divine texts. Through this ambiguity he cleverly points out that the Saudi learned scholars are involved in all aspects of Saudi life, sacred and mundane, but without forming a 'papacy' or a 'theocratic' establishment or class

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<sup>459</sup> Hamad Al-'Obaydi, *Al-Shatibi wa Maqasid Al-Shari'a* [Shari'a's Divine Objectives] (Beirut: Dar Qutaybi, 1992).

<sup>460</sup> Ghazi Al-Qusaybi, '*hatta la takuna fitna*' [So that Discord Does not Take Place], Riyadh, 1991.

(*tabaqa kahanutiyya*). His idea is that in Islam a/ “there is no religious class”, and b/ that there is the principle of ‘*deen wa dawla*’ [religion and a state].<sup>461</sup> He intended this to mean two things, which is typical of his ambiguity. Firstly, this means there is no possibility of separation, a realm of secularists and a realm for religion-ists. Secondly, since there is no ‘papacy’ or ‘church’, then he is proposing that Islam is amenable to a kind of division between the religious and the political even if these two he takes to be intertwined. He uses this ambiguous defence to advance the idea that he, like the learned scholars, gets involved in politics through the practice of values of dialogue and out of their concern for the public good, mostly to enjoin the good and ensure cohesion and national unity. They do this not because it is part of their religious duty. Rather, they do this because the public expects them to serve the nation and invest trust in them. In spite of this role in mundane affairs, he says: “our scholars do not view themselves as being ‘politicians.’”<sup>462</sup> He goes on to say, in defence against his accusation and through an accusation of his own, “in the Kingdom there are no secularists who are demanding separation of religion and state: everyone in the Kingdom knows that the state is based on religion and would not survive a minute if it was separated from it. So if there are no secularists in the Kingdom, there is no reason for the existence of fundamentalists to fight a secular government and to establish Islamic law, which already is the law of the land, thank God.”<sup>463</sup> Al-Qusaybi fails to convince because he was defensive and as held a Ministry in government at that time did not want to be seen to be at odds with the public discourse of the state, a state that deals with the West, uses Western technology and expertise, collaborates in Western security arrangements,<sup>464</sup> is part of its defence planning,<sup>465</sup> and in 1991 even fought side by side with the non-Muslim US-led forces against a neighbouring Muslim state (Iraq), which invaded another (Muslim) state. Just as the establishment clergy rallied to defend the state using the Qur’an and the Hadith, al-Qusaybi did the same to defend himself. It was not the best defence for the forces of pragmatism in the Kingdom since he tried to also defend female education and inclusiveness, dialogue, the right to differ, and the idea of ‘otherness’ in thought. In

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid. pp. 61-66.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., p. 62

<sup>464</sup> Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr. “Saudi Arabia Faces the 1980s: Saudi Security Problems and American Interests,” *Fletcher Forum*, (Summer 1981), 243-77; and see Robert Lacey, “How Stable Are the Saudis?” *New York Times*, 8 November 1981, pp. 35-40.

<sup>465</sup> Joseph Malone, “America and the Arabian Peninsula: The First Two Hundred Years,” *Middle East Journal*, 30, No. 3, (Summer 1976), pp. 406-24.

defending himself against the accusation of secularism, Al-Qusaybi did not mention separation of religion and politics as his definition of secularism. He was employing a different definition of secularism (*'almaniyya*) "*al-kufr al-muhrij 'an al-milla*" [disbelief that takes one out of his faith].<sup>466</sup> Al-Qusaybi deliberately avoided using a precise definition as he did not wish to have a public showdown about the pragmatists' project or use of Western models of thought and even borrowing of standards such as political competition, pluralism, gender inclusiveness as the basis of their project of moderation.

Moderation for the puritanical trend has no agenda of separation. Typically, the discourse reaffirms the primacy of the divine order and the role of Islam within it. This role for figures like Abdallah Al-Hamid is primarily civil – he is the author of the idea of spiritual (*ruhi*) and civil (*madani*) monotheism. Under the madani type of monotheism values of civility are adopted: renaissance (*nahud*), progress (*ruqi*), renewal of religion (*tasheeh al-mafaheem*) or *ijtihad* through activation of the Godly sanctions of Islam, free speech and work ethic (*'ala kull muthaqqaf an yudli bi 'amalahi wa qawlihi*). Al-Hamid affirms the importance of justice as “the foundation to endurance of nations civilisations” through a vicegerency that seeks good for all. In politics he repeats the idea that *shari'a* is the moral compass of all rulers if they are to establish the “just state” and succeed in reform.<sup>467</sup> He even goes as far as talking about a civil society, within an Islamic order, with “a set of values that champion freedom, justice, consultation in government, dignity, equality, and pluralism.”<sup>468</sup> This language can easily be mistaken for the language of ‘liberals’ or ‘pragmatists’. In its commitment to the values associated with moderation and democratic reform it refers to religion, and is not at all inclined to drop the religious framework. By contrast, a pragmatist would state all of these standards but without reference to *shari'a* or the divine order, implying preference for separation of religion and politics. For a puritanical trend it is the non-separation which informs the preferences for moderation, reform, progress, and patriotism. Shaykh Abdallah Ibn Sulayman Al-Mani', a top learned scholar, gives an example of how respect of the rules of the political game themselves, namely patriotism, is granted only as a condition of total “loyalty to religion and traditions,”

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<sup>466</sup> Al-Qusaybi, *'hatta la takuna fitna,*' p. 5.

<sup>467</sup> Abdallah Al-Hamid, “*Arrahbaniyya al-Jadida,*” [The New Priesthood] lecture published on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, p. 2.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

country, and values of “solidarity, participation, co-operation, sacrifice,” and “commitment to nationalist goals.”<sup>469</sup> Coming to the fore in a period which is in a way the twilight of a new era of confident but subtle challenge of the longstanding Wahhabi dogma, the puritanical trend of thought, like its pragmatic counterpart, produce the linguistic and moral devices of a discourse that is emerging as the hallmark of the new discourses propagating the values of two types of moderation. They differ in their use of language, concepts and the sources of these concepts. However, both commit to religion in different ways. Both to an extent are hinged on addressing the emergence of a serious threat to Saudi society waged through violence. So the state had no choice but to ignore or tolerate these discourses as on way of facilitating the induction of the Saudi populace into the values of moderation as a remedy against the danger of terrorism and even ‘fundamentalism’ as Al-Qusaybi himself refers to it. The endeavour to deepen the culture of moderation is easier when helped by two or more projects of moderation at a time when the forces of extremism is sufficiently strong and widespread. What is important to note is the endeavour for the pragmatists is concerned with inducting the public into the values of respect of difference and diversity, and the channels of facilitating their equal participation and competition. They do not see the necessity of justifying these values, and assume their tacit acceptance and inner good without having to refer to tradition or religion. For the puritanical trend, the values of moderation, be they pluralism, *muwatana*, inclusiveness or respect of the rules of the political game have their internal good in their moral standing and kinship with a the notion of a divine order seen as the ideal paradigm for re-enacting justice, God’s law, and reconciliation of the ultimate balance of the worldly and the mundane. Moderation for the pragmatists takes place when the values they champion are enacted. For the puritanical trend the socio-moral order of Islam contain within them the values and standards only through their enactment can moderation takes place.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The answer to questions about the change or ‘cultural shift’ in terms of ‘moderation’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has to be based on the evidence obtained through the analysis of the discourses of the pragmatist and puritanical trends of

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<sup>469</sup> Shaykh Abdallah Ibn Sulayman Al-Mani‘, “*Al-Jinisyya Wathiqat Ithbat*,” [Nationality confirmation]. Lecture given on 6 April 2011, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

thought. The two trends are a logical result to a long process of social revolution<sup>470</sup> of which ‘reintellectualisation’ is the most prominent feature today. The fact that there is different trends of thought that are entangled in public debate about reform in the Kingdom. What is important about this socio-political phenomenon is that it happens with the approval of the rulers and the religious establishment which is today very restrained even if it maintains hard-line positions in various matters of policy. It has accepted the King’s decision for women to vote and run in elections but it still opposes women driving. The main observation in relation to the two trends of thought discussed in this chapter is that they are agents of maturation, building on the foundation of struggles from the 1990s. They do this without confrontation either with each other or with the state, and definitely not with the hard-line religious establishment. This is in itself a moderating factor in the progression towards the Qur’anic concept of an “*umma wasat*” (balanced community) as the puritanical trend calls it. Both trends have inherited normative projects from earlier struggles which not only exercised little sensitivity to the context of time and place in which they sought to propagate their ideas and values. For instance, the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights used in the early 1990s Western concepts such as human rights at a time when reintellectualisation was not deep and the Saudi public was not ready to accept and deal with such ideas. It propagated for those ideas at a time of international conflict and the state’s involvement in the US-led war in Kuwait meant that it was not in the mood to consider such a discourse. However, they left behind a legacy of struggle which the pragmatists have developed in a way making it today acceptable. They propagate their values without being offensive to Islam. They stay away from issues of Islamic law and *da’wa* has no place in their vision of moderation and reform. In addition to this their values of dialogue and acceptance of difference can easily defended, when they need to, by referring to the Qur’an and Hadith in the same way done by Al-Qusaybi. When he needed to defend against accusation of secularism he spoke as if he were a religious figure with religious commitment. The puritanical trend does the same. They maintain only part of the normative framework of the *sahwis*, especially the non-radical branch of it.<sup>471</sup> They develop it though means that leave out *jihad*, and their choice of time cannot be better. The wave of terrorism in the Kingdom has made this Islamic concept

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<sup>470</sup> David G Edens, “The Anatomy of the Saudi Revolution,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1974), pp. 50-64.

<sup>471</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

controversial in public debates. They maintain the normative content of the *sahwis* before them, by committing to *shari'a* and *da'wa* and the Godly sanctions, all of which they place within monotheistic parameters. Regarding Jihad, they drop it building on the foundation left to them by the early *sahwis*' struggles for reform and moderation. For instance, al-Hawali started from the early 1990s preaching 'spiritual jihad', by making this superior to military jihad. As Lacroix quotes Al-Hawali's statement that "*jihad* by the sword is the type of *jihad* that has the least value...Anyone can play a role in it, in contrast to *jihad* by preaching where very few can be useful. The essential *jihad* on which we should concentrate our efforts, and without which any *jihad* is futile, consists of bringing people together, training them, educating them."<sup>472</sup> The puritanical trend has built on this foundation through which an earlier generation began to downgrade the role of jihad. Its followers today leave it out of their discourses. They even go further by creating a civil branch under monotheism that is compatible with the arena of *mu'amalat* (worldly transactions) in Islam. In this they rely on the Hadith that Muslims must perfect their worldly affairs and know them well for the management of the state, commerce or war. Under this civil arena they allow for equality of citizenship, and forms of inclusiveness. Al-Hamid even refers to the notion of a civil society so long as this is intended to advance the Godly order and the Godly sanctions, including good government, freedom. The synthesis attempted by the pragmatists is the only facet of their discourse that the puritanical trend finds objectionable: imitation of the West should not be given priority over seeking renewal and attributes of moderation available, according to them, in the socio-moral order of Islam.

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: 'MODERATING' SAUDI ARABIA

This dissertation set out to understand the dynamics of change in Saudi Arabia with focus on the question of 'moderation'. The contents of the previous chapters have attempted to analyse the complex discursive processes involved in the construction of a culture of 'moderation'. The discussion borders on another theme, not directly addressed in the thesis: the reconstruction of Saudi identity at a time when the Kingdom witnessed its worst crises since its emergence as a nation-state in 1932. The twin problems of the tragedy of 9/11 for which Saudi citizens are responsible, and the rise of radical forces using violence in the name of Islam have raised legitimate questions about the kind of 'culture', if not 'religion' and 'citizen', that lead to the perpetration of such acts in today's world.<sup>473</sup> The Kingdom did not experience such violence on its territory after the takeover of the Grand Mosque in 1979. Throughout the thesis the research agenda is indirectly about 'moderating' Saudi Arabia. Partly, this is done to respond to the Orientalist assumptions and generalisations that contribute to a library of knowledge about the Kingdom in which little has changed since the first Western travellers crossed the 'empty quarter' (Al-Rub' Alkhali) early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and since Orientalists began their investigation into the 'sultans of Arabia'.<sup>474</sup> The knowledge produced, whilst solid and impressive in parts, in other parts it typifies what Said attributes to all Orientalism: reductionistic through use of contrast, oversimplification and omission of local knowledge. More directly, however, the investigation in this thesis seeks to establish through reliance on local knowledge that there are moderating 'shifts' in Saudi Arabia, and this justifies new types of research and knowledge about the politics and society of the Kingdom. The local knowledge used here apart from reliance on my own authorial agency is to seek responses from Saudi activists and opinion-formulators about the norms, values, and concepts that define their conceptualisation of 'moderation'. The thesis has attempted to capture all of this through the local discourses and counter-discourses of 'moderation'. The fact that

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<sup>473</sup> John Sabini, *Armies in the Sand: The Struggle for Mecca and Medina* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

<sup>474</sup> Peter Brent, *Far Arabia: Explorers of the Myth* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), and another work by Robin Bidwell, *Travellers in Arabia* (London: Hamlyn, 1976).

there are diverse discourses is in itself a ‘moderating’ dynamic rarely noted by students of Saudi Arabian politics and society. The dialectic nature of these discourses is helping shift the political culture towards new areas where the language of politics is being changed, where the norms of political activism are themselves changing, and where new political actors are proving that there is nothing ‘static’ about Saudi Arabia. It is within a rapidly shifting context of norms of authority, power-relations, media and social dynamics, that these discourses must be understood. They point to the fact that understanding of the country’s Wahhabi creed itself requires innovative thinking, researching and writing. Wahhabism is without a doubt undergoing a process of revitalisation through a reinterpretation that seeks new norms of moderation, reform, and rules of political engagement for reordering of the religious and political. Al-Qaida, ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘radical forces’ cannot be taken as ‘texts’ for comprehending Saudi Arabia. It is from within a widely assumed conservative creed that discourses and counter-discourses are emerging in the Kingdom. The ‘texts’ this thesis has relied on are primary, obtained from Saudis who are amongst the agents of the ongoing and yet hidden socio-political revolution in the Kingdom. This thesis has aimed to show that the study of emerging trends of thought and social groups, operating within a religious context, cut across each of the big questions of tradition and modernity, nationalist identity and Islamic belonging, religious and secular morality and local and global norms.

The analysis in this thesis on society and socio-political discourses of moderation has shifted the focus from Islam to Muslims, and from the Islamic texts and dogmas to the actual space of Muslim political activism and its concepts and content that is today, according to James Piscatori and Dale Eickelman, producing increasing contestation and discourses from within. It is within this space that this investigation has sought to contextualise and understand moderation. Therefore it is within this space and the contestations and discourses led by various groups and projects that one can understand the continuous and discontinuous responses to the challenges of norm production, and renewal of identity, morality and politics. The themes that have directly and indirectly been used to provoke the discussion throughout the previous chapters are produced below to try to summarise as well as criticise some shortcomings within this thesis.

## 8.1 Researching ‘Moderation’: Gains and Limitations

The research conducted for this thesis aimed at gathering a set of data that allows Saudis to speak for themselves. The huge library on the Kingdom seems to be ‘texts’ about Saudi politics, culture, society, and people by non-Saudis. One objective was to seek local views and ideas not to discard or belittle what has been written by impressive non-Saudi scholars. The idea was rather to add to the field of scholarship analysis obtained from within Saudi Arabia in which Saudis tell their own ‘stories’ of politics, moderation, religion or reform. My task was not easy as the research environment posed its own challenges for gathering local views from the perspective of Saudis. There is still a culture of fear or perhaps distrust that stands in the way of easy access to the local data.

The research site posed difficulties, logistical, ethical, and of time. Despite the joy involved in doing the research and learning about one’s own country through this process of data gathering, my biggest difficulty was that I did not undertake the research fieldtrip in the research site I planned for initially: to explore moderation within the multiple *majalis* (the traditional male forums where politics, amongst other issues are discussed openly) of the Kingdom. Like the *majalis*, the research site I worked with was local, not related to the state, and supplied indigenous perspectives. The only difference was that the data obtained from the *majalis* would have been ‘natural’ and ‘direct’ not prompted through questions and interviews. Reliance on my own authorial agency and my own interpreting of the data is another set of ‘textuality’ that rendered the data not ‘pure’ and ‘natural’, and this is to an extent one of the weaknesses of the discourse analysis method. It is the price one pays for a solid qualitative methodology that is suited to interpretation of meaning through spoken and written texts. The texts I have used here do not lack ‘authenticity’. They lack the ‘naturalness’ I was hoping to obtain from observing and accessing discourse as it was produced without the help of my interference through questions. Nonetheless, by using the additional resource of written texts, I have acquired evidence that allowed me to verify continuity and discontinuity with the spoken discourse obtained from the informants who responded to my questions from the two trends analysed in this dissertation. One gain is that I was able to seek explanations for missing information or unclear statements. A key gain in this exercise was that I had additional non-verbal evidence to rely on in informing myself about the discourses I was investigating. I could see that my female informants spoke about gender inclusiveness with seriousness and passion when they wanted to state their

displeasure with Western models and explanations, and when at the same time they expressed full conviction about their own approach and understanding of the question of pluralism and the gender question. The benefit of having an additional behavioural and physical ‘language’ or ‘text’ easily makes up for the problem of ‘naturalness’ of information. This strengthened my own authorial agency in the full knowledge that the informants from the pragmatist and the puritanical trends knew what ideas to communicate with precision and clarity. This made me feel comfortable to be part of the ‘conversational’ process of explaining moderation, which I initially thought would have been better if unaided by my active role as an initiator of conversation and Q & A meetings.

## **8.2 Knowledge and Agency**

The idea of conducting this type of investigation was partly motivated by the desire to seek a ‘different’ perspective from the ‘doom and gloom’ scholarship available on Saudi Arabia. One’s evidence is part of one’s ‘text’ about the ‘story’ any social scientist wishes to write. Since evidence of knowledge is part of the ‘text’, I placed high importance on the agency involved in producing it. Saudis speaking about Saudi affairs was important to the investigation only as an equalising mechanism for allowing self-description and self-expression. The result was that the discourses analysed and the texts they produced proved to me the point about the relationship of knowledge and agency. Saudi texts by Saudi informants in this thesis are given agency, an agency they practically claim and struggle for through the pursuit of moral and political projects. This double agency is the best response to Orientalist ‘texts’ about Saudis that deny agency and self-expression. One shortcoming is the subjectivity involved in the production of meanings about the self – as opposite meanings written by the ‘other’, the Orientalist or the non-indigenous. Here the role of authorial agency plays the role of the fair critic. One way of doing this is through the mixing of sources, which is done in this dissertation firstly by seeking texts from two sets of discourses of moderation, and secondly by using interviews and written texts as a way to verify discursive compatibility or incompatibility. Part of highlighting this agency has been the aim to investigate moderation from non-statist forces, to show in some way that society is not totally inactive in Saudi Arabia. There is an element of empowerment involved not only in working on a topic that seeks to work with local knowledge, but also knowledge the

empowering feature of it is not in any wholly geared towards proving the superiority of Islam as past generations of Muslim reformers sought to do. The role of local knowledge here is to gain agency by not standing passively towards the inherited knowledge of Islam. In various ways, both the pragmatists and the puritanical trends of thought try to go beyond this passivity, which is a feature of Wahhabi theology since the creation of the state, and since the 1930s when the learned scholars became employees of the state whose chief role is to justify mundane political decision-making. The *sahwis*' texts and speeches of the 1980s and early 1990s were using inherited knowledge in the same way, literally to justify *jihad*, or to cast doubt about the Islamic credentials of the ruling class. What is noticeable in this new phase is the beginning of a process of rethinking inherited knowledge by validating it in new ways or seeking (the puritanical order) to go beyond it (pragmatists). The result of this is the creation of a foundation of struggles and innovative use of local knowledge that future generation of activists will feel encouraged to push the limits of independent reasoning or *ijtihad* even future. This is where one finds the first signs of a 'cultural shift' in the Kingdom. In this shift, gradualism is maintained, and this is the most enduring feature of Saudi Arabia's political culture.

### **8.3 Moderation as a Site of Contestation**

The two discourses which this dissertation tried to understand and interpret through discourse analysis are proof of the gradual emergence of a culture of discussion and debate what was not so visible in Saudi Arabia more than ten years ago. In this debate, which it is in its own right a form of moderating practice, there is pluralism, signs of ideological moderation and respect of the rules of the political game, the very three criteria used in this thesis to define and 'measure' moderation in the discourse of the pragmatist and puritanical trends of thought. In this side of debate, there is contestation at many levels: indirectly between the hard-line clerical class who have had monopoly on the interpretation of the Wahhabi creed and on its implementation as the ideology of the state and the creed of the people; directly between the pragmatist and puritanical trends of thought; and between all of these and the radical *sahwis* that still threaten social peace. The key contestation that this dissertation tried to analyse does not involve violence or exclusion. There is a kind of undeclared peaceful competition for the hearts and minds of the public amongst those who can be influenced by norms of

moderation, pluralism, inclusiveness, equality, dialogue and citizenship. The media has been one arena of this site of contestation through which the writings, messages and discourses of these two trends amongst others gets to be propagated widely. What is being contested however is not the normative socio-moral system of Islam but ways of adding to it (pragmatic trend) revamping (puritanical trend). It has been pointed out in the thesis that the latter are concerned with internal reworking of the existing religious dogmas to find and justify and propagate values and concepts considered amenable to moderation. This is largely an inward-looking exercise. It is a purely internal process of rethinking the Islamic heritage not sidelining it or moving beyond it. By contrast, the former are not concerned with finding meanings of moderation and reform in the Islamic repertoire. They try to go outside it to find meanings which are not all incompatible with Islam's political thought such as argumentation and debate, tolerance of difference. But other norms such as free competition and pluralism, which may involve party politics or gender inclusiveness, are borrowed from the Western practice of democracy and civil society.

The main feature of this debate is that there is the unchangeable core of Islam and that is the component both sides respect and do not wish to detach from too much. The pragmatists end up inventing a set of ideas and language the content of which may not always mention this unchangeable Islamic core. But at the same time these ideas and terms do not involve this unchangeable core in the contestation of norms they are trying to change. In comparison to them the puritanical trend uses this unchangeable Islamic core as a non-negotiable framework from within which they redefine existing norms. For them the normative nature of Islam is what allows them to involve themselves in contestation with ideas they have either inherited from a former generation of activists, moderate *sahwis*, or norms and ideas they consider to be challenging the normative system of Islam. The changeable component of Islam, the worldly transactions or *mu'amalat* is the space in which the puritanical trend tries to apply independent reasoning. They creatively divide monotheism into a Godly/spiritual realm and into a worldly/civil realm. The former is the realm where the unchangeable core of Islam is respected and made to be very sacred, not open to human interference or modification. The latter is the realm where they exercise inventiveness and creativity. Hence they drop *jihad* from their language by preferring not to get bogged down in theological and political debates that may not serve their project. This is a type of discourse in which they omit and not add norms and values. This omission of *jihad* is

their own way to speak about the kind of moderation they want: one that is based on civil norms that can be manipulated for the purpose of religious pluralism, equal citizenship under an Islamic state, institutions of *da'wa* and *shari'a* with civil use, to respectively serve enjoining the good (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf*) and implementation of a just system. The pragmatists do not mind using the changeable core of Islam or the area of worldly transactions to borrow norms and concepts from non-Muslims, particularly the West. By borrowing they are not challenging Islam, which they do not do at all. Rather their aim is to add to the resources of Islam norms that have served non-Muslim nations very well in the institution of moderation, democratic government and civil order. The result of this contestation is the emergence of two techniques. The pragmatists seem to use *synthesis* with outside norms in the civil arena as their method for putting in place a vision and a project for reforming society and politics in Saudi Arabia. The puritanical order, by contrast, use the method of *reformulation* of existing ideas inherited from Saudis before them to advance their project. Both methods are not difficult to legitimise since one does not offend Islam even if it does not use it as its main frame of reference. The second legitimises itself since its tools are local and return all justifications to Islam itself. It is their interpreting of Islam that may differ but not their challenge to Islam that is the novel element in this contestation.

Future research could potentially focus on this area of contestation, comparing and contrasting the techniques more profoundly and not so much the discourses which are the subject of contestation. This is where study of political Islam in general lacks innovative work that tells us about how religion and reason are involved in the rethinking of Islamic dogmas, and about how far synthesis and reformulation can go and the extent to which the Islamic philosophical tradition of *'ilm al-kalam* (dialectical philosophy) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) shapes this exercise. This would be a legal-philosophical inquiry into the politics of rethinking Islamic dogmas in relation to reform.

#### **8.4 Wahhabi Tradition and the Trend of Renewal**

The discussion in the previous chapters focused on seeking to understand two competing interpretations of moderation. This moderation's significance in the current Saudi context is directly attached to the prospect of reform and change in Saudi Arabia. The types of moderation discussed from pragmatist and puritanical trends add new

concepts, reformulate others, and have ‘modernised’ thinking on diversity, difference, pluralism and citizenship. However, this discussion is concerned with a broader picture about the potential for this culture of moderation and the new norms being invented within it to help reform in the Kingdom, politically and socially. Wahhabism has traditionally defined the normative parameters of the political, religious and the social. Through this discussion one is opening up room for venturing further into asking legitimate questions about the whole future of Saudi Arabia with or without Wahhabism, and Wahhabism with or without Saudi Arabia. This moment of ‘tradition-modernity’ tension, which is now more visible in the Kingdom and the neighbouring Gulf region than ever before, leads to questions about the viability of ‘tradition’ and under which forms, and the potential of ‘modernity’ (the innovations capable to lead to a coexistence of the old and the new to ensure viability of the cultural, political and social systems) and under which forms. The discussion in this thesis points to the onset of a process of pluralising the Wahhabi creed. This process is not new and its agents have been visible in the country’s political scene for some time now. They knew confrontation and accommodation with the state and with the Wahhabi theological establishment. We would not be at this point of time discussing moderation if it were not for the ground work done by these agents of reform, which Lacroix has documented very well.<sup>475</sup> The pluralisation of Wahhabism is in my view happening through the attempt by the new forces of reform to incrementally renew Wahhabism itself. The norms of debate, pluralism, inclusiveness and respect of the rules of the political game are in a way being invented as the means by which to initiate in this process not only with the rest of the lay public, but also with the religious establishment. This is the subtlety of contained in the two trends since the only thing standing between them and their vision is the Wahhabi hard-line clergy, and even some of this clergy are changing their own discourse, which is another area of future research that should be considered for me at least after this thesis. The substance of this pluralisation lies is to initiate a process of purging Wahhabism of its monopoly of deciding on all things religious, including those that touch on civil and political rights. This purge would primarily address those areas in the creed’s dogmas which are not necessary for dealing with worldly affairs: political parties, competition, acceptance of non-Wahhabi values, and greater role for women and minorities, including the country’s citizens from the Shi’a

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<sup>475</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, “Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia’s New Islamic-liberal Reformist Trend,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 345-365.

sect. This pluralisation is about reconsidering the whole heritage of *al-salafiyya al-islahiyya* (renewalist Salafiyya) of which Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhab was a leading innovator. Wahhabism has been reduced to maintaining the interpretations of the *salaf* (the religious ancestors) but without a reformist core. Through this pluralisation of Wahhabi dogmas the pragmatists, to a lesser extent, and puritanical trend, whose vision is based on religion, are advancing a project to change this creed from a closed set of dogmas into a set of values and norms with the inner resources to reform itself into a force of positive transformation, not a force holding back change. My own view, and based of my discussion and current research is that this is what is happening in Saudi Arabia: we are entering into a phase of Wahhabisms not a single Wahhabi creed. This is what I consider the puritanical trend to be: an innovative branch focused on civil struggle for reform from within Wahhabism itself. It is a movement pioneered by the moderate *sahwis* such as Shaykh Al-‘Awda, al-Hawali amongst other leading figures of reform loyal to the normative order of Islam. In this regard, I disagree with the proposition, including by Lacroix, that we have entered into a phase of post-Wahhabism based on the combination of state and social activism joining forces to isolate the creed. Lacroix is correct in noting that ‘revision’ of Wahhabism is taking place through the activism of what he calls “Islamoliberals”.<sup>476</sup> But his speculation on the era of post-Wahhabism is a bit too premature at this stage. The current phase is the phase of renewal from within, and Wahhabi learned scholars have trained and produced most of the voices speaking today on behalf for reform. It is through their own epistemological offspring and trainees that the Wahhabi clergy may be very gradually and subtly reinventing itself. In addition to this, the state has no autonomy to be able to detach itself from the ideology that gives it legitimacy. At least this is not possible now until the state finds an alternative repository of norms and ideal and resources and modes of legitimation to cut its ties with the Wahhabi clerical establishment, which up to now it has maintained alliance with for the purpose of political survival given the non-democratic nature of rule.

Neither ‘modernity’ nor ‘tradition’ in the Saudi context poses problems for change. In a strange way, it is the meeting of the two that is defining the current phase in the modernisation and transformation of Saudi Arabia, politically, culturally, and

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<sup>476</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, “Post-Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia?” CERJ, The Gulf Monarchies in Transition Colloquium, 10-11 January 2005, in <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/mars05/artsl.pdf>, access: 01/11/2011.

socially. Saudi Arabia may be a 'late-comer' to modernisation, but right now the substance that the pragmatist and puritanical trends are effecting in terms of change is a shift towards a zone of flexibility. This zone of flexibility, which is a site of ongoing contestation, involves association with religion (the puritanical) and detachment from religion (the pragmatists). It is a zone which is pushing the Kingdom towards having the resources of renewal. Without this renewal, including the substantive work being done by the discourses studied in this thesis to embed moderation as a permanent value in Saudi society, negotiation of the challenges of how to wed modernity and tradition will continue to weaken the forces of reform and strengthen the forces of extremism. This would be tragic for both religious and political reform without which the struggles currently conducted by forces such as the pragmatist and the puritanical trends of thought will not come to a happy fruition in the land where Islam was born. Where moderation, just government, reform from within and renewal, the way of Islam as the doctors of Wahhabism would readily argue, are concerned, the way of Islam has been to be guided by the pragmatic rule of *maslaha* (public good), which accords needs and necessities (*darura*) of the Muslim community, of which Saudi Arabia is an inseparable part, full agency. That full agency is today being tested in the pursuit of a public good and a Godly objective, the *wasati* or balanced community, a community today needing moderation not only as a necessity but also as an urgent public good.

## GLOSSARY

<b>Arabic Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>Tawheed</i>	Monotheism
<i>tawheed ruhi</i>	Spiritual monotheism
<i>tawheed madani</i>	Civil monotheism
<i>Ijtihad</i>	Independent thinking
<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic law
<i>al-dawla al'adila</i>	The Just State
<i>Khilafat Allah al al-ard</i>	Vicegerency
<i>ta'adduiyya Islamiyya</i>	Muslim pluralism
<i>Umma</i>	Muslim community
<i>tawheed ruhi</i>	Spiritual monotheism
<i>tawheed madani</i>	Civic monotheism
<i>shaqa'iq al-rijal</i>	Equality of women
<i>da'wa</i>	Preaching, call for Islam
<i>Muwatana</i>	Right to citizenship of Muslims and non-Muslims in an Islamic state
<i>shar'iyya</i>	Legitimacy
<i>wasati umma</i>	Just and balanced nation or community
<i>Wasatiyya</i>	Moderation; middle path
<i>Maqasid</i>	Divine sanctions
<i>Insane</i>	Human being, without stress of gender or colour
<i>ahl al-kitab</i>	Peoples of the book

<b>Arabic Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>ta'addudiyya diniyya</i>	Pluralism based on religious teaching
<i>la ikraha fi al-deen</i>	Non-compulsion in religion
<i>Ta'addudiyya</i>	Pluralism/ diversity
<i>Tanawwu'</i>	Diversity
<i>Tasamuh</i>	Tolerance
<i>Al-ra'y al-akhar</i>	Other opinion
<i>Al-ra'y al-mukhalif</i>	Opposing opinion
<i>Al-Hiwar</i>	Dialogue
<i>Niqash</i>	Calm debate
<i>'lakum dinukum wa liya dini'</i>	Freedom of religion
<i>Mujadalah</i>	Discourse and counter-discourse
<i>Munaqasha</i>	Debate
<i>Ikhtilaf</i>	The right to differ
<i>Mukhalafa</i>	Difference of opinion
<i>Hurr fima yudeen</i>	Non-compulsion
<i>Hurriyyah</i>	Freedom
<i>Ta'ayush</i>	Coexistence
<i>Tanafus hurr</i>	Free competition
<i>Jihad</i>	Spiritual struggle Holy war
<i>Umma</i>	Islamic community

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