

The State as an Identity Racketeer: The Case of Saudi Arabia

by

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Thesis

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The united front is enforced by the feelings of individuals, by their conviction that their own security depends on the security of their state – Kenneth Waltz, 1959

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General Declaration

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Declaration for thesis based or partially based on conjointly published or unpublished work

General Declaration

In accordance with Monash University Doctorate Regulation 17.2 Doctor of Philosophy and Research Master's regulations the following declarations are made:

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes zero original papers published in peer reviewed journals and zero unpublished publications. The core theme of the thesis is the instrumentalisation of religion in Saudi governance. The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the candidate, working within the School of Social Science under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin MacQueen, Dr. Pete Lentini and Dr.. Remy Davison.

Signed: Ben Rich

Date: 13/01/2016

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Abstract

Although the close link between the Saudi state and the religious revivalist movement commonly known as “Wahhabism” is well known, little scholarly effort has been made to apply social or political theory to better interpret this relationship. This thesis seeks to begin to fill this gap, asking the question “how has the Saudi regime employed revivalist Islam as a system state of legitimation?” and seeking to answer it through a synthesis of sociological and political theories proposed by Catarina Kinnvall and Charles Tilly

In adopting this approach, the thesis outlines a broad system of state “identity racketeering,” in which the Saudi state seeks to shape and stoke an exclusivist, Islamic identity in many of its citizens and then exploit the metaphysical insecurities intrinsic to this identity towards its own political ends. It demonstrates that this behaviour is not modern and has existed across the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, over three distinct periods of Saudi rule, under increasingly consolidated conditions of statehood. Throughout these periods, the system has displayed remarkable consistency, tarnishing political rivals of the regime as enemies of Islam, while emphasising the state’s necessity in ensuring the religious purity of the revivalist community.

The findings of the thesis are far from historical curiosities and continue to have important ramifications in contemporary times. Despite the advent of the oil era and the powerful welfare state this produced, efforts to maintain and expand racketeering efforts where possible remain a central tenet of the House of Saud’s governing strategy, most recently evident in its response to the Arab Spring. From the Islamic State, to women’s right to drive, to the subordinate status of the Kingdom’s Shi’a, the effects of such identity racketeering remains pervasive and profound at many levels of Saudi politics, society and security today.

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Introduction

For over half a century the political integrity of the Arabian Peninsula has been of central importance to the international community. The monarchies on the Persian Gulf's eastern coast have played a critical role in the global energy security equation. Chief amongst these states sits the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a country whose importance is not only the product of its integrity to the global economy, but also its strategic position in the region and its status as caretaker of Islam's two holiest sites. Despite the Arab Spring, climate change, falling oil prices and a wave of other emergent challenges that have led some observers to conclude that the Kingdom's importance has diminished, its stability will remain integral to western interests for the foreseeable future.

The concept for this thesis emerged over several trips to the Saudi Kingdom between 2009 and 2012. While working across the country, I was struck by the contrasts of modernity and atavism that pervaded the state and its society. Although all countries experience this paradox to varying degrees, the Saudi case was easily the most profound manifestation of it I have encountered. Widespread internet access is employed by regime-backed preachers to talk of the ideals of a community fourteen-hundred years old. Satellite television is used to broadcast images of royals paying tribute to idiomatic religious customs. Much of the state sector, theoretically designed to streamline the functions of the country, is weighted with religious departments aimed at maintaining traditionalist fidelity. The profits of oil sold to fuel global innovation, trade and development are employed to spread a fundamentalist Islamic discourse born of remote central Arabia to a global audience. The lists of such paradoxes are endless and increasingly my attention was drawn to the manner in which such evident dissonance endured.

In 2011 I was back in the country as the Arab Spring was unfolding across the region. As my Saudi colleagues surrounding me discussed televised images of Egyptian tanks roll towards Tahrir Square in Cairo in a small coffee shop in Jeddah, I was interested to listen to their discussions, particularly as they related to the legitimacy of grievances expressed in countries like Tunisia and Syria. What was immediately apparent was that, while many of those I spoke with supported the actions in Cairo and Tunis, there was little sense that the same dramatic action was required here at home. The state, while burdened with its fair share of domestic issues, was seen as a source for stability, continuity and the general good. Precisely what this good constituted depended on who you spoke to. For some, the monarchy was a guarantor of livelihood and success. Where the people of countries such as Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen had long languished under a chaotic system where one could never be sure they would be able to care for their family, the Saudi state had ensured that its people, while not necessarily living prosperously, could be assured that food would be on the table and gas in the tank. For a smaller number, the state represented

the lesser evil that protected against the predations of regional competitors and imperialists, primarily Iran. Still others saw the regime as a protector of the traditional ways, a barrier to ‘corruptive’ sectarian influences of the Shi’a that threatened the purity of the ‘Muslim’ community. For these individuals, the state remained a necessary tool to maintain religious homogeneity and certainty in a manner consistent with what they saw as the authentic vision of Islam articulated in the Koran and the Hadith and resurrected by reformist thinkers like ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. It was this last demographic that I became most interested in. While the first two groups were driven by issues of material security, the latter’s support for the state seemed to be the product of a desire to have their core identity as conservative Sunni Muslims uncontested by the existence of unorthodox groups claiming affiliation to their community. As the effects of the Spring grew over the next year, I watched the state increasingly focus upon rallying this third group through the discourse of its approved clergy, statements by senior officials and an array of other propaganda distributed through both new and old media. The skill and speed with which this tactic was implemented and metastasised throughout Saudi society led me to wonder how long it had been in the state’s repertoire and what latent sociological kindling existed for it to catalyse within. Although I had long been aware of sectarian issues inside the Kingdom, I had little concept at this stage of how the state’s behaviour during the Spring was just the latest manifestation of a long-standing tendency to securitise change, innovation and uncertainty for the purpose of building domestic legitimacy through a self-perpetuating racketeering system that offered protections against epistemic uncertainty during times of political crisis and threat.

Tyler defines legitimacy as “a psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just.”¹ Legal definitions aside,² a state’s ultimate legitimacy rests on an intersubjective notion held within a sufficient number of its subjects that its authority is the correct nature of affairs and that alternatives arrangements are less desirable. As Gilley puts it, “a state is more legitimate the more that it is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power.”³ Scholarship on the origins of the domestic legitimacy of the Saudi state has tended to focus on two major areas: the role of rentierism in buying the population’s support and the religious prerogative afforded by its close alliance with the revivalist ‘Wahhabi’ establishment.⁴ Although the former has been dealt with from a heavily theorised perspective,

¹ Tom R. Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (New Jersey: Princeton, 2006), 357.

² Kenneth F. Warren, "We Have Debated Ad Nauseam the Legitimacy of the Administrative State-but Why?," *Public Administration Review* 53, no. 3 (1993): 250.

³ Bruce Gilley, "The Meaning and Measure of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries," *European Journal of Political Research* 45, no. 3 (2006): 500.

⁴ For rentierism, See Matthew Gray, *A Theory of "Late Rentierism" in the Arab States of the Gulf*, vol. 7 (Qatar: Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2011).& Rolf Schwarz, "The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization," *Review of International Political Economy* 15, no. 4 (2008).& Giacomo Luciani, *The Rentier State* (London: Croom Helm, 1987). & Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* (Washington, D.C.: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2009). For religion, See David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*

consideration of the latter has largely been approached either historically or theologically, save a few notable exceptions.⁵ As al-Rasheed has pointed out, the tendency in scholarship to focus on the rentier munificence of the modern Saudi state has been at the expense of highlighting other schemes that have ensured the population's loyalty and submission.⁶ Despite its pervasiveness, there has been little attempt to employ existing political science or sociology frameworks to understand the Saudi regime's use of religion and religious movements as a means of political power. This has left a large and fertile gap in the existing literature that potentially offers new insights and explanations for the general historical continuity and stability of the Saudi state and the society it rules over. Given the current instability in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia's comparative political and social tranquillity, such a reconsideration of the status quo is long overdue.

This thesis poses the question "how has the Saudi regime employed revivalist Islam as a system of state legitimation?" In approaching this line of inquiry, it addresses a number of further sub-questions, including:

- Under what social, political and religious conditions did a Saudi state emerge?
- Why did the state adopt and maintain revivalism as a central tenet of its legitimacy?
- How long has the state undertaken this policy?
- What can existing social and political theory tell us about this phenomenon?
- Has the state merely been a passive service-provider to revivalist demands, or has it sought to shape these for its own ends?
- What negative side effects has this policy produced for the regime?
- What is the relevance of this policy today?

Through these various avenues, the thesis develops an understanding of revivalism as self-reinforcing system of political legitimation that emerged during the initial Saudi state formation process of the eighteenth century and has been reproduced throughout its subsequent history and has been integral to the regime's success. In doing so, the inquiry proposes a model of "state identity racketeering" that sheds new light on the causes of many of the regime's actions and the reasons for its long-standing success.

and Saudi Arabia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). & Jonas Otterbeck, "Wahhabi Ideology of Social Control Versus a New Publicness in Saudi Arabia," *Contemporary Islam* 6, no. 3 (2012). & for a critique of this dichotomy, see Pascal Menoret, *The Saudi Enigma* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 71-73.

⁵ See Afshin Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francais, 2013). & Tarik K. Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 5 (2013).

⁶ Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

0.1 The importance of formative norms in subsequent state behaviour

As Walter Russell Mead has shown in the case of the United States, the experiences of formation and subsequent early development have a profound influence upon the nature of a state's elites, its society, its relationship with its citizenry, its institutions, and its domestic and international behaviour.⁷ Quataert expands on this premise in regard to Russia, writing that:

If there is such a thing as the paranoid style in twentieth-century Soviet Russian politics, we have the Ottomans to thank, in large measure...For centuries, the Ottomans were the single most important foreign enemies of the Russian state; czars and sultans fought against each other in a seemingly endless series of wars between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, until both disappeared. These wars had a powerful impact on the evolution and shaping of the emerging Russian power: the Muscovite state's deep fears of powerful enemies on its southern (and western) flanks permanently marked its polity with a need to seek safety in expansion and domination.

Although time and circumstance almost inevitably serve to reshape the emphases and memories of such experience, the conditions of a state's birth and growth exert continual impact upon the nature and behaviour of its political and societal establishments, even centuries after the initial conception. This is not to say that such factors represent a mono-causal explanation for all subsequent actions, but rather that this period leaves a profound and lasting legacy that cannot be discounted in any robust analysis of a state. An understanding of such progenitor patterns can thus assist observers in comprehending the contemporary domestic and international behaviour of states, their policies and the manner in which they conceive and respond to certain issues.

The case of Saudi Arabia does not err from this assumption and indeed provides fertile ground for a demonstration of its effects. As Niblock points out "[the] conception of the Saudi state being shaped by the intertwining of temporal power and religious activism has remained constant in...[its] rule on the Arabian Peninsula [and] can be traced through all three historical articulations of the...state."⁸ A systematised understanding of the social power, purpose and political instrumentalisation of this symbiosis will likely assist in comprehending the Saudi state and its behaviour today.

0.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into nine chapters to address the twelve research questions. The chapters are sequentially grouped into three interdependent themes: the first (Ch. 1-2) establishing the historical conditions and gaps in understanding the run-up to the Saudi state; the second (Ch. 3-4) establishing a model to fill in such gaps; and the third (Ch. 5-8) applying the model to various periods of subsequent

⁷ Walter Russel Mead, "The Jacksonian Tradition and American Foreign Policy," *The National Interest* 58 (1999): 5-29.

⁸ Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francais, 2004), 23.

Saudi history throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries to highlight its ongoing relevance.

Before attempting to offer new insights into the formation and behaviour of the Saudi regime, it is necessary to outline the conditions under which central rule initially emerged and in respect to existing literature on state formation and development. Chapter one investigates the pre-Saudi environment of eighteenth century Central Arabia, focusing on the social, geographical, ecological and political dynamics and patterns of the region and their impact upon its societies. With these variables in mind, it discusses the applicability of existing theories of state formation to the Saudi case and highlights the need for alternative explanations to account for the rise of Saudi statehood.

Critical to analysing revivalism as a force for state legitimation is to understand the historic religious conditions surrounding the initial emergence of the state. Chapter two provides an overview of these, investigating the question of sectarian pluralism and the split between liberal and conservative interpretations of Islam in pre-state Central Arabia. It also provides an outline of the motivations and critiques articulated by the Islamic revivalist movement headed by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab as they related to the region. This discussion provides the reader with a general overview of the religious conditions to which the state would construct its legitimation strategies in response to.

With the histories of the two previous chapters in mind, the thesis then moves to understanding the deeper attributes and implications of Najdi revivalism as a sociological framework. Chapter three focuses on Catarina Kinnvall's theory of ontological security and religious nationalist movements. It showcases how such movements manifest and provide insulation against the existential anxiety produced by perceptions of social dislocation from change, innovation and plurality. It applies the model to the Saudi revivalist movement outlined in chapter two, demonstrating how and why this new form of mass religiosity helped to reorder the socio-political fabric of Najd.

After developing an expanded understanding of the sociological properties of Saudi revivalism, the next step is to understand how this was integrated into a wider framework of state building. Chapter four introduces the theory of state protection racketeering and employs elements of this to construct a new understanding of Saudi state legitimation. It begins by focusing on Tilly's model in its European context, arguing that many modern states have traditionally existed as enlarged criminal protection rackets that simultaneously generate threat and charge their citizens for protection from it. A key element of the chapter's discussion focuses on the concept of threat, arguing through Kinnvall's concepts that physical risk is but one of many issues a state may propagate and protect from. It then highlights the manner in which Saudi political and religious elites employ Islamic revivalism in a manner that displays broad consistency with Tilly's theory, ultimately presenting this behaviour as a positive feedback loop system,

which, at optimal performance, grants the state a profoundly powerful source of legitimacy that has enabled it to manage numerous crises throughout its history.

With a model of Saudi identity racketeering established, the next step is to see how such behaviour manifests in the real world. Chapter five begins this by seeking to apply the model to the context of the second Saudi state during the nineteenth century. It highlights the intrinsic flexibility of the system and demonstrates how the state has been able to employ it to delegitimise external threats to its hold on power by constructing them as a source of metaphysical anxiety for revivalists. It discusses the manner in which the state's identity racketeering shifted focus from internal groups to emphasise the ontological threats posed by external imperial actors during the nineteenth century to fit the political requirements of the regime. It also considers how the state's commitment to the racket can conflict with its own traditional security requirements and lead to internal tension, using the case of the Saudi civil war of the 1860s and 1870s to illustrate this point.

As the thesis will show, the state's racketeering efforts have not always produced positive result and have occasionally led to counterproductive outcomes. Chapter six discusses the most profound manifestation of this backfiring effect, moving into the twentieth century and looking at how the imperfect use of racketeering in the sedentarisation of Najdi Bedouin helped to produce the rebellion known as the *Ikhwan* Revolt. This chapter investigates the limitations of the state in implementing its identity racket vision and shows how the flaws and complexities in the system and the groups to which it is applied can cause it to harm those employing it.

A central claim of this thesis is that the racketeering system that emerged in the eighteenth century continues to have relevance to the modern Saudi state and is operated in tandem with other forms of state legitimation. Chapter eight considers the use of racketeering in the twentieth century, seeking to understand how the regime has continued to employ this strategy alongside rentierism and the use of oil to win the population's loyalty. The chapter looks at the complementary and contradictory nature of this relationship and discusses both its benefits and its unintended consequences, within the context of the Cold War.

Bringing the thesis full circle from its initial inspirations, chapter eight concludes the inquiry with a consideration of the use of identity racketeering during the Arab Spring. It showcases the manner in which the regime employed identity securitisation in tandem with fiscal co-option and the use of force to manage the crisis period of 2011. This chapter highlights the continued use of identity racketeering by the state today and the manner in which the legacy of the early formation period of the Saudi state continues to heavily influence contemporary regime policy.

0.3 A note on terminology

Throughout this research I employ the term “revivalism” to describe the ultra-conservative brand of Najdi-derived Sunni Islam propagated by the Saudi regime, rather than the commonly used “Wahhabism.” My decision behind this is twofold. First, the term “Wahhabism,” like the term “Christian,” conveys a sense of deification of the individual it refers to - in this case the Najdi preacher Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Although Wahhab is a respected figure in the revivalist movement, he is not seen as a revolutionary prophet in a manner similar to Christ or Muhammad, but someone who sought to re-establish the pre-existing doctrine of Islam. Indeed, such a term contradicts the very essence of the revivalist movement that adamantly opposes worship of figures other than God, a practice seen as a form of forbidden innovation that interferes with the oneness of the deity. Secondly, the term “Wahhabi” has long been employed as a pejorative by critics of the movement and Salafi Islam more generally, both locally and international. I have yet to meet an individual who subscribes to the movement’s tenets and identifies as “Wahhabi,” with “Muslim” or “*Ahl al-Sunnah*” (people of the book) being the most common titles. As a result, I feel the term “revivalism” serves to adequately encapsulates the unique characteristics of the movement and differentiate it from the 52 percent of Saudi Sunnis that do not identify with its doctrine today,⁹ while at the same time not being politically charged or alluding to normative judgements.

0.4 Methodological Approach and Limitations

The methodology employed in this thesis consists of three steps: the aggregation of a pool of historical data, the development of a theory that appears to best account for gaps in that data, and the interpretation of that pool with the theory.

To formulate a pool of data for theoretical analysis, I have applied a hermeneutical approach to an array of literature on Saudi history, state formation, development, politics economics, society and governance that spans the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I have sought to find any intersubjective trends in the scholarship that relate to the state’s employment of religion as a tool of legitimation. Given that very few sources focus heavily on the mechanics of this dynamic, the collection of data has been intrinsically piecemeal and required considerable theoretical interpretation to fill in the blanks. Data has been drawn from primary source material, such as the writings of various prominent Saudi *ulema*¹⁰ and the notes of western explorers and travellers to the region.¹¹ Given that such documents rarely focus on the larger dynamics of the state, however, more attention has been dedicated to an array of histories written over the past three centuries, as well as a wide range of academic journal articles and book chapters. The most frequently cited sources in this regard are those works by Alexei Vassiliev,¹²

⁹ Mehrdad Izady, "Demography of Religion in the Persian Gulf," (Columbia University 2015).

¹⁰ Including Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Sulayman ibn Abdallah, Abdallah Abd al-Latif, Hamid ibn Atiq and Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz.

¹¹ Primarily John Lewis Burckhardt, Thomas C. Barger and St John Philby.

¹² Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

Madawi al-Rasheed,¹³ and David Commins,¹⁴ all of whom have produced thorough and extensive histories of the Saudi state, without which this endeavour would not have been possible.

In building a model of analysis, I have combined elements of models proposed by Charles Tilly and Catarina Kinnvall, the minutia of which is detailed in chapters three and four. I was first exposed to Kinnvall's work on religious nationalist movements during a course on political violence in 2010 and its relevance to the Saudi case was immediately apparent to me. Curiously, little research has applied the model to its original subject matter, which seems an obvious gap, given the rise of religious nationalist extremist groups over the past three decades. A considerable impediment I have struggled with in relation to the model is the inability to quantify the insecurities it alludes to in historical figures and movements. With no way of interviewing such individuals I have had to try and discern such tensions from the words of elites such as Abd al-Wahhab, which understandably presents a number of issues. Nevertheless, the research operates with an assumption that ontological insecurity is an underscoring component of essentially all religious revivalist movements, which all seek to re-establish an idealised past, implying that the current state of affairs is undesirable. Kinnvall's theory provides useful explanations for the intersubjective appeal of such movements that establish a series of consistent social and political explanations for agent recruitment that remain applicable across individual case studies. While staring at the trees, she remains very much aware of the wider forest.

The decision to employ Tilly's theory emerged after several discussions with my supervisor, who pointed out early in my candidature that much of what I was attempting to describe in the Saudi state's instrumentalisation of religion mirrored state racketeering theory. Although explicitly a response to European state behaviour, the model's concept of contrived threat as a tool maintain and expand the power of the state showed considerable promise in the context of a country that commonly employed sectarianism to sure up its own position domestically. Upon reflection on Tilly, the main obstacle I encountered was the notion of threat itself, rather than the mechanics of how it was instrumentalised. Being aware of the Saudi state's relatively bloodless history¹⁵ and having read the discourses of those individuals responsible for crafting the public zeitgeist, it was apparent that the notion of physical threat was nowhere near as prominent in the Kingdom's case as in the European experience. I largely surmounted this issue by returning to Kinnvall, with the notion that threat does not have to reflect an empirical reality, or even the perception of physical risk, but merely uncertainty. By substituting Tilly's very physical threat with this broader conceptualisation, the applicability of the model became increasingly apparent as I read through the various histories of the state.

¹³ See Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). & *Contesting the Saudi State*. Amongst many others.

¹⁴ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*.

¹⁵ And I do emphasise the term 'relatively' here.

It should be stressed that the model proposed in this thesis is constructed from and applied to a generalisation of information necessary to encompass a complex and wide-ranging set of events spanning nearly three hundred years. This is not to say empiricism is precluded, but to emphasise that reductionism is a necessary evil. As a result, the intricacies of individual case studies often focus on only the most relevant types of data for the sake of clarity and legibility and to focus on the underlying racketeering dynamics at play. This is not undertaken with revisionist or apologetic pretence, but simply seeks coherence in an inherently intricate and often incomprehensible web of social, cultural and political interactions and interrelationships, even if such order is largely artificial.

0.5 The Limitations of Theoretical Models

In describing what an ideal theory of democratisation should do, Teorell establishes several features that provide a general framework with which to guide similar efforts in other areas of social and political science.¹⁶ Following this example, an adequately functioning model should at once be general enough to explain the long term drivers, endurance and effects of the racketeering dynamic it identifies, while at the same time retaining applicability to individual case studies and events in Saudi history. In short, the model should be expected to have both structural and local applications and implications. A generalist model of this nature should not be expected to explain every elite decision and pattern of state behaviour encountered, even in situations where they would be predicted to. As Mearsheimer argues, even the best social science models typically only function as predicted in about three out of four situations.¹⁷ Kaplan reiterates this notion, summarising the problem as:

[Social]-science theories are gross simplifications of reality; even the most brilliant theories can be right, say, only 75 percent of the time. Critics unfailingly seize on any theory's shortcomings, damaging reputations. So the truly ambitious tend to avoid constructing one. (Parentheses mine)¹⁸

Given the inherent complexity, agency and reflexivity of the subject matter, expecting a general model of social or political science to function with the same fidelity as a *pareto-optimal* theory built in the hard sciences – itself often a utopian dream – seems unrealistic. At the same time, when encountering such outliers, the model must be flexible enough that it can accommodate confounding variables that override its effects. Given the aforementioned degree of subject complexity, the model should not overstate its application and should allow for the existence and interplay of other social, economic, political and psychological models to fully account for state and individual elite behaviour. In the Saudi case, one is immediately aware of the powerful influence of both rentierism and the use of hard power to ensure

¹⁶ Jan Teorell, *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972-2006* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁷ John J Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (WW Norton & Company, 2001).

¹⁸ Robert D. Kaplan, "Why John J. Mearsheimer Is Right (About Some Things)," (2012), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/01/why-john-j-mearsheimer-is-right-about-some-things/308839/>.

regime legitimacy and survival. The model should remain internally consistent, while at the same time being able to accommodate and account for external confounding variables that might obfuscate the observability of such continuity. Finally, and most importantly, the components constituting the model, as well as its impact, must be empirically observable and verifiable, both in its outcomes and in the wider cause and effect relationship that it aims to describe.

0.6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to provide a new understanding for the manner in which the Saudi state employs religious revivalism to maintain its power. Generally speaking, this does not fundamentally challenge the existing literature, but sheds new light on dim and largely unexplored corners and add a new dimension to the common understanding of the Saudi state. Although not constituting a singular explanation variable for Saudi state formation, development and success, it stands a new piece in the wider puzzle. Its findings and implications are far-ranging, holding particular bearing for those interested in issues relating to future security policy, social and educational reforms and political confrontation inside the Kingdom. In a time when the authoritarian power structures of the Middle East, so often taken for granted, appear to now be much reduced in their capacity, understanding the region's enduring success stories is more important than ever.

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Chapter 1

“Going nowhere, meaning nothing”: the absence of latent forces for statehood in a pre-Saudi Najd

The Saudi state first materialised as a result of the conquests waged by peoples of the Najd territory of Central Arabia that began somewhere between 1744 and 1746.¹ At its maturation, the nascent kingdom came to represent the first coherent authority in the region since the fall of the al-Akhaydir dynasty in the 11th century.² Despite developing in roughly the same period as many of the European nation states, the Saudi state’s developmental process and the factors that drove it stood in stark contrast with the Western experience. In particular, the physical security conditions of Najd shared little with Europe. Whereas the latter was characterised by contested borders, large populations, intense resource competition and long-term, wide-scale conflict between powerful international actors, the former was a remote landlocked territory where competition beyond the tribal level was a relative unknown and external interest was best characterised as indifferent. Although the Ottomans maintained a presence on the Arabian Peninsula during this time, Constantinople’s desires primarily pertained to securing the eastern and western seaboard as trade conduits and fending off encroachments into Arabia by competitive imperial actors, such as Portugal.³ In addition, the Sultan retained a ceremonial guardianship over the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, in the Hejaz that generated prestige for the both himself and his empire vis-à-vis the broader Muslim community.⁴ While Ottoman garrisons were present on the Najdi periphery, there was never a serious attempt by the imperial power to penetrate into the Peninsula’s interior prior to the House of Saud’s rise. Lacking regional competition and with imperial attitudes generally apathetic towards it, Najd was insulated from external affairs and introverted in its own petty struggles waged between isolated oasis and Bedouin communities.⁵ Larger conflicts raged on in other parts of the Middle East and surrounding areas during the first half of the eighteenth century, but Najd remained physically remote from their effects; at worst, experiencing them in economic depreciation through declines in pilgrim traffic.⁶

The development of a centralised Saudi state remains distinct from historical trends of Hobbesian European state-building where Charles Tilly has argued that “[war] made the state, and the state made

¹ 'Abd Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works* (London: I.B. Taurus and Co, 2009), 58.

² Uwaidah M. al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State* (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 2002), 140.

³ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 3.

⁴ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 8-9.

⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 6.; al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*.

⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 7.

war.”⁷ Under this “bellicist”⁸ view, the state as an expansive institutional bureaucracy with an growing monopolisation of violence within a defined territory was rationalised as part of a method through which to maximise the protection of a domestic client polity against predatory international actors. A decade after its proposal, Tilly took this theory further, suggesting that, at its core, the state effectively develops and functions as a criminal protection racket. By providing a constituency with a degree of material security against real or imagined threats, a state is able to extract material recompense and loyalty to ensure its continual function in this capacity.⁹ This, he argues, broadly accounts for the rise of European statehood in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a series of interlocking actors waged a perpetual high-intensity competition to resist external encroachment and annexation and retain existential autonomy. As Hintze argues, the emergence of a consolidated France as a response to pressures emanating from central Europe served as a catalyst for the rise of numerous surrounding states in the region, as political actors scrambled to counteract this nascent hegemon.¹⁰ Any state that emerged in a system of non-states would, by default, have an important competitive advantage over other units. But Saudi Arabia in the 1740s was not France and at its birth did not face other states or the types of pressures that stimulated the emergence of a consolidated France. Put simply, no political predators threatened Najd in the seventeenth century, and as a result, there was no force to drive a process of state formation in a manner similar to the European experience.

Arguments of statehood as the outcome of “automatic process” do not account for the rise of Saudi statehood either. Scholars such as Childe have argued that innovations in agricultural techniques and technology and the associated abundance of foodstuffs historically have acted to sophisticate economies and passively led to the emergence of state entities.¹¹ According to this line of argument, the proliferation of foodstuffs unleashed by enhanced farming techniques enables the emergence of dedicated craftsman classes that are able to apply themselves entirely to the pursuit of their professions without having to worry about participating in agricultural subsistence. Increased professionalisation leads to the increased diversity and multiplicity of technical aptitude in broader society and facilitates further development and innovation, as well as population expansion. The theory argues that at some point this newfound growth and development begins to create powerful incentives for a corresponding political entity to organise and regulate the expanding society, and that ultimately the state emerges as the natural solution to such a dilemma.¹² As with bellicist theories, however, automatic process falls short in accounting for the

⁷ Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.

⁸ Cameron G Thies, "War, Rivalry, and State Building in Latin America," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (2005): 452-55.

⁹ Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschermeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169-72.

¹⁰ Otto Hintze, "The Formation of States and Constitutional Development: A Study in History and Politics," in *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze*, ed. Felix Gilbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 174.

¹¹ V. G. Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (London: Watts, 1936).

¹² Robert L. Carneiro, "A Theory of the Origin of the State," *Science* 169, no. 3947 (1970): 733.

development of Saudi statehood in the eighteenth century. While Najd maintained agrarian practice locally, the harsh and erratic environment prevented sustained cultivation in a manner that could generate an abundance of foodstuffs. Furthermore, while indigenous dedicated craftsmen did operate in the region, they had done so for hundreds of years previously with no semblance of state or statist institutions emerging.

Some scholars have criticised the Euro-centric focus of state-building literature when viewing the Middle East more generally and have proposed alternative explanations based on region-specific dynamics including rentierism, energy security, and decolonisation.¹³ Schwarz, for example, argues that many states in the Middle East have developed functional and institutional idiosyncrasies that set them apart from other states, due to their abundance of exportable natural resources that negates the need to extract income from the domestic polity.¹⁴ The absence of such necessity is said to have subsequently shaped strong security apparatuses and welfare components in these same states,¹⁵ while at the same time leading to poor representative political structures and population insecurity during resource busts. However, while this region-specific theory – and others like it - may go some way in accounting for late-state development in the Saudi case, it bases its core assumptions on processes unique to the twentieth century and views the Saudi state discreetly in its third incarnation after 1932. The claim that “war-making activities in the Middle East have often not increased the state’s infrastructural power, but to the contrary led to a decline of state power”¹⁶ is demonstrably wrong when looking at the massive territorial expansions achieved by the Saudi state during the 18th century, whose borders have broadly endured to this day. Thus, modern-focused theories discount the key role of the prior two manifestations of Saudi statehood as, at best, having only marginal input on the third. Correspondingly, there has been a general downplay of the continuities and ongoing formative processes that streamed between the three manifestations of the Saudi state. Such theoretical compartmentalisation often seems to be implicitly rationalised as a natural response to clear divisions between pre-modern (first and second) and modern (third) state types. While this delineation certainly fits in other cases of Middle Eastern state formation and development, for Saudi Arabia it appears awkwardly artificial and imposed. One cannot, for example, understand the religious discourse that serves as a cornerstone of modern regime legitimisation without understanding its origins in eighteenth century Islamic revivalism, as well as how it persisted and evolved as a central idiomatic tenet

¹³ For examples of Middle East-specific models see Schwarz, "The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization." & Timothy Luke, "Dependent Development and the Opec States: State Formation in Saudi Arabia and Iran under the International Energy Regime," *Studies In Comparative International Development* 20, no. 1 (1985). & Thierry Gongora, "War Making and State Power in the Contemporary Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 03 (1997).0

¹⁴ Schwarz, "The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization."

¹⁵ Eva Belin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," *Comparative Politics, Ph. D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York* 36, no. 2 (2004): 12.

¹⁶ Schwarz, "The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization," 608.

in Saudi statecraft for the following two and a half centuries.¹⁷ This necessitates a longer historical conception of Saudi statehood, that views today's as part of an ongoing process of state-formation that began over 250 years ago. With this in mind, then, it is clear that theories which focus on the dynamics of the twentieth century Middle East to account for Saudi Statehood will be, by their very own ephemeral nature, unable to fully explain its existence.

Before addressing the unique traits of Saudi state development, however, one must recognise why it does not conform to previous models. Although it is easy to problematise the applicability of Middle-Eastern statecraft theories based on their relatively modern focus, those borne from European experience do not suffer the same limitations, as they are modelled on events that, in many cases, occurred in a similar timeframe to the Saudi phenomenon. Schwarz suggests that these Euro-centric theories roughly adhere to one of four general assumptions to explain the origins of state:

- i. Dynamics of economy, economic competition and problems associated with class and the means of production within a given territory.
- ii. Global economic interactions and the place of the territory within that global economy.
- iii. Domestic shifts in elite political power and crises that emerge from such alterations.
- iv. International conflict, threat and power disparities between regional actors.¹⁸

This chapter will focus on understanding the conditions of pre-state eighteenth century Najd in relations to these four explanatory variables, developing an understanding of the social and political conditions that the Saudi state emerged in. In particular, it will argue their inapplicability as explanatory variables for the emergence of the Saudi state in the mid-1700s by examining the economic, social, political and international dynamics in and around Najd at this time. Such an understanding will pave the way for the articulation of an alternative and Saudi-specific model of state development, to be discussed in subsequent chapters.

1.1 Sources on Pre-Saudi Najd

While many authors have written on the history of post-1744 Arabia, focuses prior to this period, particularly on the Najd region, are rare. This is partially due to the absence of primary source material, such as first-hand accounts written by locals and travellers to the region. As al-Juhany, a historian and native of the Kingdom, states: "the greatest obstacle to the study of pre-[Saudi] Najd is the lack of local sources on the subject ... [and] the use of such scarce and diverse [material] calls for particular care when

¹⁷ For the one example of an author looking at this process see Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir."

¹⁸ Rolf Schwarz, "State Formation Processes in Rentier States: The Middle Eastern Case," in *Pan-European Conference on International Relations* (The Hague: Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2004), 3.

forming conclusions”¹⁹ Michael Cook has noted that only seven substantive chronicles of pre-revivalist Najd written by people of the time exist; of which only one has been published publically.²⁰ Of these, only one - the works of ibn Mansur - makes a serious attempt to transcend a simplistic and wholly descriptive methodology in approaching its subject. Even this work is borderline, however, as it was composed around the time of the first major Saudi conquests of the broader Peninsula in 1786. Cook summarises the limitations of the pre-revivalist scholarship, stating that:

All-in-all, this material reflects an annalistic tradition of the most primitive kind. In such-and-such a year, the chronicler will tell us, so-and-so was killed, the people of this settlement attacked the people of that, such-and-such a lineage migrated from here to there, there was a drought, a certain scholar died.²¹

He further elaborates on this, citing the frustrations of the late-eighteenth century revivalist historian, ibn Bishr, in his attempts at constructing a more substantial analytical account of the social, cultural and political idiosyncrasies of the region prior to the rise of the Saudi state:

We all know, he (ibn Bishr) continues, that fighting has been the order of the day since the time of Adam; what we want to know in any given case is what the fighting is about, its background, and the interesting things that happened in the course of it – and of that, he concludes, the annalists tell us nothing.²²

The rudimentary nature of primary source material is a natural epistemological impediment for developing a fuller understanding of the nuances of pre-revivalist society in Najd. Complicating this further, numerous contemporary authors²³ have noted the prevalence of revivalist scholars in chronicling the histories of pre-Saudi Najd. Such writers, they argue, have typically emphasised a narrative that seeks to cast the al-Saud and the al-Sheik in the best possible light, while emphasising the ‘heretical’ nature of Najd before the establishment of the Saudi state. Cook challenges this assumption, however, arguing that although “these later chroniclers reproduce their sources with useful amplifications [they] do not radically alter the character of the transmitted material.”²⁴

Although the bias of the few authors who have attempted to detail Najd’s past remains a contentious issue, the limitations of sources on the region has meant that histories of its social, cultural and political complexities prior to 1744 almost always appear as small chapters or prefaces to broader works on the Saudi state. Little work has attempted to tackle the subject of pre-Saudi Najd in its own

¹⁹ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 21-22.

²⁰ Michael Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd," *Studia Islamica*, no. 76 (1992): 164.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For examples of such critiques see al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 24. and Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 10.

²⁴ Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd," 165.

right. A few exceptions exist, however, with al-Juhany providing the most in-depth account in his history of pre-Saudi Najd.²⁵

1.2 Geographical and Climatic Conditions of Najd

Positioned between the sand-sea deserts of the al-Nafud, the al-Dahna and the Rub al-Khali to its north, east and south, Najd is a landlocked territory in central Arabia situated atop a plateau that slopes eastwards from the Hejazi Mountains in the west. Geologically, Najd is primarily composed of sedimentary and igneous formations, the result of a continuous cycle of volcanic and sedimentation activity²⁶ occurring largely between the Precambrian and the Miocene periods. With an average elevation of 1219 metres, the landscape of Najd is characterised by arid, rocky flatness, punctuated by clusters of low mountains, small, sandy deserts and a crisscrossed vascular system of wadi valleys. Despite the presence of these features, fluvial activity remains seasonal, with no permanent river or stream systems to speak of. Water, the ever-scarce capital of desert existence, is found in shallow natural aquifers at various intervals across the region. The presence of these persistent sources of water in the surrounding desert clime led to the establishment of numerous sedentary agrarian oases communities dependent upon their output, such as Burayda, al-Kharj and al-Diriyah.²⁷ Access to water for drinking, crop irrigation and pastoral activities remained an ongoing uncertainty in Najdi life during the pre-modern period and was a constant source of inter-communal conflict.²⁸ Lack of water foretold the extinction or decimation of many settlements, with oasis wells not always reliable in their yields. Arable soils are found most abundantly around the Wadi al-Rummah, the Wadi Hanifa and the Wadi al-Dawasir, which helped facilitate the emergence of settlement clusters situated in the vicinity of these valley systems.²⁹ Temperatures oscillate from intense dry heats over fifty degrees centigrade in the summer, to stark colds approaching zero during the winter period. Rainfall is limited and irregular, with several-year droughts not uncommon.³⁰ When it does occur, rain can produce catastrophic flash floods of mud down wadi channels that inflict destruction on towns constructed in their vicinity.³¹ Although not a factor prior to the twentieth century, little oil is found in Najd, and the Peninsula's vast petroleum resources are concentrated to the east, centred on al-Hasa. What mineral resources are present in the region were not discovered and exploited until well after the establishment of the modern Saudi state in 1932.³² The combination of climatic extremes, resource scarcity, and lack of coastal or river access all served to contribute to the profound isolation of the Najd

²⁵ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*.

²⁶ John McMahan Moore, "Primary and Secondary Faulting in the Najd Fault System, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," (Jeddah: United States Department of the Interior, 1979), 1-4.

²⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 30-31.

²⁸ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 57-59.

³¹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 11.

³² Fouad al-Farsy, *Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi Equation* (Guernsey: Knight Communications Ltd, 1990), 2-10.

from its surrounding environment in the Arabian Peninsula. This was further amplified by its encirclement by even more inhospitable environments along three of its four borders. Although urbanisation did exist in the eighteenth century Najd in the form of sedentary oasis communities in places like Riyadh and al-Diriyah, environmental factors and climatic extremism seriously constrained settlement expansion, the development of more sophisticated systems of governance and the extension and collectivisation of identity beyond the local level. Mere survival became the central focus of many Najdis during this period, with the concept of consolidation and expansion of the disparate communities a distant pipedream. As Vassiliev argues, “[the] isolation of individual oases and tribes as independent economic entities, together with the vast size of the peninsula, where islands of human life were separated by the deserts (sometimes spreading over hundreds of kilometres), acted as factors for [sustained political] decentralisation.”³³

1.3 Economy and trade

Due to harsh climatic conditions and persistent political instability, the pre-Saudi Najd economy was always limited when compared with regional contemporaries in Iraq and Hejaz. Trade was conducted largely within the local and regional spheres, with only a small amount of truly ‘international’ economic interactions. Locally, trade took place both within and between townships and the Bedouin populations and appears to have been based primarily on the piastre currency of the Ottoman Empire. Given Najd’s remoteness from Constantinople and Cairo, however, defacto value of goods was often measured through camel, rather than coin, as the former had a functionally utilitarian role in desert existence.³⁴ Sedentary agrarian villages provided the nomadic pastoralists with farmed goods, such as wheat, dates and maize. In return, the townships acquired pastoral goods including butter, cheese and various breeds of livestock from the Bedouins.³⁵ Settlements also possessed limited industry and were able to produce small quantities of textiles, firearms, jewellery, metalwork and other assorted products.³⁶ The indigenous skilled labour sector remained small, however, in part due to the extremely low social status given to craftsmen, who were viewed by the wider society as barely above slaves.³⁷

Despite the presence of local artisans and smiths, the Najd’s production capacity was always meagre in terms of both output and sophistication when compared with trade epicentres in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Najd’s regional isolation and tiny, disjointed communities acted as natural impediments to the development of institutions such as guilds that could facilitate greater levels of production and technical aptitude in the local populace.³⁸ The limits of economic output were illustrated by the complete lack of warehouses in the region; with such few goods in circulation storage space was appears to have been easily

³³ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 58.

³⁴ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 33-34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

accommodated in the merchant's own home.³⁹ In spite of the limits of Najdi craftsmanship, however, the economic interdependence of the Bedouins and the oasis townships facilitated an ongoing "intense commercial exchange"⁴⁰ of rudimentary goods between the two groups, creating a degree of inter-communal symbiosis necessary to their mutual survival.

Farming was conducted by a sedentary peasant class in the vicinity of the oasis communities, where there was access to favourable amounts of water and arable soil. Due to geographical conditions, agrarianism was localised and relied upon primitive technology and practices that hindered further economic development. Numerous crops were cultivated, but by far the most prized was the date palm, which provided a readily-consumable foodstuff that could be consumed raw with no preparation. This factor was particularly pertinent in the desert environment, where even the boiling of cooking water could prove a perilous drain on resources key to survival.⁴¹ The isolation of the individual townships of Najd and the scant natural resources of the desert environment prevented the development of large irrigation projects and facilities. Vassiliev points to this factor as crucial in stymieing the emergence of centralised government in the Najd prior to the Saudi state, as there was no need to administer or provide security to any form of farming infrastructure shared by multiple communities.⁴² Indeed, the dispersion and limited load-bearing capacity of arable land in Central Arabia breaks down the applicability of Karl Wittfogel's "hydraulic hypothesis" of state building. In this, Wittfogel argues that groups of farmers in arid environments will often forgo individual autonomy in the pursuit of large-scale irrigation works. The corresponding multi-tiered bureaucracy that develops in the administration of such shared infrastructure can subsequently form the nucleus that facilitates the emergence of a state, as individual parties reap the benefits afforded by collective organisation and gain increasing competitive advantage over their neighbours.⁴³ Simply put, however, in the case of Najd, such large-scale and interlinked projects were simply not environmentally viable.

The limited resources of Najd meant that the interdependence of the local economy between town and nomad was not sufficient to sustain the lifestyles of its inhabitants and necessitated trade with the outside world. Commercial relations were strongest with close and accessible neighbours like Mesopotamia and al-Hasa on the Peninsula's eastern coast, but also existed with Syria, Yemen, Oman and Hejaz. The primary export of the Najd was the camel and, to a lesser extent, Arabian horses. In return, it imported textiles, sugars, coffee, frankincense, arms and rice; which was a vital, yet problematic crop in water-scarce central Arabia.⁴⁴ Raw materials for local industry and artisans were also imported, including

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴¹ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 11.

⁴² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 31.

⁴³ Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 18.

⁴⁴ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 13.

sulphur, copper, lead and various other workable metals.⁴⁵ External trade routes were purely terrestrial, as Najd lacks littoral zones and rivers in which to establish ports with access to the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. Goods moving in and out of the region were perpetually insecure due to the endemic raiding culture of the region's nomads and the complete lack of a centralised policing authority capable of reigning in such activity. Trade convoys in and out of Central Arabia would inevitably cross the territories of multiple Bedouin tribes, requiring the paying tributes to local clan chiefs and hiring indigenous guards and guides to ensure their cargo's security. Even if such accrued costs could be met, this did not necessarily guarantee the safe passage of merchant convoys, which were still often attacked and plundered by competing tribal groups.

Raiding formed a foundational pillar of the Najd economy. Considered a noble undertaking, particularly amongst the Bedouin, it was most successfully adopted by camel breeders. Following a successful foray, the robust mounts of these nomadic pastoralists allowed them to retreat deep into the surrounding deserts where they were shielded from the reprisals of sheep herders, caravans and sedentary townfolk by the rugged environment itself.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it was also practiced with less finesse by the lesser nomads involved in goat and sheep rearing, as well the sedentary oasis populations. Al-Juhany notes that of eleven recorded instances of raiding against sedentary populations during the eighteenth century in Najd, eight were either undertaken exclusively by rival oasis communities alone, or in an alliance with Bedouin tribes.⁴⁷ The small number of instances referenced by this figure does not seem reflective of the heavy emphasis placed on raiding in the majority of historical accounts of Najd. This leaves several distinct possibilities, suggesting that either raiding on townships was actually quite rare and largely occurred between individual Bedouin communities or against caravans; that records of the majority of settlement raids were lost, poorly maintained, or simply never existed; or that historical narratives uniformly overemphasise the practice itself. Given the prominence of raiding in numerous unrelated historical accounts of the region, combined with the relative absence of day-to-day record keeping in the oasis settlements during this period, the former two possibilities seem more likely. By many accounts, raiding tended to be a relatively bloodless affair; the success or failure of which was often predicated on a pragmatic cost-benefit analysis of capabilities by both parties, rather than actual violent conflict. The explorer John Lewis Burckhardt recounts this in his writings on the Arabian interior, noting that in instances where raiders demonstrated a clear numerical superiority to their quarry, resistance was typically minimal.⁴⁸ In cases where a target was able to pose a stalwart defence, however, they could frequently drive off three times their number of raiders in short order with only minimal effort. Within the raiding

⁴⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁷ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 146.

⁴⁸ John Lewis Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys*, vol. 1 (A.J. Valpy, 1831), 133.

enterprise, death on either side was an undesirable outcome, as it could pave the way for blood feuding⁴⁹ and facilitate an escalation of violence and an extended period of between conflict between the raiders and their former quarry.⁵⁰ In instances where deaths occurred, the tribes involved would often quickly seek some form of resolution through payment to the side which had accrued the loss to avoid such an outcome.⁵¹ Long-term, high-intensity conflict was a difficult venture to sustain within the harsh conditions of the desert environment. It also undermined the benefits of raiding, as it often required the expenditure of the very profits that had been reaped through marauding. The best interests of raiders were served when they could extract goods from their victims through intimidation and a restrained use of force. In this regard, raiding struck a fine balance where too little violence could render its perpetrators impotent, while too much could remove all benefit to the practice. As a result, while the raiding dynamic of the Najdi economy generated a persistent level of conflict in the region, there were also cultural dampeners in place that prevented it from spiralling out of control and creating persistent open warfare and mass casualties.

Slavery existed in Najd, but was not a major cornerstone of the economy. Unlike in Hejaz, which was a regional hub of the Arab slave trade, owning slaves in Najd was largely the domain of the rich and powerful. Slaves were largely concentrated in southern Najd, around Riyadh and neighbouring sedentary communities, although they were found in other areas, like Shammar, in limited numbers.⁵² As with other extraterritorial economic practices, Najd's isolation – and in particular its complete lack of littoral zones – precluded it from a heavy interaction with the human trafficking market concentrated to its west.

Pilgrims out of Iraq, Iran and Oman also had input on the Najd economy. Travellers to Mecca and Medina would typically enter Najdi oasis townships to purchase supplies for their caravans and sell exotic wares. Movement through the interior necessitated economic engagement with the Bedouin tribes, too. Similar to merchant caravans, pilgrims in these areas would be required to pay tribute to the local nomadic authority and could hire escorts to ensure their safe passage through the harsh environment.⁵³ Declines in pilgrim traffic resulting from external wars, diseases and other calamities would inevitably damage what was effectively the Najdi version of the tourism industry, a factor that could often usher in periods of subsequent economic downturn in the region.

Trade flows in and out of Najd appear to have facilitated some degree of emigration of the indigenous population. Najdis were known to travel to other parts of the Middle East in search of work due lack of local opportunities. Diaspora communities formed across the region, and were particularly

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 45.

⁵¹ Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys*, 1, 133.

⁵² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 49.

⁵³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 9.

concentrated in the Levant.⁵⁴ Although al-'Uthaymin makes reference to this extroverted movement of Najdis, however, he does not mention their return at the end of such sojourns. Historical accounts suggest that local custom allowed individuals to leave Najd for up to twenty years, but there appears to be little record of either the number of such individuals, or whether their behaviour within society was altered upon their return.⁵⁵ Despite the lack of precise details, however, Najd society does not appear to have experienced a great deal of cosmopolitanisation as a by-product of this phenomenon. In contrast to contemporary global migrations, which have tended to generate increasing levels of cultural, political and economic interchange between the communities they travel between,⁵⁶ Najd society appears to have remained highly insular and introverted throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, much as it had prior to this period. The concept of a culturally isolated Najd is further supported by the fact that Muhammad al-Wahhab's revivalist movement manifested as a response to perceived deviances in Najdi cultural practices, the origins of which were said to be local. At least initially, the movement had little focus on the world outside of Najd,⁵⁷ except to deem it as a place of chaos, undesirable for the faithful. Indeed, the revivalist vision only appears to have shifted to the external world when Saudi conquests began attracting the ire of the Egyptian Ottomans under the leadership of the Albanian Muhammad Ali in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵⁸ The outside world's negligible impact on the social norms of Najd during this period suggests that either the locals were extraordinarily resistant to the kinds of cultural encroachment that coincide with cosmopolitanism, or that these processes were, in reality, simply too insignificant to create any sort of noticeable impact on the traditional behaviour of the indigenous population.

The economy of Najd remained only tenuously linked to the external world during the first half of the eighteenth century. Trade routes were perpetually insecure, leaving the landlocked territory only intermittently linked with the larger regional economic hubs in Hejaz and Iraq. The harsh environmental conditions and limited technical aptitude of the dispersed populace left industrial, agrarian and pastoral capabilities small-scaled and localised. These economic activities functioned much as they had over the previous centuries, with little innovation and only the most rudimentary infrastructure supporting them. In combination with the perpetually fractured and competitive political environment, the persistence of these factors throughout the first half of the eighteenth century left the prospect of development, networking and technical expansion of the Najdi economy structurally stifled. Ultimately, it was to require

⁵⁴ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 13.

⁵⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 35.

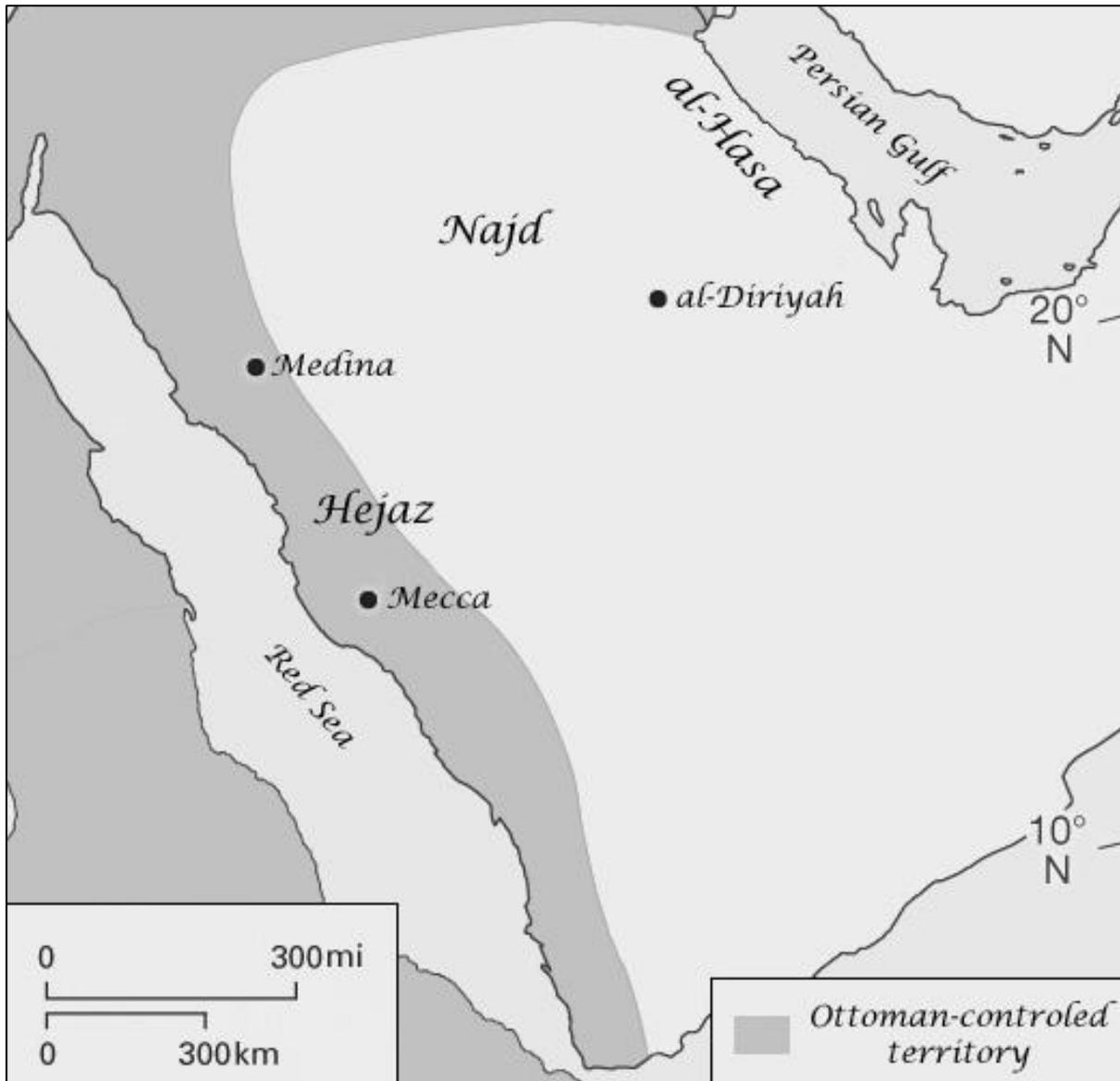
⁵⁶ Richard Sennett, "Cosmopolitanism and the Social Experience of Cities," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 42-48.; Allan M. Williams, "International Labour Migration and Tacit Knowledge Transactions: A Multi-Level Perspective," *Global Networks* 7, no. 1 (2006).; Sami Zubaida, "Middle Eastern Experiences of Cosmopolitanism," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁷ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 103.

⁵⁸ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 781-87.

a dramatic paradigm shift generated as a by-product of expansive Saudi statehood to break the cycle of regional economic isolation of Central Arabia. Even then, development in Najd was to remain limited when compared with other areas of the Peninsula for centuries to come.

Figure 1: Ottoman holdings in the Arabian Peninsula in the decades immediately preceding the first Saudi state.



Original map source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

1.4 Settlement Politics and Power Hierarchies

The mechanisms of power and social control in the Najd during the first half of the eighteenth century can be best characterised as ephemeral and limited in reach. As had been the case for over half a millennia previously, the overarching political system of Najd was one of default anarchy, instigated by an abject lack of central governing authority. Here, a range of settled and nomadic groups constantly vied with their neighbours in an effort to gain greater access to the scant natural resources and build political prestige and clout internally and amongst themselves. Locked in a perpetual state of competition, the limited interests

and capabilities of these various actors in their micro-principalities acted to form something of a defacto system of checks and balances; restraining the capacity of any one individual group to emerge hegemonic. This fragmentation was further amplified by the apparent absence of an overarching 'macro' identity structure, such as nationalism, that could serve to transcend localised loyalties and develop broader socio-cultural cohesion amongst the scattered Najdi population. Without such a unifying force, the brief, fluctuating and fragile system of alliances that manifested between the various communities appeared to be the largest form of mobilisation possible prior to the rise of the Saudi monarchy. By its very nature, however, it could never be expected to endure for long and certainly never showed any signs of truly galvanising the individual groups into a single, larger unit.

As previously mentioned, the eighteenth century Najd political system had lacked any pretence of a central ruling authority for over 600 years, leaving it a self-help system for the individual townships and nomadic tribes that existed within it. These individual groups either had to operate autonomously, or form fractious alliances with those whom they temporarily shared a common interest or enemy. Within this paradigm, the political models and methods of social control in the Bedouin tribes and the sedentary communities differed starkly. While the former adopted a structure of semi-democratic decentralisation and sub-unit autonomy, the latter roughly adhered to tendencies of authoritarian feudalism.

The method of rule in the oasis township was one of petty tyranny, emanating from one or a small collection of elite families.⁵⁹ The sedentary nobility often achieved its privilege through a combination of genealogical 'blueblood' pedigree and the conquest of a concentration of natural resources over which a community could viably be established. Rule was subsequently maintained through threat, coercion, taxation and the provision of some level of material security and order to the ruled populace by the autocrat that established a limited social contract between the two parties. Al-'Uthaymin summarises this functionalism, stating "[the] chief [purpose] of the ruler was to lead his men in the defence of the town or against other towns of villages in raiding for booty. In times of peace, it fell to him to carry out judicial rulings and sentences."⁶⁰ Rulers exercised what Mann would term as a limited 'despotic' form of power; wherein control was maintained through direct and physical means in the immediate vicinity of a tyrannical figure, who could exercise near-limitless dominance over the subjects within his reach.⁶¹ What such petty sheiks lacked, however, was infrastructural power in the form of institutional influence over the nature of the societies they ruled and the corresponding legitimacy such pervasion imparted. Institutions simply did not exist in the Najdi social environment, where the loose bonds of tribal affiliation and the extremely limited oasis-centric structure of the township constituted the largest form of social

⁵⁹ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 140-41.

⁶⁰ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 16.

⁶¹ Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 25, no. 02 (1984): 188-90.

organisation. Without a larger social consciousness, as well as the appropriate instruments to influence such, the means to shape broader social, cultural and political attitudes was largely inaccessible to local rulers. Notwithstanding dramatic events, the oasis leadership *could* generally maintain their positions at the head of the community, but ultimately lacked the ability to alter the nature of the society they ruled over. This inadequacy of elites in this area naturally acted to curtail any notable shifts in the social order of the particular settlements in peace time. Furthermore, the limited, despotic nature of elite power made their ability to foment the emergence of institutions capable of spurring this process negligible.

Conflict within the ruling elite was an ever-present feature of oasis town life. As was common throughout much of the world during this period,⁶² assassination and suppressive violence were expedient means of realising political power and ascendancy for those with enough ruthless ambition. An example was found in the case of ibn Saud's predecessor, Zayd ibn Markhan, who, assisted by ibn Saud, slew the ruler of al-Diriyah, Muqrin ibn Muhammad, and assumed the role of sheik in his stead in the mid-1720s.⁶³ The perpetual cycling of leadership likely contributed to the endemic uncertainty hard-wired into the security environment of Najd. Indeed, ibn Saud's length of rule prior to his adoption of the revivalist creed was exceptional in this regard, as he reigned for 18 years unchallenged. Al-Uthaymin argues that this consistency of leadership, led to a period of regional stability and prosperity in the vicinity of the al-Diriyah township, allowing it to grow militarily and become increasingly resistant to raids by strong nomadic tribes like the Banu Khalid.⁶⁴ The importance of consistent leadership in the Peninsular environment was highlighted in the subsequent dynastical successes and failures of the al-Saud and their effect on the Saudi state itself. Here, expansion, conquest and stability seemed to have occurred more readily under long-standing rulers, whereas political infighting and conflict over succession often harkened dark portents for the state's prosperity and even its continued survival, as seen in the disintegration of the second state in 1865. In the immediacy, however, al-Diriyah's relative strength was to be highly fortuitous for the realisation of Abd al-Wahhab's vision upon his arrival in the desert township.

Taxes appear to have been levied from the agrarian sector during harvest time, but the elites also accrued wealth by raiding rival townships.⁶⁵ Here, the sheik could improve his legitimacy, prestige and authority by passing on portions of the booty to his subjects. By this method the accrual of wealth and the concurrent increase in living standards for many sedentary Najdis became aggregated to their continual support for the autocratic ruler. The ruler was also expected to provide protection to his people from this same threat. Naturally, this led to an environment of "endless raids and counter-raids between rival entities."⁶⁶

⁶² Martin Kramer, "Nation and Assassination in the Middle East," *Middle East Quarterly* (2004): 59.

⁶³ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁶⁶ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 111.

Thus, the role of the ruling elite of the sedentary Najdi communities during the eighteenth century roughly correlated with two of Tilly's four key axioms of state functionality:⁶⁷ protection of a client population and the extraction of means by which to carry out this process from this same client. Tilly's first two criteria, war and state-making, however, remained largely beyond the capabilities of the oasis ruler. The neutralisation of external rivals was generally beyond the abilities of any individual autocrat, problematising the prospect of a war-making capability similar to that exercised by what were to become the European states. Although raiding was viable at times – serving as a punitive measure and a means of external resource extraction and social consolidation - the permanent elimination of a neighbouring township as a security threat was a rare occurrence in Najd. Although a particularly vicious raid could devastate a neighbouring rival temporarily, the townspeople and their leaders would almost inevitably rebuild and re-establish themselves in fairly short order. As individual actors, Najdi towns simply lacked the latent resource and organisational capacity to wage the level of warfare necessary to utterly ruin their opposition, while simultaneously preserving their own limited and delicate prosperity. In such a harsh environment, extended conflict was, in almost all cases, internecine. In this manner, the prospect of hegemony was structurally restrained.

Persistent conflict within the township elites also prevented the establishment of the sorts of institutionalised leadership and bureaucracy structures necessary in the state-making and administration. Rather than facilitate a centralised and strong leadership through the elimination of political rivals⁶⁸, the ever-present climate of mistrust, personal ambition and betrayal only served to foster its own perpetuation, leading to an endless cycle of Machiavellian volatility. Here, the concept of a broader unification movement emerging across the disparate actor townships was remote, as the assurances of any one particular leader could quickly be rendered meaningless with the oft-unpredictable ascension of their replacement.

1.5 Bedouin Political Structures

Contrasting the autocratic method of rule of the oasis communities, the nomadic Bedouin tribal units displayed a considerable amount of social and political decentralisation. In part, this was due to the individual autonomy of the subunits that collectively made up the tribe and the correspondingly-diminished role of hierarchy in general day-to-day existence in Bedouin society. Tribe represented an overarching umbrella structure under which operated in diminishing order: group, division, clan and finally, family.⁶⁹ While these same divisions existed in settled communities, they were diluted by the social

⁶⁷ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 181.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ al-Farsy, *Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi Equation*, 194.

heterogeneity and economic interdependence; with tribe, in particular, appearing to have played only a limited role in the oasis life.⁷⁰

Within the Bedouin system the subunits of clan and family often had to rely on themselves for day-to-day survival. Herding in Najd was, by the very nature of the land, a mobile process that required the constant repositioning of camel and goat flocks onto sparse, viable pastures. This coincided with cyclical seasonal shifts, and rostered agreements of grazing rights were often established between separate groups to prevent overstressing the fragile ecosystem. Such arrangements also helped to minimise inter-communal conflict by establishing a normative system that helped limit inter-pastoral competition. In most cases an individual plot could not hope to service an entire tribe and necessitated dispersion of tribal subunits over a much larger area. The persistent mobility of Bedouins also meant that ownership of static natural resources by elites, the norm in many oasis communities, was limited. In particular, Burckhardt noted that wells in the Najd interior were often considered the property of the entire tribe, to be used by whoever was in their vicinity at any particular time without quarrel.⁷¹

In such a stratified society, interspersed across large swathes of arid terrain, the capacity for the tribal chieftain to provide security for his subjects in a manner similar to the leaders of the sedentary populations was severely inhibited. This most profound security threats in Najd were the sudden and dramatic raids waged between the various communities. These required an immediately response that was difficult to muster out of the makeup of the Bedouin system due to its natural dispersal. In lieu of a centralised, immobile community and a lacking permanent, professional security apparatus, the tribe's ability to swiftly mobilise in defence of its own subunits was limited. Further compounding this was the nature of inter-communal conflict in the Najd. This limited the notion of a social contract within the tribal system, correspondingly diminishing the legitimacy and influence of the elites and limiting their ability to exercise raw, despotic power. Tribal fidelity and identity were also largely subordinate to the immediate family and clan encountered in day-to-day existence.⁷² The consequence of this was that the authority exercised by the tribal head appears to have been less the political tyrant and more the esteemed elder. With an inability to provide the same protections found in the oases, the sheik could not behave excessively and count on the continued support and tolerance of his people.

The legitimacy of the sheik's position over the Bedouin tribal community was principally based around personal prestige. This status was largely achieved through admirable wisdom, generosity, fairness and heroic deeds, rather than fear, violence and intimidation. In his travel notes, Burckhardt observed that the sheik possessed:

⁷⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 37.

⁷¹ Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys*, 1, 228.

⁷² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 41.

[No] actual authority over the individuals of his tribe; he may, however, by his personal qualities obtain considerably influence. His commands would be treated with contempt; but deference is paid to his advice, if the people regard him as a man skilled in public and private affairs. (Parenthesis mine)⁷³

Adding further that:

[A sheik's] prerogative consists in leading their tribe against the enemy; in conducting negotiations for peace or war; in fixing the spot for encampments; in entertaining strangers of note, [but] even these privileges are much limited. The [sheik] cannot declare war or conclude terms of peace, without consulting the [clan chiefs within the tribe]... [his] orders are never obeyed, but his example is generally followed. (Parenthesis mine)⁷⁴

Such comments suggest that although the sheik was a figure of eminent respect and influence, he could never truly find himself in a position that mirrored the oasis despots.

The sheik initially achieved his position through popular election by tribal notables. This factor informed his subsequent actions which, by necessity, displayed a large degree of conformity to populist will. His behaviour could not exhibit the tyrannical style of the oasis leadership, lest he be quickly overthrown by a disenfranchised constituency and replaced by another able to strike a more noble character. The power of the sheik was also constrained by the existence of the *aqid*, a kind of elected military leader of the tribe to whom the sheik became subordinated under during periods of ongoing conflict.⁷⁵ Although with democratic support the sheik possessed the ability to initiate hostilities with other communities, such a commitment also represented the cessation of much of his authority. This suggests that in many cases, it could be in the best interest of the tribal leader to deter the desire for inter-communal conflict, especially if he suspected an *aqid* of being particularly ambitious. At the very least, this meant that the distribution of power within the ruling authority of a Bedouin tribe adopted a bi-polar format that was determined by the individual community's conflict status. If one is to take this further and argue that the clan elders collectively represented a third power bloc, then the distribution becomes even more multi-polarised.

Although theoretically sheikdom was open to anyone of sufficient merit, in reality, the position was the purview of a defacto nobility within the tribe. Economic largesse, typically enabled by the elite's superior wealth, was essential to attaining the status necessary to be a viable candidate for tribal leader. The nobility also sustained its privileged position via exclusivist 'blue blood' genealogies and the associated prohibitively high bride prices that no common camel or goat herder could hope to afford. By exploiting

⁷³ Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys*, 1, 116.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 51-52.

these cultural norms the Bedouin elites maintained their status, creating entrenched inhibitors to class mobility and ultimately, potential rivals.⁷⁶ Thus, while certainly a more egalitarian society than their settled counterparts, the Najdi Bedouin still maintained a defined structural division between elite and commoner. Indeed, travellers to the region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Constantin François Volney, often noted the marked opulence and physical health of the well-to-do Bedouin when compared to their underclass contemporaries.⁷⁷

Despite incentives to behave in a favourable manner towards the general population of the tribe, the sheik still was forced to adopt pitiless strategies in managing his political rivals. Similar to the Byzantine machinations of the oasis communities, the Bedouin tribal leader found himself enmeshed in a permanent “ruthless power struggle...accompanied by intrigue, murder and internal divisions.”⁷⁸ Victory in such competitions was not anything approaching absolutist authority seen exercised in the sedentary townships, however. Rather, having temporarily curtailed his opposition, the sheik could expect to enjoy an enhanced degree of social capital and influence within tribal policy and strategic outlook. Ultimately, this meant that the capacity for any one leader in the Bedouin unit to stimulate any real lasting structural change appeared very remote.

Further limiting the authority of the Bedouin elites, the structure of tribe itself was, under certain circumstances, malleable for participating groups. Al-‘Uthaymin provides an example of this in which the al-Mahashir clan switched its allegiance from the Banu Hajir tribe to the Banu Khalid during the latter tribe’s rise to dominance in the al-Hasa region to Najd’s east.⁷⁹ Although genealogy was and continues to be extremely important in the social transactions of Arabian society, it clearly did not prevent the alteration of a nomadic subunit’s tribal ties.⁸⁰ If a group became disaffected with the state of affairs and the method of rule they lived under, there was no formal structure in place, such as citizenship, to prevent them from switching their affiliation. Nevertheless, social and cultural pressure would have certainly dissuaded such an act and it is clear that given the persistence of the major tribal groups over many centuries that such shifting of affiliations were not overly common. The degree to which such migrations were normalised remains unclear in the historical literature, but the existence of such notable precedent suggests that the Bedouin tribal unit was one with a degree of latent instability built in to its foundations. Given their independent way of life, the fact that the participants in the tribal structure could opt out of that same grouping should the elites choose to pursue a radical shift in policy, such as the settlement the tribe itself, seems largely unsurprising.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁹ al-‘Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 19.

⁸⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 56.

Little political structure existed above the two types of dispersed power hierarchies of Najd in the centuries prior to the Saudi state's birth in 1744. With the Ottomans disinterested in the Arabian interior, the only actors with the potential to impose any form of broader authority in Najd were its regional neighbours to the east and west. The first of these were the Meccan Sharifs in the Hejaz, who were able to extract tribute from a number of sedentary oasis communities in Najd.⁸¹ Failure to meet such requirements would result in punitive measures against transgressors in the form of pillaging raids. The rulers of Mecca also staged expeditions into Najd that appear to have been conducted outside of the enforcement of the tribute system, the first of which recorded was conducted in the late sixteenth century by Hasan Abu Numay. Such encroachments were aimed at the seizure of property and raw materials, with eighteen noted over the course of the seventeenth century and ten in the first half of the eighteenth.⁸² Even at the apex of their power, however, the rulers of Mecca never made any serious attempt to annex Najd or establish a formal governing bureaucracy there to institutionalise their influence. Thus, while the Sharifs maintained a degree of influence in central Arabia, their authority was limited and maintained by posing a disciplinary, rather than existential, threat against the indigenous population.

The Banu Khalid Bedouin were the second regional actor to exercise a degree of political influence over Najd during the eighteenth century. This large tribal group had previously wrested control of al-Hasa from Ottoman hands in the late seventeenth century.⁸³ By the 1730s it had displaced the Meccan Sharifs as the primary source of external influence in Najd. In contrast to the tenuous existence of many Najdi Bedouins, the Banu Khalid maintained a relatively prosperous way of life due to their control of the rich agricultural lands of the eastern provinces through their subunit clan, the al-Humaid.⁸⁴ Despite their custodianship of the developed agrarian sector of al-Hasa, the Banu Khalid preserved their traditional nomadic lifestyle, eschewing mud brick for tent and camel. Rather than settling and directly cultivating the land themselves, it appears that the tribe was content to garrison oasis townships in the region and extract bountiful tribute from their already-settled peoples.⁸⁵

The wealth afforded by the verdancy of al-Hasa does not appear to have influenced the raiding habits of the Banu Khalid in Najd during their period of regional prosperity. But where the Meccans had targeted sedentary communities during their incursions into Najd, the al-Hasan chiefs generally focused their efforts on Najd's nomads. Al-Juhany suggests a number of possible causes for this, including pastoral grazing competition, as well as the desire to maintain trade routes through Najd, as attacks by Najdi

⁸¹ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 4.

⁸² al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 141-44.

⁸³ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 14.

⁸⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 43.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

nomads on merchant caravans traveling to and from al-Hasa appear to have been particularly prevalent.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the Banu Khalid's raids were not solely arrayed against their nomadic competitors, and villages could still fall prey to their attacks. In 1733, for example, sources note an instance in which the tribe led a foray against al-Diriyah where it sustained unusually heavy casualties thanks to a robust defence, presumably mounted by Muhammad ibn Saud.⁸⁷ Despite such exceptions, the Banu Khalid appear to have maintained largely-peaceful relations with the sedentary occupants in Najd and were known to form temporal alliances with individual Oasis communities, likely based around mutual trade relationships.

The Banu Khalid's presence in al-Hasa also brought a degree of prosperity in the Peninsula's east, as they made an ongoing effort to ensure security along the trade routes in and out of the province, which itself was a littoral zone with commerce links to locations as distant as India.⁸⁸ Despite this, the Banu Khalid's power over Najd was still limited by interest and the tribe made little attempt to institutionalise its authority or annex the region. Although there was economic interplay between Najd and al-Hasa, Central Arabia was more of a go-between linking regional economic and religious centres than an actual serious trading partner. As a result, the Banu Khalid appeared content with a status quo in Najd that was ensured in the first half of the eighteenth century by their military power and temporary alliances with various individual communities in the region. Although the Banu Khalid may have theoretically possessed the latent capability to conquer significant portions of Najd, like the Meccan Sharifs before them, they lacked the incentive to pursue such a course.

Pre-Saudi Najd displayed a degree of diversity in the composition and idiosyncrasies of the various power players operating within and around its periphery, but the overarching political and power hierarchies nevertheless shared an important consistency: limited reach and ephemeral authority. Whether nomadic or settled, domestic or external, no single actor involved in the affairs of the region appeared to possess the ability or the will to assert centralised rule over the region. This was the product of several factors. Distance between individual settlements and the roughness of the terrain that separated them stymied the prospect of the emergence of an effective and unified institutional bureaucracy. Communications between individual actors was at best limited and at worst non-existent, thanks to a complete absence of developed road infrastructure within Najd to link groups together. The population's dispersal and low density also deterred the emergence of a potential hegemon within the system of competing tribal and settle groups by making prolonged conflict and conquest costly and beyond the capabilities of many communities, where manpower was inescapably finite. For many, if not most, the prospective venture of a drive for unification was simply too perilous a journey to embark upon. The

⁸⁶ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 144.

⁸⁷ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 53.

⁸⁸ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 154.

hold of individual leaders over their constituents was all-to-often temporary and easily disrupted in the perpetual petty struggles that characterised the Najdi aristocracy. Rule was either exercised through a tenuous despotism, or through a type of privileged democracy, as was the case in the Bedouin units.⁸⁹ Either way, the power of the leader lacked an infrastructural component in the form of embedded institutional penetration, a structural factor which made it endemically temporary. Inter-communal competition was largely conducted between immediate neighbours over the scant resources offered by the harsh environ.⁹⁰ Indeed, the minimal resource base helped to ensure “that there was no significant change in the size of, or roles played by, different social groupings,”⁹¹ a factor that was to continue in Arabian society even after the birth of the Saudi state. The constant competition over resources helped to keep the eyes and minds of the local Najdi leaders, as well as the broader indigenous population, fixed in their immediate vicinity. With such convoluted local politics, and having to contend with the relentlessly harsh and unforgiving environment, a broader unification of individual actors was neither practical, nor likely to address the types of insecurity confronting Najdi society. Absent some form of dramatic reordering of the centuries-old regional competition dynamics, the prospect of a regime of centralised control emerging internally in the Najd in the eighteenth century appeared extremely unlikely prior to the alliance struck between Ibn Saud and Abd al-Wahhab.

For the regional power players looking in to Najd during this, influence seemed best exercised through limited engagement with the region, rather than direct conquest. Although short-term incursions into the region and temporary alliances with its sedentary communities could prove profitable for the Banu Khalid and the Meccan elite, the exertion of larger amounts of economic and political capital to establish a more direct form of institutional rule over the region made little sense. Regionally remote, strategically negligible, possessing minimal resources and populated by scattered and individualistic peoples who posed no overt security threat outside their own territories, Najd was an empire-builder’s nightmare, in many ways akin to Afghanistan during the same period. While certainly exceptional in their capabilities when compared with contemporaries in the Arabian Peninsula, neither the Banu Khalid, nor the ruler of Mecca were imperial powers with mammoth resource bases that would have allowed them to engage in risky ventures of expansionism.

Outside of motivations of pure conquest, there was also a lack of perceived commonality between the peoples of Najd and their neighbours that acted to prevent the fomentation of irredentism. For purposes of regional cohesion, the limited and localised identities of the Najd communities seemingly obscured any broader sense of a shared ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ past with the outside world. For their part, those in Hejaz in particular tended to view the inhabitants of Najd as a backwards and primitive people

⁸⁹ Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," 188-92.

⁹⁰ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 148.

⁹¹ Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, 21.

who maintained views that would often castigate many of the more liberal and modern practices of the inhabitants of the Peninsula's West.

Under such conditions, although the imposition of authority over the indigenous population of Najd by an outside power may very well have been possible prior to the rise of the Saudi state, the incentives to motivate such an action were absent. Threat of external annexation in Najd was effectively non-existent; the arid territory existed on the periphery of the consciousness of regional powers and, prior to the rise of the Saud/Wahhab alliance, this polarity showed little signs of shifting in the first half of the eighteenth century.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate via historical analysis why the development of Saudi Arabian statehood in the mid-eighteenth century in the Najd does not correspond to previous theories of state formation. The causes for such divergences can be primarily linked with the social, political and geographical conditions of Najd and its surrounding neighbours during this period, and indeed had been the norm for centuries. Both structurally and functionally, the four categories of European state development – these generally being shifts in the conditions of local economic practices, global economic interactions, political elite power distribution and sharing arrangements and international conflict dynamics – remain unsatisfied as precursors to the formation and subsequent expansion of the Saudi state after 1744.

The inapplicability of these models is largely accounted for by the stark contrast between Europe and the Arabian Peninsula during this period. It is difficult to imagine more dissimilar natural environments than when comparing the lush and bountiful verdancy of the Rhineland to the arid plateau around Riyadh. The harshness of the Najd environ had a profound influence on the capacity, size and intercommunal linkages of the societies that manifested therein, leading to a pattern of disparate anarchy without any semblance of central authority. To paraphrase Scott; while the form and function of Najd's social and political systems surely had logic, that logic was not the product of any single, overarching plan.⁹² In tandem, these factors served to perpetually limit the likelihood of any of the European qualifiers for state formation being fulfilled. Isolation and the stagnation of social development was an ever-present feature of the region prior to the rise of the Saudi state. Inter-communal competition existed, but only functioned at a small scale. Such visionless antagonism served as a self-reinforcing mechanism for stifling a broader social cohesion, creating an “atmosphere of fear and insecurity...where life and property were not safe, [and where] economic and social growth suffered [as a result].”⁹³ Although the polarities of the

⁹² James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale: Yale University Press 1999), 184.

⁹³ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 149.

major international powers surrounding the region fluctuated, Najd itself functioned in a state of stable anarchy, with its inhabitants focused on eking out a living in a fashion much the same as their ancestors had done for millennia. Contact with the outside world existed through trade and the flow of pilgrims, but neither seemed to generate any real transformative impact on the inhabitants of Central Arabia, and certainly didn't provoke a process of state formation as a response. Elites remained perpetually focused on their immediate surroundings, displaying little vision, desire or capability for a broader aggregation of control or influence. Here, identity and commonality, particularly those found in the settlements, was limited and local. To paraphrase the Najdi historian, Cook, the region's history was going nowhere and meaning nothing.⁹⁴

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⁹⁴ Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd," 175.

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Chapter 2

Religious Tension and Revivalism in Eighteenth-Century Najd

The problems of applying existing state formation theories to the case of Saudi Arabia discussed in the previous chapter leaves an open question: what independent variables then drove the emergence of a state from Central Arabia during the mid-eighteenth century? A core historical understanding of these factors is clearly a necessary underpinning in the development of a theory of Saudi state formation.

Historians have tended to view the Saudi state's formation in 1744 - known then as the emirate of al-Diriyah - as the product of the warlord Muhammad ibn Saud and the revivalist preacher Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab.¹ Such a narrative often runs that ibn Saud's careful alliance building and use of force was complimented and empowered through the fiery religious rhetoric of Wahhab in his drive to instigate large-scale reformation of the Islamic faith. This pragmatic politicking, combined with the socially legitimating force of religion is generally said to be responsible for the widespread mobilisation of the sedentary and previously-unmoving peoples of Najd into an expansive conquest through jihad that ultimately unified most of the Arabian Peninsula under a single, central authority approaching local-regional hegemony by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Although this common view accurately describes many events surrounding the emergence of Saudi statehood, it has nevertheless tended to avoid developing a substantial understanding of why precisely the second factor, that being religious revivalism, proved to be such an effective tool in stimulating the mass social cohesion of the previously-disparate actors of Najd. Up until this point, the role of religion and religious revivalism within the Saudi state formation process has been largely treated as a self-evident *raison d'état* utilised by the architects of the Kingdom. Although considerable work has been done on the nature of the Saudi-specific brand of revivalism and its theological and political underpinnings and problems,² less considered has been its reflexivity to the initial Najdi society that adopted it in a largely non-coerced fashion.³ Simply put, although the "how?" of Saudi state formation has been addressed in the existing literature, the "why?" has been less considered. Why was religion, previously a diminished force in Najdi settled society, suddenly able to drive the state building efforts of

¹ A very common narrative, found in such texts as Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). & Gene Lindsey, *Saudi Arabia* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991). & James Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2004).

² Examples include Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). & Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir." & Samira Haj, "Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab," *The Muslim World* 92 (2002).

³ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 22.

ibn Saud's and Wahhab's efforts to result in such unprecedented success and how might existing social theory help us to understand this success? An in-depth answer to this appears to be at the core of understanding the "why?" of Saudi state formation.

This chapter seeks an answer to the first of these two questions. It will continue to describe the major historical features of the Najd during the first half of the eighteenth century. This time, however, the focus will be specifically directed towards the nature and role of Islam in Central Arabia: looking at its heterogeneity, its major points of focus and its role within the communities of Najd. Importantly, it also details the rise of the Islamic revivalism that formed the ideological nucleus of the Saudi state and discusses how this movement interpreted and responded to the existing social, political and religious features of the region. In so doing, the chapter will help to clarify the religious conditions under which the Saudi state emerged, as well as begin to answer why the state adopted religious revivalism as a central pillar of its legitimation. It will develop a reading of the revivalist movement that goes beyond its chief architect, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, presenting it as reflexive to the remote desert society from which it emerged. In establishing these various concepts, this chapter will provide important conceptual data for the model of state legitimation proposed in chapter four.

2.1 The Religious Conditions of Pre-Saudi Najd

The details of pre-Saudi Najd outlined in the previous chapter purposefully omitted one key factor from its analysis: the nature and state of religion in the region during this period. Above all else, successful manipulation of religious symbolism and discourse was to become the instrumental tool that ultimately enabled the establishment of the first and all subsequent incarnations of the Saudi state, with the particular religious conditions of Najd forming the centre of this process. Understanding these conditions, then, and specifically what they represented in terms of deeper social patterns, is key in a conception of Saudi state formation and development.

Sunni Islam represented the only discernible common identity structure shared between the disparate desert communities during the eighteenth century. The Muslim faith was practiced throughout Najd by Bedouin and settled folk alike, and there is no evidence of other faiths in the region during this period. This led some historical observers to characterise its inhabitants as religiously homogenous, disconnected and 'backward' relative to their neighbours in more cosmopolitan locales like Hejaz and Basra.⁴ Such characterisations, however, ignored important religious divisions within the townships themselves, as well as between the sedentary settled folk and their nomadic peers.

Islam played a key role in social organisation within the oasis villages. What common laws existed were interpreted and dictated by religious scholar judges, known as *qadis*, and it was partially by these

⁴ Author Unknown, "The Iraq-Najd Frontier," *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 17, no. 1 (1930): 77. & Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 110.

tenets that social stability and order was maintained. This is not to say that the oasis towns operated as miniature theocracies; the power of the *ulema* remained subordinated to the chieftain in all practical senses and they were without executive authority, highlighted particularly in their lack of access to hard power enforcement mechanisms for their rulings.⁵ By the eighteenth century, legal doctrine appears to have been largely based on the conservative Hanbali school of religious jurisprudence, although strict observation does not appear to have been the norm.⁶

As with other historical details of the Najd prior to the rise of the Saudi emirate, records of religious activity remains sparse. As Commons notes:

we know few details...about the religious lives of ordinary Najdis apart from what the [revivalist] critics wrote about their deviance from proper Islamic practice... [revivalist] sources characterise Najd as a land of such lax observance and moral degradation that a [purification] mission was necessary, but the handful of chronicles that predate the mission take no note of such decadence.⁷

While this lack of local recorded data on the subject is problematic, Vassiliev does cite a limited number of such accounts made by locals and travellers to the region.⁸ Ultimately, however, the records that do remain are extremely scant in their descriptions and lacking in hard evidence, making speculation and assumption an unfortunate necessity in coming to any wider conclusions about the state of religion in Najd prior to the revivalist movement.

2.2 Diversity and Pluralism in Sedentary Najdi Islam

Pluralism within Islam appears to have been an endemic factor in settled Najdi existence during the eighteenth century. Although the conservative Hanbali school of Sunni faith represented the dominant tradition in the region, the Maliki and Sha'afi forms were adhered to by a minority of religious scholars.⁹ There is also some suggestion that the Hanafi school was present in the region as well, as Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab himself is alleged to have been educated in its doctrine at a young age.¹⁰ It is difficult to determine the precise length of the existence of this legalistic schism, as there is no record discreetly dating the individual introduction of these schools to Najdi society. Whether they represented an idiom from the times of Abbasid suzerainty, or manifested later, is difficult to tell. What is clear is that by the turn of 1700, Hanbalism was the dominant and most intellectually-refined school in the region. Al-Juhany attributes this to a limited number of Najdi scholars who travelled to al-Hasa to the east and were there

⁵ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 154.

⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 7-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 70-72.

⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 10.

¹⁰ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 38.

able to further develop their fluency in the Hanbali rite.¹¹ Despite the existence of these divergences, however, the historical records do not indicate any overt tension between the practitioners of the Hanbali, Maliki and Sha'afi forms prior to the revivalist movement.

Religious pluralism was not just found in the existence of the three legalistic schools, but also existed in rituals and practices derived from pre-Islamic paganism, as well as Sufi aestheticism. Although in-depth historical records of the religious conditions of Najd during the eighteenth century are slim, they universally agree that these types of practices were considered innovative and polytheistic by the revivalist movement, due to the alleged fact that they deviated from the original form of Islam and drew worship away from the single God. Such practices were varied and drawn from a range of different sources. Some, including the worship and idolisation of trees in towns like al-Uyayna,¹² appear to have been the product of pagan religious practices that predated the time of Muhammad. Others, like the veneration of saints and ancestral tombs, were linked with Sufi mysticism's notions of intercession between the worshipper and God. These practices were viewed as abhorrent, polytheistic innovations by revivalist scholars like Husayn Ibn Ghannam,¹³ and Wahhab himself saw them as supplanting the central and incontestable role of God by diverting worship to lesser entities.¹⁴ Framing such resistance as synonymous with the golden era of Islam, Wahhab bluntly stated "[we] fight those who worship idols just as [Muhammad] fought them."¹⁵

The ubiquity of this type of 'polytheism' in Najd remains contested amongst scholars. Al-Rasheed suggests that it was possible such practices were only adopted by a minority of Najdis, allegedly under Ottoman influence, although little evidence is provided to support this.¹⁶ Such an assertion is also problematic when considering the Najd's general isolation from Ottoman influence, as detailed in chapter two. Commins questions the historical reliability of the accounts during this period, highlighting the fact that descriptions of religious pluralism in the Najd are typically found in the writings of Wahhab and his successors in the revivalist tradition.¹⁷ Nevertheless, he concludes that "the religious climate [of Najd] appears to have accommodated a variety of [Islamic] traditions... [and] the coexistence between local custom and norms of Islamic law."¹⁸

¹¹ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 133.

¹² DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 24.

¹³ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 24.

¹⁴ Haj, "Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab," 359-60.

¹⁵ Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, trans. Abu Rumaysah (Birmingham: Dar as-Sunnah Publishers, 2010), 20.

¹⁶ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 22-24.

¹⁷ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 10.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Al-'Uthaymin suggests that while such innovations existed, they may have been largely restricted to the al-Arid region of north-central Najd. He points to little mention being made of such practices in the fragmented records of the surrounding area, combined with the fact that “the Hanbali rite was...followed by the [Najdi] scholars [and this] would argue for an adherence to Islamic traditions and a rejection of innovations.”¹⁹ This line of reasoning is not sound, however. Although it is true that there is little record of the religious traditions of most of Najd outside of al-Arid, they remained subjected to the same structurally isolating factors found in al-Diriyah and its surrounding townships that seemed to promote emergence and sustenance of localised deviations from ‘correct’ Islamic canon. Furthermore, the populace of al-Arid adhered to the same Hanbali tradition as the rest of the region and town of al-Uyayna, neighbouring al-Diriyah, was considered a hub of relative religious enlightenment within the wider region.²⁰ Although historically, Hanbalism has proven the most philosophically resistant to change of the four dominant schools of thought in Sunni Islam,²¹ al-'Uthaymin’s caveat implies that it is somehow immune from alteration, regardless of how isolated its practitioners are. The fact that al-Uyayna was simultaneously considered a centre of Hanbali learning, while at the same time sustaining pagan traditions of tree worship; a practice that incensed Wahhab and his followers to the point of violent action²²; indicates that this was simply not the case. If this was the norm in a Najdi bastion of Hanbali ‘enlightenment’, then that metric alone clearly cannot be used to dismiss the presence of religious innovation throughout the wider region, given its disconnect from the centres of Islamic learning in the broader Middle East. Ultimately, while there is scant unbiased historical record discussing the religious fidelities or infidelities of the Najdi population, the case study of al-Arid combined with the local populism of the revivalist cause in its call to reject such behaviour once it was articulated,²³ suggests that religious innovation was, at the very least, perceived to exist widely by considerable portions of the isolated Najdi community. How pervasive such a phenomenon was is ultimately impossible to determine thanks to the unreliability or non-existence of historical record, but that it did exist and that it was commonly perceived at the mid-eighteenth century by Najdi residents is clear.

2.3 Bedouin Religious Practices

As with other socio-political characteristics of the period, the religious practices and adherences of the eighteenth century Najdi Bedouin appear to have differed considerably from their settled contemporaries. While adhering to the first pillar of Islamic faith by acknowledging the oneness of God and Muhammad as his prophet, many amongst the Najdi nomads appear to have abstained from the other four core precepts of the Muslim faith: failing to adhere to prescribed prayer routines, avoiding the payment of charitable

¹⁹ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 25-26.

²⁰ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 135.

²¹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 67.

²² al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 41-50.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

contribution, eating during the fasting period of *Ramadan* and never making the *Haji* pilgrimage.²⁴ Similarly, the French adventurer Constantin François Volney observed a pervasive indifference towards Islamic practice found amongst the Bedouin he interacted with on his journeys in the late eighteenth century. In particular, many nomads found it peculiar they should be asked embrace the physical and economic hardship required within Islam when those factors were already an omnipresent and inescapable reality in their day-to-day existence. Some even went so far as to declare that Islam was not a religion created for them and their way of life.²⁵

Unsurprisingly, the nomads of Central Arabia did not tend to produce or retain *ulema*. Writing in 1830, Burckhardt noted that it had only been in recent years that Bedouin had begun to have *ulema* attached to their formations to teach Islamic doctrine. This was thanks to direct intervention by the Revivalists, who were attempting to gain greater influence over the nomads by shaping their religious normative patterns to be more in line with official state doctrine.²⁶ With the relative estrangement of the 'correct' form of Islam in many of the Bedouin tribes, paganism appears to have been commonly practiced prior to the rise of Saudi governance. The cult of ancestors was a common observation, although it is not clear whether this was thanks to Sufi influence or the product of pre-Islamic tradition. Worship often centred on portable shrines hoisted onto the backs of camels, where sacrifices and observances could be made on the move.²⁷ According to some sources, rites were also developed around the worship of the moon and stars, a practice condemned by Wahhab and the revivalists.²⁸ These celestial bodies played an important role in the day-to-day existence of Bedouin life, allowing them to navigate the monotonous desert terrain by night and take shelter from the harsh sun by day.²⁹ By contrast, the teachings and requirements of a religious figure who had largely dwelled and shaped his doctrine amongst the urbanised populations of the Hejaz often seemed to bear little relevance to the wandering nomads of Najd.

The idiosyncrasies of Nomadic religious practice incensed some in the Najdi townships and were viewed by revivalist scholars as a key driver for the corruption of the Islamic form.³⁰ Shamanism and the invocation of peculiar rites against medical ills were argued to capitalise upon the relative ignorance of the Najdi people. Worse in the eyes of reformists, such acts were said to create intercession, drawing the worship away from God and redirecting it to the mundane; an act of utter sacrilege in conflict with the core principles of God's oneness laid down in basic Islamic teachings. Although such accounts may have

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁵ Translated excerpt in Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 72.

²⁶ Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys*, 1, 99.

²⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 73.

²⁸ Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, "The Four Principles," in *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah* (Birmingham: Dar as-Sunnah Publishers, 2010), 101.

²⁹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 72.

³⁰ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 24.

been exaggerated for effect, it is no coincidence that many Bedouin proved to be particularly resistant to the revivalist call when compared to their settled neighbours across the wider Arabian Peninsula. The conversion of said nomads would be an ongoing project for the Saudi state well into the twentieth century.

2.4 Najdi Ulema

Numerous historians have noted the narrow capabilities of Najdi religious scholars prior to the rise of the Saudi state.³¹ Whereas the cosmopolitan centres of the Middle East produced a vibrant and diverse community of *ulema*, with a wide range of theological skills, affiliations and backgrounds, Najdi scholars appear to have largely specialised in the study and execution of local Islamic law.³² The lack of large urban settlements and the rudimentary nature of Central Arabian society did not lend itself to supporting a robust intellectual community and Najdi *ulema* only began to be even noted in historical records during the sixteenth century.³³ Students of the creed rarely travelled far to further their education, with only a few notable exceptions, including Wahhab himself.³⁴ Of the fifty-two Najdi *ulema* noted in eighteenth century biographies, only eleven are known to have ventured outside of the region. Of these, six went only as far as al-Hasa on Najd's eastern border.³⁵ The remoteness of Najd meant that even the smallest of extra-regional sojourns appeared to have imparted travellers with a noticeable level of scholarly sophistication and mystique over the less-adventurous majority. These 'seasoned' individuals could generally expect a great deal of prestige and credibility in their small communities, due to their perceived worldliness. Such were the limits of local religious learning that it appears that mere literacy and a vague familiarity with the Hanbali rite was enough to earn one esteemed titles and the ability to become a judge of local Islamic law.³⁶ Despite a steady growth of religious learning centres in Najd in the two centuries preceding the Saudi state,³⁷ the actual focus of teaching in such 'institutions' appears to have remained almost exclusively focused on matters of religious jurisprudence and little else. Isolation and the general limits of the chiefly authority meant that the legalistic system of norms articulated, and to some degree enforced, by the *ulema* played a vital role giving some sense of consistency and moderation to social transactions and interactions in the otherwise-fragile social system of Najdi settlements.

³¹ Ibid., 22.

³² al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 20.

³³ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 129.

³⁴ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 28.

³⁵ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 133.

³⁶ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 22.

³⁷ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 155.

Upon completion of their studies, individual *ulema* could be expected to assume a role as legal arbiter of the community they resided in.³⁸ Here, they were expected to resolve issues emerging from day-to-day social interactions, including property transactions, inheritances and matters of criminal justice.³⁹ This position was problematic in its inherent corruptibility, however. Although Judges would sometimes receive part of their income from a public endowment, this was not consistent and many moonlighted as merchants or farmers to survive. Far more problematic, however, was the issue of tribute. It was general custom that individuals whose legal issues were addressed by the judge would pay that same judge compensation for their time and expenses.⁴⁰ This naturally raised some issues in relation to the unbiased dispensing of their legal duties and the ability to maintain and enforce correct religious doctrine. In some cases, such fees appear to have so exorbitant that they drew considerable outcry from the general populous, recorded in poetry.⁴¹

With their primary focus on jurisprudence, the Najdi *ulema* appear to have paid little heed to the less technocratic and more existential aspects of the faith, such as theology or exegesis. This suggests that while the religious scholars of Central Arabia may have been competent in maintaining the order of daily life in the settled townships, their ability to reflect more deeply on the nature of the religion they presided over and provide spiritual guidance to their followers at a more metaphysical level was limited. While the Najdi scholars may have possessed the ability to drive the theological machinery of Islam for the relatively mundane needs of day-to-day existence in Central Arabia, their deeper understanding of its operational complexities and how to respond to any broader malfunctions in the system was likely limited. Political and geographical isolation would have further compounded this. Najdi *ulema* functioned either individually, or in small enclaves. Intrinsically tied to the settlements they operated within, they were fettered and constrained by the same petty rivalries and competitions that impacted all around them, stifling their ability to create religious networks that transcended the structure of the individual township. Lacking executive authority, their will and goals remained subordinate to the petty chiefs that ruled over the oases. Although centres of religious learning had expanded in Najd during the eighteenth century, this does not appear to have fostered a wider environment of commonality between individual *ulema* in which meaningful, progressive debate could occur, or new forms of pedagogy be crafted to respond to the concerns of the populous. Although some intellectual exchange took place between the Najdi *ulema* and the outside world,⁴² this appears to have been the exception to the rule. Seclusion from the Islamic learning networks of the wider Middle East and Asia acted to diminish the Najdi *ulema's* potential to develop their religious credentials beyond their very limited focus. Put simply, there appears to have been

³⁸ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*.

³⁹ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 154.

⁴⁰ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 40.

⁴¹ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 154-55.

⁴² al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 21.

little sense of a wider religious community or engagement in Najd in the first half of the eighteenth century and little in the way of scholarship emerged from the region before the ascent of Wahhab and the Saudi state.⁴³

Prior to the emergence of the revivalist movement, Vassiliev describes Najdi society as experiencing a “widespread popular dissatisfaction in the area of religion”⁴⁴ stemming from the perceived corruption and degradation of Islam through the integration of ‘polytheistic’ and ‘innovative’ practices by many in the local community. Despite such extensive discontent, however, it appears that the Najdi *ulema* were ill-prepared to manage the complicated task of overseeing religious reformation with their limited skillset. Indeed, the only Najdi scholar who is known to have written specifically on the issue was Uthman ibn Qaid in his work ‘The salvation of successors in their belief of their predecessors.’⁴⁵ It should be noted that ibn Qaid represented an outlier in Najdi religious authors, as he was one of the few who had travelled outside the region to further his formal education. His one treatise on the topic was actually published in Damascus and he ultimately settled outside of Central Arabia in Cairo, where he was ill-positioned to devise and implement an effective response to the apparent spiritual crisis in Najd.

2.5 The Emergence of Najdi Revivalism

Despite the apparent concerns over religious divisions in the townships of Najd prior to the 1740s, there was no indication of a coherent, unified reformism movement forming out of the socially and politically divided environment. With the range of factors discussed in chapter two, Najd society had lacked a centrally organised administration for several hundred years and had remained in a state of perpetual anarchistic stratification following the decline of the Abbasid caliphate. Within such a system, religious cleavages represented just a relatively minor divisive factor amongst many others endemic to the socio-political system of Central Arabia. Indeed, while forces for division based on pragmatic concerns; such as resource and political competition; commonly generated intra and inter-communal violence, there is no historical indication of intra-denominational conflict in Najd prior to the revivalist movement. The aforementioned lack of reformist leadership before the late 1740s capable of stirring up their spiritual constituents may account for the submerged nature of religious division before Wahhab. Ultimately, however, understanding the precise factor for why such a current remained in a dormant state for so long remains a matter of speculation, as accounts written during this period remain extremely rudimentary.⁴⁶ Whatever the case, such religious pacifism would dissipate with the emergence of the revivalist movement championed by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁴³ Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd."

⁴⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 76.

⁴⁵ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 22.

⁴⁶ Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd," 165.

Revivalism became a coherent movement shortly after the return of Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab to the Najd region following his sojourns abroad sometime in the 1730s.⁴⁷ Born in 1702 from a lineage of religious scholars, Wahhab distinguished himself from his peers at an early age by his mastery of the Koran.⁴⁸ After taking the pilgrimage to Mecca and a brief stay at Medina in his early teens, Wahhab began to expand his Islamic education into spheres out of the ordinary for most Najdi *ulema* in his home town of al-Uyayna, with an avid dedication to works on exegesis and theology.⁴⁹ During this same period he appears to have begun to develop early concepts of the revivalist doctrine, preaching vocally against what he saw as corruptions of the Islamic faith and calling for major reforms of both the public and private spheres. DeLong-bas argues that although these critiques may have found some sympathisers amongst the local audience, they also incensed political and religious elites, who found the calls to reform a threat to their positions of authority and ultimately pressured the young firebrand to embark on a journey that would carry him far and away from the Najdi town.⁵⁰ Al-'Uthaymin's account of this incident differs somewhat: suggesting that Wahhab decided to leave of his own accord in his late teens to further his education with no mention of local pressures.⁵¹ Although it is impossible to verify either account completely, the fact that Wahhab was run out of numerous other settlements due to his views seems to put weight to the former. The range and scope of his travels following this event also remains contentious amongst historians, with some claiming that he went as far as Egypt, Kurdistan and Iran.⁵²

Whatever the actual course of his journey, Wahhab appears to have spent several years in Hejaz, as well as the city of Basra in southern Iraq. It was with access to an extensive collection of religious literature in the latter that he seems to have solidified his doctrinal precepts. Commins states it was in Basra that Wahhab composed his central work, *The Book of Monotheism*,⁵³ while DeLong-Bas says this occurred later in Huraymila.⁵⁴ This 67 chapter volume detailed the outline for the revivalist doctrine, providing a clear roadmap for achieving a reformation of what it saw as the 'corrupted' form of Islam. It emphasised the need to reject all practices built upon the Muslim faith after the first three centuries and return Islam to its 'original' and 'authentic' form, as outlined by God through the prophet Muhammad.⁵⁵ As Shahi puts it, the doctrine:

⁴⁷ The precise date remains debated amongst scholars, see al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 39-40. & Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 66.

⁴⁸ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 18.

⁴⁹ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 31.

⁵⁰ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 20.

⁵¹ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 31-32.

⁵² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 66.

⁵³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 12.

⁵⁴ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 22.

⁵⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 79.

Implied that the reunion with the final truth would be the best and safest system for the [Muslim community] at any time. Hence it was not Islam that had to be flexible to accommodate the emerging social changes, but Muslims themselves who had to return to the 'empowering' zone of 'truth'. (Emphasis mine)⁵⁶

In this capacity, revivalism rejected earlier scholarly consensus and interpretation and stressed the importance the recurrent interpretation of the texts between the generations, so as avoid the emergence of structures and discourses of innovation.⁵⁷ It viewed any form of intercessional worship as polytheistic and in direct contradiction to the monotheism espoused by the Koran. Concurrently, it condemned as non-Muslims those who integrated any 'non-orthodox' practices into their faith, or drew inspiration from later generations of "degenerate and corrupt"⁵⁸ scholars. Importantly, it sought to not only eliminate these types of blasphemies from the existing Muslim society, but to engineer a system of social, cultural and political control in which the future manifestation of such offences were not possible.⁵⁹

Such rigidity put the doctrine at natural odds with Shia and Sufis, whose Islamic faiths were viewed as blasphemous innovations, and whom the revivalists went as far as to deem non-Muslims atheists.⁶⁰ The proactive elimination of such threats from the Muslim community was of paramount importance for revivalists. Internal self-piety alone was not sufficient to be of sound commitment to the faith.⁶¹ Tolerance for pluralism within Islam was itself an insufferable heresy and Wahhab argued that "[anyone] who believes it is permissible for some people not to adhere to the Shari'ah of Muhammad as it was permissible for the Khadir not to follow the Shari'ah of Musa is a disbeliever."⁶² Through such a frame the mere toleration of other Islamic denominations severed the agent's own claim to membership of the Muslim community. Revivalist discourse emphasised that unity amongst Muslims, brought about by the proliferation of ideological adherence to the 'original' interpretation of the faith, was not just a mundane mission, but one commanded by the Creator himself.⁶³ The pursuit or acceptance of anything less would be tantamount to returning to the chaos of the pre-Islamic period, an epoch Wahhab spent considerable time describing and warning against.⁶⁴ This focus on the internal homogeneity of Islam meant that the "[revivalists] treated even Jews and Christians less harshly than the non-[adherent] Muslims,"⁶⁵ as the former groups had a place in the original Koranic texts as subordinate 'peoples of the book.' Since Shia and Sufi practices were developed well after the time of the Koran, they were viewed as

⁵⁶ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 103.

⁵⁷ Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, 25.

⁵⁸ Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 43.

⁵⁹ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 772.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 773.

⁶¹ Ibid, 772.

⁶² Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 85.

⁶³ "Characteristics of the Time of Ignorance," 35-37.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 31-79.

⁶⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 78.

unnecessary and insulting changes of an already-perfect creed. Thus, even divergent faiths were afforded greater status by foundational revivalist doctrine than those who adhered to 'tainted' forms of Islam, suggesting that modernity, change and innovation within the religious form posed a greater concern than ideological diversity outside its discreet unit. This was at least partially a pragmatic reflection of reality, as there is no historical indication that Najd was peopled by anyone other than Muslims. Any construction of a threatening, abject 'other' capable of stimulating a collectivisation of identity amongst the disparate Najdis had to appeal to that same population's own limited experience of diversity. For achieving such an end, focusing religious ire on non-Muslims who did not exist in the physical or conscious experiences of Najdis was simply not practical; it had to be directed towards something tangible and known commonly. As Kinnvall puts it, "a major ingredient of collective identity formation [is] when the familiar "stranger" is suddenly recognised as a threat."⁶⁶

Wahhab's attempts to instil revivalism in the peoples of Basra appear to have elicited poor results. This was likely due to the port city's large Shia population, with some writers claiming he was run out of town by an angry mob roused by his fiery polemics.⁶⁷ After leaving Southern Iraq, he continued his wanderings for several years before returning to Najd sometime in the 1730s, settling initially in the town of Huraymila, northwest of Riyadh. While his proselytising efforts gained him some supporters here, they also created resentment amongst those they critiqued over issues of 'sexual deviance.' A number of such offended individuals banded together as conspirators in a plot to assassinate the preacher, forcing him to once again flee his place of residence due to his religious activities.⁶⁸

From Huraymila, Wahhab returned to his hometown of al-Uyayna around 1740, where his reformist ideas found a much warmer reception amongst the locals. Wahhab demonstrated a much greater degree of political sensitivity in regards to his religious activism in Uyayna than had previously been seen. One of his first acts in the village was to seek support from the ruler, Uthman ibn Muammar. Ibn Muammar responded positively to such advances and Wahhab was quickly offered asylum and protections in exchange for his religious support for the chief's expansionist ambitions. It was in this alliance that Wahhab also began to articulate a vision of a state built upon the principles of revivalism, declaring to Ibn Muammar that "I hope, if you rise in support of the unity of God, He will grant you his aid to rule Najd and its Arabs,"⁶⁹ adding "I want you to spread [revivalism] and capture the Najd and its Bedouin."⁷⁰ This association was particularly prophetic, as "it foreshadowed the later alliance between Muhammad Ibn

⁶⁶ Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 753.

⁶⁷ Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 14-15.

⁶⁸ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 23.

⁶⁹ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 42.

⁷⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 81.

Saud and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab that led to the foundation of the first Saudi state, which remains intact today as the third Saudi state.⁷¹

By establishing such a relationship with local elites, Wahhab was able to insulate himself – at least temporarily – from the blowback which often resulted from his preaching and had seen him uprooted from previous bases of operation. Such a pattern was to become replicated within the Saudi state itself, with the secular elites providing security to authorised religious figures, who in turn provided legitimacy to those same elites. The stability afforded by ibn Muammar’s patronage enabled Wahhab not only to preach the revivalist ethos, but to begin to enact its vision physically. In many respects, al-Uyayna was to become the symbolic springboard for behaviours that were to later be institutionalised within the Saudi state. These manifested as three targeted acts of violence addressing core critiques produced under the revivalist doctrine. The first focused on the movement’s criticism of the use of physical objects as a means to intercession. Revivalists sought out local shrines and laid waste to them, the most famous being a blessed tree that Wahhab felled himself.⁷² In response to the movement’s criticisms of ancestral worship, Wahhab led a procession of six hundred revivalists to the neighbouring town of Jubail, where they destroyed the gravesite of a companion of the Prophet where pilgrims and locals often worshiped. DeLong-Bas notes that “the destruction of the tomb set a pattern for tomb destruction by the [revivalists] over both space and time...[that] has led to conflict between [them] and [Shi’a] and Sufis up through the contemporary era.”⁷³ The destruction of the tomb had an additional monetary effect in that it starved local ‘deviants’ of much needed income from tributes paid by the pilgrims, further weakening their capacity to resist revivalists.⁷⁴ Finally, in what was widely considered the most dramatic act at the time, Wahhab himself organised the murder of a local woman by mob stoning after she admitted to engaging in acts of sexual promiscuity.⁷⁵ DeLong-Bas has criticised the popular presentation of this event as being overly simplistic, providing a detailed account in which the woman herself unrepentantly confessed to ongoing acts of adultery and where Wahhab ensured to give a prolonged inquiry of the circumstances before carrying out the killing. DeLong-Bas concludes that:

[The woman] had been given ample opportunity for instruction and repentance yet had repeatedly rejected them. Because of the strong stand of the *hadith* on this issue and because the woman had consistently and repeatedly confessed to the crime of [adultery], [Wahhab] was left with no choice but to implement the prescribed punishment, however much he personally disliked it.(Parenthesis mine)⁷⁶

⁷¹ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 23.

⁷² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 81.

⁷³ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 81.

⁷⁶ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 28.

What seems abundantly clear in the account; apart from Wahhab's apparent complete lack of personal agency; is that the woman rejected revivalist prescriptions that "marriage [was] the only means for the satisfaction of sexual desire"⁷⁷ and represented a clear challenge to one the movement's core claims during the vulnerable period of its infancy. The fact that she may have been given the opportunity to repent and amend her ways to the correct path was meaningless, as she viewed her sexually liberal behaviour as normal, and the revivalist demand of strict monogamy as illegitimate. As with the other two acts, her murder was felt to be necessary to symbolically promote unity amongst the community and eliminate alternative, divisive perspectives on the contested social and spiritual order.⁷⁸ Although DeLong-Bas stresses that the woman was given all the benefits of due Islamic legal process - as interpreted by Wahhab; in the run up to her killing - there is a remarkable consistency in this act and authoritarian regimes' use of legal veneer to legitimise the elimination of political dissidents for instrumental, rather than jurisprudential purposes. Simply put, the woman's continuing unrepentant defiance of revivalist norms posed a clear challenge to the nascent movement's authority. Wahhab's personal decision to use violence to suppress political and philosophical dissent represented a consistent, if expansive, tendency in line with his earlier signature acts. This graduation to using coercive force against people, rather than just property, to enforce revivalist doctrine was to metastasise outwards in the movement, leaving a profound legacy of precedent for subsequent institutional development and adherent behaviour.

Combined, these three acts represented a watershed in the methodological application of Najdi revivalism that "declared its intention of putting its principles into practice not only through propaganda...but also through calculated acts of violence."⁷⁹ This shift was not only noticed locally, but within the wider Peninsula. When word reached the Banu Khalid in al-Hasa, there was a general sense of outrage. This combined with the concerns of local clerics, who saw a clear threat to their authority manifesting to their west. The anger was such that the Sheik of the eastern province demanded Ibn Muammar murder Wahhab or else face a severance of trade with the vital ports in the region, as well as a forfeiture of the chief's own extensive agrarian holdings in al-Hasa.⁸⁰ Although refusing to kill the preacher, Ibn Muammar ultimately bowed to the Banu Khalid's pressure and exiled Wahhab from Uyayna in 1744. It is telling that in this case, Wahhab not only left with a collection of followers, but also was driven out by external political pressure, rather than local grassroots outrage, as had occurred previously when the preacher had left his dwellings as a friendless pariah.⁸¹ Had Wahhab remained in his hometown, the monarchy ruling over much of the Peninsula today might very well have carried the title 'Muammar'.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁸ Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 36-37.

⁷⁹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 81.

⁸⁰ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 33.

⁸¹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*.

From Uyayna, Wahhab travelled south to the town of al-Diriyah. Here, he quickly made an alliance with the town's ruler, Muhammad ibn Saud, which replicated the pact earlier struck in Uyayna. Saud granted Wahhab political protections and backing in exchange for religious support for his own expansionist ambitions. Importantly, Saud, seeing the draw of the revivalist doctrine Wahhab espoused, demanded that the preacher remain in al-Diriyah even after other towns responded to his call, thus maintaining a direct influence over him.⁸² While the Banu Khalid had been able to intimidate ibn Muammar into ejecting Wahhab from Uyayna, the Saudis seem to have been unconcerned by this threat. This was likely due to the previous success that al-Diriyah had shown in its ability to fend off raids conducted by the nomadic tribesmen.⁸³ In the sanctuary afforded by the Saudis, Wahhab was able to further develop the revivalist framework and discourse, and adherents from across Najd flocked to the settlement.⁸⁴

It was in al-Diriyah that the revivalist movement would blossom and from where the Saudi state would begin to expand outwards in 1746. The revivalist message demonstrated a capacity to override much of the otherwise-divisive nature of the Najdi socio-political environment through a mutually-held distrust towards change and innovation held innately within much of the population. With a legitimacy derived from the cause of religious purification, the new expanding state entity would go on to capture Riyadh in 1773, before conquering the previously powerful Banu Khalid in al-Hasa in 1793.⁸⁵ Hejaz would later be annexed under the banners of revivalism, with the capture of Mecca and Medina in 1803 and 1805.⁸⁶ Wahhab himself would retire from his position as the central religious authority in the burgeoning state in 1773.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, his descendants in the al-Sheik line and other like-minded scholars would continue to propagate and develop the revivalist doctrine under Saudi sponsorship and symbiosis for centuries to come. The expansion of revivalism into the western Arabian Peninsula ultimately proved too much for the previously-impartial Ottomans, who saw their important religious holdings in the area seized out from under them by the Saudis. Ultimately, the first Saudi state was to be crushed by the Egyptian-Ottoman forces of Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1818, when al-Diriyah itself was levelled by cannon bombardment. While this saw the end of initial Saudi rule in the peninsula, however, the state would reconstitute itself again in 1824 and then again in the early twentieth century. Importantly, each of these instances saw the replication of many of the earlier core institutions, processes and divisions of power established under the first state, a pattern that would help to ensure Saudi rule over the peninsula for the majority of the twenty-seven decades preceding contemporary times.

⁸² al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 55.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁵ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 66-67.

⁸⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 32.

⁸⁷ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 74.

The rise of revivalism in eighteenth century Najd occurred in tandem with numerous other Islamic reformist movements during this same period. From locations ranging from India to West Africa, scholars like Shah Wali Allah and Uthman ibn Fudl led movements that sought to 'fix' the 'broken' elements of the Islamic faith that they perceived in their midst. These critiques demonstrated considerable variance in both their motivations and their goals, but shared commonality in their attempts to formulate doctrinal solutions to a pervasive sense of anxiety derived from a loss of traditional identity through processes of change and modernisation. While revivalism in the Najd occurred roughly within the same timeframe as other reformist movements,⁸⁸ its precepts differed markedly, with a focus and prescriptions formulated as a response to issues largely occurring within the boundaries of Najd, rather than from those imposed through external encroachment.⁸⁹ Thus, its conception of modernity and its ideas on the appropriate response to such a challenge were distinct from other Islamic reformist movements occurring after it. As Shahi puts it:

Unlike the other major Islamic reformers who emerged after him, [Wahhab] had no preoccupation with modernity and was not concerned with accommodating Islam to the modern world. In other words, [revivalism] in its original shape was not exposed to those products of western modernity such as industrialization, nationalism, liberalism, capitalism...Hence, [it] never offered any strategies to prepare Islam conceptually or ideologically to accommodate those gradual emerging forces, which were going to deeply influence the Islamic world for centuries to come. This was in contrast to later Islamic [reformist] movements, which were preoccupied with the challenges of modernity. (Parenthesis mine)⁹⁰

Najdi revivalism thus demonstrated a tendency towards an abject rejection of modernity, rather than an attempt to reconcile Islamic reformist thought with inexorable emerging phenomenon as other Salafist movements did from the eighteenth century onwards.⁹¹ Such an inflexible position reflected the uniquely semi-closed system of Najd, where, at least initially, the agents of change were structurally restrained and easy to suppress for revivalists, allowing them to adopt a hard-line position of absolute rejectionism with little resistance from the existing social, political and religious forces. In a system more open to the effects of globalisation, however, such a strategy was simply not viable, a factor that would become gradually more apparent as the state expanded outwards from Central Arabia and made efforts towards sophisticating its institutions and its methods of rule over an increasingly diverse population.

It's crucial to emphasise that revivalism was not the product of a single man and his vision alone. Although Wahhab was a crucial catalyst for igniting Islamic reformism in Najd, his spark nevertheless had to strike the appropriate kindling for it to achieve any success. The sociological conditions of Najd were a

⁸⁸ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 14.

⁸⁹ Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993). & Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 11.

⁹⁰ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 102-03.

⁹¹ Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850," 349.

key independent variable in the experiment that was revivalism, the lack of which would have very likely seen Wahhab repeat the experience of his ill-fated attempt to preach to the people of Basra.⁹² Latent socio-religious tension stored within the indigenous Najdi population during the mid-1700s was critical to revivalism's success. Indeed, Wahhab's own grievances were the product of this very system. Although the preacher appears to have developed much of the nuance of his doctrinal idiosyncrasies abroad, it seems apparent from his early preaching efforts in Uyayna that he was concerned with the coexistence maintained between the 'innovators' and the 'faithful' prior to being exposed to external discourses on the matter. Although education in Mecca, Medina, Basra and elsewhere enabled him to develop his theological skillset further, his underlying purpose was nevertheless borne out of his initial experiences in Najd during his youth. In this, he was not alone, Vassiliev summarising that in Najd:

As occurs during all important socio-political developments, their ideological basis was already 'in the air'. The seeds of [revivalist] propaganda fell on soil that was generally prepared to adopt the new teaching and germinated where conditions were most favourable to the realisation of the [revivalist] socio-political ideas. (Parenthesis mine)⁹³

Precisely what the collective desires of these proto-revivalists entailed remains unclear. Although the polemics of the revivalist scholars make the focus of their critique abundantly obvious, we know little of the lay devotee to Sunni orthodoxy in Najd prior to the Saudi state's arrival. As with all other firsthand historical records of Najd of this period, little appears to have been transmitted to the modern day. Given the dispersed and localised nature of the individual settlements, combined with the lack of religious networks in the region, the opportunity for a singular populist discourse to emerge on the topic of reformation was likely remote. What seems more probable to have existed was the widespread perception of a 'familiar stranger' in parallel to the indigenous religiously conservative community. Those who integrated paganism or Sufi rituals into their practice of Islam were likely marked out as distinct from the orthodox in-group, although there is no record that this facilitated any sort of reprisals before the return of Wahhab. The presence of a religiously pluralistic society - even when such differences were minute from an outside perspective - left an enduring potential for a process of securitisation to emerge between divergent practitioners. Indeed, Kinnvall has highlighted how the widespread perception of difference has often been a root driver for intercommunal conflict emerging from environments of seemingly perennial peace.⁹⁴ For a society to mobilise uniformly in such a drastic departure from its past requires some degree of epistemological intersubjectivity at a grand scale - a phenomenon that cannot simply be the work of a single individual. This problematises the popularised concept of the revivalist movement as simply the

⁹² Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 14-15.

⁹³ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 76.

⁹⁴ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 753.

product of a puritanical preacher manipulating a naïve people.⁹⁵ Mass movements do not spring from a vacuum as the creation of individuals alone, but are generally an intersection of capable, available leadership and a pre-existing, commonly perceived grievance held amongst a large populace. Much of Bolshevism's success, for example, rested on its ideological alignment with the concerns of the urban working class of the Russian empire and their willingness to take up armed struggle to redress their systemic dissatisfaction. While Lenin and his 'Vanguard' played an integral role in directing and shaping this discontent into effective political action, their calls to revolution would have fallen on deaf ears had there not already been the kindling of grievance found commonly amongst the workers of St Petersburg and other large Russian urban centres.⁹⁶ As Lenin is alleged to have said, the Bolsheviks "found power lying in the streets and simply picked it up."⁹⁷ Likewise, the latent antisemitism and antiziganism within the German population of the 1920s and 1930s that Hitler and his underlings were able to expertly politicise and securitise into an anti-establishment discourse were a key element in the Nazi party's initial success in the Weimar Republic.⁹⁸ Similarly, as a populist movement aimed at reordering the systemic structure of the region, the viability of revivalism rested upon a pre-existing grievance in the population of Central Arabia that held widely and with enough conviction that, when emphasised correctly, could drive them to overcome the entrenched centrifugal forces that had characterised Najdi social and political life for centuries.

While revivalism shared a number of features common to other types of mass movements, Islamic and otherwise, the precise combination of these idiosyncrasies saw it as highly distinct. Although it drew many parallels with other Islamic reformist movements emerging in the Middle East and Asia during the eighteenth century and onward, both its conceptualisation of the problems faced, as well as its prescribed responses to such issues was very much a product of Najdi internalisation. Though sharing many commonalities with mass revolutionary movements of Europe, the mission's focus on Islamic creed, as well as its rural, desert nature, marked it very much apart from the aforementioned cases.

2.6 Conclusion

The religious conditions of Najd prefacing the rise of eighteenth century revivalism demonstrated a degree of supra-communal consistency that marked them as distinct from the other fractured socio-economic and political characteristics of the region during this period. The close proximity of 'orthodox' Hanbali-oriented Sunni Islam with Sufi and Pagan rituals throughout Central Arabia appears to have fostered the latent potential for social cleavages and tension, although this remained in a state of apparent dormancy

⁹⁵ Laurent Murawiec, *Princes of Darkness: The Saudi Assault on the West* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 145-59.

⁹⁶ Daniel H. Kaiser, *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁹⁷ Quoted in Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 96.

⁹⁸ Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, Revised Edition* (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 1988).

during the first half of the century. While subsumed, the kindling of religious schism appears to have been entrenched within large segments of the Najdi population, evidenced by the rapid spread of revivalism and the unprecedented unification this stimulated through the region.

Despite being the most appropriate arbiters of religious discontent, the Najdi *ulema* at either end of the spectrum demonstrated almost no capacity or will to address or manipulate the latent tension derived from intra-denominational issues. This was likely due to the limited role of religious scholars in Najdi society, who tended to focus on practical, day-to-day issues, rather than grand reflections on metaphysical division. Such a prevalent limitation goes some way in explaining why no coherent reformism agenda emerged before 1744 in Najd, despite the region being sociologically primed for it. Motivated religious leadership capable of addressing such issues appears to have simply not been available within the semi-closed Najdi system prior to Wahhab's return in the late 1730s. The religious educational system available in Central Arabia at this time was adequate for sustaining an indigenous body of religious judges between the generations, but was not conducive branching out beyond this limited focus. It is extremely telling that while Wahhab was incensed by the intra-denominational divide encountered in his youth, his success as a preacher came only after he left Najd and continued his education in the more erudite centres of Islamic thought. Fundamentally, what pre-revivalist Najdi *ulema* appeared to have lacked in this area was either the ability, or the drive "to assure the [observant] of how [they were] essentially different from the [non-observant]" in a methodical fashion that could construct a coherent "discourse of exclusion" capable of pushing the issue from the ill-defined periphery into the centre of social consciousness and discourse.⁹⁹

In a response to this latent tension, Wahhab's ability to tap into the common experience of Najdis through revivalist doctrine proved revolutionary, not only in Central Arabia, but for the social and political order of the Arabian Peninsula more generally. In this most crucial of capacities, Wahhab himself cannot be seen as progenitor for the revivalist movement, but rather as catalyst for its emergence. While he remained a key agent in articulating the agenda for Islamist reformism in Arabia, his death did little to slow the movement's inertia. The integration of revivalist thought into the philosophical foundations of the Saudi state saw the emergence of a particular set of institutions and means of obtaining and maintaining elite-level power over the ruled constituents that would be replicated across dynasties for centuries to come. The maintenance and propagation of Najd-derived revivalism by the state began and arguably endures today as the most important factor for the acceptance of Saudi rule by the population of much of the Arabian Peninsula. Despite expanding outwards from Central Arabia, the features of the Islamic reformism at the heart of Saudi legitimacy nevertheless retained numerous features and structures

⁹⁹ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 754.

formed in the initial Najdi environment; chief amongst them a tendency amongst diehard adherents towards an abject rejection of modernity.

This chapter has discussed how the Saudi state formed and developed initially through its relationship with the revivalist movement in historical terms. What such an overview fails to explain is the impetus for why many of the foundational institutions, structures and strategies of the Saudi state in the eighteenth century have continued to be replicated and reproduced across the centuries, even after numerous instances of regime collapse. The next chapter will begin to seek to understand this phenomenon by considering how Najdi revivalism exists as a social force and how this can influence the state's governing strategies.

2.7 References

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Chapter 3

Securitising and Exploiting Intersubjectivity

Why was religious revivalism such an effective tool for Saudi state building? This chapter attempts to shed new light on the nature, importance of this longstanding intangible component of Saudi rule, by applying existing social theory on religious revivalist movements to the Saudi case, investigating how such reformist movements act as a bulwark against existential anxiety and intersubjective uncertainty and how the Saudi regime was able to integrate these dynamics into its state building efforts. This chapter draws heavily on the works of Catarina Kinnvall, outlining her theory on ontological security and religious nationalist movements and then employing some its core concepts to explain the logical drivers behind early period revivalism in Najd during the first Saudi state. In so doing, it highlights the manner in which revivalism securitised intersubjectivity and how the Saudi regime was able to exploit this dynamic towards ends of state building by offering revivalists an environment under its rule in which metaphysical insecurity was minimised. In exploring these concepts and relationships, this chapter begins to highlight what existing social and political theory can tell us about such phenomena and continues to clarify why the Saudi state adopted revivalism as a central tenet of its legitimacy.

3.1 Ontological Security

Although articulated as a theory to describe phenomenon in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the theory of ontological security nevertheless retains explanatory power for events prior to this period. The theory of was first articulated in its contemporary form by Anthony Giddens in relation to individual experience in the contemporary era. Giddens' writings largely focus on the impact of increasing complexity and uncertainty associated with neo-liberal globalisation upon the individual and the experience of existential anxiety resulting from this process.¹ Giddens defines ontological security as “a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual.”² He argues that individuals lose such security when the experience of reality grows incomprehensible, unpredictable and risk-laden due to the complexities of contemporary globalisation.³ As Mitzen puts it, individuals “need to ‘make sense of their world’, and when there is insufficient information or meanings are unsettled [they] suffer...psychological stress.”⁴

¹ Examples include Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). & *Modernity and Self Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

² *Modernity and Self Identity*, 243.

³ *The Consequences of Modernity*, 124-25.

⁴ Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 348-49.

The collapse of time and space and the increasing overlap, destruction, evolution and reconstruction of various social, political, economic and cultural systems place individuals in a reality that is progressively pluralistic, contested and uncertain. Processes of change do not necessarily have to be in the immediate vicinity of the agent, but, increasingly, can be experienced through modern media, the internet and even word of mouth. In Giddens' view, a key response mechanism for coping with the anxiety linked to this complexity is adherence to routine. The structure imparted by such consistent behaviour helps to counteract unpredictability by creating a feeling of consistency and congruence of narrative out of which a stable sense of identity may emerge. Giddens' concept of ontological security relates directly to modern, western individual experience; a focus it never truly discards, despite establishing fertile ground for wider applications and levels of analysis. Given the pioneering nature of the work, however, its inability to articulate a complete picture of its applications seems expected. The concept, as defined by Giddens, also suffers from a persistent vagueness and resistance to empirical verification. This appears unavoidable, as it deals with the notion of instability in one's sense of self; something often experienced more viscerally than cognitively and inherently problematic to measure within any satisfactory metric. Indeed, the internalised nature of the theory's subject matter makes it inherently resistant to quantification within the methods currently employed in social science.

Subsequent work has sought to expand and refine the definition of the theory, often with specific emphasis being determined by the object of analysis. Numerous scholars have sought to build upon Giddens' core assumptions and elevate the level of unit analysis to both the societal and the national levels. Mitzen, for example, has applied it within the context of international relations, providing a definition that is a direct rebuttal to the claimed 'security dilemma'⁵ endemic to realist thought. As a collection of individual actors operating within a system of international ambiguity, states desire to maximise certainty, so as to be confident that their foreign policies reflect the reality of the security environment surrounding them in their competitors. The inability for states to know the true capabilities of their rivals generates uncertainty, which worsens the security dilemma and creates greater ambiguities in responding to it. In turn, this can further contribute to the security dilemma, as competing states make miscalculated moves and countermoves against one another without truly knowing the other's capabilities. As she puts it:

[Structural] forms of uncertainty threaten... identity security. The reason is that agency requires a stable cognitive environment. Where an actor has no idea what to expect, she cannot systematically relate ends to means, and it becomes unclear how to pursue her ends. Since ends are constitutive of identity, in turn, deep uncertainty renders the actor's identity insecure. Individuals are therefore motivated to create cognitive and [behavioural] certainty, which they do by establishing routines. (Parenthesis mine) ⁶

⁵ John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2, no. 02 (1950).

⁶ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."

In this manner, Mitzen provides an explanation for militarism, arms races and other forms of security responses states often engage in when sensing potential threat and which external observers may deem irrational or exacerbating. The imposition of routine through these behaviours projects a sense of order, stability and mastery of the security environment, even if such self-assurances are empirically incorrect and the policies themselves are actually damaging to the state's national interest of survival. In this, perpetual conflict can become a routine that provides a permanent 'war footing' identity. One might point to the normalisation of seemingly erratic and confrontational tendencies in North Korea's foreign policy for evidence of this type of brinkmanship behaviour that is perceived by domestic elites to assert dominance over uncertainty, but ultimately serves to leave state's own security position less stable. Mitzen explains this, arguing that "[where] conflict persists and comes to fulfil identity needs, breaking free can generate ontological insecurity, which states seek to avoid."⁷ Mitzen is not alone in applying this framework to the study of international relations; similar efforts have been made by other scholars, such as Burke⁸ and Steele⁹.

Others have sought to apply Giddens' concepts to the social realm. In a study on the ontological security of British Muslim populations, for example, Croft emphasises the importance of community in determining individual identity by providing an "authentic" set of routines and behaviours that help to buffer against the uncertainties of modern existence for those of minority status.¹⁰ Agents often interpret destabilising events communally, rather than individually and look to their affiliated community for rituals and routines that reaffirm solidarity to allay stress and anxiety. Indeed, as members of one community find themselves increasingly excluded from others due to such affiliations, these same structures of solidarity often become more important to their members.¹¹ As Kay points out, the affiliations underwriting such collective identities are often not primarily based on cognitive calculations of cost and benefit, but those of emotion and feeling that can appear to defy overt rationality.¹²

The varying image-level analysis within the current scholarship on ontological security points to its diverse applications. Research areas employing the theory have included, but are not limited to urbanisation,¹³ multiculturalism,¹⁴ people migration,¹⁵ media¹⁶ and peace and conflict.¹⁷ Discussions over

⁷ Ibid., 343.

⁸ Anthony Burke, "Ontologies of War: Violence, Existence and Reason," *Theory and Event* 10, no. 2 (2007).

⁹ Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self Identity and the Ir State* (London: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁰ Stuart Croft, "Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain's Muslims," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 220.

¹¹ Catarina Kinnvall and Paul Nesbitt-Larking, "The Political Psychology of (De)Securitization: Place-Making Strategies in Denmark, Sweden, and Canada," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 6 (2010).

¹² Sean Kay, "Ontological Security and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 236.

¹³ Ann Dupuis and David C Thorns, "Home, Home Ownership and the Search for Ontological Security," *The Sociological Review* 46, no. 1 (1998).

the accurate definition, level of image analysis, and applicability, of ontological security remain contested within the academic world and a debate around its theoretical nature and focus could easily form several theses of their own. This research, however, largely eschews engaging in such debates and instead attempts to apply what it sees as the core consistent assumptions of the theory to inductively interpret a specific set of historical data and events.

Throughout the numerous definitions and interpretations of the nature and form of ontological security, a number of features remain relatively consistent and relevant to the purposes of this study. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, the fact that individuals tend to seek a security of the self and try to avoid processes that lessen this state; that this security generally relies upon a routinisation of existence that provides order, structure and 'known' pathways within existence; that identity is a key element in this process, as it provides a particularly flexible and evolving set of routines and interpretive devices to the agent; that such identity is often linked to larger structures of community that provide definition, reinforcement, normalisation and legitimation for routines; and that change is the fundamental anathema to the security of the self, as it erodes and undermines patterns of routine and their supporting identity and community structures by introducing new, alternative physical, philosophical and ideological realities to the agent and the groups surrounding them.

Most individuals wish to avoid the experience of psychological stress felt when they begin to lose trust in the nature, stability and continuity of their surrounding reality. Trust in one's surroundings and interpersonal relationships are key to managing and buffering against such existential unease, as it imparts the agent with a sense of order and an ability to relate means to ends that provides "hope and courage in the face of whatever debilitating circumstances she or he might later confront."¹⁸ The ability to feel confidence in various social, cultural and political systems and institutions - such as the democratic process, the reliance of social services, or the infallibility of the church, for example - helps to ease the experience of uncertainty and hardship for the individual by providing the potential for normality, or even prosperity.

Degradation of reliable axioms leads to an increasing incomprehension of the world around the agent and a corresponding rise in the perception of risk. This produces an increase of ontological

¹⁴ Catarina Kinnvall and Jitka Lindén, "Dialogical Selves between Security and Insecurity: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Challenge of the Global," *Theory & Psychology* 20, no. 5 (2010).

¹⁵ Nicholas DeMaria Harney, "Migrant Strategies, Informal Economies and Ontological Security: Ukrainians in Naples, Italy," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 32, no. 1/2 (2012).

¹⁶ Myria Georgiou, "Seeking Ontological Security Beyond the Nation: The Role of Transnational Television," *Television & New Media* 14, no. 4 (2013).

¹⁷ Kay, "Ontological Security and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland."

¹⁸ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 39-40.

insecurity in the agent. Scholars across multiple disciplines including Giddens, Kinnvall, Volkan,¹⁹ Kristeva²⁰ and Kilcullen²¹ all posit that the majority of individuals seek to avoid insecurity and respond positively to some degree of “predictable, ordered, normative system[s] that [tell] them exactly what they need to do, and not do”²² on the social level. Regardless of whether they can be considered positively emancipating or negatively oppressive, such systems nevertheless provide clear, definable rules that allow the agent to order their existence reflexively and that conveys a degree of certainty and consequentially allows for the construction of a more clearly defined sense of self.²³ As shown by Kilcullen in his theory of competitive control,²⁴ the philosophical underpinnings of such regimes often matter far less than their capacity to impose normative stability in this regard. As he puts it, “normative systems create predictability and order, reducing transaction costs for populations and minimising the risk of a potentially fatal miscalculation.”²⁵

A secure state of self is generally dependent on the agent undertaking a routine or series of routines. Routine asserts a sense of stability and consistency in the experience of existence through regimentation, attributing meaning to acts of agency and helping to sustain identities constructed around such actions.²⁶ The sources and form of routines are infinitely diverse. They can be derived out of something as banal as home ownership, with all the associated rituals and requirements of that status.²⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, national, subnational and supranational communal affiliations have provided members structured and routinised ways of ordering their existence since time immemorial.²⁸ Despite disparate sourcing and form, all routines establish and enforce normative regimes that provide a lens through which reality is experienced and push back against uncertainty. The agent experiences a series of structured, rehearsed frames that provide context and can assign value to otherwise chaotic events, while granting the agent’s actions meaning in the context of those same circumstance. Through routine, individuals can experience reality not simply as ill-defined individuals, but as home owners, as religious devotees, as parents or any other number of regimented archetypes, along with all the connotations, values and priorities these affiliations impart.

¹⁹ Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity: A Study of Bloody Conflicts* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone Publishing, 2006).

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

²¹ David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²² *Ibid.*, 126.

²³ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 752.

²⁴ Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla*, 116-68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁶ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," 347.

²⁷ Steve Taylor, "Searching for Ontological Security: Changing Meanings of Home Amongst a Punjabi Diaspora," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47, no. 3 (2013).

²⁸ Georgiou, "Seeking Ontological Security Beyond the Nation: The Role of Transnational Television."

A strong sense of identity or identities acts to place the agent within an existing narrative or set of narratives that again help to order reality and reduce complexity; attaching meaning to the meaningless and diluting uncertainty. Identity acts as a mechanism to moderate anxiety by creating a “biographical continuity” that helps in establishing and maintaining a feeling of internalised stability in the agent.²⁹ Put crudely, knowing who one is, what one is, and where one belongs in relation to their fellow human beings and the world around them helps one to comprehend and manage the unknowns of their reality. A neo-Nazi may interpret long-term unemployment, resulting out of the complex and often incomprehensible global financial system, as the work of a nebulous global Zionist conspiracy. Similarly, an al Qaeda militant may attribute the collective woes of the Middle East to the nefarious meddling of the United States. Such examples are extreme caricatures, but each illustrates how a particular form of identity imparts which prescribes a reductionist and intersubjective communal narrative to interpret and order the complexity of reality.

Community remains a crucial component of identity and the narratives and routines that underlie it. Community often informs, affirms and legitimates the contours of the individual’s own perceptions and expectations, both of themselves and of their surrounding world.³⁰ Collective belonging affords a living and adaptive answer to the uncertainties of existence, providing an avenue to bolster the individual’s ontological security through the group.³¹ Facing complexity and change in isolation is typically a harrowing experience that often leaves only a greater perception of risk in the individual. By contrast, experiencing the same forces as a member of a broader social unit provides solidarity and consensus which can act to counteract the anxiety produced by these same unknowns. Such belonging also helps to moderate the threat presented by certain ‘expected uncertainties’; the prospect of unknowns sustained and normalised in communal memory. Intersubjectivity provides comfort and confidence to the individual, as they experience a world alongside others “equally real, alive, whole and continuous,” enabling them to “encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological from a centrally firm sense of [their] own and other people’s reality and identity.”³² Communal belonging thus provides not only a solid set of structures, routines and order that help to develop and sustain individual identity, they also importantly provide authenticity to that same identity by effectively collectivising it.

The key driver for a loss of identity and the corresponding generation of ontological insecurity is the challenge presented by change. The concept of change in this context is an umbrella that encompasses an array of social, political, economic and cultural processes associated with modernisation, pluralism, innovation, development, regression and devolvement. These can manifest in any number of ways: from

²⁹ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 746.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 742.

³¹ Michael Vlahos, *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 33.

³² Ronald David Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (England: Penguin Books, 1960), 39.

the erosion of idiomatic patterns of commerce and communal relations resulting from neo-liberal structural adjustment policy;³³ to perceived threat to national narrative introduced by rising multiculturalism;³⁴ down to even the parochial drudgery of divorce that sees the deconstruction of long-regimented intimate relationships.³⁵ In particular, rapid modernisation over the past century has been called out as a prominent source of ontological insecurity. As Bill and Springborg put it:

[Modernisation] is an unsettling, disruptive, painful process. The comforts of traditional habits are lost as these habits are uprooted. In [modernising] societies, new processes and institutions seem always to be trapped in a state of becoming, and, as a result, the expected uncertainties of the past have given way to the more frightful and unknown insecurities of the present. (Parenthesis mine)³⁶

Regardless of their various sources, behind many such insecurities lies the disestablishment of existing and tested normative systems relating to the social, the cultural, the economic and the political. The anxiety produced by this normative vacuum imparts many with the desire to establish some sort of alternative structure or set of structures to act in its stead. This can occur through the reaffirmation of pre-existing identity structures, as some communities will pull together in the face of adversity and create preservative bulwarks against the agents of change. Alternatively, the development of new strategies that re-assert the certainties of lost identity structures, real or imagined, in new and reflexive ways also become viable. This is often a reaction to the perceived failures of the pre-crisis system, the inadequacies of which are seen responsible for the wider loss of certainty and predictability that followed. In some cases, this occurs through a process of fundamentalist reductionism that emphasises a return to a pre-modern utopian ideal and has been seen again and again globally throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³⁷ Vlahos puts it simply, “[change] destroys...identity, but also makes space for new ones.”³⁸

3.2 Ontological Security, Religious Nationalist Movements and Identity

Key to understanding revivalism as an integral component of the Saudi state-building and legitimisation process is a working knowledge of the ontological implications of religious nationalist movements (RNM). The majority of work in this area has been undertaken by Kinnvall, who highlights how such cause-based, macro-scale collective identities facilitate a profound sense of confidence in individual adherents. Discussing the central notion of identities as a means to alleviate insecurity, Kinnvall argues:

³³ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 743.

³⁴ Kinnvall and Lindén, "Dialogical Selves between Security and Insecurity: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Challenge of the Global."

³⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 11.

³⁶ James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East*, 4 ed. (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994), 5.

³⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3, 288.

³⁸ Vlahos, *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change* 13.

Nationalism and religion... are more likely than other identity constructions to provide answers to those in need... supply[ing] particularly powerful stories and beliefs because of their ability to convey a picture of security, stability, and simple answers. (Parenthesis mine)³⁹

Beyond providing the basic characteristics of community (intersubjectivity, a sense of belonging, collective authenticity), the power of RNMs is found in their incontestable message, the sense of mandated purpose derived from canonical principles, their epistemological certainty and their promise of a sovereign territory within which to implement their vision. The divine nature of RNMs make them particularly effective as a living buffer against the insecurity of globalising modernity, providing a lens with which to interpret complex and nebulous happenings that claims to transcend time and space and derives authenticity from a broader, cosmic narrative that assigns easily comprehensible meaning to events.⁴⁰

Simplicity of narrative message and the corresponding reductionism of complexity in reality is a powerful force for ontological security. This inadvertently corresponds with Scott's maxim on expertise that argues:

Many forms of knowledge...require a narrowing bridge of vision...[the] great advantage of such [a view] is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. The very simplification, in turn, makes the phenomenon at the centre of the field of vision more legible. (Parenthesis mine)⁴¹

Simply put; artificially simplifying a system's parameters increases an agent's comprehension of said system. Although Scott's own comments refer to expertise in governance and organisation under state bureaucracy, the same principles hold true for an individual or group conception of reality. The fewer elements that are deemed to have relevant meaning or importance to an individual, the easier it is to achieve a state of epistemological confidence. Identities sustained by this form of reductionism thus hold a great deal of appeal for many seeking to alleviate existential anxiety. Although the construction of a reductionist, polarised assessment of reality in this manner is not the exclusive purview of religious nationalism, its message of a clear, defined world and way of life; generally articulated through a set of core texts and rituals; can be particularly poignant and far reaching when compared to other movements. For many within RNMs, personal identity is imbued with an incontestable truth of knowing born out of the celestial, making the challenging of its core principles through material process or competing ideologies problematic. This grants movements constructed around such principles a great deal of resistance to the aforementioned impact of change and modernity upon epistemological. It is by little coincidence that as rapid change and innovation has occurred in the past century as the result of the rising

³⁹ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 742.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴¹ Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, 11.

effects of globalisation, there has been a corresponding explosion in the number of religious fundamentalist movements.⁴² Although, inevitably, each of these instances has emerged in part due to their own specific set of local criteria, the general global trend nevertheless stands out from historical patterns. The divine underpinnings of narrative within RNMs offer the agent a sense of timeless consistency and clear answers to many of life's most existential questions. The power of a narrative that is not simply concerned with banal material reality, but with a cosmic struggle between righteousness and sin, is extremely compelling, particularly for those who find the trappings of the former unattainable or unsatisfying.⁴³ The surety derived from being a 'soldier' on the side of right in such a cosmic conflict serves to burn away many ambiguities of existence and provides a robust, comprehensible means through which to interpret and respond to the risks posed by change, transformation and modernisation. Importantly, it can also serve to minimise and supplant the importance of contemporary systems of moralism and rationalise behaviours that would otherwise be considered extreme and radical. This seems particularly prominent when such behaviours aim at eliminating the perceived sources of insecurity that drove individuals to the RNMs in the first place.

Religious nationalist movements also have a number of organisational advantages over other sources of collective ontological security. With many of the major faiths retaining a global following in the hundreds of millions, nationalist movements derived from their principles are also able to point to these immense constituencies as a tool for legitimisation. The ability for elites in such movements to link their parochial experiences of insecurity with these wider structures of community further contributes to a sense of ideological authenticity in the minds of followers and some observers. The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) claims that its objectives of establishing a caliphate benefit the entire Muslim community. In so doing, its current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has called on the loyalty and support of all Muslims.⁴⁴ This does not mean that the ISIS is accepted by the wider group it claims membership of and in reality it operates in a parasitic manner; attaching itself to a host macro-community and drawing legitimacy from it, while at the same time serving to damage the perception of said community by outsiders. ISIS is not representative of the heterogeneous global Muslim *ummah*, but nevertheless can capitalise on membership of this community to frame its actions as undertaken in the name of all 'true'

⁴² For in-depth discussions on this phenomenon see Michael B. Salzman, "Globalization, Religious Fundamentalism and the Need for Meaning," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 32, no. 4 (2008). & Thomas W. Segady, "Traditional Religion, Fundamentalism, and Institutional Transition in the 20th Century" *The Social Science Journal* 43, no. 2 (2006). & Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 32 (2006). & Rodney Stark William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁴³ Mark Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War," in *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 148-66.

⁴⁴ SITE, "Islamic State Leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Encourages Emigration, Worldwide Action" (2014), <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/islamic-state-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-encourages-emigration-worldwide-action.html>.

Muslims, a strategy that has drawn a large amount of material and financial support to their cause in Syria and Iraq from many onlookers, particularly those in the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁵

The age of most universalist religions lends nationalist movements claiming adherence to their principles a degree of authenticity and historical legitimacy most other structures of identity cannot claim or access. While religion and religious doctrines are constantly reconstructed and restructured in reflex to the social and political realities under which they exist, the various faiths of the world are nevertheless perceived as homogenous, unchanging, timeless and monolithic entities by many of their believers; a factor of immense comfort during times of uncertainty. RNMs are able to contextualise the experience of contemporary complexity and uncertainty within the broader historical narrative of the religion of which they claim membership. Sources of alternative epistemological truth outside the movement, such as other sects, denominations or cultural groups, are reduced to the ever present and threatening non-believers contained in almost all religious lore that threaten the integrity of the faithful community. By contrast, followers of the movement are elevated to admirable holy warriors charged with defending the religion, as they embody everything the outsider is not. This follows Freudian thought that suggests that the parameters of communal identity are constructed by utilising outsiders as an example of what the in-group is not.⁴⁶ Indeed, this is far from an observation uniquely found in psychology and sociology. The historian Quataert, for example, wrote in regards to heterogeneity in his history of the Ottoman Empire that “a people comes to perceive of itself as distinct and separate, with particular and unique characteristics, often through using the “other” as a means of defining what it is and, equally, what it is not.”⁴⁷ Quataert goes on to speak of both the positives and negatives of this process, wherein the other is often admired for certain qualities as much as it is loathed by the community. All too often, however, the other is reduced to a threatening, non-human object to which the ‘we-image’ of the community is positioned in relation to. In extreme cases, this dehumanising effect results in the creation of a moral dichotomisation, which casts the chosen community as the embodiment of all that is good and desirable and outsiders as contemptible and loathsome. As Kinnvall puts it, “[by] demonising the other, the self becomes sufficiently [sacralised].”⁴⁸ In this manner, for many the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is transformed for many from a parochial and modern struggle between competing norms of self-determination and self-defence⁴⁹ into a wider, endless melee between the Jews and the Muslims that has raged for fourteen hundred years.

⁴⁵ Examples of such support can be seen at <http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/facebook-riddled-with-australian-muslims-supporting-isis/story-fnjwmwrh-1227034437804> & <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/12/world/meast/isis-numbers/> & <http://www.businessinsider.com/turkeys-capital-is-rattled-by-growing-signs-of-isis-support-2014-10?IR=T>

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion*, vol. 12 (Toronto: Penguin Group, 1991), 302-06.

⁴⁷ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

⁴⁸ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 754.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Macqueen, *An Introduction to Middle East Politics* (London: SAGE Publications, 2013), 332-42.

This capacity of RNMs to augment parochial experiences of inter-communal and socio-psychological insecurity with a broader religio-historical frame enables the chosen group to add greater credence and self-confidence to their construction and classification of external “abject others,”⁵⁰ as well as in the securitisation of intersubjectivity itself. Ontological insecurity is transformed from an ephemeral manifestation of the particular time the group occupies into an ongoing feature of a perennial cosmic struggle. Uncertainty, in effect, becomes familiar – the RNM, empowered by its own confidence and knowledge of self, adopts a siege mentality towards the external world that has long threatened it. Those whose interpretation of reality differs from the RNM are shifted from stranger to potential threat and thus can be treated accordingly. Through such a realisation, a “discourse of exclusion” is constructed that provides ready classification of the other and which can in many cases rationalise hostility towards it.⁵¹ Such discourses are given credence by a deep sense of historical continuity and are riven by endless conspiracy and intrigue against the affiliate religion by the outsider. Al Qaeda’s use of the Crusades to frame contemporary US policy in the Middle East demonstrates a history of Christian aggression towards Muslims in the minds of militants that can justify the use of political violence as a legitimate response.⁵² Similarly, Serbian nationalists evoking historical conflict between Christians and the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan wars of the 1990s contributed to the legitimisation of violence against other ethnic groups, particularly Muslims.⁵³ As Quataert puts it, “[after] 1989, the reinvented memory of [the 1389 loss at the battle of] Kosovo [against Ottoman forces] became a powerful catalyst to the formation of modern Serbian identity.”⁵⁴ Not only do such historical allusions provide a sense of longevity and order to the uncertainties RNMs face, they also authenticate the movement itself as a manifestation of longstanding resistance to these same ‘age-old’ antagonists, providing a clear justification for its existence, its radical goals and its desire for territorialisation. Of course, the use of historical contextualisation to legitimate confrontational political behaviour and classify rival units is not restricted to RNMs. States often follow a similar path, with individual instances of insecurity often being framed and reduced within a broader historical context that may not necessarily reflect the empirical reality currently faced. Thus, for many in the West, Russia’s role in the ongoing Ukraine crisis projects the spectre of the USSR and the re-ignition of the Cold War, despite – and likely because – the modern Russian state being far diminished in comparison to its Soviet predecessor.⁵⁵ As a result, it cannot be said that the wider phenomenon of historical augmentation is particularly unique to RNMs. However, many of the aspects utilised for legitimisation within the process itself, such as the focus on “cosmic” rather than earthly conflict and the sheer length of the histories drawn upon can be seen as relatively unique, with scholars such as

⁵⁰ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 753-62.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 754.

⁵² Usama Bin Muhammad Bin Laden, "Statement of Jihad against Jews and Crusaders," (1998).

⁵³ Slobodan Milosevic, "The Gazimestan Speech," (1989).

⁵⁴ Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* 20.

⁵⁵ Robert Legvold, "Managing the New Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* (2014), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141537/robert-legvold/managing-the-new-cold-war>.

Juergensmeyer suggesting they may ultimately influence the policies of the RNM in responding to the perceived insecurity.⁵⁶

It is little wonder that this securitisation of difference that redefines extra-communal 'strangers' to the status of known threat can facilitate the legitimisation and normalisation of violence between communities where previously there may have been none. The displacement of experiences of change and insecurity onto local or, in an increasingly globalised world, physically distant outsiders and the concurrent perception of threat to the self-community generated by this dynamic has often seen the desired destruction of those same strangers emerge as a central objective in the praxis of re-establishing security. Violence becomes a celebration and assertion of identity, as competing structures of truth are stifled and stamped out and their associated doubt curbed.⁵⁷ In effect, violence becomes conceptualised as an instrumental means by which epistemological uncertainty, and through it, ontological insecurity, can be eliminated. In line with Fanonist logic, it suggests that only through the purity of violence can corruption be completely removed.⁵⁸

This dynamic rarely manifests as the sole cause of conflict, and tends to emerge within wider struggles over political power, resources and dominance, creating a complex interplaying of ideological and materialist drivers for violence. Importantly, it is often against a backdrop of change and modernisation that the securitisation of intersubjectivity becomes most prominent and aggression is displaced onto local outsider communities. The causes for this are both ideological and practical. By its very nature, the 'other' group exists outside of the social moorings and norms of the in-group, leaving them open to suspicion, particularly during times of uncertainty where the sources of insecurity are often not readily visible or comprehensible. At the same time, the physical proximity of neighbouring groups enables action against them. Some have argued that the sectarianisation of conflict in Iraq today reflects precisely this type of dynamic, with the breakdown of the normative arbiter that was the Ba'athist state in the 2003 invasion⁵⁹ and the inability to reintroduce⁶⁰ such a system facilitating a rapid and enduring intercommunal securitisation. In turn, this caused many in the newly dislocated population to fall back to new militant forms of traditional religious nationalist identities for epistemological certainty and predictability to counter feelings of risk and anarchy posed by the post-Saddam order. Kinnvall points to the explosion of conflict between Hindu and Muslim communities during the decolonisation period in India and Pakistan as another example of this. While there had been longstanding tensions between these

⁵⁶ Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War."

⁵⁷ Vlahos, *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change* 26.

⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

⁵⁹ Thomas Sommer-Houdeville, "Six Years Later: The Political Landscape in Iraq," (Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity initiative, 2009).

⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Jihadi Jack-in-the-Box," (2014), [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/files/middle%20east%20north%20africa/iraq%20syria%20lebanon/iraq/b038-iraq-s-jihadi-jack-in-the-box.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/files/middle%20east%20north%20africa/iraq%20syria%20lebanon/iraq/b038-iraq-s-jihadi-jack-in-the-box.pdf).

communities that had sporadically flared into conflict since the eighth century,⁶¹ the violence witnessed in the wake of British partition was systemic and unprecedented. Kinnvall claims that much of what drove this process was the power vacuum left in the wake of British rule and the subsequent scramble to fill such a void with a clear national identity. The collapse of British dominance on the Indian subcontinent represented the ending of a system of governance that had been in effect for over three centuries. The radical alterations this wrought on long-standing political and social power dynamics and structures in the region is difficult to overstate. In a short space of time, a suzerain colonial asset fractured into two distinct, modern nation states. The chaos that surrounded this radical change is difficult to overstate. Within the anarchy, the pursuit of a broader national identity unleashed was seen by many within both the Hindu and Muslim populations as being predicated on the creation of a 'homogenous' national community.⁶² Within such a framework, the existence of a readily identifiable parallel community built around defined epistemological differences was seen by many with the RNM as weakening the realisation of this goal and was consequentially easily identified and securitised. In this, intercommunal violence over such questions became tragically all too common, as fragile religious national units sought to harden themselves and eschew dissent.

While not a religious movement, the extreme racial and cultural elitism of National Socialism in Germany displayed tendencies remarkably similar to actual RNMs. Despite its inherent secularism, the Nazi ethos has been described by numerous authors as a form of "political religion"⁶³ at the head of the German nationalist movement.⁶⁴ Alongside other patterns of symbolism, philosophy and ritual reminiscent of a religious movement, the concept of a population cleansed of all ethnological, cultural and ideology impurity identified within the National Socialist ethos became elevated to a sacrosanct level by many in both the Nazi elite and the wider German populace. As with the India/Pakistan case, the precursor to this exacerbation of emphasis on exclusionary identity was in many ways a response to the political, economic and military turmoil and shifts of the previous two decades that saw the breakdown of predictability and the rise of new forms of uncertainty and risk. Once again, known 'other' communities that diverged from the surrounding the Germanic peoples became securitised as scapegoats for the wider national traumas and the collapse of predictability experienced during the First World War and the subsequent interwar period by the German population. Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Communists and Slavs all represented unwanted blemishes that served to dilute and corrupt the 'pure' Aryan community. Ultimately, this type of identity securitisation played a key role in both enabling and subsequently driving

⁶¹ Marc Gaborieau, "From Al-Beruni to Jinnah: Idiom, Ritual and Ideology of the Hindu-Muslim Confrontation in South Asia," *Anthropology Today* 1, no. 3 (1985). & C. A. Bayly, "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985).

⁶² Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 758.

⁶³ Michael Burleigh, "National Socialism as a Political Religion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 2 (2000).

⁶⁴ Pete Lentini, *Neojihadism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 171-76.

the implementation of a regime of systemic, industrialised violence against these numerous ‘outsider’ communities, in spite of the irrationally burdensome strategic and economic costs it placed on the state under the conditions of total war.

Returning to the religious upheaval of Najd discussed in chapter three with these lessons in mind we can see that the rise and expansion of revivalism produced similar outcomes to the cases listed above; violence erupting between previously co-existent communities, as issues of religious identity that had seemingly not been cause for major consternation during previous epochs were suddenly reconfigured into major sources of anxiety and insecurity. The revivalist movement’s own function and form also displayed many of the features of religious nationalism outlined in Kinnvall’s observations: a reactionary mass mobilisation based around an intersubjective interpretation of core religious texts and rituals with end state goals of territorialisation to ensure identity security. With this general logic in mind, the following section will now seek outline how revivalism functioned as a self-contained system that promulgated ontological insecurity in adherents through a process of identity securitisation, then subsequently provided security against such uncertainties to those same individuals.

3.3 Ontological Security in Early-Period Revivalism, 1744-1818

As with many political and religious ideologies, revivalism was built to simultaneously terrify and provide immense comforts to those that followed its tenets. At once, the doctrine presented a world rife with imminent threat, chaos, unbelief and corruption, while at the same time assuring the believer that they were part of an exclusive few who were morally and ideologically superior to all others and would be saved from these same forces if they were to remain vigilant and observant. As Shahi writes:

Exclusionary doctrines are often derived from collectivizing social constructions such as race, class, ideology and religion. Often individuals or groups who adhere to exclusionary narratives claim to be on the side of the ‘truth’ and assume themselves to be enriched by higher ‘moral’ standards. This very much describes the anatomy of exclusion in [revivalist] doctrine. (Parenthesis mine)⁶⁵

These are, of course, generic features of many subsets of religions, from Islam, to Christianity and to Judaism. Nevertheless, the extremity and literalism with which the revivalist doctrine interpreted and responded to these features makes it stand out within the wider religious pantheon. The core of the revivalist message excelled in both its simplicity and its use of divine mandate as a force for epistemological certainty and, correspondingly, security for participants. Central to the movement’s ideological basis was the concept of absolute monotheism. This stressed the unitary nature of the creator being and the intrinsic heresy associated with elevating anything else to his level. As with Christian Protestantism, worship was to be conducted between the believer and the deity, with no scholar or item augmenting or interceding in that personal relationship. Any attempts to do so were viewed as a

⁶⁵ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 106.

corruption on the religion that required retaliatory action from the faithful. While the concept of absolute monotheism within Islam is not in any way unique to revivalists, the extent of their emphasis on this precept marked them as distinct from most other Muslim communities and reformist movements. At the same time, the movement's singular focus on this precept as an force for metaphysical emancipation likely acted to generate a considerable sense of ontological surety for adherents, as the message was both simple and, through the movement itself, attainable. Within revivalist's conceptualisation of absolute monotheism was the assumption of predestination and the acceptance that God had created and determined the actions of human kind.⁶⁶ This type of fatalism was combined with a rigorous attempt to emulate the actions and deeds of the pious ancestors of the first community, a theme scholars like Wahhab and Sulayman Ibn Abdallah commonly alluded to in justifying their hard-line views.⁶⁷ In their minds, the reconstruction of the original, authentic community required and justified a considerable harshness of action and thought. In tandem, these three elements of monotheism, fatalism and emulation served to create a clear, legible ideological structure that defined a community and in turn dictated many of the central precepts of individual identities associated with revivalism. They also lessened the implications and responsibilities associated with decision making in an ever-increasingly complex world, giving adherents a clear model of moral and physical lifestyle, and eliminating many ambiguities associated with choice. Fatalism also created a scapegoat for failures, unforeseen consequences and unfortunate outcomes. This last factor was to become increasingly prominent as the state matured, and the term "*Insha'Allah*", or "God willing", although present throughout the Arab vernacular, is a particularly ubiquitous and multi-layered colloquialism in the context of Saudi society, rule and policy.⁶⁸

In further line with other RNMs, much of the foundational core of the revivalist doctrine concerned precisely what a true believer was not, as dictated through the interpretive lens of historical precedent. Wahhab dedicated considerable time to outlining the characteristics of the polytheistic 'other,' so as to determine what constituted a 'true' Muslim. Much of this concerned what he perceived as the incorrect practice of Islam itself, rather than the targeting of competing religions. In *Characteristics of the Time of Ignorance*,⁶⁹ he critically outlined 128 features that characterised the socio-religious environs of pre-Islamic Arabia. Such elements ranged from the general state of diversity within religious focus and practice,⁷⁰ to the illegitimacy of certain laws at odds with religious doctrine,⁷¹ down to even condemning specific offenses, such as engaging in acts of worship in a state of undress.⁷² Such a descriptive text gave readers clear examples from which they could then find parallels in their current existence. In his work,

⁶⁶ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 115.

⁶⁷ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 33-34.

⁶⁸ Ohoud al-Lami, "Waiting for God's Will: Falsehood of Open-Ended Gradualism in Saudi Reform," (2013), <http://riyadhbureau.com/blog/2013/8/saudi-reform-open-ended-gradualism>.

⁶⁹ Abd al-Wahhab, "Characteristics of the Time of Ignorance," 33-80.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 35-7

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 54

⁷² *Ibid*, 53

The Four Principles: Differentiating the Muslim from the Polytheist, Wahhab utilised historical context derived from Koranic parable to draw parallels between the local Sufi and pagan rites practiced by many Sunni Muslims in eighteenth century Najd and its surrounds and the polytheists described in foundational Islamic lore. Specifically, he attacked the claim that the belief in God alone was enough to be considered Muslim, outlining events in which:

The polytheists whom [Muhammad] fought accepted that Allah was the Creator, the Provider, the bestower of all life and the disposer of death, the One who regulates all affairs, causes harm and grants benefit. However, this acceptance did not avail them because they did not supplicate to Allah alone. (Parenthesis mine)⁷³

This creation of a seemingly linear, historical narrative directly linking the actions and trials of the Prophet with the contemporary experience of religious pluralism enabled revivalist elites from Wahhab onwards to reframe and subsequently securitise the issue of ideological diversity with a credibility authenticated by precedent. For more traditionally-minded Muslims, the peculiar practitioners of Sufi and pagan rites that had existed in their midst for innumerable generations were transformed from the ever-present familiar stranger to a source of risk and anxiety in a pattern that in some ways imitated the original activities of the Prophet himself in his condemnation of paganism and idolatry.

The natural inference out of revivalist discourse concerning these issues was that polytheism was not just a long-dead idiom of historical curiosity, but still prevalent at the time of writing. Such was evident in Wahhab's own writings when he laid charges against what he viewed as the idolatrous practices of neighbouring communities in Hejaz and Yemen in *The Book of Monotheism*, claiming:

Allah, Most High, reviles all idol-worshipping polytheists in general and in particular, those who worship the three idols: Al-Laat, the idol of the people of Taa'if, Al-'Uzza, worshipped by the people of Waadi Nakhlah, and Manaat, the idol of the people of Al-Mushallal, near Al-Qadeed, and He challenges them concerning these idols: Can they benefit them in any way, by bringing good or protecting from harm? Or are they simply names which they have given themselves, not sanctioned by Allah?⁷⁴

To revivalists, the 'innovative' adherents of tomb worship, ancestor veneration and similar practices were not at all unlike those loathsome individuals that had defied Muhammad's word and authority in the sixth and seventh centuries. Wahhab and his supporters claimed that, like those resistant to the teachings of Muhammad in Mecca and Medina, many in Najd utilised intercession in their daily worship. This was hardly a remarkable claim, as intercession was and remained commonly practiced throughout the Muslim

⁷³ Abd al-Wahhab, "The Four Principles Differentiating Muslims from the Polytheist," 118.

⁷⁴ "Whoever Seeks Blessing from a Tree, Stone, or Any Such Thing," in *The Book of Tawheed* (International Islamic Publishing House, Date Unknown).

world.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, revivalist held that such practices were a direct affront to Islam. This challenged the concept of absolute monotheism central to revivalist interpretation of the Islamic faith, which dictated that the relationship between the individual agent and the divine was via a direct conduit without intermediaries.⁷⁶ The existence of objects between the individual and God implied a celestial hierarchy or multiple sources of divine authority that directly contravened the oneness of the Creator. For revivalists, the use of such practices constituted not only misguided observance, but arch heresy, as ritualistic foci and religious practitioners were said to be elevated to the same level as God itself in the minds of worshippers. The severity of this issue in revivalist thought is made clear in *Ten Things Which Breach Islam*, in which “Associating partners in the worship of Allah” was listed as the number one offense, with numerous Koranic passages cited to support the claim.⁷⁷ The perception of an endemic culture of corrupted worship in Najd and its surrounds during the eighteenth century was such that Wahhab went as far as to claim in *The Five Maxims* that “the [polytheism] practiced today is worse than what [the unbelievers during the time of the prophet] practiced.”⁷⁸ Those who engaged in the practice endangered not only their own immortal soul, but the souls of those around them and by correspondence, the integrity of an Islamic community constructed on the precept of a purity and authenticity derived from the foundations of the religion. Theoretically, it was not enough that such dissonant individuals and groups be ignored; they had to be either spiritually righted, or removed from the community until full supplication. As Wahhab put it:

I am of the view that the innovators should be boycotted and ostracised until they repent. I judge by what is apparent in them and I relegate what is inside them to Allah. I believe that every newly invented matter in the religion is an innovation.⁷⁹

This dissociative position was later further reiterated by revivalist scholars like Sulayman ibn Abdallah and Hamad ibn Atiq, who drew on hadiths like “[whoever] associates with the idolater and lives with him is like him” to legitimate their claims.⁸⁰ One again, such plain, direct language enabled easy classification of outsiders. These types of prescriptions of disassociation and coerced conversion clearly reflected a desire to remove uncertainty from the midst of the new community and would go on to form the basis of the *takfir*⁸¹ doctrine of intra-Islamic denouncement that would come to be an infamous component of Saudi rule.

⁷⁵ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 104.

⁷⁶ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 23.

⁷⁷ Abd al-Wahhab, “Ten Things Which Breach Islam,” 82-83.

⁷⁸ “The Five Maxims,” 89.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 28

⁸⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 46-48.

⁸¹ This refers to the process of denying one’s membership of the Muslim community due to their deviance from the ‘official’ Sunni Orthodoxy. It was and remains employed against Shi’as, Sufis and Ibadis to deny status and rationalise extreme actions against them.

Revivalism called for the creation of a space which could be religiously moderated and administered and within which such violations could not occur.⁸² This was far from mere theory. Those with religious influence, such as teachers, judges and scholars and who rejected revivalist notions were often forced to emigrate out of conquered lands⁸³ or were sometimes simply murdered.⁸⁴ This territorialisation was intrinsically linked with the notion of creating a space in which ontological security could be directly moderated by elites and in which the threats of insecurity could theoretically be excluded. Disagreements over ideological principles beyond a certain point could be stifled and the intersubjectivity of the revivalist community could be maintained as dominant.

Although parallel communities of Christians and Jews were theoretically outside this system and allowed to maintain their separate identities, they assumed a subordinated, marginalised position, where the threat of destruction was an ever-present sword of Damocles, should they fail to pay religiously-mandated tithes to their enlightened overlords.⁸⁵ One should also highlight that within the Arabian Peninsula such communities represented the merest fraction of the overall population and largely existed on the periphery, concentrated mostly in Yemen.⁸⁶ As a result, non-Islamic faiths never posed any real threat to a hegemonic Muslim identity on the Peninsula. Their diminutive size also meant that they offered no credible political or military threat to the exponentially larger Muslim population. This enabled them to be largely ignored by those seeking to stimulate large scale socio-political change. More specifically, in Najd itself, there appears to be no historical evidence of any Christian or Jewish settlement. Given this lack of proximal familiarity, the focus any religious mass-movement emerging from Central Arabia was thus unlikely to be overly concerned with the other peoples of the Book during the mid-eighteenth century and this was reflected in the minor role such groups played in the early revivalist discourses.

While revivalism did display many consistencies with the precepts of Kinnvall's theory, however, one central driving principle driving religious nationalist movements seems absent from the Najd case. Unlike other cases discussed, revivalism and the wave of violence it unleashed sprouted in an environment that was, for all intents and purposes, static. Neither the politics, nor the society, nor the religion of Najd had altered in any dramatic fashion for generations prior to the rise of the movement. Modernity had simply not impacted Najd by the time revivalism emerged. This leaves an important question: how, then, did a RNM emerge in an environment where the potential for ontological insecurity seemed relatively remote?

⁸² Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 772.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 27

⁸⁴ al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 62.

⁸⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 26.

⁸⁶ Joseph Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1999).

A central theoretical assumption of Kinnvall's concepts on RNMs remains problematically absent when considering the historical case of the Najdi revivalist movement: the apparent lack of new input variables responsible for generating ontological insecurity that can adequately account for revivalism's sudden populism and rapid rise in the Central Arabian system of the eighteenth century. As highlighted above, a consistency held between most RNMs as ontological security providers is their emergence as a response to some form of new, intersubjectively experienced process that is perceived to undermine traditional patterns of behaviour and norms in a given community. As Kinnvall and Giddens both make clear, it has been modern, international processes such as decolonisation, globalisation and the fluidity of modern labour that seem most culpable for the ontological insecurities driving the emergence of RNMs.⁸⁷ As chapters two and three argued, Najd was a remarkably static environment, disconnected from its surrounds and displaying little deviance from its past in the run-up to the emergence of revivalism. To say that what few forces for change that did exist were peripheral to day-to-day existence may be an overstatement of their influence. The religious pluralism that was to be the focus of revivalist critique had existed in relative peace for hundreds of years without any major incidents of intra-denominational violence.

This leaves several possible explanations. Could some major source of structural upheaval be at play that the histories simply fail to record? This seems unlikely, as, despite the limits of Najdi historians, it is doubtful such an influence would escape their writings entirely. Perhaps revivalism emerged in Najd from drivers completely unique and distinct from other instances of religious nationalism. Or, conversely, there was no insecurity at all and Wahhab himself galvanised a disparate, impartial people through charismatic leadership alone. Alternatively, Muhammad Ibn Saud could have bribed and coerced the movement into existence, imposing it purely through inducements of coin and the edge of a sword. Again, these seem unlikely. As previously indicated, revivalism shares many commonalities with other RNMs in both its methods and its function. While the theory of Wahhab as a single, dominant linchpin may be viable within the confines of a cult, it seems unlikely that he could have effected an enduring mass movement without appealing to a broader current of insecurity in the populace. If revivalist ideology had rested on his shoulders alone, it would be expected to have suffered a mighty blow upon his death in 1792. In reality, the movement had yet to reach the zenith of its power and appeal. Similarly, the use of pure military power and bribery alone to form the movement seems unlikely; as Najd elites had long employed such methods with far less impressive results, never achieving anything close to such a system-altering outcome. An alternative is that the contemporary focus on the impact of large-scale factors of globalised externality in open systems to account for ontological insecurity in the literature may obfuscate from the potential of micro-scale, localised factors occurring in closed, disconnected systems having precisely the same effect.

⁸⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 743.

Rather than resulting from large-scale economic, political or cultural changes, the key variable of underpinning the emergence of revivalism seems to have been the simple, yet profound act of reimagining the meaning of religious pluralism in Najd by Wahhab and his disciples and their corresponding application of a new ‘traditionalism.’ Through theological argument and a willing subset of the population open to such ideas, the religious pluralism experienced by many was transformed from a mere feature of the region into a source of imminent threat and uncertainty for the conservative community. The lack of revisionist thought in the pre-Saudi religious community of Najd and its theological fluency seems to account for why these issues remained dormant prior to the 1730s and 1740s. Either by lack of imagination, incentive, desire, training or a combination of the four, the religious scholars of Central Arabia showed little concern over diversity within the practice of Sunni Islam. Augmented with a seemingly unprecedented comprehension of theology and exegesis, however, revivalist arguments rapidly altered the nature of what likely had been seen, at worst, as a nuisance for centuries. Suddenly, the existence of the ‘other,’ whose primary sin was ‘innovation,’ became a risk to the newly defined puritan movement, a position authenticated through Koranic and Hadithic writings. Out of this novel interpretation of holy text, anxiety flowed into the masses. Suddenly, structures of truth and knowing began to strain under the weight of new knowledge. The devout, it claimed, were in reality surrounded by sources of threat; polytheists who had corrupted the religion by integrating blasphemous practices into worship and who compromised the spiritual integrity of good Muslims. Despite drawing on the precedents of the Prophet to provide validity to their claims of threat in this manner, revivalist scholars went as far as to claim that heretical practices presented a greater metaphysical menace in the 18th century than they had at the time of Muhammad due to the fact that they festered in spite of the correct doctrine having been illuminated.⁸⁸

The focus of revivalist critique on innovation clearly implied distaste for the modern, even if some of the supposed changes, such as pagan ritualisation, may have in fact predated the Islamic religion itself. The mere existence of intra-denominational disagreement was now seen to be a challenge to the epistemological truth held within the orthodox view. Through this new interpretation, revivalist advocates sought to ensure that the coexistence of divergent streams of Islamic thought equated to a perpetual state of insecurity for adherents. The clear inference from this state of affairs was that some form of action was required to eliminate competing sources of epistemology, so as to re-establish the desired secure state. As it turned out, the optimum method for reaching this goal, that being a territorialisation wherein the principles of the movement could be implemented, administered and enforced; neatly coincided with the desire of ibn Saud to greatly expand the borders of the Emirate of Diriyah. As Rasheed puts it, the revivalist elite was able to “mystify”⁸⁹ the world and reconstruct old, accepted ambiguities of day-to-day life into new dramatic binaries that demanded action. Within this process, the heterodox “familiar

⁸⁸ Abd al-Wahhab, "The Five Maxims," 89.

⁸⁹ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 34.

strangers⁹⁰ in the midst of the orthodox became not only an impediment to the realisation of the 'original' utopian community of the Prophet, but actually responsible for its departure in the first place. In this manner, the very act of reinterpreting the meaning of intra-denominational diversity in Najd ushered in a process of change that challenged the basis of the social equilibrium that had been at play there for centuries. This would naturally serve to foment ontological insecurity in those sensitised to the new conditions; an anxiety religious elites were all too eager to alleviate through their own radical set of prescriptions. The ability of revivalist and Saudi elite to not only introduce and proliferate this ontologically dislocative force, but to then securitise it and exploit it for political ends and state building was masterful. The process provided a kind of *asabiyyah*, or sense of collective purpose along religious and kinship lines peculiar to non-urbanised peoples of the Middle East,⁹¹ that unified many of the disparate peoples of Najd into a relatively cohesive single political unit eager to support Saudi expansion.

3.4 Violence as a Tool to Fulfil Ontological Security Demands

The use of violence has long been associated with the revivalist movement and has been characterised by many as cruel, barbaric, vicious and excessive. Most recently, the Saudi state has drawn widespread international criticism for its continual use of the decapitation in its enforcement of the death penalty, as well as its employment of flogging and lashing to deal with political dissidents.⁹² The regime's defence of this behaviour is that it adheres with the traditions of classical Islamic governance it claims adherence to. This is far from a modern phenomenon and violence has long been instrumental to achieving particular ideological ends for the Saudi state, many of them pertaining to ontological security of its citizens. During the period of the first state, two instrumental uses of violence were particularly notable: the use of force to expand and consolidate the ontological integrity of the in-group; and the employment of punitive violence to maintain the integrity of the state, particularly along the periphery where the in-group was not dominant. With regards to this specific study, the former directly related to the identity security of revivalists, while the latter became a means of winning over and controlling those who were not necessarily swayed by the central premise of the movement by providing other forms of ontological stability.

Although DeLong-Bas challenges the commonly-held notion that Wahhab himself was an advocate of sectarian violence - arguing that he was far more concerned with preaching and conversion-sans-coercion⁹³ - it is clear that the securitisation of Sunni heterodoxy in Najd that he and his followers

⁹⁰ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 753.

⁹¹ Linda T Darling, "Social Cohesion ('Asabiyya) and Justice in the Late Medieval Middle East," *Comparative studies in society and history* 49, no. 02 (2007).

⁹² Amnesty International, "Flogging of Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia 'Vicious Act of Cruelty' " (2015), <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/36317/>.

⁹³ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*.

advocated acted to create the sociological conditions for normalising violence against those who challenged revivalist identity. As Vassiliev puts it, “[revivalism] led easily to fanaticism. The conviction that the [Revivalists’] opponents were ‘infidel’ and ‘polytheists’ was seen as justifying their cruelty towards them.”⁹⁴ Al-Uthaymin concurs, arguing that “[the] inhabitants of the region had been taught to believe that the opponents of the [revivalist] cause were enemies of Islam, who should be fought against and whose properties were lawful spoil.”⁹⁵ For the purposes of understanding the broader implications of this normalisation of violence in the revivalist identity, debating whether or not one particular scholar was or was not an explicit advocate of force has little use outside of pure academic interest. Rather, what seems more important is an examination of the patterns of behaviour that emerged following the articulation of the discourse, after it was digested and accepted in a widespread manner. For zealous devotees of revivalism, “hate became the link among the present, the future, and a re-created past,”⁹⁶ and was directed squarely at those familiar neighbours who were seen to be agents of chaos, unsanctioned change and innovation and whose activities served to destabilise what was an already perfect religious form. By eliminating these identified sources of existential discomfort, the state was effectively providing ontological security to the revivalists. This widely propagated and accepted abhorrence of change likely helped to establish the necessary psychological and sociological conditions under which harsh reprisals against the perceived sources of communal insecurity could be undertaken with relative ease. As Wahhab put it:

We fight people who commit [polytheism] as Allah, Most High, says, “*fight them until there is no more [strife]...*” i.e. [polytheism], “*...and the religion is Allah’s alone.*” And, “*Kill the polytheist wherever you find them, seize them, besiege them and lie in wait for them on every road. If they repent and establish the prayer and pay the [religious tax], let them go on their way.*” The prophet said, “I have been ordered to fight the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped saved Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and they establish the prayer and give the [religious tax] If they do this, their blood and property becomes inviolable except by due right and their reckoning lies with Allah, Mighty and Magnificent.” (Parenthesis mine)⁹⁷

Such claims reflected a common sentiment within revivalist adherents that violence against individuals, communities and property was a legitimate response to them as sources of insecurity; that it was a necessary precursor to the rejuvenation of society in the image of the early communities of Islam; and that it was in fact an emulation of the Prophet’s own actions when faced with similar conditions.

Beyond securing the community itself, violence was characterised as a form of philanthropy. It was claimed that intra-denominational and sectarian violence formed part of an emancipatory process for

⁹⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 78.

⁹⁵ al-Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhab: The Man and His Works*, 59.

⁹⁶ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 755.

⁹⁷ Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 19-20.

recipients; the logic dictating that “[when] stricken with severe harm, [the] polytheists whom the Messenger of Allah fought left their intermediaries and supplicated to Allah alone, making the religion sincerely His.”⁹⁸ The contention here was clearly that violence could be employed constructively to grow the revivalist community through the forceful assertion of ‘correct’ normative behaviour. Such a mentality displayed a curious parallel with the ethos of the “civilising mission,” used in part to justify European colonial ventures and expansionism.⁹⁹ This position further reconciled violence directed against the ontological other beyond simply maintaining the integrity of the in-group. Instead, it implied that through the ‘altruism’ of violence, the appropriate individuals in the out-group could be weeded out and integrated into the revivalist community through coerced supplication; ultimately leading to the salvation of their immortal soul. This, in turn, would serve to strengthen the ideological convictions of the revivalist identity and help to confirm in the minds of adherents that their mission was ultimately one of benevolence. Violence, then, existed not only as an instrumental means to protect the ontological security of the in-group by destroying threats to its integrity, but also as a kind of social Darwinist process that acted to strengthen that same group by creating conditions under which supplicating outsiders could be integrated. In the minds of revivalist ideologues, violent cleansing of the Muslim community was a divinely sanctioned action. This addition of a fundamentalist religious framework to the violence emanating out of Najd marked it as distinct from the traditional rationales of defence and raiding that had underpinned conflict in the region for hundreds of years.¹⁰⁰ The introduction of this new variable also brought with it the ever-expansive goal of purifying the Islamic faith, a pattern that was to become entrenched as a central axiom of legitimation in the emerging Saudi state and drive it to expand outwards. This was initially extremely successful at winning over converts when implemented in Central Arabia. As al-Rasheed notes, most of Najd accepted its reformist precepts with little resistance; many such willing converts becoming the dedicated foot soldiers necessary for the subsequent expansion of Saudi hegemony.¹⁰¹ Such an unresisting acceptance was likely a combination of the aforementioned conservative pre-disposition of much of the population discussed in the previous chapter, the threat posed by unprecedented level of centralised hard power the movement itself wielded, as well as its parochial nature that drew upon common perceptions of heterodoxy within the Najdi system.

Once revivalism began to expand beyond the territory of Central Arabia, however, it began to encounter resistance to both its tenets and its violent methodology. For many on the receiving end of such ‘blessings’, the vociferous rhetoric of the doctrine was not interpreted favourably. After exposure to the writings of revivalism, for example, the Omani historian Ibn Razik, an Ibadi, noted that it:

⁹⁸ "The Four Principles Differentiating Muslims from the Polytheist," 124.

⁹⁹ In depth studies on the British attitudes in this regard towards India can be found in Harald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission* (London: Wimbledon Publishing, 2004). Similarly, French views on West Africa can be found in Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁰ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 773.

¹⁰¹ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 19.

[Legalised] the murder of all Muslims who dissent from [revivalism], the appropriation of their property, the enslavement of their offspring [and] the marriage of their wives without first being divorced from their husbands¹⁰²

The reconstruction of conflict from what was largely a tool of wealth and resource redistribution to a means to achieve the perennial securitisation of the revivalist community appears to have occurred at the same time that a spike in the frequency, scale and purpose of violence employed by adherents radically shifted. As previously noted, raids, the most common source of violence in Najd, had often been fairly bloodless affairs in wider the peninsular system due to the feuding and cycles of reprisal killings that could emerge from excess bloodshed. By contrast, the use of violence by revivalists for widespread conquest seems to have often disregarded these types of outcomes, leading to an unprecedented level of destruction and death emanating from Najd. The sacking of Karbala in Southern Iraq during a raid conducted by Saudi forces in April, 1802 came to symbolise this radicalisation of violence emanating from Najd. Here, despite meeting “almost no resistance” from locals, forces led by Saud ibn Abd al-Aziz, the son of Muhammad ibn Saud, slaughtered thousands of civilians, plundered the town and destroyed numerous religious artefacts and monuments, particularly those linked to the Shi’a sect, under the pretext of religious purification.¹⁰³ The French adventurer, J.B. Rousseau recounted the unprecedented scale of violence in visceral detail:

12,000 [revivalists] suddenly attacked the mosque of Imam Husayn; after seizing more spoils than they had ever seized after their greatest victories, they put everything to fire and sword...The elderly, women, and children—everybody died by the barbarians’ sword. Besides, it is said that whenever they saw a pregnant woman, they disembowelled her and left the foetus on the mother’s bleeding corpse. Their cruelty could not be satisfied, they did not cease their murders and blood flowed like water. As a result of the bloody catastrophe, more than 4000 people perished. The [revivalists] carried off their plunder on the backs of 4000 camels. After the plunder and murders they destroyed the Imam’s shrine and converted it into a trench of abomination and blood. (Parenthesis mine) ¹⁰⁴

Although Rousseau may have relied on some degree of poetic licence in this account, the sacking of Karbala became infamous and often-cited by critics of revivalism as evidence of its barbarism. Despite the shifts in targeting methodology towards the civilian population, Rousseau’s account still reveals that the Karbala assault was nevertheless still partially motivated by the raiding mentality of old, with “the greatest

¹⁰² Salil-ibn Razik, *History of the Imams and Seyyids of Oman* trans. George Percy Badger (1871), 307-08. quoted in Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 106.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 96-98

¹⁰⁴ J.B. Rousseau, "Description Du Pachalik Du Baghdad Suivie D'une Notice Historique Sur Les Wahabis," (Paris: , 1809). Translated by Mohammad Ballan at <https://ballandalus.wordpress.com/2014/08/02/the-wahhabi-sack-of-karbala-1802-a-d/>

damage [inflicted] on the minarets and the domes, [which were believed] made of gold bricks.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in 1802, revivalists sacked the Hejazi town of Taif, killing several hundred civilians and destroying countless “heretical” texts and “innovative” property, such as mirrors and window frames, as well as plundering the town’s wealth.¹⁰⁶ Similar behaviour was witnessed in Zubayr and numerous other population centres in and around the growing Saudi emirate.¹⁰⁷ As previously mentioned, as potential sources of epistemological contention, non-adherent religious figures were often forced to emigrate or simply killed. Regardless of which option was chosen, such men inevitably replaced in their stations by regime-sanctioned clergy more amenable to the revivalist message.¹⁰⁸ Although Saudi forces are not recorded as unleashing widespread violence on the populations of Mecca and Medina after their capture in 1803 and 1804, they did engage in a systemic campaign of destruction where they razed the domed tombs of the Prophet, the cities’ former caliphs and many other objectionable religious sites.¹⁰⁹ Once again, the physical environment was reshaped to reflect the contours of their strict sense of identity.

Theft had always been an intrinsic component of raiding culture for Najdis and had always included a degree of violence. The specific targeting and slaughter of civilians and the destruction of property and infrastructure on religious grounds were largely new phenomena in the eighteenth century central Arabian context, however, and were specifically linked to the assertion of revivalist identity and the effort to erase aberrant social patterns and forms. By their very nature, such activities often provided little in the way of material advantage over previous patterns and often neglected new potential sources for revenue in line with local norms. Why, for instance, in a culture where slavery was common, did revivalists not simply sell their captives into bondage, rather than murder them outright? The acts also served to alienate revivalism from many onlookers, often making political engagement, negotiation and trade with neighbouring actors unviable. While internal trade under Saudi rule became more prosperous, many foreign merchants simply refused to enter revivalist lands for fear of their own safety due to their non-orthodox beliefs. In addition the regime itself imposed new provisions that imposed harsh penalties for trading with these same heretical outsiders.¹¹⁰ These types of decisions delineated revivalist violence considerably from previous patterns characteristic of the region, which were typically aimed at the appropriation of wealth. Instead, such acts became a kind of ontological catharsis, in which the individual could celebrate and assert his identity by destroying the vestiges of other, competing concepts of self. The symbolic destruction of sources of alternative truth became instrumental to securing the metaphysical integrity of the community and through this, the individual. This new scale and nature of violence utilised

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 99 & Yarislav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca* (New York: Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group, 2007), 17.

¹⁰⁷ David Commins, "Why Unayza: Ulama Dissidents and Nonconformists in the Second Saudi State, 1824-1865," in *Religion and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (UCLA,2002), 13.

¹⁰⁸ *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 21. & Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 100.

¹¹⁰ *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 134-38.

in incidents like the Karbala and Taif raids in the pursuit of such objectives were to become synonymous with the revivalist Saudi state and its subjects in the minds of many outsiders for decades to come. Over a century later in 1924, when Abdul Aziz bore down on Taif in his drive to reconstitute the Saudi state for a third time, concerns over a potential repeat of such a massacre were a prominent feature in many British diplomatic cables out of the Gulf.¹¹¹ As it turned out, Taif fell a second time in a far more peaceful manner.

The use of violence in the formation of the Saudi state was rationalised to many as a means to impress correct religious form and, through this, secure the ontological integrity of the revivalist community. Instead of dissipating after initial conquests, however, its legacy was to become a perpetual and systemic characteristic of Saudi hegemony and elements of the society it lauded over. What had initially been employed as a tool to expand and consolidate political power remained ingrained in many of the social and political structures and institutions established under this process. The legacy left by the strategic use of mass-violence in the pursuit of religious purification by the burgeoning Saudi state did not simply evaporate once its regime had achieved a semblance of stability in its dominion. Rather, the success of these initial actions left a view in the minds of some adherents that violence was a legitimate and necessary means of ensuring the sustained integrity of their newly realised in-group.

The endurance of such thought was not simply sustained by bottom-up, grass roots process, however. As subsequent chapters show, regime elites continually linked traditional security threats to the state to the ontology of the revivalist population by framing internal and external challenges to its authority as threats to the integrity of Islam so as to mobilise popular support and legitimate violence against opposition. This mirrored similar efforts by the first generation of revivalist scholars who used the same techniques to legitimate sectarian violence in and around Najd. The state's continual framing of changing political, cultural and social norms as part of an ongoing spiritual crisis that stretched back over a millennium in turn helped to renew and reinvigorate the ontological security derived from revivalism itself, with the state as its patron and guarantor. As the Egyptian Ottomans under Muhammad Ali began to militarily curtail the expanding Saudi state in the early nineteenth century, the critical discourse of the revivalist movement shifted its focus away from issues of religious pluralism within the Peninsula, and instead focused on the threat posed to the mission by an external "infidel state."¹¹² Such pragmatic flexibility in the emphasis of the 'official' doctrine was to also become a common feature of Saudi rule as well, always emphasising support for the regime as the panacea for the public's own insecurities; both ontological and otherwise. Once again, the prescribed response was a reassertion of the revivalist

¹¹¹ Numerous diplomatic cables expressing concerns over a potential massacre, as well as relief when this did not transpire can be found in *The Expansion of Ibn Saud, 1922-1925*, ed. Robin Bidwell, Kenneth Bourne, and D. Cameron Watt, vol. 4, British Documents on Foreign Affairs (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1985).

¹¹² Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 780.

community's identity in the face of hardship, realised through violence. By no coincidence, the cannons of the Egyptian Ottomans, in fact, represented an existential threat to the survival of the Saudi state, as highlighted by their use to demolish the last resistance in Diriyah in September of 1818.¹¹³ But while such guns were certainly a physical threat to the elites of the revivalist movement and the nascent Saudi state, a return to Ottoman suzerainty did not necessarily pose the same concern to the wider population of the Arabian Peninsula. For many, particularly in Hejaz, life under Ottoman dominion with its far more interconnected and cosmopolitan economy would have likely presented greater chances at prosperity and personal enrichment. The continual securitisation of identity thus became seen as critical to the survival of the revivalist state, as existential threat could not necessarily be relied upon to hold the various subjects of Saudi rule under a single banner in times of crisis. Revivalism ingrained a semblance of religio-national solidarity for adherents without having to address issues of ethnic or civil commonality typically associated with the experiences of European state formation and nationalism. Such concepts were alien to most Saudi subjects, as they have continued to be for hundreds of years since.¹¹⁴ For their part, the Ottomans engaged in a campaign of religious refutation against the Saudi state, a strategy that only heightened and confirmed the religio-communal narrative of the conflict for many revivalists.¹¹⁵ But while this approach afforded the young Saudi state some capacity to resist the incursion of the Egyptian Ottomans, the power of the empire ultimately was able to overcome the Emirate of Diriyah through material capacity and political intrigue alone by 1818. Although the power of identity-driven mobilisation and violence was an effective tool at defeating many local political actors on the Arabian Peninsula, its capacity still paled in comparison to what was still at the time the one uncontested hegemon of the Middle East. Nevertheless, the legacy left behind of this first experience of Saudi statehood between 1744 and 1818 was to leave a profound mark on the state's methods and strategies of rule for hundreds of years to come.

3.5 Dominating Non-Revivalists and Establishing Non-Religious Nationalist Ontological Systems

It is important to emphasise that many sided with the revivalist cause without convictions of religious purification and the goal of a creation of an ontologically secure in-group. While there are always true believers in any large mobilisation to which such intangible concepts appeal, inevitably there are still many others who are not convinced purely on the grounds of identity, and whose affiliations derive from other motivations. For many supporting the Saudi state, particularly the elites and leaders of settlements and tribes, the material rewards afforded by the prospect of religious conquest and expansion were enough to bring them in to the revivalist fold. As al-Rasheed notes, "[participation] in Saudi-[revivalist] expansion

¹¹³ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 23.

¹¹⁴ "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2011): 522.

¹¹⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 30.

greatly appealed to the tribal confederations as it promised a share of the booty that resulted from raiding disobedient oasis dwellers and other tribes.”¹¹⁶ The outwardly-focused mandate of conquest in revivalist thought meshed nicely with the pre-existing raiding cultures of many communities in the Arabian Peninsula. The potential for new income streams of wealth afforded by the process of state formation were bountiful and served to fill the coffers of numerous chieftains and governors. Taking part in the construction of the revivalist utopia for many became synonymous with an increase in personal, family and tribal wealth and status. Indeed, Vassiliev argues that the collapse of the state expansion process itself under duress from the Egyptian Ottomans was a major factor in the downfall of the first Saudi state, as undevout elites lost incentive to support the central regime due to revenue streams drying up.¹¹⁷ Similar issues were encountered by Abd al-Aziz a century later during the early twentieth century. Here, when the contours of the re-emerging state became constrained by surrounding political and colonial entities, the expansive raiding habits and Jihadist efforts of many revivalist devotees became a serious liability for the central Saudi regime. Subsequently, as the state sought to restrain its subjects in these practices, political turmoil developed.

Violence was also utilised as a coercive means of ensuring the loyalty of conquered communities outside of Najd to the central Saudi authority. While Najdis had adopted the revivalist identity in a largely peaceful manner, communities in territories like Qasim¹¹⁸ and Hejaz¹¹⁹ were more resistant to the creed and remained restive even after conquest. Correspondingly, these areas were subjected to punitive violence in order to ensure loyalty. The harbingers of such state-sanctioned actions inevitably were able to reap large economic benefits in their execution, with theoretically less threat of reprisal from blood feuding than had been a feature of the previous system. This was in part due to the redistribution of relative military capacity afforded by the emergence of a proper mass movement that acted to disincentivise violent response. Revivalists simply tended to have more troops and better organisation than any one single community in Najd, with one commentator describing their military exploits and discipline as “truly Spartan.”¹²⁰ The religious legitimisation afforded by the revivalist doctrine also played a part in dissuading violent response. It was one thing to resist raiders, quite another to fight back against religious authority. Although this remained a reasonably effective means of maintaining political dominance and loyalty over the sedentary populations when international pressure was minimal, its use was more limited when directed against the Bedouin, whose nomadic lifestyle often allowed them to evade of this type measure.¹²¹ Indeed, the Bedouin question remained a serious dilemma for Saudi rulers until the early twentieth century, when Abd al-Aziz finally made a concerted effort to settle them and

¹¹⁶ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 113.

¹¹⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 67.

¹¹⁹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 138.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 134-35.

¹²¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 67.

indoctrinate them in revivalist tenets – a policy that was itself to produce serious unforeseen consequences for the state thanks in part to the new ontologies constructed in this process.¹²²

The increasingly centralised nature of violence afforded by growing state capacity was also utilised within to create greater levels of physical security within the boundaries of the wider Saudi emirate, fulfilling the rudimentary precepts of a Hobbesian social contract. This helped to establish a normative system that could provide increased levels of physical security to subjects who might not necessarily be sympathetic to revivalist dogma. The state's efforts to monopolise violence meant that raids on farming plots diminished and the protection of private property became much more common.¹²³ Parochial and often arbitrary systems of tributes extracted by threat of attack were abolished and replaced by a more centralised and bureaucratised tax system. Conquered oases were fortified and garrisoned by loyalist troops who both protected the community and enforced the will of the centre over it.¹²⁴ Roads were patrolled constantly and internal trade became increasingly secure under the new order, although there was a corresponding decline in foreign economic interactions, as the exclusivism embedded in revivalist doctrine inevitably served to alienate the new state from outsiders.¹²⁵ The whole effect of this was to create a sense of economic and physical stability and security in the ruled populace, even those who did not accept the teachings of Wahhab and his acolytes. While revivalists did engage in gratuitous acts of violence in many of their conquests, the period following this initial trauma often settled into a relatively tranquil normalcy, under which citizens were clearly instructed as to what was expected of them by state-employed religious judges and preachers and the spectre of arbitrary acts of violence declined.¹²⁶ Many such seizures also lacked the violence seen in Taif and Karbala. When Saudi forces entered Mecca in 1803, for example, their disposition towards the populace was ordered and didn't extend beyond chastising them for incorrect religious conduct and destroying offending artefacts.¹²⁷ As an alleged letter from Saud to the Ottoman Sultan Selim III wrote, "I entered [Mecca] on the fourth day of Muharram in the 1218th year of the Hijrah. I kept peace towards the inhabitants, I destroyed all things that were idolatrously worshipped."¹²⁸ The grand effect of this was not only creating a territory in which ontological homogeneity could be enforced, but also one with a greater sense of uniform predictability in wider social, economic and political affairs. This was to draw at least a modicum of support for the central regime in the wider populace, to the extent that the first period of Saudi rule was able to endure over the vast tract of the Arabian Peninsula until external intervention by a regional great power. Although many Saudi

¹²² Joseph Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," *Middle East Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985).

¹²³ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 129.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 125.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 137.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 127.

¹²⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 100.

¹²⁸ Samer Traboulsi, "'I Entered Mecca... And I Destroyed All the Tombs': Some Remarks on Saudi-Ottoman Correspondence," *The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History, Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook* 83 (2011): 197.

subjects may have disagreed with the puritan notions espoused by the central state, they nevertheless could still passively benefit from the stability and security imparted by the existence of that same entity to a degree unseen under the previous, decentralised system.

Kilcullen's theory of competitive control goes some way towards explaining the power of this dynamic, arguing that acceptance of a political actor's legitimacy amongst large sections of a population tends to be positively linked with its capacity to supply and enforce a stable normative system, rather than the populace's identification with official ideology.¹²⁹ Metz estimates that under Ba'athist Iraq in 1988 only ten percent of the entire population were actually members of the Ba'ath party. Of these many joined for practical, rather than ideological reasons, as "[participation] in the party was virtually a requisite for social mobility."¹³⁰ As Stewart puts it, "[although] there certainly were some true believers, most Baath Party members joined...for pragmatic purposes."¹³¹ Similarly, affiliation with the Communist party was a necessary precursor for individual and family success and prestige in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.¹³² These examples demonstrate that only a relative small portion of the populace need be devout supporters of official state ideology, with much larger portion being effectively neutral to it, provided the state can maintain a semblance of stability under its rule that allows for routine and predictability. This position suggests that a state's philosophical underpinnings and its disposition as either democratic or authoritarian often play a subordinate role to its consistent ability to establish and maintain order, basic security and the freedom from conflict for its client population. As Waltz puts it, "[if] the alternative to tyranny is chaos...then the willingness to endure tyranny becomes understandable."¹³³ Acceptance of state authority in this manner is often a passive process, characterised by subconscious adherence to authoritative structures by the agent, rather than an active form of conversion or swearing of allegiance. The citizen does not necessarily have to become a zealous supporter of the new order, but simply must abide the new system she or he exists in and not resist. By not actively challenging the state, the citizen effectively accepts rule. Once such a power hierarchy is established and itself routinised at a societal level, the state becomes increasingly empowered to disseminate its own ideological views through its institutions and shape the attitudes, desires and ontological parameters of the client populace, should it wish to do so.

¹²⁹ Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla*, 137-38.

¹³⁰ Helen Chapin Metz, "Iraq: A Country Study," in *Iraq: Issues, Historical Background, Bibliography*, ed. Leon M. Jeffries (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 182.

¹³¹ Scott Stewart, "How the Baath Party Influences the Islamic State," *Stratfor* (2015), <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/how-baath-party-influences-islamic-state>.

¹³² Mervyn Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union: A Study of Elite Life-Styles under Communism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978).

¹³³ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1963), 12.

3.6 Conclusion

The ontological features underlying religious nationalist movements help to explain the appeal of the revivalist movement in Najd during the eighteenth century and the initial success of the Saudi state as its patron. Najdi revivalism provided adherents with a profound sense of identity, a clear set of doctrinal routines, norms and narratives that ordered reality and a cohesive and burgeoning community that legitimated the wider endeavour. In a system of disparate and localised identities, the movement was able to effectively fill a vacuum by propagating a sense of crisis around issues of intersubjective pluralism thanks to the capable demagoguery of Wahhab and his disciples.

The implications of the Najd case study challenge two assumptions within theories on ontological security. First, it highlights that RNMs as a response to insecurity are not a phenomenon confined to the past century. The perceived effects of change and innovation in Najd, while relatively minor in comparison to the enormous social, political and cultural upheavals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, played a critical role in facilitating the emergence of a counter-movement of religious nationalism aimed at their elimination. This suggests that ontological insecurity from change may be a generic feature, regardless of time period and that the dislocative effect of change is experienced relatively, rather than through a single spectrum. The Najd experience also suggests that a sufficiently large enough manifestation of insecurity able to challenge a political status quo is not reliant on the interconnected systems proposed by Giddens and Kinnvall. Indeed, Najd was the antithesis of globalised: a remote social, political and economic system with only the most limited vestiges of regional connectivity. Up until now, much work has emphasised the importance of modern globalisation in cultivating existential anxiety through the degradation of what are perceived as “traditional” systems. But in isolated Central Arabia in the 18th century, the only notable external input factor prior to the revivalist movement was a single aggrieved religious scholar returning from his travels abroad. Even then, as the catalyst for revivalism, Wahhab’s own discourse and general attitudes were largely constructed in reflex to issues that had been familiar to Najd for generations, with little concern on wider regional issues. Whether these features are outliers specific to the Najd case, or are indeed part of a broader pattern that exists outside the assumptions of the current theory, requires more research to determine and is beyond the scope of this study.

By securitising intersubjectivity and cultivating ontological insecurity through the Najdi revivalist movement, the house of Saudi increasingly displayed features of statehood throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While this process has been presented in a fairly ad-hoc and idiosyncratic manner, deeper, cyclical and self-reinforcing logics underlay its execution. Utilising the work of Charles Tilly, the next chapter will showcase how the Saudi state’s use of revivalism as a strategy of legitimation exists as a self-perpetuating and cyclical system.

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Chapter 4

State Racketeering and the Saudi Identity Racket

The Saudi state's use of religious revivalism as a central instrument of its legitimation was more than just opportunistic and came to exist as a nuanced and complex system that served to replicate and strengthen both itself and the regime. After its initial successes, the first Saudi state had little incentive to jettison this winning strategy and sought to institutionalise key aspects of revivalism within its own governing strategy, so as to ensure a persistent demand for the state's services in a sufficient portion of the ruled population. Despite conquering the majority of the Arabian Peninsula and achieving a scale of rule that revivalist ideologues like Wahhab could barely have dared to dream of, the state continued to maintain and promote the same types of ontological securitisation that had been so crucial to its founding. The persistent employment of such a policy rendered the regime both a purveyor of and protector against metaphysical threat, a role that helped rationalise a regime of extraction from ruled subjects. In so doing, the state was not simply opportunistically responding to the demands of the revivalist movement, but actively seeking to shape that same movement's desires and focus for ongoing political ends.

At a glance, this type of behaviour by the state shares numerous characteristics with Charles Tilly's theory of European state racketeering. Like Tilly's state, the Saudi regime promoted a sense of threat and unease in its subjects – both directly and indirectly - to which it offered protections against. At the same time, the Saudi state sought to eliminate all other possible providers of such protection and monopolise the ability to dispense such services. By doing so, the regime was able to achieve greater standards of extraction and grow its own capabilities as a state. Indeed, while not a perfect fit for the case, Tilly's theory seems to offer considerable insight into how and why the Saudi state has profited politically from the revivalist movement. Combined with the concepts developed in chapter three, this chapter seeks to explore the notion of the racketeering state and demonstrate how a similar logic functions in the Saudi state's relationship with revivalism. In so doing, it continues to clarify why the state maintained revivalism as a central tenet of its legitimacy and whether the state was merely a passive service-provider to revivalist demands, or has it sought to shape these desires towards its own its own ends. The chapter spends considerable time outlining the minutia of Tilly's theory in its original European context, challenges some of these core assumptions and then, channelling Kinnvall's concepts of ontological security and religious nationalist movements, proposes a model of state identity racketeering that explains the mechanics of revivalist legitimation for the Saudi regime.

4.1 The State According Tilly

It is difficult to pick a precise date for the emergence of the modern state, defined by Mann as a large-scale territorial entity that possesses a politically centralised and institutionalised core which holds a monopoly on authoritative rule-making and physical violence.¹ While scholarship generally agrees that the foundations for the present system of states lies in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia which entrenched the notion of territorial sovereignty, this framework laid the structural conditions for states to emerge, rather than establish the states themselves. The units that were to conform to this new environment arose over the next few hundred years. Modern states began to emerge in Europe and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and gradually displayed increasing capacity and efficacy as time passed. While States had numerous consistent functions, responsibilities and patterns of behaviour between them, Tilly defines four fundamental traits of statehood: war making by eliminating or neutralising rivals outside their territories; state making by eliminating or neutralising rivals inside sovereign territory; protection by eliminating or neutralising enemies of their subject population; and extraction through acquiring the means to carry out the previously mentioned activities.²

These core functions were not discreet, but existed symbiotically and continuously influence each other's development. War making led to and was empowered by regimes of extraction levied upon a given population. In turn, this facilitated and was augmented by protections offered to the client populous by the war maker. As extraction regimes matured, they led to processes of state making, which established numerous centralised institutional structures that added efficiency to the harvest of resources from the population (i.e. taxation agencies, population censuses, etcetera) and diminished rivals by denying them those same incomes. In this manner, core state functions tended to behave in a interdependent fashion, shaping one another's subsequent form and function. The bureaucracies established through state making often retained qualities of the militaries who carved a path for their creation, while at the same time, these same militaries often structured and positioned themselves in a manner to better protect to the client population. While the various functionalistic pathways and interactions Tilly sketches are diverse and reduced in order to provide legibility to the European experience of state development, two consistent features remain between them: all originally stem from the war making efforts of elites and all were made more efficient and effective by the provision of protection to a client populous from the threat of physical violence and competition presented by the activities of these same elites.

Drivers behind establishing the initial structures of state were many, but Tilly suggests a key stimulus lay in the perennial war making pursuits of pre-state elite of Europe. This perspective holds that states were not so much planned as they were the outcome of an interlocked and highly competitive system of regional actors comprised of kingdoms, principalities and city states, all struggling for survival and hegemony. Within these crowded and war-prone environs, a "centralised, differentiated, autonomous,

¹ Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," 112.

² *Ibid*, 181.

extensive political [organisation]”³ was the most efficient means to maximise resource mobilisation and organise, direct and wage conflict against other actors. In a system comprised of smaller, diffuse political actors, a modern state was an apex predator, with a level of centrality, resources and capabilities that far outstripped other unit types.

Above all else, the efficacy of war making rested on the ability of elites to efficiently and reliably locate, extract, direct and organise capital and human. While this could be achieved in the short term by conquest, occupation, the liquidation of personal fortunes, the intimidation of accumulators of wealth and forced conscription, the subject population had no real dependency the elites and no incentive to support them once their tools of coercion retracted. Enforcement of such regimes during times of crisis required the centre to allocate considerable portions of its war making capacity internally, not necessarily to quash rebellion, but simply to ensure that resources continued to flow. Such activities were an exercise in despotic power, what Mann defines as “the range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalised negotiation with civil society groups.”⁴ Without wider public consent and its reliance on violence, however, such power often lacked in durability. Although the despot could exercise effectively unlimited whimsical power upon those in their immediate vicinity, “once you were out of sight...[they] had problems getting to you.”⁵ Despotic modes of rule could not rely on extraction from constituents without close supervision and the continual menace of violence, a threat which itself could undermine the ruler’s legitimacy in the longer term. While despotic power could be imposed upon a given society, it lacked the ability to penetrate that same unit. Without such penetration, institutionalisation was effectively rendered impotent, as it relied upon the ability to permeate and aggregate with the social unit it presided over. The Russian state’s nineteenth century experience in the northern Caucasus typifies the effects of this limitation. Although Moscow was often able to suppress the restive territory through violence, its authority was constantly resisted by locals, who viewed the Russian state as brutal external invader and occupier.⁶ Fundamentally, what the despotic form of rule lacked was infrastructural power, or the state’s ability to permeate the society it rules over in a manner that lends permanence to elite decisions without the need for constant vigilance on the part of the regime.⁷ Deprived of this, the will of the centre could not be relied upon to function for any length of time without the constant employment of coercion, a policy that could result in precisely the opposite outcome as desired.

Infrastructural power functioned in a far more durable and insidious fashion than its despotic cousin and was not so much imposed as integrated into the society under governance. Infrastructural power created pervasive instruments of surveillance with which the state could monitor its people and

³ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 172.

⁴ Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," 113.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert W. Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 55-78.

⁷ Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results."

stored vast quantities of information about them through a bureaucracy that these same subjects were complicit in operating. This was to make society far more legible and malleable for the state, granting it increasing power over its people without the constant need to threaten the use of violence.⁸ The integrated nature of infrastructural power also tended to foster the loyalty of the population, which was more willing to engage in conflict when called upon by the state than had previously been seen.⁹ This also produced increasing economic order and predictability in post-Westphalian European society, a factor integral to subsequent industrialisation.

Although centralisation and infrastructural expansion was subsequently vindicated by its relative efficacy over previous systems, Tilly maintains that elites did not engage in state-building activity with the ultimate intention of creating the modern nation state.¹⁰ Instead, states were an aggregated outcome of the strategies aimed at the standardisation, regulation and extraction of wealth and manpower within an expansive demarcated territory towards an end of war making.¹¹ The state emerged out of the concentrated inertia of such policies that was impossible to halt after being unleashed. Once the form of modern states began to emerge, it became very difficult to unmake them.

4.2 Multipolarism versus Unipolarism

What separated efforts at state-building from that of the power-hoarding behaviour of lords and strongmen that predated them? Clearly, their outcomes were revolutionary to the international socio-political order of the European system, but what about them produced such a radical shift? The answer, Tilly suggests, is found in the effort to centrally organise, institutionalise and monopolise the production of force within a demarcated territory. As he puts it:

Back to Machiavelli and Hobbes...political observers have recognized that, whatever else they do, governments organize and, whenever possible, monopolize violence. It matters little whether we take violence in a narrow sense, such as damage to persons and objects, or in a broad sense, such as violation of people's desires and interests; by either criterion, governments stand out from other organisations by their tendency to monopolise and concentrate the means of violence.¹²

Taken alone, however, this does little to differentiate formative state behaviour from the primordial tribal chieftainships, the noble holding, or the feudal kingdom. What does a warlord do, whatever regal title he may adopt, if not strive to lord over war? But while monopolising force at the local or provincial level, as in Machiavelli's Florentine city state, may have been a viable task for those with enough charisma, luck

⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁹ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 172.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For an in-depth description of how many such regimes have been implemented, see Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*.

¹² Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 171.

and most importantly, military force, the ability to control violence in a relatively homogenous and uncontested manner across a large territory containing numerous population centres was another matter entirely. Such an endeavour was a complex, exhaustive and required a far greater level of administration, centralisation, multi-level comprehension and sophistication on the part of power holders than existed in the pre-state era of Europe.

The control of force within a township or a city-state, no matter how absolute, did not behold a true modern state entity, as this monopoly was almost always limited to the extent of its urban or peri-urban borders.¹³ Kingdoms and principalities had a nominal centre of control in a monarch who projected sovereign rule over a wider territory, but in reality, however, this authority was generally distributed across multiple, albeit hierarchical, points of authority. Monarchs ruled in part through concessions to local magnates, with whom they shared some degree of power and whom they relied upon in efforts to wage war against her or his rivals. Such aristocrats typically reserved the right to levy their own troops, a privilege that fundamentally competed with the centre's monopoly on violence. In place of a larger standing army or police force of the realm, lords also provided protections to their local constituents with their own militias and paramilitary forces. This enabled many to exercise a greater degree of influence over their constituents than the monarchy they nominally served and concurrently afforded them a degree of autonomy from the monarch. This could leave the king or queen's true power resting upon feet of clay.

Looking at the importance of the monopolisation of violence by a central authority within a large territory as indicative of a modern state, one might immediately point out the array of empires that have risen and fallen in Europe and beyond as examples of such. Indeed, the ability of empires to centrally project force over expansive territories seems at first glance to fulfil this criterion. The Roman, Ottoman, Mongol and Persian empires all retained military apparatuses loyal to the imperial centre that could project their influence over their territories and eliminate competing sources of violence at one time or another. Why do they fall outside Tilly's established parameters? A closer inspection of the nature of imperial authority is telling in this regard and draws many parallels with the issues encountered under the feudal forms of rule above. With the possible exception of Imperial China,¹⁴ multinational empires consistently struggled to adequately centralise the means of violence within their dominions. Inevitably, the imperial centre had to afford considerable independence to provincial rulers viewed as reliable enough to maintain the overall integrity of the empire and pay the appropriate tithes in a consistent fashion. As with the feudal lords, such magnates typically exercised their own local control of violence that operated in semi-autonomously from the imperial capital. Centrally directed forces could be directed to crush insurrection and rebellion, but this was a slow and unreliable process, especially across larger territories. Ultimately, the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

day-to-day security of most empires fell to semi-autonomous local rulers, along with all the concessions of power by the empress, emperor or senate that this entailed.

A system that encouraged the creation of personal political fiefdoms spread over considerable geography in this manner naturally led to a multi-polar political environment. This could consequentially produce fracturing, division and multipolarity in the authoritative power structures of empire. Inevitably, most peoples under imperial dominion would have to look to their local ruler for governance, not some distant emperor they had little knowledge of. Parochial elites could thus generally expect to exert greater influence over their constituents than could the distant imperial capital. In turn, this could allow them to pursue policies contrived quite apart from the rule of the imperial sovereign or senate. 'Federal' power only existed to the extent that the capital could project loyalist forces within its territories to ensure the integrity of the imperial unit; without this, it had to rely on the loyalty and good will of local elites. Consequentially, paranoia over the ambitions of parochial magnates was a common theme of many imperial rulers throughout history. Under King Cyrus in Persia, for example, fears of rebellious Satraps led to the widespread paranoia and use of spies known as the 'King's eyes' and the 'King's Ears.' The vocation of these perennial oglers was to monitor the behaviour of the provincial governors for signs of potential disloyalty to Persepolis.¹⁵ Local elites feared too ambitious or Machiavellian were often forcibly removed from power, or executed for fear of their potential to rebel against the centre, as were the fates of Tissaphernes under Artaxerxes and Lepidus under Octavian.

Given the dispersed nature of imperial authority and power, however, the capital was not always in a position to reign in the autonomous activities of its more independent-minded satraps and governors. This was no more obvious than in the case of Muhammad Ali Pasha, whose status as Egypt's governor was nominally within the rubric of the Ottoman dominion, but who effectively exercised personal control over Egypt's political, economic and military institutions and policy throughout much of his rule, thanks to the wisened nature of the wider empire.¹⁶ Ultimately, Cairo's independence would see it and Constantinople come to blows over imperial hegemony in two separate wars that would leave Egypt as its own independent state in 1841, with the Albanian Ali Pasha as its new sovereign. Similarly, no clearer was the perilous ramifications of dispersed power in the Roman context highlighted than with Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon

Attempts to centralise the means of violence within empires along statist lines almost always led to decay, disaster or dispersion of power. The attempt to implement a more consolidated mode of rule in the Ottoman Empire during the decades prior to its collapse through reforms such as the Tanzimat and

¹⁵ Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter Daniels (Warsaw: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 344.

¹⁶ Macqueen, *An Introduction to Middle East Politics*, 22-23.

the 1864 Vilayet law represented one such case of this tendency.¹⁷ Loyalty to Constantinople had traditionally been predicated on the imperial capital's tolerance of the autonomy of many of its imperial governors and the various confessional communities and identities they purported to represent, enshrined in the millet system.¹⁸ The reform of the late Ottoman period also overtly favoured the dominant Turkish ethnic group at the imperial centre. Many local elites of Arabic lineage balked at ceding their autonomy to the newly assertive Turkish authority with little reciprocity for their sacrifice. The nationalistic grievances borne out of this attempt at systemic centralisation of an empire along statist streamline only served to hasten the demise of Europe's Sick Man and highlight its fundamental divergence from the state model.¹⁹

Ultimately, defining a modern state based on its monopolisation of authoritative rulemaking and the production of violence is an artificial and imprecise simplification applied to case studies that often resist such ordering classifications. The complex and opaque nature of individual instances of state-building means the division between a unipolar monopoly on violence and instances where such a capacity is distributed across a multiple actors is not always readily discernible. While we often resolve such issues in a contemporary setting through the classification of 'failed states', the label does not seem appropriate to describing a pre-state environment, as it implies the state as the norm. Historical identification often becomes particularly problematic when a pre-state system is transitioning to a state. While the Tudor dynasty was able to effectively demilitarise the great lords of England over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by destroying their power bases, it wasn't until the nineteenth century and the growth of an adequate policing apparatus that this monopoly was fully consolidated homogeneously throughout the British territory by a central ruling government.²⁰ This transitional ambiguity is a near-universal feature in the history of states and problematises the precise classification of a particular unit during such a period. What is perhaps more important is the vector of the process itself that, in retrospect, can be more easy to isolate than the exact status of the unit undergoing such a change at a given point. In short, it is more useful to argue that Britain was in the process of moving away from a multipolar system of violence production towards a unipolar monopoly between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, than assigning an arbitrary date to signify such a transition.

One further addendum worth noting in Tilly's observations is the primacy he places upon violence over other forms of state authority during the formative European period. Representative government, development, justice and the plethora of other issues states often intervene in today were of

¹⁷ See Walter F. Weiker, "The Ottoman Bureaucracy: Modernization and Reform," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1968). for a more Peninsular focused look see William L. Ochsenwald, "Opposition to Political Centralisation in South Jordan and the Hijaz, 1900-1914," *The Muslim World* 63, no. 4 (1973).

¹⁸ Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 19, no. 1/2 (2005).

¹⁹ M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 150-202.

²⁰ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 173-74.

less importance for gaining the initial support of the population than the ability of political elites to centrally organise and direct force within their borders, while simultaneously denying others that capability. This is certainly not to say such other functions and responsibilities do not factor in to legitimizing the state and lending it authority from its citizenry. As Tilly emphasizes:

Frank recognition of the central place of force in government activity does not require us to believe that governmental authority rests “only” or “ultimately” on the threat of violence. Nor does it entail the assumption that a government’s only service is protection. Even when the government’s use of force imposes a large cost, some people may well decide that [its] other services outbalance the costs of acceding to its monopoly of violence. (Parenthesis mine)²¹

Rather than existing as the permanent sole means of state authority, an effort to monopolise violence acted as a necessary catalyst for state formation in Europe upon which other legitimating functionalisms could subsequently be erected as superstructure. Centralisation of the means of force enabled further state building efforts. Without the consolidated control of conquest, external defence and internal policing, the capacity to establish, regulate and maintain other centralised, systems of state was extremely remote. A statist monopoly on violence helped to establish a level of stability that facilitated the growth of social, political and economic systems that tended to outstrip anything that had preceded them. This type of monopoly helped to “create predictability and order, reducing transaction costs for populations and minimizing the risk of a potentially fatal miscalculation [on the part of citizens],” which scholars like Kilcullen hold as the fundamental source of elite authority from a governed populous.²² This is not to say that such monolithic efforts were generally undertaken by elites for the altruistic purpose of defending the societies they presided over. As previously pointed out, a monopoly on the force was greatly beneficial to the personal aggrandisement of the elites who wielded them for numerous reasons.

4.3 Racketeering

In response to large-scale violence on the European continent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, elites began providing the populations a panacea to discord utilising a series of strategies that would eventually, in aggregate, emerge as the state. Such a characterisation is accurate, yet incomplete. Crucially, it neglects the complicity of these same elites in stimulating and constructing the conditions that necessitated their protections. If the state truly represented a simple bulwark against a natural condition of physical threat for its clients and nothing more, then why shouldn’t its architects be construed as Tilly’s “legitimate protectors” who protected the population against a threat they had little control over?²³ What could be nobler than attempting to prevent a hapless people from being subjected to a system of pervasive anarchy? Such a position ignores a crucial point: that war making in Europe was not typically

²¹ Ibid., 172.

²² Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla*, 162.

²³ Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 171.

organised by or executed in the interests of the masses, but was an activity initiated by the same elites who would subsequently become state builders. In reality, the conditions of violence that threatened the individual agent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – and certainly their most devastating manifestation – often resulted either directly or indirectly from elite making war and other activities. Elites who sought to provide compensated protections to client populations could thus not be characterised as philanthropic altruists, but as racketeers – individuals who created the conditions of danger and charged for its reduction.²⁴

While it would be disingenuous to say that the threat of violence towards the peoples of Europe originated solely from the nobles, princes, empresses, queens, popes and lords, it was these same elites who were responsible for its most widespread and devastating manifestations. The Thirty Years War was waged between a bewildering array of elites over a complex, intertwining series of issues relating to dominance, personal fiefdoms, territorial claims set against the backdrop of a greater struggle between France and the Hapsburgs of Central Europe. Over the conflict's three decade span, the military deaths have been estimated at around six thousand per annum, totalling 180,000.²⁵ When factoring in civilian deaths, however, the total has been claimed at closer to seven and a half million, with the decline of some national populations during this time said to be as high twenty percent.²⁶ This was not from direct military action alone, but also from its by-products: famine, economic instability, infrastructural collapse and so forth. The devastation of this period was so extensive that it led to the creation of an entire 'vocabulary of despair' aimed at describing an aesthetical horror that was to be ingrained in the European psyche for generations to come.²⁷ While grand in the scale of its annihilation, the Thirty Years War was but one in a string of conflicts that manifested between the elites of Europe and which swept up the wider population in its fallout. It is thus something of a historical irony that these same elites would step forward during the subsequent centuries to offer a remedy from the anarchy they were complicit in orchestrating.

In its broadest sense, the state protection racket was a straight forward affair. Elites delivered client populations increasingly sophisticated, organised and institutionalised forms of protections from the threat of other international and local actors. Mann puts it simply; "societies with states...had superior survival value to those without them."²⁸ At the same time, however, the existence of a given foreign threat to was often the direct or partial product of its guardian state's own behaviour. With its growing monopolisation of force internally, the state also afforded its populace a shield from the violence of local

²⁴ *Ibid*, 170-71.

²⁵ Richard M. Garfield and Alfred I. Neugut, "The Human Consequences of War," in *War and Public Health*, ed. Barry S. Levy and Victor W. Sidel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

²⁶ Matthew White, "Selected Death Tolls for Wars, Massacres and Atrocities before the 20th Century," (2012), <http://necrometrics.com/pre1700a.htm#30YrW>.

²⁷ John Theibault, "The Rhetoric of Death and Destruction in the Thirty Years War " *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 2 (1993).

²⁸ Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," 119.

rivals, although in this regard, it might be said to have acted less a racketeer and more closely to a genuine guard, as it was less complicit in instigating such threats. Finally, the state also offered protections from itself, provided the appropriate extraction requirements were met by clients: taxation, conscription, loyalty and so forth.

The extractive component of the racket shared a symbiotic relationship with the infrastructural power of state. As regime organs progressively penetrated, organised, simplified, observed, fixed and recorded the societies they permeated,²⁹ they rendered the means to extract ever more efficient, the monopoly on violence ever more omnipresent and the capacity for rulemaking ever more effective. Although Mann's claim that "there is no hiding place from the infrastructural reach of the modern state"³⁰ may be somewhat hyperbolic, it nevertheless captures the radically ubiquitous nature of infrastructural power of state over previous forms of governance and rule. With growing state capacity client populations became increasingly beholden to protection racketeering by the regime, as its control of force was left it the only viable source of defense for the majority of its citizens - a monopoly on violence equating to a monopoly on protection services.

Through a growing monopolisation on protection, the racket provided a new indispensability to the elites for the population. This helped to counteract and rationalise the discomfort experienced by growing levels of centralised social penetration, organisation and intervention; culminating in a level of institutionalisation that would have been unwelcome in a pre-state society. This new order could not simply be implemented by despotic force alone, as it required a considerable degree of complicity in the governed to take root and endure. Without this, rejection was almost assuredly to be the outcome as soon as the central authority alleviated pressure. Effective state builders were aware of this fact and compensated the populous for the parasitic and intrusive tendencies of their activities with an increased sense of security, stability and safety. This served to create an interdependence between the state and society that could drive the governed populace to willingly accept and even support efforts that would empower centralised extraction, such as the intense social pressure to voluntarily enlist in the security apparatus that often emerged during times of war, in which large portions of society came to view those unwilling to commit to the defence of the state as cowards.³¹

The success of this approach incentivised states to seek means of propagating a sense of physical risk within their client population, even during times of peace. This helped to maintain a sense of the state's relevance in the day to day lives of the subject and contributing to its ongoing legitimacy. As the state matured, legitimacy was increasingly the product of non-traditional security provisions, what has

²⁹ Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, 53-146.

³⁰ Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," 114.

³¹ Erika Kuhlman, *Petticoats and White Feathers: Gender Conformity, Race, the Progressive Peace Movement, and the Debate over War, 1895-1919* (Westport: Greenwood Publishers, 1997).

been termed in modern scholarship as “human security.”³² This included the delivery of social, economic and welfare services, the construction and the maintenance of public infrastructure, the enforcement of coherent legal and fair codes, the guarantee of food and a plethora of similar activities that help to order society and deliver a sense of justice, safety and stability.

Despite the increasing importance of human security in legitimating it, the state still commonly utilised its position as racketeer as a source of legitimacy, even during times of relative peace. As numerous scholars will cite of Tilly,³³ to this day it remains common regime behaviour to contrive, encourage or even entirely construct the threat of external war – conventional or otherwise - to rationalise growing the state and its capacity for war making, internal observation and extraction.³⁴ As Erdogdu puts it in the context of economic development, for example, “[such] a situation makes it easier for the state to establish common goals and pursue a self-sufficient industrialisation drive supported by the majority of people.”³⁵ Threat manipulation for instrumental ends of power by the state in this manner is not unique to the post-Westphalian period in Europe and remains readily observable today in a wide range of instances. Kenney cites “the War on Drugs” and the “Long War” on Terrorism as two case of modern racketeering by the United States, wherein the state contrives or stimulates an external threat to its public so as to garner new powers, capacities and increases extraction.³⁶ The spectre of terrorism to draw support for the state and rationalise the expansion of war making, observation and extraction capacities has become a particularly ubiquitous phenomenon in this regard. Moscow’s heavy-handed policies in Chechnya following the Cold War, for example, saw a blowback of terrorist attacks inside the wider Russian Federation that led to the deaths of hundreds of civilians. Despite its culpability in creating conditions of instability in the northern Caucasus that made a significant contribution to the emergence of Chechen terrorism,³⁷ the Russian state was able strengthen its own position with regards to its client population by presenting itself as the key to solving the new terrorist threat and gain new powers and capacity as a resurgent state.³⁸

The classical notion of a protection racket imagines a scenario in which a beleaguered shop owner pays tribute to their local gang boss to protect them from the threat posed by both him and his rival dons.

³² Mary Kaldor, *Human Security* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

³³ See Gerard Casey, *Libertarian Anarchy: Against the State* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 22. & Michael Niemann, "War Making and State Making in Central Africa," *Africa Today* 53, no. 3 (2007): 24. & Lubna Abid Ali et al., "War Making and State Making in Pakistan," *South Asian Studies* 29: 380.

³⁴ Achilles Batalas, "Send a Thief to Catch a Thief," *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation* (2003): 6.

³⁵ M. Mustafa Erdogdu, "Culture of Development and Developmental Capacity of States: The Korean Case.," in *Nationalism, Cultural Indoctrination, and Economic Prosperity in the Digital Age*, ed. Bryan Christiansen (Hershey: Information Science Reference), 25.

³⁶ Michael Kenney, "Crime, Insurgency, and Political Violence" (paper presented at the Memo prepared for the workshop Responses for Political Violence and the Growth of Anti-Americanism, Palo Alto, May, 2008), 11.

³⁷ Katrien Hertog, "A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: The Seeds of Islamic Radicalisation in Chechnya," *Religion, State and Society* 33, no. 3 (2005): 250.

³⁸ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*, 195-232.

While Tilly's notion of state racketeering is far more nuanced than this, it nevertheless shares a central premise with the aforementioned scenario: the state, like the gang boss, helps to create and shape the conditions – both directly and indirectly - under which its guardianship becomes a necessary evil for the citizen and through which it is able to gain a dependent source of extraction.

4.4 Threat

In Tilly's context of racketeering, "threat" refers to impending physical violence perceived by a large population to pose existential risk. Whether credible or imagined, Tilly argues that this perception encourages the population to make concessions of extraction to the state, which allegedly provides insulation against the threat.³⁹ As the existence of human security theory dictates, however, threat is not tied solely to the capacity of antagonistic actors to produce violence. Rather, as Kinnvall's work on ontological security alludes,⁴⁰ it is a reflection of an individual actor's own perception of reality and what challenges their stability within it. The conceptualisation of threat represents the outcome of a process in which a distinct object becomes identified as a challenge to one's ontological security. External war is certainly a gross offender in this regard, but it is far from holding a monopoly on ontological dislocation. Were this the case, then the perception of threat could be expected to be miniscule in mature Western democracies, where the prospect of large-scale physical violence typical of the interstate conflict past four hundred years can appear quite remote.⁴¹ Nevertheless, threat remains a prominent feature in the discourses of modern Western – and indeed most other - states. This takes innumerable forms: from the spectre of climate change, to outbreaks of virulent diseases,⁴² to the collapse of long-standing social structures in the face of increased global migration and multiculturalism.⁴³ Many of these threats contain a prospective challenge to existential survival; infectious disease outbreaks in a modern, globally interconnected, urbanised society, for example.⁴⁴ Others, such as the current tension existing in the west between majority populations and Muslim minority,⁴⁵ are borne out of less tangible moral panics relating to the erosion of personal and communal identity that hold no identifiable challenge to existential survival

³⁹ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 171.

⁴⁰ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security."

⁴¹ Debate still remains highly polarized about the causes of this diminished level of interstate conflict, some attribute it to structural factors in the system of international relations itself that restrain dangerous state behaviour, as argued in Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better," *Adelphi Papers*, no. 171 (1981). Others suggest that it is the nature of the democratic units themselves, as put forward in Spencer R. Weart, *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Never Fight One Another* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴² Peter Doherty, "How Threatened Are We by Ebola Virus?," (2014), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-31/doherty-how-threatened-are-we-by-ebola-virus/5638438>.

⁴³ Jef Huysmans, "The Question of the Limit: Desecuritisation and the Aesthetics of Horror in Political Realism," *Millenium - Journal of International Studies* 27 (1998): 569.

⁴⁴ Stephen Eubank et al., "Modelling Disease Outbreaks in Realistic Urban Social Networks," *Nature* 429, no. 6988 (2004).

⁴⁵ A prominent example of this being the fear of Sharia law becoming established in states with extremely small Muslim minorities. See Liz Farmer, "Alabama Joins Wave of States Banning Foreign Laws" (2014), <http://www.governing.com/topics/elections/gov-alabama-foreign-law-courts-amendment.html>.

in and of themselves.⁴⁶ Despite this differentiation of threat type, however, concerns over the latter are often rationalised by way of the former. The response from right wing nationalist groups to inflows of immigrants and refugees constitute one prominent example of this type of threat perception dynamic within contemporary Western society. While generally posing no overt traditional security risk, such foreigners are nevertheless classified as a threat by sizable portions of the population in countries including the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Australia, which view them as barbarous invaders that will sweep away the traditional values of those countries.⁴⁷ Concerns around such cultural degradation are often delivered through the vernacular of securitisation. Refugees and immigrants are commonly characterised as objects of suspicion - terrorists,⁴⁸ criminals,⁴⁹ rapists⁵⁰ and drug traffickers⁵¹ - by default, where, in reality, data available fails to correlate such claims. A report published by The Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education on asylum seekers in Australia in 2000, for example, suggests that only .00007 percent, or one in thirteen-thousand, of applicants for refugee status had potential links to terror groups.⁵² Similarly, numerous reports have found that immigrant populations in the United States are much less likely to engage in criminal activity than citizens.⁵³

This suggests that the observation of threat by an agent not only does not necessarily reflect an empirical reality in which a credible source of violence exists, but that the perception itself can allude to a deeper, intangible set of insecurities within the observers that fall outside of “the fear of a violent death.”⁵⁴ Such concerns often relate to the maintenance of a consistent, authentic narrative of identity, and the challenge posed to this by new and unfamiliar inputs, particularly those in the socio-cultural realm. As Croft puts it, “it is the reliability of those [socio-cultural] narratives to the individual that creates the sense of ontological security.”⁵⁵ Anything that undermines the stability of such narratives, such as the influx of outsiders, can act to degrade ontological security and produce existential anxiety. By their very incorporeal nature, apprehensions generated by these non-violent sources can often be difficult to articulate using a conventional lexicon, particularly for those not mired in the esoteric idiosyncrasies of social science. While

⁴⁶ Nick Folkes, "Labor's Boat Policy Is Ruining Our Country," (2013), <http://www.nick-folkes.com/2013/03/26/labors-boat-policy-is-ruining-our-country/>.

⁴⁷ Michael Pugh, "Drowning Not Waving: Boat People and Humanitarianism at Sea," *Journal of Refugee studies* 17, no. 1 (2004): 57.

⁴⁸ Natascha Klocker and Kevin M. Dunn, "Who's Driving the Asylum Debate? Newspaper and Government Representations of Asylum Seeker," *Media International Australia*, no. 109 (2003): 71.

⁴⁹ The Australia First Party, "Fake Refugees Are Criminals! Deport Them Now!," The Australia First Party, <http://www.australiafirst.net/fakerefugees.htm>.

⁵⁰ Rupert Neate, "Donald Trump Doubles Down on Mexico 'Rapists' Comments Despite Outrage " *The Guardian* (2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jul/02/donald-trump-racist-claims-mexico-rapes>.

⁵¹ Michael Pugh, "Mediterranean Boat People: A Case for Co-Operation," *Mediterranean Politics* 6, no. 1 (2001).

⁵² Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education, "Debunking the Myths About Asylum Seekers," in *Just Comment* (Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education: Australian Catholic University, 2001).

⁵³ Jason L. Riley, "The Mythical Connection between Immigrants and Crime," *The Wall Street Journal* (2015), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-mythical-connection-between-immigrants-and-crime-1436916798>.

⁵⁴ Huysmans, "The Question of the Limit: Desecuritisation and the Aesthetics of Horror in Political Realism," 571.

⁵⁵ Croft, "Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain's Muslims," 222.

it is simple to point to the terrorist, the soldier or the criminal as a source of insecurity, it is far more problematic to charge the refugee or the immigrant with undermining one's own trust in the nature of reality.⁵⁶ The temptation to reinterpret such immaterial, emotional anxieties within the familiar and comprehensible rubric of physical threat attached to a particular object offers an easy solution to this dilemma. Throughout history this tendency of attributing physical violence to the ontological 'other' has often been seized upon, contrived, encouraged and directed by state elites for instrumental purposes of politics and power: be it the securitisation of non-Aryans in Nazi Germany, intellectuals in Khmer Rouge Cambodia, or refugees in many of today's Western democracies.

4.5 Identity Racketeering

In the context of Tilly's racketeering, what this pluralism of threat outlined above suggests is that a regime's effort to generate a perception of risk for its population towards ends of extraction and state building need not be restricted to the spectre of outright war, but may be able to produce similar effects by emphasising any source that acts to degrade communal ontological security to a sufficient level. While the basic mechanics of this process remain the same, it allows for a much wider range of threats to generate the desired outcomes. Such an variation on Tilly's model appears to provide considerable explanatory power for how the Saudi state was able to employ revivalism as a method of legitimation during its initial formation and subsequent development.

The emergence and success of the Saudi state in the eighteenth century was reliant on its elite's ability to provide protection in a manner that mimicked the racketeering patterns of Europe.⁵⁷ As in the west, the emergence of this system was stimulated by a demand for security amongst a ruled populous that itself was stoked by the activities of these same elites. In contrast to Europe, however, the Saudi racket responded to an immaterial threat posed by sectarian plurality, rather than the potential for physical violence posed by external actors. The racket drew power from and fuelled ontological insecurities intrinsic in revivalist doctrine, which concerned the purity of the Islamic identity and saw metaphysical risk embodied in symbols of change, innovation and diversity within the limited context of Najd. This racket has continued throughout all subsequent instances of Saudi rule and has proven remarkably effective as a tool for maintaining the political power of the monarchy and the subordinate clerical elite, even as other sources of state legitimation have manifested. The Saudi system has functioned in a manner consistent with European racketeering as a means to realise the four functions of state outlined by Tilly: war making, extraction, state making and extraction. As in Europe, the motivation to engage in the practice was initially driven by the demands of inter-elite competition, albeit at a much smaller level. The racket's ability to augment and stimulate these four features served to reorder the regional political and security paradigm, transforming Central Arabia from a system of anarchy into one dominated by a single,

⁵⁶ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 29-36.

⁵⁷ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime."

central hegemon.⁵⁸ As Commins put it, “[profound]’ may not do justice to the depth of change. In the light of nearly 1,000 years of political fragmentation, it was an astonishing rupture.”⁵⁹ Further paralleling Europe, elites Najd sought to centralise and monopolise the means of providing protections to their clients, so as to isolate and foster dependency for their services and maximise extraction. In Europe, this was the aforementioned monopoly on violence, whereas in the Saudi case, this manifested as an attempt eliminate competing claims to Islamic authenticity within their territory in a manner that both grew and placated revivalist sentiment. While the Saudis gained an increasing comparative advantage to produce violence within their own domain as a side-effect of this effort, it was far from absolute under their rule for the first one a half centuries of Saudi rule. It was not until after the elimination of the *Ikhwan* rebels in 1930, by King Abd al-Aziz, discussed further in chapter six, that the state was able to claim a monopoly on force.⁶⁰ Perhaps most critical to the notion of a racket, the Saudi elite, like European state builders, helped to generate the socio-political conditions under which their protections and corresponding rule became seen as necessary and supported by many of their subjects.

As previous chapters have indicated, the threat environment of Central Arabia during the eighteenth century sat in stark contrast to that of post-Westphalian Europe. Whereas the European consciousness had been scarred by numerous devastating wars, Najd remained untouched by large-scale conflict thanks to a combination of remote geographic location and limited resources. Although there is some indication that inter-communal competition was on the rise in the decades leading up to the emergence of Saudi statehood,⁶¹ this does not appear to have radically increased conditions of physical threat in a manner that could be expected to stimulate state formation. Nevertheless, the Saudi statism received widespread support in both its construction and continued existence from the substantial revivalist demographic in Najd.

The pact struck between Wahhab and Ibn Saud discussed in chapter three ensured that the Saudi military and organisational support for maintaining the socio-religious conditions necessary to sustain the revivalist movement’s ideological hegemony within conquered territory. In effect, the Saudi state was providing protections against the central threat perceived by the movement - epistemic competition. In return, the regime could generally depend on a religious sector that would promote and add credibility to the state in its expansion and efforts to grow capacity. The movement’s single-minded focus on eliminating sources of ontological insecurity underlay and legitimated all efforts at state expansion and development undertaken by the Saudis. Outward conquests were undertaken under the pretence of a

⁵⁸ Menoret, *The Saudi Enigma*, 49.

⁵⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 38.

⁶⁰ Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," 298-323.

⁶¹ al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social Political and Religious Conditions During the 3 Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, 148.

sanctified and righteous missions aimed at eradicating the sources of threat to the revivalist identity.⁶² Mimicking Wahhab's famous desecration of religious sites in al-Uyayna,⁶³ it became typical practice of Saudi military forces seizing a population centre to destroy grave sites, monuments, contrary religious texts and other items that were seen to challenge revivalist claims about Islam.⁶⁴ The use of the military to realise the revivalist vision in this manner embodied the state-sanctioned efforts to extinguish both the aesthetical and philosophical sources of uncertainty that were claimed to undermine revivalism. Through the elimination of contestations to this rigid world view, the state was creating and enforcing an ideological hegemony for revivalists in which the validity of their ideology could not be challenged.⁶⁵

Apart from protecting the ontological security of revivalists, the destruction of symbols of Islamic heterodoxy under the Saudi rackets also had more immediate material benefits, by degrading oppositional resources. Traditionally, the offending shrines and temples in Najd were common layovers for pilgrims traveling to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, who would stop to worship and pay tribute to local rulers. The systematic destruction of such holy sites and the suppression of the cult of saints under the assertion of revivalism saw a corresponding decline of pilgrim traffic and the external income for many oasis settlements. This, in turn, denied many oasis nobles the means to finance war making efforts and maintain autonomy from the Saudi state, as they could no longer commodify the exclusivity of their particular holdings.⁶⁶ In many respects, this type of duality was rife throughout the form and function of the Saudi racket, which often served to simultaneously fulfil the political interests of the Saudi elite while protecting the identity of the revivalist community.

As in Europe, the provision of protections by the Saudi elite for the client populous drove the millstone of state development and functionality. Protections afforded to the revivalist community contributed to the growth and efficacy of corresponding regimes of state building, extraction and war making by providing a stable and expanding resource base upon which elites could increasingly depend upon. As the revivalist racket expanded, so too did centralisation. Under the revivalist mandate, the state imposed a centralised system of religious tax, or *zakat*, which overrode previous systems of local tribute. Within the context of Najd, the tax, which fulfils one of the five pillars of Islam, had previously existed as individual custom, with little in the way of enforcement mechanisms. This was to change under Saudi dominion, as the state drew on its credentials of Islamic fidelity to impose a new interpretation of the tax on its subjects that was regulated and directed by the central authority. Teams of agents were dispatched from Diriyah on an annual basis, collecting large sums from across the ruled territory from both the settlements and the Bedouin in the name of Islamic propriety. Although under Islamic doctrine the tax

⁶² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 75-78.

⁶³ Haj, "Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab," 354.

⁶⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 78.

⁶⁵ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 742.

⁶⁶ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 79.

was ostensibly to be used to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the indigent, elites employed often directed it towards ends of war making, state making, extraction and protection. Funds were employed to pay the salaries of revivalist scholars, court administrators and the military, as well as to construct religious infrastructure like mosques that served as hubs for transmitting and proliferation of revivalist identity.⁶⁷ Although extracted under the pretence of doctrinal conformity and purity, the religious objectives adhered closely to the needs of the burgeoning state.⁶⁸ The employment of tithes to fund revivalist scholars and projects showed the state fulfilling its protectionist sanction with regards to the wider community. Simultaneously, by creating a monetary dependency on the state in the revivalist elite, the regime further incentivised them to utilise their influential role as communal spiritual guides to maintain a sense of threat in their congregations that created a demand for protection for the state to respond to. The *ulema* thus existed as a crucial element of racketeering and maintaining their allegiance was necessary to ensuring the racket's integrity.

In courting the *ulema*, the state was also seeking to gain increased influence in one of their primary domains, education. Traditionally, Najdi religious scholars had been responsible for much of the schooling of the oasis settlements they occupied. This imparted them with great sway in shaping the ideas, values and attitudes of new generations, a phenomenon far from unique to the Saudi case.⁶⁹ By acquiring greater influence in the education of its subjects, the state gained yet another means to promote and reproduce the potential for racketeering, as well as encourage the religious homogeneity its role as protector entailed. Collectively, this and similar interventions into the sources of societal influence rationalised within the framework of the racket represented the early foundations of Saudi infrastructural state power. As in Europe, the state began to penetrate into society, shape its character and create conditions under which it seemed increasingly necessary and inescapable to the people. This process occurred far slower than in Europe, however. As a result, from 1744 until King Faisal's reforms in the 1960s,⁷⁰ the method of rule within Saudi territory was situated in murky waters somewhere between modern statehood and the feudal chieftaincy of old, particularly outside of Najd. While the Saudi-revivalist project may have been said to have heavily penetrated Najdi society, it was far less successful outside of central Arabia until the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, this radical shift towards a more centralised, coordinated and pervasive form of power on the Arabian Peninsula represented a foundational watershed that was to influence all later state development in the region.

The state played an active role in engineering and maintaining the perception of threat, while concurrently seeking to monopolise the means of providing protection against it. This relationship with

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁹ Andy Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State* (ERIC, 1997).

⁷⁰ Joseph Kostiner and Joshua Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," in *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, ed. Joseph Kostiner (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2000).

threat differed somewhat from the European experience, however. While European state makers responded to a wider insecurity that was a by-product of their activities, the Saudi-revivalist alliance actively shaped the conditions under which statism became desirable by propagating a new image of threat that drew on latent biases in an already amenable population. Put another way, while Europeans may have stumbled into racketeering in response to the material conditions of elite war making, the revivalists the Saudis had co-opted had constructed a threat out of the religious imagination of Najd itself.

As in Tilly's theory, the Saudi state often represented the largest source of threat to its client population.⁷¹ Despite offering protections from the newly defined ontological threats of change, innovation and pluralism, the Saudi regime would often ultimately be the greatest conduit for unleashing them on its client base. While in suppressing Sufism and paganism in Najd during their initial conquests, later incarnations with the state would often accommodate and tolerate a degree of this for politically pragmatic reasons, particularly with Shi'a⁷² and non-revivalist Sunnis.⁷³ Although couched in the rhetoric of religious purification, the expansive war making activities of the state would also provoke external interventions into Najd by the Ottomans and Egyptians, unorthodox infidels who would otherwise have remained disinterested in the territory. In the twentieth century, despite the incensing of many revivalists, the state became the prime driver for social, cultural and economic innovation, as it sought to compete with regional rivals throughout the Middle East.

Originally, systems of threat for the state emerged by simply offering sanctuary and military support to revivalist ideologues, like Wahhab, while they preached, nourished and cultivated latent insecurities in the Najdi population. As its state capacity grew, however, the regime adopted an active role in supervising the proliferation of revivalist doctrine - a practice that expanded and demands for its services. The state rewarded subjects with considerable material inducements and increased social mobility for completing a revivalist education.⁷⁴ Incentivisation in this manner helped to win over many to whom revivalism lacked organic appeal. Once pulled into the system by the prospect of material gain, individuals would be more likely to adopt revivalist tenets through the social and psychological pressures of their new surrounds, a phenomenon consistent with patterns observed in new religious movements.⁷⁵ Many such individuals could then be used to further promulgate revivalism across the Saudi domain. As Commins put it:

⁷¹ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 171.

⁷² Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁷³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 43.

⁷⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 127.

⁷⁵ Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Conversion and "Brainwashing" in New Religious Movements," *The Oxford handbook of new religious movements* (2004).

In [Saudi-ruled] Arabia, study with [the revivalist elite] conferred status. It became...common for itinerant pupils to make [al-Diriyah] their destination to imbibe the mission's doctrine and essential texts and then return to home towns as its agents. (Parenthesis mine)⁷⁶

Religious judges and scholars were no longer appointed locally, but were dispatched by the central authority to oversee the population's ideological indoctrination, eliminate other teaching, oversee the implementation of dogma and promote religious jingoism and loyalty towards the state.⁷⁷ They were backed with not only the army, but a new group of religious enforcers known as *mutaween* who ensured correct revivalist practices in the public sphere by promoting moral virtue and punishing vice. Within the racket, these agents served two primary functions: eliminating epistemic plurality as a visible fulfilment of the state's protection duties, while at the same time utilising this process to recruit new clients. This had considerable success and under state auspices revivalism took root in many conquered areas.

The legacy of this propagation campaign was most telling following the decline of the second Saudi state in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁸ As the Saudi dominion shrunk, much of the territory formerly under its control came under the rule of the emirate of Jabal Shammar, a state built upon the dynastical conquests of Abdullah ibn Rasheed. Constructed out of tribal solidarity, the Rasheed state never sought to impose a particular brand of Islamic practice within its territory as the Saudis had done.⁷⁹ As a result, even after the second Saudi state collapsed in 1891, revivalist practice continued strongly in many of its former territories within Rasheed hegemony. The sect endured in population centres such as Hai'l, Riyadh and Burayda, a testament to its appeal within Najd and the effectiveness of Saudi efforts to entrench the racket in Central Arabia.⁸⁰ When Abd al-Aziz began his project to restore the Saudi state in the twentieth century, he consequentially found much of the population of Najd already receptive of his efforts to re-establish the state and its corresponding protections against the ontological threat perceived by revivalists. Outside of Najd, the effects of racketeering were far less successful. Despite state efforts to implement sectarian expansion in al-Hasa, revivalism had little appeal to the local Shi'a, who retained their own distinct cultural identity. Similar, with its heterodox and comparatively cosmopolitan community, the Hejaz province remained resistant to the orthodoxy of revivalism and never constituted a client populous of the first and second Saudi racketeering projects. With limited infrastructural power established in these territories before the twentieth century, it is little coincidence that they were first to disaggregate from the Saudi rule during times of crisis.

⁷⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 30.

⁷⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*.

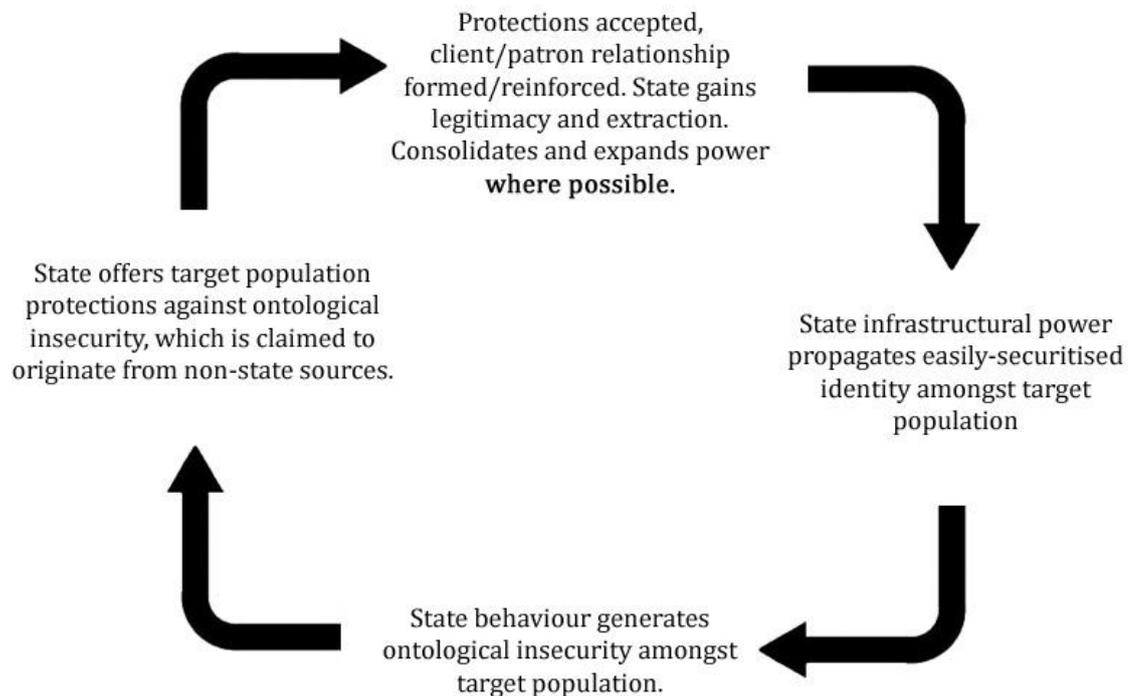
⁷⁸ Joe Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Wala' Wa-L-Bara'," *Middle East Studies* 44 (2012): 93.

⁷⁹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 196.

⁸⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 67-68.

4.6 The Saudi Identity Racket as a Positive Feedback Loop

Figure 2: Identity Racketeering as a Positive Feedback Loop



Since emerging in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Saudi identity racketeering can be broadly summarised as a positive feedback loop as shown in figure one above. This loop functions in four cyclical and sequential stages that have expanded and reinforced the state's capacity to extract resources from the revivalist population to greater or lesser degrees in every instance of Saudi rule over the past four centuries.

Given the cyclical nature of the loop, it can easily be argued that establishing its beginning risks falling into a chicken and egg dilemma. Nevertheless, a reasonable germination point can be claimed to have occurred when Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab established his understanding with Muhammad ibn Saud in 1744 and laid the foundation of the regime of protections and support for the revivalist community from the Saudi regime. Subsequently, this first stage has become a recurrent feature of the Saudi identity protection racket and is identifiable whenever the state successfully offers protections against new ontological threats posed by the existence of sectarian pluralism to the revivalist community. Historically, this behaviour has formed and/or reinforced the client/patron relationship between the state and the revivalist community, granting or ensuring the state a reliable source of extraction for necessary resources. While the protections offered by the state have not always been – and often aren't – accepted by all its subjects, the historical evidence demonstrates a consistent security symbiosis between the Saudi state and the majority of the revivalist community in this regard. With the benefits of this relationship, the

state can then reinvest some of its acquired capital and power back into infrastructural propagation of the revivalist identity to ensure it remains prolific in key areas of Saudi society.

The second phase concerns this use of state infrastructural power to propagate the ontologically vulnerable revivalist identity within receptive elements of the population under Saudi rule. Religious educators, schools, material incentives and other various methods for spreading revivalist doctrine in the population all have operated under a central mandate by the state. Although during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the individual actors involved in these praxes were often afforded a great deal of autonomy in achieving this mission, the state has always been a critical enabler of their activities. The importance of the state in ensuring revivalist prosperity was most readily observed by the movement's deterioration under the rule of other regimes, such as the Ottomans and the Rasheeds. As highlighted continuously throughout this thesis, the revivalist identity spread through the racketeering system is one highly sensitive to pluralism and socio-cultural change. Issues pertaining to these themes appear easily securitised for many who adopt the identity, as shown by the success of initial mobilisation efforts waged by the state to 'purify' the Islamic form of all unwanted blemishes through expansionism. It should not be assumed that propagation equates or requires to the ruled population homogenously adopting revivalist doctrine to be considered successful. Indeed, one study conducted between 2008 and 2009 suggests, that only 23 percent of Saudi citizens were considered ideologically revivalist, while 52 percent identified as mainstream Sunni and 25 percent as Shi'a.⁸¹ However, as chapter four and the wider experience of Middle Eastern authoritarianism indicate, a well organised and cohesive minority can have a disproportionate impact on a wider, less ideologically and communally aggregated population.

The third stage of the racketeering loop relates to the sources of insecurity for the propagated revivalist identity, the largest contributor to which has often been the state. This input takes three distinct forms: the regime's central role in propagating the insecure identity initially, its deliberate securitisation of political competition along sectarian and religious lines and the fallout of its activities as a pragmatic state upon said identity. While the former two have been discussed at length in this and the previous chapters, the latter has become increasingly relevant as the Saudi regime has matured as a state and demonstrated a growing socialisation within the international system. Within this, concessions and decisions of traditional security often require a degree of domestic change, innovation and displacement that is at fundamental odds with the founding concepts of revivalism. As a result, although the state claims to be a protector of ontological security of its client base, it nevertheless often exists as the greatest source of insecurity for its client.

The final component of the model concerns the state's offer of protection against ontological insecurity. Utilising its infrastructural power in the form of organised, complicit scholars, propaganda and

⁸¹ Izady, "Demography of Religion in the Persian Gulf."

related activities and individuals, the state typically displaces the blame for the insecurities of revivalists upon a divergent group identified along sectarian lines and offers a shield against them. This initially took the form of local pagan and Sufi communities in Najd, but increasingly focused on external actors during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries to align with the political interests of the state. As chapter six will discuss, the nineteenth century saw a heavy focus in state-backed revivalist discourse on the corruptive influence of the Ottomans and the British, while the Cold War saw many scholars demonising those who adopted Arab nationalist and leftist ideologies in a similar manner. In each case, the state aimed to present itself as the panacea to the threats posed by these same actors, providing a sense of security and ontological stability by destroying symbols of epistemological contention, enforcing doctrinal conformity and generally maintaining an environment that shielded and privileged revivalists over non-conforming ‘deviants.’ As history has shown repeatedly, such offers are typically accepted by the majority of revivalists, who then provide the regime with allegiance and other forms of extraction, beginning the cycle anew.

While the model proposed here certainly acts to simplify and reduce the complicated dynamics between the Saudi state and the revivalist community, it showcases a consistent pattern of racketeering on the part of the regime, whereby it reinforces, undermines and protects the revivalist identity for the purposes of extraction and state building, utilising the benefits of this process to ensure its repetition.

4.7 Conclusion

As Tilly powerfully argues, the foundations of the European state system today lay in the adoption of a policy of racketeering by the individual regimes. Although state racketeering has generally been considered a pattern most compatible with the European experience of state formation and development, the basic logic of the model holds true in the Saudi case. From inception, the Saudi state mimicked the racketeering behaviour of contemporaries in Europe by creating threat through a complex set of systems and then charging for its reduction. Just as in Europe, the racketeering regime employed was used to pursue ends of war making, state making, protection and extraction – the foundation of a modern state.. Although the types of threat protected against in Saudi racketeering differed from that of Europe, its focus on ontological threat, rather than physical, nevertheless enabled a tiny isolated desert oasis to develop into an immense state in an environment typified by statelessness and which showed little sign of changing prior to 1744. Racketeering provided for centralisation, for a collectivisation of identity and for regimes of extraction that far outstripped anything that had preceded them. Not only did it provide a demand for a statist entity amongst the Najdi population, but also laid the foundations for a type of proto-nationalism that helped to define and unify many Najdis under a single banner of Islam that, up until the advent of revivalism, had remained in a state of relative dormancy. The successes and benefits of this approach were clear and were to instil a profound cultural legacy in the political calculus of decedents of the first Saudi state. As subsequent chapters will show, racketeering was to continue under all incarnations of Saudi rule

and to continue to influence political, social and religious dynamics inside and around the Kingdom for centuries to come.

4.9 References

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Chapter 5

Racketeering of the Second Saudi State (1824-1891)

The previous two chapters have outlined the concept of a revivalist identity racket and sought to demonstrate how this process was integral to the early-period of Saudi state formation during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Both the drivers and the features of the racket have been addressed using a combination of abstract theory and historical evidence drawn from the experience of the first state. Were endeavours in Saudi statism to have ended there, or fundamental sources of legitimation altered, then the concept of identity racketeering might be little more than a historical curiosity. Neither occurred. Although the first regime was destroyed by Muhamad Ali's Egyptian forces in 1818,¹ a second state would emerge in under a decade. In many respects, this reconstituted entity differed little from its predecessor, especially in its employment of identity racketeering. As before, the state engaged in a pattern of behaviour in which it propagated revivalism, securitised the associated identity and then offered protections against this for cost. But while this behaviour displayed continuity with the previous regime, it retained its own distinctive patterns reflecting the emergent political conditions confronting the state. Revivalism utilised in the racketeering of the first state had identified the key source of metaphysical threat in subjects internal and adjacent to Najd, foes that often conveniently stood in the path of Saudi conquests and expansion.² By contrast, the challenge to the second state posed by imperial Turkey, Egypt and Britain skewed the focus of its securitisation towards the international sphere and a wider range of sectarian threats. At the same time, the state was forced to reconcile the failures of its *raison d'être* to safeguard the revivalist community with its protection narrative. Its seeming impotence in the face of external invaders seemed to invalidate the prerogative for its existence. To survive, the regime would have to portray this failure in terms that preserved its prestige over its revivalist extraction base.

This second period of Saudi rule also marked the first major occurrence of a tension between the pragmatic political behaviour of the Saudi state and its role in the racket. As the regime struggled with an internal dynastical succession crisis, its appeal for external aid from the Ottomans incensed many in the revivalist establishment, who would begin to challenge its religious credentials and commitment to protecting the revivalist community from corruption. While not resulting in an open challenge to the state's authority by the *ulema*, the incident set a precedent for future contestations of the regime by those who viewed its actions as contrary to its role as the community's metaphysical moderator.

This chapter aims to take the concept of state identity racketeering established over chapters four, five and six and demonstrate how it remained a poignant, if occasionally problematic, approach to state

¹ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3, 161.

² DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 7.

legitimation during the nineteenth century. In doing so, it aims to further explain why state maintained revivalism as a central tenet of its legitimacy, how the state actively sought to shape revivalist demands and to demonstrate some of the negative side effects of this policy for the regime. The chapter focuses on the integration of new colonial threats to the securitisation process of the racket and how they translated the political challenges to the state into the wider religious narrative of revivalism in order to create solidarity behind the regime. It will also highlight how some of the pragmatic policies of regional relations adopted by the regime conflicted with its role as security provider in the racket and how this led to tension and a potential weakening of its authority. Finally, it will consider the wider continuities and developments in the racketeering process during the nineteenth century.

5.1 Conditions facing the Second State

The pitiless war against the Egyptians that concluded in 1818 destroyed the Saudi state, reversed and profaned revivalist gains and left Najd devastated and destitute. Although Muhammad Ali's forces managed to destroy the instruments and institutions of the Saudi state, they failed to stamp out the revivalist sentiment propagated as a legacy of the Saudi state's efforts at racketeering. As Vassiliev puts it:

The Saudi state lay in ruins; its military strength had been crushed and its administrative machinery was destroyed. Unleashed as a result of the route of the [revivalists], the forces leading to decentralization seemed to have destroyed the earlier hopes at unity. The process of social development within the framework of a centralized Arabian society was interrupted. The many long years of war had exhausted the scarce resources of central Arabia, and the Egyptian invasion and the rage of Najd had severely damaged the economy. However, the same forces survived that had rallied central Arabian society more than half a century previously and led to the formation of the emirate of al-Diriya...[revivalism] retained deep roots amongst the Najdis, who considered the Saudi family as the instrument of Allah's will on earth. (Parenthesis mine)³

The endurance of a revivalist movement shaped by over 60 years of state racketeering meant that the latent forces for Saudi statehood remained endemic to Najd, should the appropriate leadership emerge to re-establish the process of racketeering. The Egyptians had doused the fire of Saudi statehood, but its embers burned strongly amongst the ashes.

The second state emerged in 1824, when Turki ibn Abdallah of the al-Saud seized Riyadh with support from the Najdi population.⁴ This re-established Saudi sovereignty in central Arabia, but the new entity was to never rise to the same level of power and influence of its predecessor. This was most evident in the fact that it was unable to wrest control of the two holy cities of Islam from Ottomans dominion

³ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 160-62.

⁴ Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Wala' Wa-L-Bara'," 96.

during its reign.⁵ The international environment that the reborn state confronted was one constrained by a growing encirclement of empire. Egyptian forces had gradually withdrawn from Najd, but this was largely due to the lack of strategic interest that had sustained wider Ottoman apathy towards the region, not their outright defeat. This is not to say that occupation was easy, with demobilisation hastened by local uprisings responding to the Egyptians' brutal occupation, described by one chronicler as "the Devil [ruling] the earth."⁶ Despite sporadic violence against the occupiers, however, a grand Saudi military campaign of reconquest was not to manifest. Instead, Turki's rise to rule occupied the vacuum left in the wake of the Egyptian withdrawal. Indeed, opportunism in place of outright strength was to be a theme that distinguished the second period of Saudi rule from the first. The regime remained vulnerable to Egyptian predations, demonstrated by the latter's invasion of Najd and temporary removal of Turki's son, Faisal in either 1837 or 1838. Scholars disagree as to the reasoning behind this action, while Lindsey⁷ claims that Muhammad Ali feared a resurgent Saudi state, al-Rasheed argues it was primarily due to King Faisal's refusal to pay tribute to their forces in Hejaz.⁸ In either case, it demonstrated that Saudi sovereignty was not guaranteed and that it was unable to resist the larger power players of the regional environment. Instead of destroying the state a second time, however, Muhammad Ali opted to install a compliant local puppet, Khalid Ibn Saud.⁹ After several years of byzantine politicking and chaos, however, Faisal reassumed the Najdi throne in 1843 and ushered in a period of comparative stability that was to endure until his death in 1865.¹⁰

The balance of power surrounding the second state during the nineteenth century structurally restrained it from becoming the aspiring peninsular hegemon that its predecessor had been. Despite the collapse of Muhammad Ali's imperial dreams in the early 1840s, Egyptian power on the peninsula was merely supplanted by the reassertion of Ottoman suzerainty. Motivations behind Constantinople's policy shift towards the relative backwater Arabia were complex, but stemmed partly from an effort to reemphasise the caliphal claims of the sultan to avert imperial decline and partly from a fear of the military and ideological threat posed by a consolidated Saudi state.¹¹ Beyond the Ottomans, the Saudis also faced challenges from a growing British presence in the Gulf, which saw the littoral as useful to its commercial and mercantile interests in India and viewed the behaviour of the Saudis on their eastern flank as potentially impeding this goal.¹²

⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 163-64.

⁶ Uthman Ibn Bishr, *History of the Najd Region*, vol. 1 (Najd1853), 227.

⁷ Lindsey, *Saudi Arabia*, 108.

⁸ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 24.

⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 46.

¹⁰ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 24.

¹¹ Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* 84.

¹² Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 158.

After the downfall of its previous incarnation to external forces and given this emergent political reality, the Saudi regime and its supporters could no longer credibly claim that the greatest threat to the integrity of the revivalist community emanated from local heretical groups. In addition to the physical destruction wrought by the Egyptians, considerable effort was made at profaning and offending the revivalist sensibilities in symbolic efforts to delegitimise the doctrine.¹³ The actions of the regime no longer took place in an international environment typified by weak feudal microstates, non-state actors and poorly-maintained imperial frontier zones. Instead, the nineteenth century was to see the new emirate of Najd constrained between the machinations of immense and active imperial entities that could check any expansionist desire it possessed with relative ease and administered punitive policy against it seemingly at will. In line with the behaviour of the first state, these growing external political threats to the regime began to filter into revivalist discourses that were transmitted to Saudi subjects. Consistent with the previous state, the challenge posed by these various power actors was often framed in terms of the threat they posed to the purity, practice and survival of proper Islam and the community built around it, and not their potential for physical violence and destruction.

It is noteworthy that the second period of Saudi rule demonstrated a far greater potential to adopt the classical Tillyan model¹⁴ of state protection racketeering than its predecessor. While the international conflict environment in and around Najd in the mid eighteenth century had been of notably low intensity, the second Saudi state emerged after a prolonged period of warfare with the Egyptians that had unleashed an unprecedented level of destruction within central Arabia that had left the population depleted and the economy in ruins. As Vassiliev notes, “[in] the early 1830s Turki enjoyed a strong position in Riyadh... [with the population exhausted] by the previous occupation and ruined by the continuous wars, Najd submitted to his power.”¹⁵ Corresponding with Tilly’s claims about racketeering in Europe, this prolonged conflict had been imported into Najd as a direct result of the elite war-making efforts of the Saudi regime. Were the Saudis not to have openly challenged the Ottoman holdings in the peninsula’s west, then was highly unlikely to Egyptian troops would have entered Najd. A considerable component of Turki’s efforts to rebuild Saudi sovereignty related to re-establishing physical security for his client populous in the wake of the conflict his forebears had initiated. Despite the parallels with the European model of racketeering this behaviour displayed and the opportunity to discard old patterns of rule it may have provided, however, the identity racketeering efforts of the second state did not diminish and remained a prominent and evolving feature of its governance strategy.

5.2 Imperial Threats and Racketeering

The Egyptians, Ottomans and the British exercised a military, organisational and bureaucratic capacity that far outstripped the Najdi emirate. All three also demonstrated a willingness to utilise such faculties against

¹³ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 158.

¹⁴ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime."

¹⁵ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 165.

Najd when it suited their interests. At the same time, however, this growing imperial activity offered political opportunities to the Saudi elite to re-establish their rule and grow their strength, albeit within limits. The inconspicuous presence of readily identifiable outsiders chafed at the revivalist community, who were naturally hostile towards these new sources of innovation and change, in part thanks to the legacy of the first state's policies of propagation. The corruptive threat posed by the growing number of infidels in proximity to Najd was seized upon by the state to consolidate its hold on domestic power and revitalise its *raison d'être* as guardian of the authentic Islam. Although this period began to see the emergence of a more pragmatic and accommodating form of Saudi foreign policy in its relations with these international actors, throughout the nineteenth century it commonly portrayed the imperial powers and those locals seen to be in collusion with them as a hazard to the integrity of the Muslim faith to its subjects.

As the predominant threat to Saudi state during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans and the Egyptians remained dominant sources of the profane in the discourses of revivalism. While Saudi policy generally attempted to maintain non-antagonistic relations with them, fears of an Egyptian or Turkish invasion of Najd was understandably pervasive throughout the ruling culture of the state.¹⁶ Semi-regular clashes with Ottoman satraps based in Hejaz did little to assuage such concerns.¹⁷ Constrained on multiple fronts by polytheists, the Saudi monarchy could no longer claim to be on the offensive crusade to expand Islam of its predecessor. Such activities had integral to the first state's racketeering process, as they showed the state as a dynamic, effective, centralised power providing the security its subjects demanded by eliminating their ideological rivals. Without the capacity to fulfil such a grandiose desire, the second state had to employ new approaches to racketeering to resecure its central extraction base. Key to this was reconciling its claimed irreplaceability as metaphysical nightwatchman to the community with the reality that it was incapable of pushing against the boundaries established by the great powers that surrounded it. As a direct result of this, the revivalist discourses during this period switched to a defensive tone of resistance and "holding fast against idolatry."¹⁸ Gone was the heady triumphalism of the previous era, in which the state expanded to dominate the peninsular system in less than five decades. In its place was a stoic assessment of the dire conditions that faced the community and their key guardian. Resistance, consolidation and the endurance of the community in the face of external infidels were the new promises of the racket. Within this, the state would continue to promote its Islamic utopianism as best it could to provide security to its clients, but could no longer be expected to create new spaces in which this image could be enacted. In short, the state was seeking to lower the expectations of its subjects, but still maintain its essential role as a racketeer.

¹⁶ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* 6 vols., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge Archive Editions, 1986), 2518-19.

¹⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 182-83.

¹⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 40-70.

This shift towards a more outward and defensively postured racket had actually begun under the dying light of the first Saudi state. The new focus emerged in the writings of prolific revivalist scholars, such as Sulayman ibn Abdallah, as the state found itself increasingly confronted by forces out of Egypt it could not effectively resist. A scholarly consensus emerged framing Muhammad Ali's forces as innovative, polytheistic, idolatrous non-Muslims that directly threatened the survival of the Islamic community. But while there was general agreement on the nature of the threat, disagreement persisted over the correct response. While many accepted that some form of political accommodation with the outsiders was ultimately necessary in order for the community to endure, a smaller faction of hard-line, yet well positioned purists argued that universal resistance until the destruction of their enemies or the entire community were the only options available. In the minds of this minority, surrender would profane Islam and any accommodation with Egypt and the Ottomans would constitute an abdication of the Saudi state's core responsibility. This represented the first major division in the revivalist scholarly elite between what Lacroix has described as "exclusivists" and "inclusivists."¹⁹ While the former applied their tenets in a completely universal, literalistic and uncompromising fashion to all aspects of society, culture and politics the latter were more flexible to the political realities that confronted the state and made pragmatic accommodations in their own ideological positions, so as to ensure the survival of the revivalist sect.²⁰

Factional disagreements over sanctioned responses aside, however, throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth,²¹ both the Egyptians and the Turks were presented by revivalist scholars as innovative outsiders who threatened Islam. This was due to their sacrilegious practices,²² their perceived affiliations with the Sufism critiqued by the first state,²³ and Muhammad Ali's attempts to violently eradicate revivalism after he had conquered Najd.²⁴ The Egyptian occupation in Najd between 1818 and 1824 was viewed as a major breach in the heart of the community through which a corruptive, immoral modernity bled into Najd and which threatened to undo the mission's effort to restore Islam.²⁵ Indeed, part of the second state's claim to legitimacy was derived from the undoing of such damage and the reassertion of 'correct' doctrine. As the century drew on, the threat of Egyptian and Ottoman antagonism continued to be portrayed to the client population with a great emphasis on issues surrounding monotheism, rather than political or physical security issues. Sulayman had gone as far as to state that any member of the community that travelled to Ottoman holdings was in danger of polytheism and could be

¹⁹ Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 12-13.

²⁰ Guido Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, ed. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2006), 15.

²¹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 270.

²² Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Wala' Wa-L-Bara'," 99.

²³ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁴ Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," 15.

²⁵ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 780.

excommunicated due to their interaction with outsiders. He stressed that no compromise with polytheism could be made, even when in foreign lands, writing:

If an individual accommodates the heathen's religion, either from fear or a desire to please them so as to ward off their threat, then he is a polytheist, even if he is secretly against their religion and loves the Muslim community.²⁶

Nevertheless, he did allow concessions for individuals who visibly maintained their faith while abroad, an act he described as:

Openly displaying of one's religion'... [declaring the disbelievers] to be disbelievers and to point out the faults of their religion, and to insult them, and to disassociate from them, and to protect oneself from becoming close to them and leaning towards them, and to avoid them. Simply performing the prayers is not considered displaying of one's religion, and the saying of one that 'We avoid them when we are in prayer and we do not eat their slaughtered meats' is good, but it is not enough on its own to fulfil the open display of the religion. Rather, there is no option but what has been mentioned above. (Parenthesis mine)²⁷

Such a confrontational position was often not pragmatic under the best of conditions – as evidenced by al-Wahhab's constant string of exiles prior to his settling in Diriyah – let alone in the state of conflict and tension that characterised the peninsula during the nineteenth century. Such precariousness was further exacerbated by the fact that many Ottoman religious polemics against revivalists reflected a similar level of open hostility.²⁸ Commins has suggested that Sulayman's ruling was a political response to several of Najdis who travelled to Cairo to implore Muhammad Ali to renew his campaign in Najd during a truce period in 1815.²⁹ Such individuals, while part of the community, were perceived to pose a threat to the state due to their traitorous activities. Political pressures thus pushed for a reconsideration of doctrinal precepts in a manner that would delegitimise revivalists who travelled beyond Saudi sovereignty in a manner familiar to the community. Despite the severity of this type of rhetoric, such prohibitions against external travel were levied selectively and contextually. This was particularly apparent in towns with greater economic connection to external markets, such as Hai'l, where blind eyes were often turned by the state to ensure economic stability.³⁰

²⁶ Sulayman ibn Abdallah, *Al-Dala Il Fi Hukm Muwalat Ahl Al-Ishrak* (Najd Date Unknown).

²⁷ Sulayman ibn Abdallah, quoted in Abdil-Aziz al-Jarbu, *When Does Hijrah Become Obligatory?* (At-Tibyan Publications, 2005), 4.

²⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-65.

³⁰ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 35.

As the century progressed, critiques of association with ‘innovators’ outside of Saudi territory intensified from revivalist scholars, such as Abdallah Abd al-Latif,³¹ who wrote that to settle and remain in Ottoman lands grew the enemy’s numbers and resources and allied one’s self with them against the community.³² As he put it:

It [can] not be comprehended that anyone would know [monotheism]...yet would not have enmity against the polytheists...whoever does not have enmity towards them, then it is not said that he knows [monotheism] or acts upon it.(Parenthesis mine)³³

This sentiment was echoed by another prolific *ulema*, Hamid ibn Atiq who charged:

He [who] complies with them (referring to the Ottomans and the British)...is a disbeliever, whether he was forced or not. He is one whom about Allah said “they have opened themselves to disbelief, on them is my wrath, and their punishment will be great. (Parenthesis mine)³⁴

Challenges to the faithfulness of revivalists who had remained in lands conquered by the Egyptians and subsequently administered by Ottoman authority remained common. While similar views had been earlier articulated by Wahhab and his followers in epistles such as ‘Ten Things Which Breach Islam’,³⁵ the polemics written during the second state stood out from their predecessors in severity of tone, the wide net they cast and implications of such affiliations. Where Wahhab had suggested befriending non-believers was harmful to the individual, al-Latif created a dichotomy where simply living in their lands outside the Saudi domain constituted grounds for excommunication. Wahhab had generally argued that such placements were undesirable, but didn’t ultimately call for the exclusion of such believers from the community, provided they maintained the faith. By contrast, as Firro puts it, “[al-Latif’s] discourse divided the people between two extreme categories, the believers who lived under the Saudi ‘legitimate’ rule and ‘others’ who lived outside this rule.”³⁶ For him, no amount of observant behaviour or disassociation from infidels could overcome the imperative of geography; one was either Muslim within the domain of true belief, or was not.

Excommunicating revivalists who failed to emigrate provided a revisionist explanation of the state’s failure to shield the community from polytheists in the wake of the Saudi-Egyptian. It implied that those who had chosen to stay static as battlelines shifted east were never true members of the community.

³¹ A prominent Revivalist scholar who would later be the theological teacher of Abd al-Aziz and be named the first grand mufti of the third Saudi state.

³² Abdallah Abd al-Latif al-Sheikh, *Ar-Rasael Al-Mufeedah* (Cairo: Dar-ul-'Ulum, 1978), 64.

³³ Quoted in Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Millat Ibrahim* (At-Tibyan Publications, 1984), 38.

³⁴ Hamid ibn Atiq, *An-Najaat Wal-Fakak*, trans. Muhammad Saeed al-Qahtani (Najd Date Unknown), 62.

³⁵ Abd al-Wahhab, *The Foundations of Islam: Being a Translation of Masa'il Al-Jahiliyyah Allati Khalafa Fiha Rasulallah Ahla'l-Jahiliyyah*, 82-85.

³⁶ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 781.

This severed the state's obligations to these individuals, while maintaining its image as protector of the revivalist community. The new narrative suggested that the state had fulfilled this role, but that it had been undermined by fifth columnists whose lack of fidelity had driven them to submit to the Egyptians rather than maintain ideological purity and resist or migrate. The state's failure was not due to aggressive foreign policy, a comparatively weak military, unsustainable economic practices, or the hostility of the mission to outsiders, but the perfidy of some of its subjects. The culpability for the racket's protection system's collapse was thus shifted from the activities and incapacities of the state to newly reclassified 'subversives' who were conveniently not in a position to rebuke such claims. This reinterpretation of history and communal parameters also served to provide evidence that vindicated the state's claimed necessity for the community. Without it, the ideal community, as defined by state-backed scholars, had indeed fallen into disrepute. But while there were numerous inconsistencies in this line of thought - had not the entirety of the revivalist community languished under Egyptian rule between 1818 and 1824, rendering them illegitimate in their entirety? This does not appear to have troubled scholars like al-Latif. The state's ongoing suppression of non-compliant scholars also helped to stymie the raising of protests over such paradoxes. As a racketeer that held great sway over the instruments of threat generation, the state and its supporters in the establishment were able to adjust overarching revivalist narrative in relation to historical experiences, ensuring its position as security provider remained both relevant to the times and unblemished by historical failures.

The emphasis on territorialisation as a signifier of communal affiliation in response to the Egyptian occupation made explicit what had previously been implied by older generations of revivalist scholars. The state was an absolute necessity for the endurance of the community and its betrayal constituted treachery towards the true Islamic form.³⁷ Unlike European nationalisms, where the state ideally reflected the characteristics of the community, the Saudi regime acted as more of a paternal structure of intercession that ensured the correct social and cultural conditions were in place to fully realise the individual's relationship with God. In effect, the state was a path to God, although not in the same manner as in the Catholic Church, as it did not possess the deity's representative on earth. That one of the initial core functions of the state was a means of stamping the petty forms of intercession in paganism and Sufism in Najd³⁸ claimed to breach of Islam was no small irony. Explicit territorialisation also encouraged those who professed adherence to revivalist doctrine living outside of Saudi holdings to migrate. Although there are no records of the effect of such rulings, theoretically they may have served to expand the diminished extraction base of the state by providing an influx of new clients primed to accept the securities provided by the state. Shrinking the parameters of the community through territorialisation also helped the state maintain its monopoly over the racket. Individuals who claimed affiliation with the community, yet had remained outside its redefined boundaries were objects of suspicion to the observant

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Haj, "Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab," 359-62.

and their views and attitudes considered dubious. Similarly, the influence of scholars and judges outside the state was similarly diminished. This weakened the conveyance of counter-narratives from those who had experienced both being a member of the revivalist sect and living under non-Saudi rule. As Commins highlights, state elites feared that those living beyond their rule “would return to return to Najd and persuade their countrymen that the Ottomans were benevolent rulers worthy of allegiance.”³⁹ By suppressing such voices, the Saudis and their supporters were granted greater influence over dictating the nature of threat from the outside world against their client population. In some regards, this reflected a similar, if modernised and more sophisticated, version of earlier policies in which non-adherent scholars were exiled or killed, so as to maintain the state’s primacy in managing the epistemic truth accessible to its subjects.

As Ottoman power diminished throughout the nineteenth century, British influence on the Arabian Peninsula increased. While London never challenged the centre of Saudi authority in Najd, it gnawed at the edges of the state’s sphere of influence, placing increasing pressure on it from littoral zones to its east and southeast. After a British foothold in the region was solidified with the seizure of Aden in 1839,⁴⁰ London showed a growing interest in the coastal emirates. Kingdoms such as Bahrain and Oman were seen as a means to support trade to India, to consolidate naval power and to provide a check on Ottoman influence in the region. Within this wider game of empire, the Saudis were viewed as a nuisance, rather than a major player. British policies with respect to Riyadh were to provide moderate support for maintaining the independence of Oman and an absolute guarantee for the security of the Bahrain, which was declared a protectorate in 1861.⁴¹ Beyond this, London showed little interest in the parochial politicking of the Peninsula’s interior and adopted a policy of non-intervention in most Arabian affairs.⁴² As on continental Europe, British policy aimed at maintaining division amongst the various political bodies to prevent the emergence of a clear hegemon. Such an approach aimed to ensure its own freedom of action, rather than dominate outright.

In spite of the light footprint of British intervention in the Gulf during this period, some of its actions and reactions brought it into conflict with the Saudis. London’s activities in al-Hasa and Oman were seen as a direct violation of Saudi rule, which considered this territory as part of its natural sphere of rule. Saudi attempts to counter British actions were inevitably defeated, often militarily. In 1850, British naval forces repelled a Saudi sea assault launched against Bahrain, the warships of the royal navy easily trouncing the rustic dhows of the revivalists. King Faisal attempted to repeat such an action in 1959, but British forces intervened more directly, bombarding the coastal city of Damman and forcing its Saudi-backed ruler into exile. This created a buffer between Riyadh and Manama by denying the former a staging

³⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 64.

⁴⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 173.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 185-93.

⁴² al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 42.

point for further amphibious operations.⁴³ These types of actions demonstrated Saudi power in the eastern littoral as being only as strong as British complacency. When Britain chose to employ force against Riyadh, it exercised effectively unlimited capacity. While British actions were restrained limited interests in the region, they were still perceived a threat to the Saudi state's prosperity. Selling this threat to the subjects of the state on these factors alone was not simple, however. Where the Egyptians had demonstrated themselves as merciless occupiers in a manner that had naturally led to hatred and solidarity against them amongst local Najdis – revivalist or otherwise - the British hand in the Gulf was employed with kid gloves. The British remained physically remote from the experience of Najdis and their use of force was far more precise than the brutal, punitive measures employed under Muhammad Ali's occupation. As a result, while the Saudi leadership feared the capabilities of the British to weaken the state, this was not necessarily a concept relatable to the typical Najdi. To surmount the disconnection between the experiences of state and subject, the elites fell back on the securitisation methods employed in racketeering. As with the Ottomans and the Egyptians, the British became a subject of ideological derision and corruption in the revivalist discourse. London's presence was portrayed as "an imminent threat to the Muslim faith."⁴⁴ Like the Ottomans, the Westerners were claimed as polytheists, whose heresy endangered the integrity of Islam. By confronting the Saudi state, the British were challenging the revivalist mission of restoration and emulation of the first community under the Prophet. Like those that had contact with or lived under the Egyptians and the Ottomans, any revivalist who interacted with the British risked their faith.⁴⁵ By following the essential structure of racketeering securitisation in this manner, the Saudi regime contrived to translate political to state into social ones concerned with revivalist identity that were more legible and consumable by the masses, so as to consolidate the former's hold over the latter and better manage the political challenge. While the British were a new variable in the peninsular political system, their securitisation by the revivalist scholars of the second state as threats to the revivalist identity to strengthen the regime's position domestically was in emulation of the policies of its predecessor. New objects of threat were not so much addressed for their individual traits as they were woven into the existing narrative of the racket to cite as the latest manifestation of risk to revivalism that necessitated the state.

The geopolitical context in which the second Saudi state found itself mired was markedly different from that of its predecessor. The entry of the Egyptians into Najd marked the beginning of a wider process of change and modernisation that would begin to pull Central Arabia into a more global and interconnected system. The decline of the Ottomans during the nineteenth century would increasingly see the British Empire casting its shadow over the Arabian Peninsula. Although staying physically withdrawn from Najd itself, British intervention on its periphery was looked upon with consternation by the Saudi elite. At the same time, the wider revivalist community experienced the traumas associated with

⁴³ Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 157.

⁴⁴ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 782.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 783.

territorial loss and the introduction of new, distant cultures and political actors into what had previously been a relatively homogenous and regionally disconnected sociocultural system that had actively sought to maintain an image of authentic traditionalism. Although the effects of modernisation were to unfold in a far slower manner in Arabia than those occurring in Europe during the same period, in relative terms the upheavals were considerable. With much of the revivalist community already hostile to any detectable change, it takes little imagination to understand how this form of external pressure could be used to reconsolidate the political power of the Saudi state through racketeering processes it had previously employed. Through its literalism and dichotomisation, revivalist discourse provided order to complexity and created legibility from intricate, incomprehensible nuance in a manner that as an ontological panacea to adherents. This pattern showed remarkable similarity with the first state in both function and form, maintaining the same positive feedback loop that generated and protected against a specific type of threat and strengthened the state's domestic legitimacy. The vernacular used to characterise imperial powers utilised pejorative terminology in an often interchangeable manner with that of previous 'threats' to the revivalist community. The imperial actors were both described as 'polytheists',⁴⁶ in a manner reminiscent of the demonization of Sufis, pagans and Shi'a in and around Najd utilised since the first state's dominion. Similarly, much of the threat of these new actors was the likelihood that they would reintroduce processes of change, modernisation and innovation that the Saudi state had stamped out and which would undermine the revivalist mission back to the pre-Saudi period. This is not to say that imperialists supplanted the old Sufi, pagan and Shi'a foes. Rather, they rather added to the wider menagerie of threat. While the sources of menace identified in the racket had expanded, the basic challenge to the community remained the same, with each new hazard merely adding further authenticity of the state's claims of its own necessity. Although the security conditions of the region may have favoured a more European-style of racketeering that addressed threats to physical security over such ontological ones, the proven track record of the identity racket and the lack of other successful precedents drove the second Saudi state to continue to promote itself as guardian to an identity it helped to construct to elicit its client population's support. In this it was reasonably successful and the state continued to rely heavily on the revivalist population as its core extraction base, even as it became increasingly weakened by internecine conflict within the ruling elite.

5.3 Pragmatic State Behaviour versus the Racket

The nineteenth century presented the first major schism between the political activities of the Saudi state and its responsibilities as a racketeer. This issue developed during the succession crisis that emerged in the wake of King Faisal's death in 1865. Following the death, his two sons, Abdallah and Saud, both asserted their claim to the throne, leading to open civil conflict that saw the leadership of the state shift eight times between 1865 and 1876.⁴⁷ Although Abdallah was the heir apparent, Saud claimed the rulership due to his experience as governor of southern Najd under Faisal. At first, revivalist scholars tried to stay aloof of the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 779.

rivalry, supporting whoever sat the throne. But such an uncommitted position became increasingly difficult to sustain when Abdallah approached the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, Midhat Pasha, in hopes of drawing outside support for his cause. Sensing opportunity, in early 1871 Ottoman responded to his request, moving forces moved into al Hasa in ostensible support of his faction, while in reality laying claim the territory for the next four decades.⁴⁸ The revivalist scholarly establishment was placed into a precarious position by Abdallah's actions, whereby they were forced to decide between ideological fidelity and state pragmatism. Abdallah remained King and the activities of the emir had generally been viewed as outside the realm of revivalist critique, due to the symbiotic relationship shared between the two that encouraged a self-moderating quietism amongst scholars. But Abdallah's actions were seen by some as a blatant contradiction of the security provisions built into the state's racket. By aligning himself with the Ottomans and inviting them into Saudi territory, he showed the state as acting contrary to its prerogative of shielding the community from polytheism.

Abdallah's actions represented a cold, realpolitik calculus. Saud had developed his military strength to formidable levels, aligning himself with the Rashid tribe in Hai'l. Yet alliance with the Ottomans contradicted the purpose of the state in relation to its revivalist clients. Despite the apparent paradox, the majority of scholars, including Muhammad ibn Ajlan⁴⁹ and Aba al-Ghuynaym,⁵⁰ found ways to explain Abdallah's actions within the terms of the racket. They argued that while engaging with the Ottomans was unseemly, it ensured the wider power of the emir, who could manipulate the infidels in such a way that preserved the integrity of the community. While such affiliation was sinful, it was minor compared to the chaos that could ensue if the state itself should collapse due to civil conflict. This type of selective and politically accommodating application of doctrine became increasingly common in subsequent revivalist scholarship, enabling the regime to behave in ways that contradict its own principles to ensure its own survival.⁵¹ But a vocal and influential minority, including Abd al-Latif and Hamid ibn Atiq, rejected such rationalisations, equating relations with the Ottomans as loyalty to polytheists and a betrayal of the community the state claimed to protect.⁵² On staying loyal to the revivalist community in the face of Ottoman pressures, Atiq wrote: "[in] the Book of Allah (Qur'an) there is no ruling more apparent and significant than the ruling of [loyalty to the Muslim faith and community], after the requirement of [monotheism] and the prohibition of [polytheism].⁵³ At the same time, he chastised Saud for engagement with non-revivalists in Najran, writing:

⁴⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 62-65.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁰ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 780.

⁵¹ This was perhaps showcased best over a century later in the religious ruling by grand Mufti ibn Baz that permitted western forces to enter the Kingdom to protect it from Iraqi Ba'athist forces.

⁵² Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Wala' Wa-L-Bara'," 95.

⁵³ Atiq, *An-Najaat Wal-Fakak*, 14.

You write to the people of Najran and invoke them against the Muslim people, to disperse their group, and cause corruption on earth, and you are aware of their hostility to this religion and its people, and what had happened between them and the people of Islam, isn't the sensible person ashamed of it?⁵⁴

Latif similarly reprimanded Abdallah's regime, arguing that the key function of the state was to maintain an environment of moderation in which the polytheism could not manifest. He condemned any relationship with the Ottomans, writing "as for the question of asking them [the Ottomans] for help... that it is absolutely forbidden."⁵⁵

The debate between inclusivists and exclusivists would reach such intensity that ibn Atiq would excommunicate ibn Ajlan, a rare occurrence in the upper echelons of the revivalist elite.⁵⁶ Despite the heated nature of the disagreement, however, the extent to which such rejectionist scholars would act to enforce to their convictions was limited to words and violence never manifested against Abdallah as a result of his claimed infidelity. Indeed, al-Latif would switch his support back to Abdallah after October of 1871, when he was able to temporarily wrest control of Riyadh back from Saud.⁵⁷ Curiously, British support for Saud in response to the Ottomans⁵⁸ never seems to have drawn similar condemnation from revivalists. Despite their rhetoric, the general inconsistencies of scholars and the limits of their critiques during this period further reinforced the heavily instrumental image of revivalism in the Saudi context, suggesting that even its chief artificers weighed the ideological aspect of its purpose with that of maintaining their own station and privilege. While scholars critiqued Abdallah when his position was weakened, many returned to support him when he appeared to be reclaiming his position. This suggests that exclusivists were willing to challenge the state over impiety as long as it appeared a viable alternative was likely to manifest. At the same time, scholars never fundamentally challenged the idea of the state altogether, only the leadership at that particular period. Nevertheless, the schism between a minority of the scholarly establishment and the 'legitimate' ruler of the state during this period marked the first major incident in which the regime came under fire from its supporters for prioritising political activities over maintaining the security provisions of the racket. This remained purely a rhetorical disagreement within a community of religious elites estimated at less than a hundred individuals⁵⁹ and the sentiments of discontent never appear to have had much effect outside this clique.

The political behaviour of the Saudi state in its fluctuating relationship with the Ottomans drew considerable criticism from some of the key propagators and adherents of the revivalist racket.

⁵⁴ "Letter to Imam Saud," (Najd Date unknown).

⁵⁵ Quoted in Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Wala' Wa-L-Bara'," 92.

⁵⁶ Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," 19.

⁵⁷ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 780-81.

⁵⁸ Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 163.

⁵⁹ Commins, "Why Unayza: Ulama Dissidents and Nonconformists in the Second Saudi State, 1824-1865," 41.

Nevertheless, the subsequent collapse of the state in 1891 and the association of cause and effect between these two events served to temper future challenges over such discrepancies from establishment *ulema*. In reality, the assessment that religious criticism had led to the state's ultimate undoing was dubious at best and likely overstated the immediate ramifications of what was an esoteric intellectual conflict. In reality, its downfall was far more attributable to the civil war that followed the death of King Faisal and widespread famine that occurred during the following decade.⁶⁰ Both served to weaken the state and afforded increasing opportunities to its major local competitor, the Rashid emirate of Jabal Shammar. Despite these factors, a consensus developed amongst most prolific revivalist scholars that their criticisms had played an integral part in the state's failure, while producing little positive results. An absence of Saudi rule meant an absence of protections for the community and the scholars' own prestigious positions. Under Rashid rule revivalists were allowed to continue their activities, true, but social status of the sect was diminished and state support non-existent. The Saudi state may not have always adhered to its broadcast dogma, but it remained the best known means to implement the society desired by the revivalists. As a result, vocal criticism of the state's policies and their misalignment with the racket's image of security would become increasingly uncommon from senior revivalist scholars. As Wagemakers summarises

The shock of the second Saudi state's collapse caused [Revivalist] scholars to rethink their positions vis-à-vis the state, in part because collapse meant the loss of a strong ruler who could guarantee their influence and protect them. This, in turn, was detrimental to the unity and stability of the community...of Muslims they envisioned. Because they realized that their ideas could only be implemented under the protection of a leader, they vowed to remain subservient to the ruler to avoid the [chaos and strife] of civil war in the future. This attitude could be seen in their writings, which began stressing [listening] and [obedience] to the ruler as necessary for the survival of the [community] and indeed Islam itself. (Parenthesis mine)⁶¹

This was not to say that criticism of the regime from senior scholars would become entirely absent in future epistles, but rather that the tone, tenor and frequency of such discourse would far more tempered than those encountered from al-Latif and his kin in the 1860s and 1870s. Nevertheless, tensions and scholarship borne out of this experience would continue to influence and be echoed in later anti-regime sentiment amongst a minority of revivalists. The precedent of ideas borne of this experience would help fuel future and shape domestic challenges against the Saudi state due, in part, to its political activities and their divergence from the security values of the racket.

The political decision of the Abdallah regime to seek Ottoman support conflicted with the state's offer of security to its subjects necessary to close the positive feedback loop of racketeering. International state behaviour became identified as a source of insecurity by numerous important figures in the revivalist

⁶⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 199.

⁶¹ Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Wala' Wa-L-Bara'," 97.

community. This, in turn, served to undermine the state's protective behaviour, as it showed the regime not only incapable of ensuring its own integrity for the purpose of Islamic utopianism, but also acting as a catalyst for the very forces it claimed to stand against. The fact that the issue remained largely academic was likely due to the self-interests of scholars at the time, who were unwilling to move their displeasure beyond simple criticism of the regime due to their reliance upon it for privilege and station. As chapter eight will show, however, when disenfranchised revivalists saw a viable alternative to the regime, the same criticisms could be employed to far more dramatic and violent effect.

5.4 Change and Continuity in the Second Racket

The racketeering process employed under the second Saudi state found itself operating in a markedly dissimilar context to that of its predecessor. Although it maintained considerable continuities, it was also driven to implement numerous notable innovations and evolutions reflexive to its new political environment. The chief continuity remained the endurance of the racket itself. As its predecessor had done, the state continued to portray itself as the indispensable means by which the revivalist community could be fully realised, utilising its centralised power to propagate an image of this ideal in its subjects. This utopian concept remained an Islamic community cleansed of innovation, modernisation and change, the sources of which were enemies of the religion that the state was tasked with protecting against. Ideological heterodoxy endured as an issue that demanded radical political action. The racket's securitisation of 'non-Muslims' continued to draw support throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, at times it became the primary avenue of state legitimation, and from 1869 onwards it became "the main instrument to mobilise the masses against enemies."⁶² At the same time, the state continued to be both directly and indirectly responsible for the perception of threat. It maintained the practices of its predecessor, creating and supporting social structures and organisations that disseminated a narrative amongst the Najdi populous that split the world between Muslims and non-Muslims, stressing the latter as an ever-present challenge that required a state to counteract. In this it went even further than its predecessor, declaring an outright territorialisation of this dichotomisation that defined whether one was affiliated with the community or not.

At the same time, many of the activities of the state itself served as key instigator for bringing the revivalist community into contact with the feared others. Whether it was attempts to assert sovereignty over Bahrain or the refusal to pay tribute to the Ottoman satraps in Hejaz, state policies often served to antagonise powerful external actors into violence against the revivalist population. Had the regime's primary concern been its claimed safeguarding Islamic purity within its sovereign rule, then one would expect it to try to minimise such encounters and pursue policies of seclusion and placation, so as to ensure a buffer against the chaotic outside world. Despite claims to the contrary, however, such interests were

⁶² Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 782.

subordinate to the expansion and maintenance of the State's own power and interests. When the two conflicted, the latter typically won out over the former when at all possible.

While displaying numerous consistencies with racketeering in the eighteenth century, the second state's efforts also showed numerous developments and evolutions from previous patterns of identity racketeering. Maintaining the vociferous condemnation of Shi'a and Sufis of the early period, the nineteenth century also saw the regime integrating and emphasising new threats from imperial actors in the region. The instrumental purpose of this securitisation process also altered somewhat. While the first state had tended to securitise parochial 'other' communities who were in a weak position in regards to the growing power of the state, the British, Ottomans and Egyptians all posed existential threats its survival, showcased by the experience of the Saudi-Egyptian war. Where the racket had been used to increase the territory and capacity of the state in eighteenth century, it was largely employed to help it simply survive during the nineteenth. By reinforcing a clear delineative wedge between the imperial powers and the revivalist community at the social and cultural level, the state aimed to maintain a perception of its unique indispensability as guardian of Islam in the eyes of its client, even though it had lost important symbols of this in its custodianship of Mecca and Medina. The greater emphasis on territorialisation reflected this sentiment further; the state required as many supporters as possible and there was little likelihood that it could reclaim the wider boundaries it had lost to imperial encroachment. As a result, a 'cut and run' strategy that eschewed its responsibilities to those revivalist diasporas left behind and who refused to emigrate was a shrewd strategy to both consolidate political power and maintain the legitimacy derived from its role as guardian of the community in the racket.

The regime also began to display increasing caution in how its commitment to the racket influenced foreign policy. The first state had arguably let the prerogative spreading the 'correct' Islam led it to irrational decisions in foreign relations. The direct confrontation Diriyah instigated with the Ottoman Empire that was driven by the desire of the community to liberate the holy cities may have been ideologically consistent, but was strategically foolish.⁶³ While this fulfilled a central criterion of the racket's provision of security by asserting Revivalist dominance over the symbolic heart of Islam, it also served to greatly damage the prestige of the Ottoman sultan, who saw the action as an affront to his authority in the wider empire and responded with predictable force. By contrast, the second state largely avoided external spill over from its internal efforts to maintain a monopoly on identity security. External raids were sometimes rationalised through the rhetoric of revivalist purification, but these were typically conducted locally and never constituted central decisions of the state itself. While the state did frame its competition with the imperial powers through the discourse of the racket, the underlying factors driving such conflict were issues of politics, sovereignty, territorial claim and spheres of influence, not ideology.

⁶³ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 140.

The flexibility and adaptability of state-sanctioned revivalism to the political conditions of the nineteenth century further illustrated it for what it was; not an end of religious purification but a tool of elite power maintenance that employed identity as a means to secure a support base instrumental to the realisation of secular political goals. In this, the state's political disconnect with official ideology was only as problematic as its ability to degrade support for the regime and could be generally managed through favourable revisionism, compliant scholars and violence. When incongruities presented themselves, the state utilised its considerable faculties to shift the direction, focus and tone of the racket to suit the reality that confronted it, while simultaneously projecting an internal image of fidelity and continuity curated by co-opted scholars. This was far from a perfect solution, as evidenced by the criticisms during the civil war. Further, it ultimately proved insufficient to counteracting the political weakness unleashed by the civil war, famine and the external pressures from the Rashid state. Regardless of these confounding variables, however, the utilisation of identity racketeering proved adequate enough to play a major role in sustaining the second state for over half a century and enabled it to continue to draw both the *zakat*, as well as other resources from its client population. Importantly, it also laid the foundations for a future, third re-emergence of the Saudi state after its final collapse in 1891 at the battle of Mula'ida, a topic that is the foci of chapters six and seven.

5.5 Conclusion

The nineteenth century was a period of both change and continuity in the Saudi racketeering process. To ensure the existence of its core client base, the regime redefined the parameters of what it meant to be a devout Muslim, adding an explicit component of territorialised identity that drew on earlier, less defined concepts debated by scholars under the first state. The system remained an integral component of Saudi governance and legitimacy throughout this period, albeit with modifications on both its focus of threat and the forms of security provided. Given the precedent of success of racketeering and the fact that little had changed in the mechanisms of governance between the two periods of Saudi statehood, the reproduction of earlier legitimisation systems was made contextual sense. Racketeering had worked and continued to work, helping to sustain a diminished second Saudi state for seven decades. At the same time, this effort became far more inwardly focused, thanks to the regional conditions the Saudis confronted. Where the eighteenth century Peninsula had been characterised by relatively few powerful actors, the nineteenth was, by contrast, a crowded neighbourhood in which the Saudi state was a much more minor player. In these conditions, the fundamental mentality of the racket switched from one of outward conquest and expansion to one of besiegement and holding the line. In this, the imperial power players were to become profoundly influential props employed by the state to stimulate domestic solidarity and enable the Saudi elite to retain their privilege and prestige. While the state aimed to maintain an aura of religious fidelity, its weakened position also saw it engaging in certain types of pragmatic behaviour – chiefly alliance making with infidels – that conflicted with the narrative it perpetuated through racketeering. While this ultimately produced little in the way of political fallout, it

represented a portent for future, more dramatic confrontations that would emerge around similar issues under the reign of the third state. Fundamentally, the nineteenth century was a period that saw the state begin to move to a more moderated form of racketeering which sought to contain the excesses witnessed under the previous regime within its territorial boundaries and move towards a more socialised posture in the international order. While this pivot was far from complete by the time the state collapsed, it would be adopted and fulfilled by its predecessor.

5.6 References

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Chapter 6

Sedentarisation to Sectarianism: The Rise of the Third State, the Reinstitution of the Racket and the Ikhwān Revolt.

While the seeds for confrontation between the state and adherents to the racket were sewn in the nineteenth century, it was not until the twentieth, under the reign of the third state, that a conflagration was to occur. Much of the success of the third state's rise depended upon the military support of a newly emergent socio-religious group in the Najdi system, known as the *Ikhwān* (the fraternity).¹ These former Bedouin, beginning to be settled by the state in 1912, were committed to the revivalist vision of epistemic hegemony. While there were tensions that existed between *Ikhwān* and the more established elements of the revivalist community in Najd, the effort to integrate these former wanderers into a racketeering dependency with the state initially appeared to have been a considerable success. Alongside other Najdi forces mobilized by Abd al-Aziz, the *Ikhwān* would fight in all his major campaigns of conquest during the 1910s and 1920s.² As the outward expansion slowed and halted at the borders the regime observes today, however, the politically pragmatic behaviour of the state, both internally and in its foreign policy, came to anger the *Ikhwān*. The state's pragmatic accommodation of heterodox Muslims and foreigners were viewed by the *Ikhwān* as heresy and an abdication of its role as protector of the faith, a view that the state had been key in propagating. Ultimately, this divergence between the racket and the state's behaviour was a crucial catalyst behind the *Ikhwān* Revolt: an uprising by the former Bedouin's against their creators in the Saudi state.³

By examining this key event of Saudi state formation in the early twentieth century, this chapter aims to showcase a particularly crucial negative side effect of the policy of racketeering for the Saudi state. It specifically focuses on the conditions leading to the revolt and aims to develop an understanding of how divergences between regime commitments to ontological security under racketeering and non-ideological pragmatic policies necessary in state building played a key role in stoking insurrection against it. While the regime strove to portray itself as an ideological paragon and instrument necessary to the correct implementation of the revivalist projects, the irony is that it ultimately came to be viewed as an enemy of Islam by some of the movement's most fervent adherents.

¹ William Ochsenwald, "Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 03 (1981): 274.

² John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (London: Brill, 1978).

³ Christine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia* (Croom Helm., 1981).

6.1 A Second Resurgence

After the second Saudi's state collapsed in 1891, the Saudi royals spent less than a decade in exile in Kuwait, when a new dynamic leader, Abd al-Aziz, emerged to re-establish the claims of his forebears. With just a handful of loyal followers, he captured Riyadh in a miraculous turn of events on 15 January, 1902. From here, he would launch a series of campaigns against both the Rasheeds and the Ottomans to reclaim the former territories of his ancestors. The state quickly swelled to fill much of the central and eastern territories of its predecessors, expelling the Ottoman Empire from al-Hasa in 1913 after perceiving its weakness due to its poor performance in the Balkan wars.⁴ In the same year, the Turks recognized Saudi dominance of Najd and signed a treaty declaring Abd al-Aziz as governor of Central Arabia, guaranteeing that rulership of the territory would pass hereditarily to his male descendants.⁵ Ostensibly, this role existed within imperial Ottoman framework, but in reality, it was an admission by Constantinople of its own inability to curtail the reviving Saudi state.

With a fracturing empire and growing pressures from the European great powers on the imperial centre,⁶ the Turks could not afford the resources to contest organised resistance in a backwater on their eastern extremity. In 1915, Abd al-Aziz signed the Anglo-Saudi treaty with the British, rendering the regime an effectively neutral actor within the First World War. In return, London recognized Saudi sovereignty over Najd and surrounding territories and provided it with material support in its ongoing struggle with the Rasheeds and occasional skirmishes with the Ottomans.⁷ As in previous instances of Saudi conflict, these activities were framed by revivalist scholars as an effort to re-establish the religious purity of monotheism.⁸ The Rasheed emirate, the Saudi's primary local competitor in Najd, emerged from the First World War weakened, with their alliance with the Ottomans shattered. They were subsequently defeated in 1921, with their capital in Hai'l seized and their territories absorbed into the expanding Saudi state. Abd al-Aziz would conquer Hejaz in 1925, defeating Sharif Hussein Bin Ali and driving the Hashemites from their seat of power in Mecca.⁹ By 1926 the Saudi state had effectively established its modern borders and restored control over much of the territory held by the first state.

⁴ Jacob Goldberg, "The 1913 Saudi Occupation of Hasa Reconsidered," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, no. 1 (1982): 27.

⁵ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 40-41.

⁶ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 150-201.

⁷ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 249.

⁸ Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia: Britain and the Rise of the House of Sa'ud* (London: Frank Cass Publishers 1976), 86-88.

⁹ Joshua Teitelbaum, *The Rise and Fall of the Hasemite Kingdom of Arabia* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

6.2 The Settlement of Najdi Bedouin and the Failed Racket

As in previous instances of Saudi rule, much of the success behind the rise and endurance of the third state relied on the regime's ability direct a system that propagated, securitised and protected the revivalist identity. While this was to re-emerge prominently in the led up to the First World War, during the first decade of the twentieth century Abd al-Aziz displayed little interest in linking the state reformation project with the revivalist cause. This appears to have been a deliberate choice, given that he had received an oath of allegiance from prominent Najdi *ulema* in 1902.¹⁰ As al-Rasheed argues, these scholars were more than willing to lend their theological clout to the state:

Having lost their material wealth, prestige and status in the nineteenth century, the [revivalist religious scholars] were predisposed to accept a political figure who promised not only their salvation but also a reversal of their misfortune. This is not to undermine their genuine determination to revive the religious message of their ancestor and his reforms. There is no doubt about their commitment to deliver the rest of Arabia from its recurrent state of 'ignorance and savagery'.¹¹

Nevertheless, the ruler did not exploit this, Vassiliev noting that "the first decade of [Abd al-Aziz's] activities had shown no signs of a particular emphasis on religion, whether as a means of legitimising his power, strengthening the people's loyalty or lending dynamism to his campaigns of conquest."¹² Cronin provides a similar assessment, adding that:

Prior to 1912 [Abd al-Aziz] relied on military forces which were composed of members of his own clan and some Bedouin followers...[Up] to this time his campaigns had no especial ideological/religious colouring, despite his family's historical association with [Najdi revivalism] and their empowerment of this movement in earlier Saudi-led emirates of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Parenthesis mine)¹³

With little material available on the matter, the precise logic behind this policy remains a matter of conjecture. Whether a lack of institutional capacity,¹⁴ mistrust of senior *ulema* after the experiences of the second state's collapse,¹⁵ the types of conflict being fought,¹⁶ or a prioritisation of other state functions, the early period of third Saudi state was not marked by an explicit mobilisation of the revivalist movement under the pretence of purifying Islam, as had occurred under previous regimes. This particular period highlights a weakness in the model proposed in this thesis, as it would predict that upon the reassumption

¹⁰ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 57.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹² Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 227.

¹³ Stephanie Cronin, "Tribes, Coups and Prines: Building a Modern Army in Saudi Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 1 (2013): 6.

¹⁴ Joseph Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (1990), 228.

¹⁵¹⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 61-66. & al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 62.

¹⁶ Cronin, "Tribes, Coups and Prines: Building a Modern Army in Saudi Arabia," 6.

of power, any Saudi regime would quickly seek to re-establish racketeering as a central tool in its governing strategy where possible. In this particular case, however, the model fails to accurately predict the eventuating conditions.

During the first decade, Abd al-Aziz drew the majority of his army from Southern Najdi townsmen, who viewed support for the Saudis as a means to defend their own commercial interests. These militants did not constitute a permanent force, but would assemble and disperse before and after a raid or battle. A smaller number of men were recruited from around the Saudi heartland in al-Arid and formed an elite permanent corps that served directly under Abd al-Aziz as royal guard. Such individuals could expect greater rewards and positions of prestige over other Saudi subjects. Historical accounts provide no overt indication that either group displayed ideological motivations for their participation in the state expansion process.¹⁷ This suggests that the support of the majority of the forces behind Abd al-Aziz between 1902 and 1912 was the product of effective inter-tribal and inter-settlement politicking, not a system of religious solidarity and dependency generated by the state.

A decade after the capture of Riyadh, however, the state began to resume the racketeering tendencies of its forebears. In this capacity, its achievements would go beyond its predecessors in one key regard. Under Abd al-Aziz the Saudi state would finally begin to develop a solution to the Bedouin question - temporarily transforming what had been a force of defiance to state centrality into an instrument that enhanced the regime's war making capacity. While existing within the nominal territories of previous Saudi states, Bedouins had remained staunchly aloof of centralised rule. As previous chapters have indicated, their nomadic lifestyle made them resistant to the penetrating organs of state, and their religious practices, or lack thereof, had always marked them as distinct from the revivalist community. Given its sedentary system of governance, the state had offered little to the Najdi pastoralist community, who neither longed for its protections of identity, nor saw merit in the other securities it provided, which only functioned efficiently in urban, static settings. This resistance to central rule by nomads is hardly a phenomenon unique to the Saudi case. As Scott demonstrates, the wandering inhabitants of peripheral "non-state" zones - be they Amazigh, Roma or Bedouin - have persistently confounded attempts to assert centralised control throughout history.¹⁸ The desire of the Saudi state to transform encountered nomads into a "fixed, concentrated population that officials...could see and instruct"¹⁹ was hardly extraordinary. In the case of the two previous states, desires had well outstripped means and it was only after Abd al-Aziz and his allies had fully committed to the act that they were able to achieve the task. In so doing, they not only settled many of the tribal groups, but began inducing them towards the state's racket. While this would serve to greatly bolster the regime in the short term, it would also lead to a fundamental challenge of its hold on power.

¹⁷ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 59.

¹⁸ Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

The sedentarisation of the Bedouin began somewhere between 1912²⁰ and 1913,²¹ with the establishment of a series of settled agrarian townships designed specifically for the purpose. Motivations for the tribal settlement varied from case to case. Some saw a static existence with prospects of both long-term economic and physical security as desirable over the ever-perilous existence of nomadic pastoralism. Others were tempted by the financial incentives offered by the Saudi state, which provided a continuous flow of subsidised goods, gifts and raw materials into the settlements. Still others, defeated by the outward conquests of Saudi forces, found themselves forcibly demobilised.²² The implications of this move were immense. Citing John S. Habib,²³ al-Rasheed suggests that by 1926, the state had settled around 150,000 tribesmen.²⁴ If this claim is remotely accurate, then it represented a monolithic demographic and political shift in a region whose entire population was roughly estimated at around a quarter of a million in 1921.²⁵ Urbanisation grew the state's ability to observe, govern and measure its subjects, leading to "the tension between central power and the tribal periphery, which had plagued previous [Saudi] emirate... [being] partially overcome."²⁶ At the same time, however, the regime exerted considerable effort in not just transforming the nomads into farmers, but also bringing them into the fold of revivalism.

Within settlements like al-Artawiyya, the Saudi state supported a widespread program of revivalist proselytization overseen by Najdi missionaries. The activity was consistent with earlier Saudi efforts to suppress non-orthodox practices in conquered territories and establish a dependency on the state based around Najdi revivalism. It represented the first and only time that semi-urban spaces were established specifically to propagate doctrine amongst the target population, a necessity given the Bedouin's nomad nature and the fact that earlier attempts to embed preachers with the wandering tribes²⁷ appear to have failed to produce the desired mass conversions. Those who were converted were dubbed the '*Ikhwan*' and within a year were forming an integral part of the Saudi military campaign to reconquer al-Hasa in 1913.²⁸ *Ikhwan* fighters would continue to constitute a formidable and distinct component of Saudi military apparatus over the following decade, playing key roles in the defeat of the Rasheeds and the Hashemites after them. As Cronin recounts, "[these] new shock troops...indoctrinated with a variant puritanical Islam

²⁰ Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," 299.

²¹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 227.

²² al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 62.

²³ Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930*.

²⁴ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 61.

²⁵ John Scott Keltie and M. Epstein, *The Statesman's Yearbook* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 1348.

²⁶ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 60.

²⁷ Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys*, 1.

²⁸ Goldberg, "The 1913 Saudi Occupation of Hasa Reconsidered," 21.

and motivated by the prospect of loot, offered a striking contrast to [other Saudi forces].²⁹ Consistent with earlier manifestations of the mission in Najd, a central tenet of *Ikhwan* indoctrination emphasised the importance of waging expansionist jihad to seize territory, creating ideological homogeneity and eradicating epistemic challenges. As previous experiences of Saudi statehood had shown, as long as infidels existed on the periphery of the community, the correct Islamic form would never be safe. This effectively served to sanction violent conquest and meshed well with some of the traditionalist patterns of the Bedouin, as it allowed them to continue to acquire loot through raiding in a manner roughly consistent with their forebears, albeit with more 'noble' rationalisations.³⁰ Alongside annual state subsidies, this served to improve the material conditions of the settled Bedouin considerably. At the same time, the state was gradually able to consolidate its hold over the settled nomads and tax them,³¹ although this would begin to be challenged by the *Ikhwan* by the mid-1920s.

The conversion of the *Ikhwan* was far from a simple façade staged by the Bedouin to acquire material wealth. The teachings of the Najdi missionaries fundamentally altered the dispositions of many of these former nomads, to whom piety and the enforcement of doctrine became matters of extreme significance. Many converts were ardent supporters of violent, expansionist jihad and the forced imposition of revivalism on conquered peoples. This pattern was markedly distinct from the raiding habits of traditional Bedouins, which had focused almost entirely on thievery and the weakening of rivals, with no ideological and little territorial goals. Zealotry became synonymous with the *Ikhwan*, who were feared for their "uncompromising attitude and their ability to inflict severe punishment"³² on those they viewed as ideologically lax or heretical. As in previous cases, the tenor and objectives of the violence employed by the agents took on decidedly different shades after the conversion to revivalism. As during the expansionist process of the first Saudi state, violence became a means to geographically secure, expand and celebrate the *Ikhwan's* revivalist identity. But while these former nomads were certainly converted to the revivalist creed, their acceptance the state as a guarantor for their newly embraced faith was dubious at the best of times.

Although the Saudi regime oversaw the transition of the Najdi Bedouin to the settled, pious *Ikhwan*, the program it sponsored failed to instil a dependency on the ontological protections offered by the state in this same community. One weakness in the project was the inability of the missionaries to properly eliminate the decentralised tribal identity of the nomadic population. While the state was able to settle convert large numbers of the Najdi pastoralists, tribalism and resistance to centralised authority persevered within the emergent *Ikhwan* identity. This was likely at least partly attributable to the fact that

²⁹ Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," 299.

³⁰ Cronin, "Tribes, Coups and Prines: Building a Modern Army in Saudi Arabia," 8.

³¹ Michele L Kjørliien and Michele L Michele, "State and Religion in Saudi Arabia," *The Arab Studies Journal* (1994): 37.

³² al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 62.

the conversion of the *Ikbwān* permitted them to remain within their own settlements and military formations based on pre-existing communal parameters. They remained unintegrated with the wider Saudi population and aloof from a self-conceptualisation as Saudi subjects. The act of settling did little to overwrite the Bedouin tribal identity. Instead, it created a symbiosis between tribal and the religious selves, with the latter, already radicalised through revivalist teachings, being exacerbated by independence of the former. Commins summarises this issue:

The settlements were not melting pots for the blending of Arabians from different tribes [that could facilitate] their transformation into homogenized Saudi subjects...[as] a consequence, the renowned solidarity of the nomads would not have been diluted at all by this particular form of sedentarisation by tribal sections. (Parenthesis mine) ³³

The strength of the tribal identity of the *Ikbwān* and its role in their resistance to the state contrasted starkly with previous conversion efforts in the Najdi settlements. As chapter two has discussed, the settlements of Najd had tended towards subdued identities since the eighteenth century. This lack of ideological competition partially explains the rapid success of revivalism in the region and why the state was able to implement its racket so effectively.³⁴ With the endurance of the Bedouin tribal identity, the state was unable to achieve similar results in the *Ikbwān*, who adopted a revivalist sentiment scholars have noted was highly consistent with Wahhab's original vision, yet saw little merit in the state's offer of protection.³⁵

As a result of the state's inability to suppress the sentiment of tribal independence, the *Ikbwān* arose as a force temporarily harnessed by the state, rather than fully controlled by it, as previous revivalist forces had been. This tension remained largely dormant during the 1910s, as the interests of the group correlated with the state's expansionism and the regime was not in a position to assert authority strongly over their settlements. Abd al-Aziz's efforts at neutralizing local rivals and waging war on external competitors provided the opportunity to expand revivalist domain, as well as to accrue considerable personal wealth. As the outward tempo began to slow and then halt and the Saudi's came to recognise international borders, however, the *Ikbwān* increasingly viewed the state not as a means by which their faith could be secured, but as a threat to the survival of the revivalism.

6.3 The State as an Enemy to Revivalism

Notable tension over issues of revivalist doctrine and identity began to develop between the state and the *Ikbwān* from the latter's outset. While useful under conditions of war-making, the zealotry of the *Ikbwān* was troublesome to regime governance. From 1914 onwards, both Abd al-Aziz and the wider

³³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 84.

³⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*.

³⁵ Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," 20-24.

establishment *ulema* repeatedly chastised the *Ikbwān* to moderate their religious behaviour towards other Saudi subjects living in Najd.³⁶ The religious warriors considered the piety of their lifestyles as superior to all others and would often raid and attack settlements which they deemed as impious, in spite of the township's affiliation to the Saudi state, or whether they identified as revivalists. In 1919 Abd al-Aziz asked a number of prominent Najdi scholars to issue an opinion that "*Ikbwānist*" revivalism was not superior to the doctrine overseen by the state and that the former nomads had no authority to declare others as non-Muslim.³⁷ This ruling illustrated the growing subservience of the mainstream *ulema* towards the state, as it was first time they had explicitly indicated that a legitimate declaration of excommunication was a privilege restricted to the king.³⁸ Despite this further pivot toward the centre by the senior *ulema*, the effect of this proclamation appears to have had little impact on the *Ikbwān's* collective resolve. They remained a persistent impediment to the national integration of what was a fundamentally heterogeneous sectarian population. The *Ikbwān* took a hard-line position toward non-revivalists that could border on the genocidal, calling for the forced conversion or extermination of the Shi'a in al-Hasa and al-Qatif. Although the Shi'a lived as second-class citizens under the ideological chauvinism of Saudi rule, Abd al-Aziz showed no desire to exterminate, relocate or forcibly convert them as the *Ikbwān* desired. Indeed, the emir appears to have preferred to leave them to their own insular practices unmolested, provided this was not seen in the public sphere.³⁹ The Shi'a of al-Hasa had come under Saudi rule with almost no resistance in 1913, and the territory's conquest was mainly a matter of ejecting the Ottoman garrison, rather than violently suppressing the wider population.⁴⁰ Unlike the Bedouin, the Shi'a were largely sedentary, easily monitored from the centre and had pledged loyalty to their new Saudi rulers without major protest.⁴¹ The inclination of Abd al-Aziz was thus not one to permit the *Ikbwān* to indulge their violent ideological desires, as it served no purpose in the wider state building project. At the same time, engaging in such acts risked alienating non-revivalist populations being absorbed as the state expanded and the deterring foreigners from making the pilgrimage to Mecca – an importance source of revenue during the pre-oil era.⁴²

The *Ikbwān* also balked at the conciliatory tone of the state towards the liberal population in the conquered territories of Hejaz after 1925. Despite reconquering the region in the name of ideological purification, Abd al-Aziz maintained a light diplomatic touch in the region. Hejaz had been a province of the Ottoman Empire for over four centuries – apart from a relatively brief interval under the first Saudi state - and retained a far more heterogeneous array of Islamic practice than Najd.⁴³ Abd al-Aziz permitted

³⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 85.

³⁷ Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," 232.

³⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁰ Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 45-48.

⁴¹ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 41.

⁴² Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 78.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 77.

many such heresies, like drinking alcohol and singing, to persist in cities like Jeddah⁴⁴ and allowed for the continual importation of forbidden items, such as tobacco.⁴⁵ Such policies were aimed at maintaining the loyalty of the urban elite in the western provinces, whose mercantilism was qualitatively and quantitatively superior to their central Arabian brethren and was critical to the state's economic growth and prosperity in the pre-oil era.⁴⁶ The state's pragmatic diplomatic connections with external regional and global powers such as Britain and Egypt was also cause for condemnation from the *Ikhwan*, which viewed interactions with 'non-Muslims' as harmful and corruptive to the purity of the community and openly condemned them.⁴⁷ This position was reminiscent of the revivalist discourses promoted under the second regime which had come to be so problematic during its temporary alliance with the Ottomans discussed in the previous chapter. Such accommodations were seen by the *Ikhwan* ideologues as symbolic of the state's lack of ideological commitment to the revivalist mission and constituted a sabotaging of that same effort.

Although the *Ikhwan* vocally challenged the state's fidelity and engaged in unsanctioned religious vigilantism against its subjects,⁴⁸ they remained integral to Saudi expansion during the early-to-mid 1920s. Following the annexation of Hejaz, however, this was all to change. As Abd al-Aziz began to consolidate his rule within the stabilizing boundaries of the modern Saudi state, the *Ikhwan* became increasingly disquieted by what they saw as an ideologically suspect state seeking to tighten its grip over them. Sometime between November and December 1926, various tribal leaders in the movement drafted their critiques into a charge sheet. In seven points they condemned specific objectionable behaviours and lapses in the fidelity of the state, including:

1. Prince Saud's diplomatic visit to Egypt following an incident in which Egyptian pilgrims were attacked by the *Ikhwan* for claimed heretical acts.
2. Prince Faisal's diplomatic visit to London for negotiations with the British.
3. The importation of modern technologies into the Kingdom, including cars, telephones and the telegraph system.
4. The imposition of custom duties on the Najdi Muslims.
5. Grazing allowances permitted to tribes from Iraq and Transjordan that enabled them to move and feed their livestock in territory claimed by the *Ikhwan*.
6. The ban on Kuwaiti trade.
7. The tolerance of the Shia of al-Hasa and al-Qatif.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵ Daniel Silverfarb, "Great Britain, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia: The Revolt of the Ikhwan, 1927-1930," *The International History Review* 4, no. 2 (1982): 228.

⁴⁶ Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," 234.

⁴⁷ "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," 38.

⁴⁸ Kjørliien and Michele, "State and Religion in Saudi Arabia," 37.

⁴⁹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 273.

While items four, five and six pertained primarily to economic issues, the majority of the charges were linked to the revivalist identity the state had transmitted into the Najdi Bedouin. In their eyes, the state had failed to provide the adequate protections advertised under the rackets and abdicated its privileged patron role by engaging with foreign infidel powers, importing powerful and transformative objects into the Kingdom, and abiding a long-known corruptive threat of the Shi'a. After over a year of intense negotiations, religious rulings in favour of the regime and offers of inducement by Abd al-Aziz, numerous *Ikhwan* leaders remained hostile to the state and unconvinced of its revivalist credentials and commitment. This tension erupted into outright confrontation in December 1928, when Faisal al-Dawish, an *Ikhwan* chief of the Mutair tribe, launched a number of raids both inside the Saudi state and against Iraqi settlements to punish those viewed as infidels.⁵⁰ The objective was either to force Abd al-Aziz into further expansionist conquests, or reveal him externally viewed as a weak ruler, unable to control his own people and internally as uncommitted to the security provisions of the rackets. As Commins summarises aptly, “[Abd al-Aziz] had to respond or admit he was not the master of Najd.”⁵¹ In either outcome, al-Dawish, already considered a powerful contender for the throne by his followers, wished to exploit the constraints that the state's responsibilities to the rackets imposed upon itself against it. Either the regime would uphold the rackets and al-Dawish would gain greater wealth, status and influence, or it would not and he could use the population's outrage to challenge Abd al-Aziz for the throne. Al-Dawish was an astute politician when it came to his own people, correctly concluding the ideological distaste the *Ikhwan* held towards the state would be a powerful tool to mobilise them against the central authority. What he appears to have not predicted was the rapid response of that state against his forces, which, with its technological superiority, quickly and decisively defeated the bulk of *Ikhwanist* forces by March of 1929 at the battle of Sibillia. While the revolt stretched on for the remainder of the year, the *Ikhwan*, with much of its core leadership killed at Sibillia, was never to recover, and surrendered to Abd al-Aziz by January of 1930.

While crucial against the weaker foes encountered during the expansion of Saudi powers, the *Ikhwan's* dispersed raiding tactics were ineffective against the growing and modernised power of the state, which was able to utilise emergent technologies such as the radio, the machinegun and the automobile to great effect.⁵² At the same time, the *Ikhwan* failed to incite the wider Saudi population through their martyrdom. Already disliked by considerable portions of the revivalist community, it took little effort to convince loyalist *ulema* to portray them as rebels and sanction their destruction through religious ruling.⁵³ The revolt demonstrated to the state the dangers of maintaining a force whose *esprit de corps* was so fundamentally linked to the anti-modernist roots of the rackets alongside a wider effort at state building. All too often, the central regime's consolidation of gains wrought by *Ikhwan's* fervour had brought it into

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 272-80.

⁵¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 90.

⁵² Thomas C. Barger, *Revolt in the Desert* (Vista: Selwa Press, 2011).

⁵³ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 175.

subsequent conflict with their vision of an authentic revivalist society. Ultimately, this forced the state to violently dismantle a tool integral to its re-ascension. After 1930 the *Ikhwan* would disperse as a coherent movement, either quietly returning to their agrarian plots or reassuming the nomadic lifestyle of their forebears.⁵⁴

Significantly, the *Ikhwan* revolt was not alone the outcome of the Saudi state's own failure to uphold the ratchet in the eyes of a militant sub-faction of the revivalist community. Scholars such as Vassiliev, Commins, Habib, Silverfarb, and Kostiner have all stressed that the insurrection was not mono-causal, but the result of a confluence of several important political, economic and social factors. The regime's effort to consolidate rule after its key victories in the 1920s agitated an enduring tribal identity in the movement intrinsically opposed to centralisation.⁵⁵ While the *Ikhwan* were committed to carving out the revivalist utopia on the edge of the sword, they appear to have expected to retain their own communal autonomy and a status of high privilege within the boundaries of any emergent Saudi state.⁵⁶ Economic factors also played an important role. The state's drive to halt raiding into areas like Iraq and Transjordan as it solidified its borders and began to recognize international demarcations denied the former Bedouins a traditional income stream that had only been strengthened during the expansionist phase of Saudi state building in the 1910s and early twenties. At the same time, the state also banned trade with Kuwait - one of the major economic partners with Najd - over political disagreements⁵⁷ and simultaneously imposed increasing taxes on the *Ikhwan*.⁵⁸ Abd al-Aziz's tolerance for Iraqi Bedouin tribes in grazing in the lands of Northern Najd to placate the governments of Britain and Iraq produced similar consternation by forcing those *Ikhwan* who had maintained or returned to some of their pastoralist habits to compete with outsiders over limited resources. The political ambitions of the *Ikhwan* elites was also crucial, particularly that of Faisal al-Dawish. With their fiercely independent identities intact, these men sought ways in which that could expand their own personal power in the face of an increasingly centralised regime that sought to subordinate their positions within the wider structures of state. But although these factors were significant drivers for the revolt, it is telling that the common mobilisation framework against the Saudi state remained one framed through an ideology that the regime itself had propagated in the Bedouin. It is further telling that, despite the economic, tribal and political issues at play, much of the negotiation prior to the revolt focused on issues of religious propriety and the state's infidelity in the eyes of the *Ikhwan*.⁵⁹ While other factors were significant, many were critiqued through a discourse of revivalist legitimacy. While issues such as the importation of cars and the telegraph diminished the *Ikhwan's* physical autonomy from the central state, they were often attacked for their innovative and corruptive properties that

⁵⁴ Barger, *Revolt in the Desert*.

⁵⁵ Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," 235.

⁵⁶ "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," 319-20.

⁵⁷ Anthony B Toth, "Tribes and Tribulations: Bedouin Losses in the Saudi and Iraqi Struggles over Kuwait's Frontiers, 1921-1943," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 153.

⁵⁸ Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," 235.

⁵⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 89-90.

jeopardised Islamic purity – a theme essential to the revivalist spirit.⁶⁰ The siege mentality propagated into the *Ikhwān* through the racket, combined with their physical isolation from the rest of the Saudi population, also inherently conflicted with the territorialisation of the state occurring at the same time. For the *Ikhwān*, the solidification of Saudi borders was not simply seen as threatening to their economic livelihood, but represented a form of modernisation that directly conflicted with their interpretations of the authentic revivalist vision. In their mind, the ideal form of revivalism was a “state of permanent revolution and jihad without borders.”⁶¹ If the state wished to claim a position as a protector of the faith, it had an obligation to constantly expand and eliminate the ever-present sources of epistemic threat that existed outside its borders. Its efforts should have been directed outwards on a mission of purification, not inwards on political consolidation over the *Ikhwān*, within boundaries that, through observation, represented the central regime effectively condoning the existence of foreign, infidel powers.

6.4 Conclusion

The model proposed in the previous chapter provides a systematised understanding of why the *Ikhwān* experiment failed to tame the Najdi Bedouin population and ultimately required the use of force by the state to resolve. In line with previous efforts at creating a positive legitimation feedback loop through racketeering methods, the regime was able to employ infrastructural power in the co-opted religious establishment to insert an identity in the Bedouin easily securitised within the surrounding socio-political conditions of the Arabian Peninsula in the early twentieth century. Through centralised organisation, the regime established numerous new settlements specifically for this purpose, induced or forced the Bedouin to settle in them, and then applied a program of revivalist indoctrination designed to make them more pliable to its interests. Subsequently, the behaviour of the state both domestically and internationally served to formulate conditions under which a perception of the newly-defined ontological threat was perceived by those who had adopted this new revivalist identity. It was here, however, that the process deviated from the desired path. Given the undiminished independence of the *Ikhwān*, the state was never able to sufficiently monopolise the religio-political narrative in a manner that its offer as a source of security for the revivalist identity was perceived as authentic. As a result, the “Ikhwān leaders grew as a “wild” pressure group, unrestricted by the limitations that bound established groups”⁶² unfettered by the dependencies within the revivalist community that the state had carefully grown over the past two centuries. As other sources of legitimacy diminished, such as fiscal inducements and relative autonomy from central control, the first two steps increasingly directed the *Ikhwān* to view the regime as a source of threat to the identity it itself had cultivated. Simply put, the state’s attempt to establish a new client population through the tested racketeering process backfired, providing a framework of intersubjective grievance key to facilitating mass mobilization against its authority by that same group. While the regime

⁶⁰ Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of the Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," 299-315.

⁶¹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 12.

⁶² Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," 231.

was able to convert and sedentarise many of the Najdi Bedouin tribes, it failed to instil a dependency in them for its services as a provider of ontological security. Indeed, the *Ikbwān* ultimately concluded that they themselves were the final praetorians of Islam, standing against a hostile state that only served to corrupt the faith.

While the origins of the *Ikbwān* revolt cannot be ascribed to a single cause, the state's attempt to impose the racket on the Bedouin established conditions that eventually contributed to their rebellion. While it is certain that the state would have encountered opposition from the Bedouin as it sought to further amalgamate its sovereign territory under the rubric of rule, it is unlikely such resistance would have been as organised and had such mass appeal without the religious frame of revivalism applied to it. Although the intention of the state's project to absorb the Bedouin may have been sound based on precedent, its execution was lacklustre and the indoctrination of the *Ikbwān* ultimately served to shape an intersubjective critique against the regime that challenged its very survival. The centre, while able to convert the troublesome nomads to the form of Islam it claimed a patronage over, failed to make that same community accept its role as security provider. As a result, the symbiosis between the state and the *Ikbwān* was never sufficiently established in a manner consistent with previous generations of revivalist jihadists, who were far more immersed in the racketeering system. Despite the failure of this process, however, most *Ikbwān* ultimately remained settled after their military defeat by the Saudi state, while the regime - undeterred by this experience - continued to employ racketeering throughout the next century.

6.5 References

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Chapter 7

Racketeering and Rentierism

Despite the disastrous outcome of racketeering that had led to the *Ikhwān* revolt, the third Saudi state continued the practice unabated. As a source of legitimation, racketeering remained an integral pillar in the regime's governance strategy. Although might have expected this to diminish in the wake of the discovery of oil in the Arabian east and the rise of an immense Saudi welfare state, racketeering endured and, in some cases, expanded through the profits of crude. The co-existence of these two systems of legitimation was not without its tensions, however, and the rapid modernisation unleashed by oil often served to conflict with revivalist desires for ontological security that the regime continued to propagate. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the interplay between racketeering and rentierism within modern Saudi patterns of rule. It continues to address why the state has employed racketeering as a central pillar of its legitimation strategy, how it has been an active agent in shaping revivalist attitudes and expectations, and the negative side effects of this policy for the regime and its continued relevance today. It considers three general trends encountered in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries under the Saudi regime: how racketeering has combined with rentierism to increase the reach and capacity of state power and control over the Saudi populous; the domestic political and social blowback of this paradoxical relationship in the form of violence and challenges to regime legitimacy; and how the state has continued to utilise revivalism to delegitimise political threats to the regime, particularly Cold War rivals and revolutionary Iran. In looking at these three threads, this chapter demonstrates how and why racketeering remained a prominent feature of Saudi state policy throughout the twentieth century.

7.1 Modernisation and the Racket

The achievement of internationally recognised Saudi statehood in 1932 initially saw little alteration in the regime's patterns of rule and legitimation from the previous two centuries.¹ Riyadh's domestic legitimacy continued to rest on servicing the religio-political desires of a core religious client base in Najd and balancing the interests of an array of tribal, mercantile and religious elites across its wider territory. During the 1930s, King Abd al-Aziz supervised the opening up of the country to international oil interests, chief among them the California-Arabian Standard Oil Company, renamed ARAMCO in 1944. With external consortiums came an influx of transformative technologies, symbols and ideas, initially restricted to western compounds concentrated along the Persian Gulf's western shores. Revivalist outrage was common in response. Banal items and practices, including wearing trousers, baseball caps and playing football came under fire for diverging from the correct Islamic form.² Nevertheless, protests remained generally non-violent petitions to the King, whose political aptitude was able to manage such discontent

¹ Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, 23.

² Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 144.

without fundamentally altering his country's policies towards its foreign partners and trajectory towards modernisation.

The discovery of large oil deposits in Dammam in 1938 and initiation of exports in 1948 afforded the state a new and powerful tool for ensuring the loyalty and support of its population: rentierism.³ Lawson's claim that "the concept of the rentier state has been applied more persistently and innovatively to Saudi Arabia than anywhere else"⁴ is no exaggeration. Oil allowed the regime to gradually cease taxation of its citizenry and begin providing for increasing amounts of their material needs and desires, stifling calls for political reform. Rentier activity rapidly became a key instrument for maintaining domestic and foreign legitimacy. Oil wealth lent alacrity to state efforts to technologically, bureaucratically and militarily modernise, particularly under King Faisal, who initiated several multi-year plans during the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ The introduction of rentierism fundamentally altered the relationship between the state and its subjects, as the financial component of the regime's extraction needs initially lessened and then ceased entirely, with personal income taxation abolished in 1975.⁶ At the same time, the state adopted the role as financial patron to the masses. The needs of extraction were reduced to the people acceptance of the monarchy as the legitimate governing body, as the capacity to make war and operate the instruments of state no longer depended on revenues derived from subjects. This use of rentierism to ensure the state's authoritarian character endured was hardly unique within the wider Middle East, Beblawi arguing that:

With virtually no taxes, citizens are far less demanding in terms of political participation... The government's budget in the oil states remains a one-sided document, an expenditure program, a promise to spend money and distribute benefits to the population with virtually no levy on them in terms of taxes or similar impositions.⁷

Through oil wealth, the state, its infrastructural power and the population it presided over began to radically alter. Saudi society was transformed from dispersed, tiny settlements and wandering tribes into a highly urbanised and concentrated population in the space of just two or three generations. Formal institutions began to emerge in the 1940s, with 1953 seeing the establishment of the Council of Ministers, a cabinet to the king that added greater administrative processing capacity to the regime. Although the state had possessed bureaucracies prior to this point, this was largely informal and augmented the personal will of the king, who had ruled the state like an expanded tribe through decree.⁸ By contrast, the emerging order began to demarcate clear lines of institutional responsibility and jurisdiction. The Council of Ministers was followed by a dizzying array of ministries, boards, sub-councils and departments, all

³ Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, 23.

⁴ Fred H. Lawson, "Keys to the Kingdom: Current Scholarship on Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 4 (2011): 737.

⁵ For a general summary of these plans see al-Farsy, *Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi Equation*, 153-58.

⁶ Asia Trade Hub, "Saudi Arabia," (2015), <https://www.asiatradehub.com/saudiarabia/tax.asp>.

⁷ Hazem Al Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1987).

⁸ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 160.

designed to afford greater domestic capacity to the state, allowing it to further penetrate, organise and tabulate the society it ruled over. The government sectors' immense expansion offered many new employment opportunities for Saudi subjects. Between 1960 and 1980 the civil sector grew by over 500 percent, from 62,000 to over 336,000,⁹ while the population expanded from 4.2 million to 9.8 million.¹⁰ Consistent with other autocratic rentier states in the region,¹¹ the new-found wealth was also used to expand and sophisticate the security apparatus, including the domestically-arrayed National Guard,¹² although, when compared to other regional actors, these instruments historically existed as little more than deterrents, save in a small number of violent incidents. Key to the effective employment of rentierism was a domestic intelligentsia capable of managing the increasingly complex economic, organisational and military systems necessary for the state to remain competitive with rivals such as Egypt and Iraq. Given the nature of Saudi governance prior to the 1950s, the dominance of traditionalism had left society lacking the technocrats and forward thinkers capable of shouldering such tasks. To rectify this, the regime invested heavily in the education sector and in providing scholastic opportunities for its subjects, sending many citizens abroad to absorb much-needed skills in science, engineering and administration. The state's commitment to these policies became most observable during the 1970s, where educational expenses rose over 1,000 percent, from \$2.5 billion (US) during the first half of the decade to \$28 billion by the second half.¹³

Despite the need for a new, innovative generation to drive the engine of modernisation, the state remained committed to racketeering within the emergent context. Technical reforms were often couched in rhetoric of Islamic preservation, with the espoused goal of maintaining the basic purpose of the state within the increasingly chaotic surrounds. Foreseeing the potential for conflict between the new, liberal intelligentsia and the traditionalist revivalist population, Riyadh established clear boundaries of jurisdiction for the technocratic elite that restricted their responsibilities to issues of material change and administration. At the same time, the *ulema* were to retain much of their customary responsibilities in ensuring social and spiritual propriety. This segmentation aimed at preventing conflict between these intrinsically opposed camps by minimising their interactions and employing the royal family as a go-between buffer.¹⁴ In a manner similar to the spiritual/material authority divide established between the Saudi monarchy and the revivalist elites two centuries prior, the technocratic modernisers and the *ulema* traditionalists were regulated to their own self-contained fields and focuses, with the state attempting to ensure they would not interact with one or overlap in areas of responsibility, to prevent both conflict or

⁹ Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 135-36.

¹⁰ The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations Statistics Division, "Faostat," <http://faostat3.fao.org>.

¹¹ Belin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," 148.

¹² Cronin, "Tribes, Coups and Prines: Building a Modern Army in Saudi Arabia," 20.

¹³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 127.

¹⁴ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 17.

coordination. This policy was largely successful until the 1980s, after which the delineative barriers became to break down, due largely to the increasing interconnectivity of Saudi society.¹⁵

As the state modernised, it increasingly consolidated its hold over the religious sector to further instrumentalise it against emergent ideological and political challenges and ensure conformity with its own interests. Although the *ulema* had always been reliant upon the regime for their salaries and organisational support,¹⁶ they retained considerable independence in their influence over Saudi society. As Lacroix writes, “the *ulema* saw themselves as enjoying complete equality with the princes and considered their relationship to be based on enlightened mutual self-interest.”¹⁷ This was particularly prominent while Wahhab’s bloodline had dominated the religious elite, but diminished during the nineteenth century, as entry to and mobility within the *ulema* became increasingly egalitarian, diffusing its hereditarily centralised authority.¹⁸ Nevertheless, revivalist scholars had occasionally engaged in actions counter to the interests of the regime. Prominent figures, like Abd al-Latif, had challenged the state during at a vulnerable juncture during the civil war of the second state. Similarly, numerous junior *ulema* had played an important role in stoking the *Ikhwan’s* ideological discontent with the regime prior to their uprising.¹⁹ Saudi leaders felt concerned at the latent challenge posed to their rule by revivalist scholars. Al Rasheed recounts one such instance of this vividly:

[Abd al-Aziz] himself was ‘domesticated’ by the [Najdi religious scholars] in a manner similar to that experienced by the rest of the Arabian population. It is alleged that he once admitted that when he came across the most senior member of the *ulama*, Abdullah ibn Abd al-Latif Al Shaykh, in the narrow streets of Riyadh, he used to sweat from fear. (Parenthesis mine)²⁰

Such consternation concerned the social power exercised by such a scholar, should he wish to agitate contrary to state interests. Although the religious establishment had generally maintained a close alliance with the regime since the eighteenth century, the fact that it retained features of a distinct power bloc drove the state to further absorb it into its own institutional structures.²¹ This process occurred in a piecemeal fashion over a period of several decades. 1940 saw the establishment of an official religious policing organisation, known as the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV). As a key component of the epistemic hegemony promised by the racket, religious regulation was integral to Saudi rule. Prior to the 1940s, this was conducted under the auspices of local *ulema* acting

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁶ Kjørliien and Michele, "State and Religion in Saudi Arabia," 37.

¹⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 28.

¹⁸ Alexander Bligh, "The Saudi Religious Elite (Ulama) as Participant in the Political System of the Kingdom," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 01 (1985): 39.

¹⁹ Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," 22-23.

²⁰ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 62.

²¹ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, 170-71.

in the spirit of revivalist doctrine, without much centralised coordination. While it was condoned by the regime, such activities were directed parochially, without much in the way of a wider system of checks and balances to ensure consistency across the ruled territories. These agents acted in the name of the state, but they were often beholden to little outside their own religious authorities and such autonomy could lead to disastrous outcomes, as in the case of the *Ikhwān*. The CPVPV aimed to enforce the same homogeneity, but under the centralised rubric of the regime's growing bureaucracy that limited the individual power of the religious enforcers.²²

Numerous other attempts were undertaken to integrate and neutralise the independence of revivalist scholars following the discovery of oil. During the 1950s, the state implemented a standardised legal system across the country. As with the creation of the CPVPV, the regime's key aim was to diminish the power of individual religious judges and enable greater state oversight of their activities. At the same time, legal standardisation helped to integrate areas outside of Najd, particularly Hejaz, into the wider Saudi order. In 1969 a sanctioned clerical body was established. This acted to further formalise the role of the *ulema* as a subordinate organ of the state, creating an officially recognised and appointed hierarchy that further curtailed the influence of exclusivist scholars dedicated to ideological purity, who were largely excluded from the new order.²³ More recently, in 2010, King Abdullah issued a decree making it illegal for non-sanctioned *ulema* to issue legal opinions, further disincentivising and delegitimising acts contrary to the state's policies.²⁴

While serving the increasing technical demands of the Saudi state and economy, educational reforms also limited some of the independence and autonomy of religious educators.²⁵ The national requirements for STEM were unable to be met by the local teachers, who had traditionally populated the education sphere with subjects focused on the various aspects of revivalist Islam. As a result, there was a considerable domestic deficit of those able to accommodate the emergent pedagogical requirements of a modern nation state.²⁶ Countering this, the regime recruited many new educators, often from foreign countries, whose backgrounds were outside the revivalist scholarly community.²⁷ This diversification of the teaching field did challenge the hegemony of the Najdi *ulema* over the education sector, but under the policy of segmentation the religious establishment continued to exercise considerable power over the field. This has been most observable in the continuing prominence of religious education that continued to constitute a mandatory 30 percent of primary, 24 percent of intermediate, 14 to 35 percent of secondary

²² Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁴ Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Fatwa Restrictions and the State-Clerical Relationships," (2010), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/10/27/saudi-fatwa-restrictions-and-state-clerical-relationship/6b81>.

²⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 111.

²⁶ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 42-43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-51.

and 15 – 45 percent of tertiary curriculum as of 2006.²⁸ To this day, Saudi state policy continues to list “conveying the understanding of Islam in a just and comprehensive manner” as the primary purpose of its educational system.²⁹ To ensure the viability of its racketeering efforts, the state has maintained the central role of *ulema* in education, as they continue to play a vital role in instilling revivalist tenets in young minds in a way that leaves many open to the state’s offer of ontological security.

Growing material resources allowed Riyadh to gradually tighten its grip on the instruments of racketeering. While there was certainly resistance to wider efforts at modernisation, centralisation and institutionalisation that enabled this process from prominent figures in the revivalist elite, such as Grand Mufti Muhammad ibn Ibrahim in the 1950s,³⁰ the state’s framing of progress as for the good of the community and its use of abundant rentier largesse inducements slowly but surely weakened such impediments. The ultimate outcome of this process was the Saudi *ulema*’s increasing removal from political affairs and a “group of technocrats with a modern education...in full control of politics, the economy, foreign relations and [defence] matters.”³¹

While the state aimed to restrain the clerical community as it modernised, it simultaneously dedicated resources to ensuring an ongoing demand for its role as racketeer in wider Saudi society. This behaviour stands in contrast to a key point of Schwarz’s theory of rentier state formation and functionalism in the Middle East, which suggests that regimes are “autonomous from societal demands,” owing to an abundance of natural resources which discounts the need for taxation.³² Contrary to this, placating the revivalist community has remained a key component of Saudi governance to this day. In the midst of modernising upheaval, the regime sustained broadly the same racketeering behaviour it had relied on for over two centuries. Indeed, renewed emphasis was placed on ensuring the perception of state fidelity to this system in the midst of the widespread economic and social changes it was overseeing. Early in the reformist period, Faisal declared a goal of “[maintaining] economic and social stability within the existing religious and social framework,”³³ signalling the state’s commitment to the revivalist base. To achieve a sense of stability, the regime would often make symbolic gestures or concessions to revivalist demands in tandem with reform efforts. Unlike in republican states like Egypt and Syria, where modernisation was presented as a revolutionary tearing down of the old order, Faisal and his successors aimed to insulate the revivalist community from the dislocative blow of change and innovation with a reaffirmation to maintaining the status quo. One way to achieve this was to sustain an image of revivalist

²⁸ Michaela Prokop, "The War of Ideas: Education in Saudi Arabia," in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, ed. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (London: Hurts and Company, 2006), 62.

²⁹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

³¹ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 25.

³² Schwarz, "The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization," 604.

³³ Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 136-37.

influence within many of the emergent institutions that were often ‘sanctified’ by specific departments aimed at upholding an image of Islamic propriety and authenticity, seeking to assure onlookers that the revivalist project remained intact and pervasive. This pattern remains observable at almost every level of the Saudi public service, from security, to education to healthcare. Religious influence and penetration of the government sector remained extremely high, with one study claiming that in 2008 one quarter of civil service positions were staffed by clerics or those falling directly under their jurisdiction.³⁴

In keeping with its role as proactive security provider, the state was also able to leverage its oil wealth to engage in large projects to spread and reinforce revivalist dominance within its borders and cater to the racket’s requirements. The largest of these was what Kostiner and Tietlbaum have termed the “Wahhabification” of Hejaz.³⁵ Through education and modernised welfare and religious institutions, King Faisal was able to import many of the revivalist values, practices and traditions into the Hejaz peacefully. In doing so, he was able to achieve something his ancestor had proven incapable of through violent conquest: a lasting ideological breach into the peninsula’s west that would expand the extractive client base of the racket. While Hejaz retains a liberal disposition relative to Najd,³⁶ Faisal’s effort helped to establish greater revivalist influence in the region than had existed previously. Visible state-sponsored projects to expand and entrench revivalist Islam like this symbolically demonstrated the regime’s continuing commitment to upholding its end of the racket during a period of immense uncertainty and change.

Circumstance could lead the regime to roll back progressive policies in order to ensure its image as security provider to the revivalist base remained maximised, particularly when it perceived a threat to its hold on power. In 1973, for example, the CPVPV was granted a new array of powers and responsibilities in its mission to enforce doctrinal conformity in the public and private sphere. This effectively undid many of the policies enacted in 1940s that had sought to restrict the powers of religious enforcers. This *volt-face* represented an attempt to curb growing critical voices emerging from a new generation of youth inspired by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood émigrés, who viewed denunciation of the regime’s perceived lack of fidelity as a viable option.³⁷ Similarly, fears generated by the threat of a domestic Islamist uprising in the wake of the Iranian revolution and the grand mosque siege in 1979 drove Riyadh to retract many of the restrictions it had placed on revivalist scholars, empowering them in the realms of education and social moderation. Once again, the fact that the state has generally chosen to enact such policies during times it detects threat suggests that its commitment to ideological purity is viewed as an instrument of political power.

³⁴ Tawfiq Alsaïd, "Relationship between State and Religion in Saudi Arabia: The Role of Wahabism in Governance," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2013): 378.

³⁵ Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 139.

³⁶ Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 77-79.

Outside of the policy and institutional spheres, state elites also commonly engaged in informal activities as symbolic demonstrations of their commitment to Islamic piety. Princes and princesses remain heavily active in patronising religious activities and displays in Saudi society. Rewards are frequently given to youth who demonstrate theological acumen, talented scholars and preachers who propagate the revivalist message. The individuals commonly invest heavily in large-scale projects for the improvement of Islam, such as the building of mosques, libraries and education centres.³⁸ As Rasheed notes, the normalisation and consistency of such acts helps “Saudis experience an enchanted world and a mystified public sphere”³⁹ which continually demonstrates the state and its elites as a proactive security provider committed to ensuring the ongoing integrity of the Islamic faith as dictated by the revivalist establishment.

7.2 Buffering against External Ideology

Maintaining the racket during the Cold War acted to counter and delegitimise emergent leftist and republican ideologies that challenged the Saudi monarchy, as the natural hostility to change encoded in the revivalist discourse was easily channelled against the post-colonial philosophies of rival states like Egypt and Syria. This was assisted by the fact that most Nasserist and Arab socialist ideologies tended to inherently oppose the traditionalist position of revivalism, considering its dominance of the public sphere a primordial idiom and an impediment to progress, development and equality. This not only challenged the status, prestige and relevance of the monarchy, but also the revivalist community, calling into question the entire socio-political structure of Saudi society. The statist purveyors of such ideas often employed this revolutionary aspect of their ideologies in an attempt to weaken the internal cohesion of the Saudi state as part of their wider regional competition with Riyadh. Arab nationalism, for instance, remained a ‘soft power’ asset in the toolkit of Egypt in its rivalry with the Saudis during the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁰ Both states engaged in active propaganda wars against the other through television and radio during this period, articulated through their respective ideological foundations.⁴¹ The symbolism of the Free Officers’ Movement with its disestablishment of the Egyptian monarchy, its modernism and its espoused egalitarianism particularly appealed to some in the Saudi military establishment, who had trained in Cairo during the 1950s. As Cronin puts it:

The dynamism of Nasserism contrasted with the weakness of Saudi political, social and economic development, the modest origins of the Free Officers with the corruption, nepotism and patrimonial authoritarianism of the Saudi rulers, and Egypt’s embrace of modernism and nationalism with the self-serving manipulation by the Saudi royal family of tribal and religious conservatism.⁴²

³⁸ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 61.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 362-66.

⁴¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 110-11.

⁴² Cronin, "Tribes, Coups and Prines: Building a Modern Army in Saudi Arabia," 17.

This was particularly concerning for Saudi elites after 1955, which saw a coup attempt by military officers inspired by Nasser's reforms. Several similar incidents, motivated by various shades of socialism and pan-Arabism, would continue to manifest until 1977.⁴³ The first and only Saudi labour movement also emerged in the 1940s and 1950s around the Dhahran oil fields in al-Hasa. This produced several large-scale strikes between 1945 and 1956 that, despite government crackdowns, were able to extract numerous concessions from the state.⁴⁴ Apart from showing the weakness of the regime against large-scale organised protests, the class-based nature of the Dhahran labour movement threatened to transcend the classical sectarian rift so integral to the divide and conquer approach of the racketeering process.⁴⁵

The new ideological threats of the Cold War saw the state falling back on a common feature of racketeering to encourage domestic solidarity behind the regime, loudly recommitting itself to sustaining the 'correct' form of Islam and presenting external rivals as a threat to this effort. Such a sentiment was broadcast in statements like Faisal's declaration in 1962 that "[the] government is fully aware of the need to make serious efforts for the propagation and encouragement of Islam and its protections by words and deeds."⁴⁶ Just as the *ulema* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had demonised Sufism, Hanafism, and other 'non-orthodox' ideologies practiced by rivals of the state, revivalist scholars denounced Arab nationalism, Ba'athism and Nasserism as godless, Communist concepts in violation of Islamic principles.⁴⁷ As before, new ideologies were presented as threats to the metaphysical integrity of the community.⁴⁸ Grand Mufti ibn Baz, possibly the most respected religious figure in the Kingdom for his time, described Arab nationalism as "atheist [chaos], a movement of ignorance whose main purpose is to fight Islam and destroy its teachings and rules. Many Arabs adopted it; they are the enemies of Islam."⁴⁹ He argued that no true Muslim could form relationships with communists, stating that they:

[Cannot] be fellow brothers of the Muslims. It is impermissible to consider them friends. However, there is no harm in eating with them sometimes, whether in a public feast or an invitation. As for taking them as fellows and eating with them on a regular basis, this is impermissible. (Parenthesis mine)⁵⁰

The attempts to deter interactions between Saudi subjects and those whose ideologies were deemed as threatening to nationalist interest echoed the efforts of nineteenth century scholars like Sulayman ibn

⁴³ Ibid., 16-21.

⁴⁴ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 108-09.

⁴⁵ Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 68-76.

⁴⁶ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 364.

⁴⁷ Prokop, "The War of Ideas: Education in Saudi Arabia," 66.

⁴⁸ Joseph Nevo, "Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (1998): 46.

⁴⁹ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 190.

⁵⁰ Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, "A Kafir Cannot Be a Brother of a Muslim," (1991),

<http://alifta.com/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?language=en&View=Page&PageID=820&PageNo=1&BookID=14>.

Abdallah, discussed in chapter six. Such prohibitions could reach absurd levels, such as the *fatwa* issued by ibn Baz on the importation of meat in which he stated:

The meat which is imported from the countries of the People of the Book (i.e., the Jews and the Christians) is lawful unless it is known that it is not slaughtered in the prescribed manner... As for the meat imported from the Communist, Socialist or idolatrous countries, it is unlawful for us to consume. They are not of the People of the Book and do not take the ruling of Muslims.⁵¹

While bizarre in their specificity, such *fatwas* reflected a broader perception of the Cold War security environment by Saudi elites in which socialistic and communist states such as the USSR and Egypt were seen as far more threatening to Riyadh than 'Christian,' 'Jewish' or 'Muslim' states. Steps to prevent the influx of external ideologies were far from rhetorical alone. Identifying the source of class-based sentiment underlying the Dhahran protests as flowing from workers that had travelled to Egypt for technical training, for example, the government stepped up its support for the CPVPV, who were a useful tool for identifying and suppressing any overt display of foreign ideology and demonstrating the regime's commitment to maintain the revivalist hegemony.⁵²

Despite the common use of recommitment strategies by the regime, their effect in stymieing alternative ideologies within Saudi borders during and after the Cold War remains debatable. Ethnic and class-based ideology has only emerged within the Saudi context in extremely specific contexts and circumstances. Those engaging in coup attempts for leftist principles were mostly military officers who had been exposed to concepts of Pan-Arabism and military-centric state building in their training abroad. The Dhahran workers' movement was built out of the common grievances of those who could observe the dramatic differences between their own material conditions and that of Western oil contractors within relatively isolated conditions.⁵³ Both groups represented only a tiny minority and neither of their claims resonated within the Saudi mainstream. At the same time, the regime's development, welfare and state-building programs between the 1960s and 1980s benefited the Sunni majority and weakened the appeal of any ideology that sought to overthrow the status quo. Within the context of the Middle East, leftist ideologies were often, although not always, more successful in regions that had experienced western colonial rule and had been exposed to European political ideas and theories for a prolonged period. Given that Saudi territory had never been under any form of western domination, there had been little opportunity for such concepts to metastasise inside the Kingdom and they remained alien, inaccessible and radical when cast against the traditionalism of much of the population. This dynamic is made

⁵¹ "Ruling on the Meat Imported from the Communist, Magi, and Pagan Countries " (1991), <http://alifta.com/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?languagename=en&View=Page&PageID=4537&PageNo=1&BookID=14>.

⁵² Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 109.

⁵³ Michel G Nehme, "Saudi Arabia 1950–80: Between Nationalism and Religion," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 4 (1994): 932.

apparent by contrasting the relative impotence of these ideologies with the rise of the populist conservative *Sabma* movement that drew considerable, if diffuse, support from the population thanks to its ability to reconcile foreign concepts of Islamist governance with local conservatism and widely perceived grievances.⁵⁴ Despite the potential traction that socialism and Arab nationalism had or didn't have within the wider population, the state continued to promote itself as a guarantor of revivalist dominance to impede the emergence of rival ideological actors, just as it had done for the previous two centuries.

The revivalist binary of racketeering has continued to be employed to delegitimise external and internal political challenges to the state since the end of the Cold War. The 1990/91 Gulf War was framed by grand Mufti ibn Baz as a struggle against atheism⁵⁵ to protect "the sanctity of Islam and Muslims."⁵⁶ Ibn Baz declared Saddam Hussein a non-Muslim⁵⁷ and advised all Ba'athists to "return to Allah in repentance and adopt real Islam with its principles in word and action, outwardly and inwardly,"⁵⁸ arguing that one could not simultaneously be Ba'athist and Muslim, as:

those who say the testimony of Islam amongst the advocators of disbelieving doctrines such as Ba`thists, communists and the like while offering Salah(worship), which are done for worldly purposes, these things will not save them from disbelief as they are based on hypocrisy.⁵⁹

As under previous instances of Saudi rule, the political enemies of the state were portrayed as outside the parameters of the true Muslim community and a threat to its integrity, a challenge that required legitimate adherents to show solidarity with the state, which would ensure the survival of the correct form.

The 1990s saw the rise of the *Sabma*, a Salafist protest movement hybridising the external thought of the Muslim brotherhood with local elements of revivalism. With regard to the former, the movement sought greater scholarly influence within state institutions and restrictions on royal power, while the influence of the latter manifested in demands for a more conservative social sphere, free of modern

⁵⁴ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*.

⁵⁵ Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, "Liberating the State of Kuwait from the Aggressors Is a Divine Great Bounty and Victory against Tyranny, Aggression and Atheism," (1991), <http://aliffta.com/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?languagename=en&View=Page&PageID=674&PageNo=1&BookID=14>.

⁵⁶ "The Action Waged by Saddam Is a Sinful Aggression," (1991), <http://aliffta.com/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?languagename=en&View=Page&PageID=673&PageNo=1&BookID=14>.

⁵⁷ "A Conversation About the Muslim Ummah after the Gulf War," (1991), <http://aliffta.com/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?languagename=en&View=Page&PageID=675&PageNo=1&BookID=14>.

⁵⁸ "Is the Ruler of Iraq Regarded as a Disbeliever? Is It Permissible to Curse Him?," (1991), <http://aliffta.com/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?languagename=en&View=Page&PageID=659&PageNo=1&BookID=14>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

influence and symbolism.⁶⁰ Although non-violent in nature, the group's scale, the large number of clerics – mostly junior ranking - contained in its ranks and its willingness to openly challenge the state's legitimacy over issues of Islamic piety saw it as the most serious domestic threat to the regime since the *Ikhwan* revolt. While Riyadh responded to this in a number of ways - from token placations, to appeals to order, to security crackdowns – a common tactic royalists utilised was challenging the religious fidelity of the opposition. Given their combination of Brotherhood and revivalist thought, the *Sabwa* were accused of heterodoxy, unsanctioned innovation, veneration of the cult of Saints and chaotic factionalism.⁶¹ Although some of the specific critiques utilised by royalists were particular to the times, their wider effort to delegitimise an opposing political force by framing it as an innovation outside the boundaries of the sanctioned community was largely consistent with the outcome of earlier efforts at racketeering. That many such royalists were not directly actually affiliated with the state, but from its cultivated core base in the revivalist community, demonstrates how processes of racketeering can be employed to extract loyalty during times of threat to the state.⁶² By maintaining the racket, the state was able to rely on its core client base to defend it against internal challenges, as they continued to view its role as protector to the revivalist community as necessary and worth fighting for.

7.3 The Neosecuritisation of the Shi'a

Perhaps the most prominent development of modern racketeering has been the new emphasis of securitisation, or neosecuritisation, of the Shi'a adopted in its execution since the emergence of revolutionary Iran in 1979. As previous chapters have discussed, the Shi'a have long been a target of othering within revivalist discourse. The distinct practices and belief systems of Shi'a to the east, south and north of Najd marked them as readily discernible from the Sunni communities of central Arabia and their doctrines were perceived heresy by Wahhab and his clerical decedents.⁶³ The Shi'a were not even recognised as Muslims by many revivalist scholars until as late as the 1950s⁶⁴ and continued to be referred to in a derogative manner in official Saudi textbooks until 1993.⁶⁵ Twelver Shi'ism has been particularly targeted in this regard. Others, such as the Zaidi Shi'a of North Yemen, have been less criticised by revivalist scholars, who "generally accept the [sect's] legitimacy...although many remain apprehensive regarding some of its aspects."⁶⁶ Despite their 'suspect' practices, the Shi'a never posed a major threat to Saudi political interests, nor were particularly restive subjects under the state's authority prior to 1979.

⁶⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 179-81.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Ondrej Beranek, "Divided We Survive: A Landscape of Fragmentation in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Brief*, no. 33 (2009): 4.

⁶⁴ Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010): 78.

⁶⁵ Prokop, "The War of Ideas: Education in Saudi Arabia," 68.

⁶⁶ Raihan Ismail, *The Saudi 'Ulamā' and the External Shī'a Threat: The Case of Bahrain, Iraq and Yemen* (2015), 332.

While resisting adopting revivalism and retaining a distinct sectarian identity, Shi'a scholars and clergy rarely challenged the movement openly, did little to deter its spread and remained physically isolated from the centres of revivalist thought in Najd. At the same time, political and military threats posed to the Saudi state by international rivals, such as the Ottomans, the Egyptians and the British, were perceived by many in the Saudi elite as existential. Within this security environment, the Shi'a, while heavily disapproved of by revivalist scholars, were of relatively little importance. As a result, racketeering efforts by mainstream revivalist *ulema* largely used the Shi'a as a target of religious derision, but never dedicated serious effort to mobilising the movement against them, as this energy was required for more serious challenges elsewhere.⁶⁷ Indeed, it is arguable that the state has at times directly defied the themes of the revivalist thought in favour of protecting its own political interests with regard to the Shi'a, first when it defended their existence against *Ikhwan* predations and second when it sided with the Zaydi Shia Badr Monarchy against leftist republicans during the North Yemen civil war. Within the political logic behind the racket, it seems that as long as the Shi'a remained a distant, remote concept with little actual effect on the community, they could be largely ignored.

The Iranian revolution fundamentally altered the relatively inactive relationship between the revivalist and Shi'a communities, as Riyadh came to view the latter as a potential political threat. Shia Islamists' 1979 overthrow of the Iranian Pahlavi monarchy stirred considerable unrest in the Saudi eastern provinces,⁶⁸ with many inspired to assert the previously dormant Shi'a national identity in a manner that brought them into violent confrontation with the state, although not with other sectarian groups.⁶⁹ At the same time, the revolutionary regime out of Tehran began to challenge Riyadh's Islamic credentials and legitimacy rhetorically, while encouraging Muslims - typically Shi'a - inside the Kingdom towards riots, clashes and revolution.⁷⁰ This practice would continue throughout the 1980s and marked the beginning of a perennial rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh that continues today.⁷¹ This initial experience was compounded by emergence of the terrorist group Hezbollah al-Hijaz, a Shi'a organisation with links to Iran which carried out numerous attacks inside the Kingdom and whose political goals were based off the Iranian revolutionary model.⁷² This period saw anti-Shi'a rhetoric becoming increasingly common from revivalist *ulema*, with a new focus on the allegiances and political behaviours of the minority group that reflected the wider concerns of the state.⁷³ Despite state's symbolic reconciliation efforts with the Saudi

⁶⁷ "The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 5, no. 4 (2012): 406.

⁶⁸ Toby Craig Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery: Modernity, Marginilization, and the Shia Uprising of 1979," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 02 (2006).

⁶⁹ Madawi Al-Rasheed, "The Shia of Saudi Arabia: A Minority in Search of Cultural Authenticity," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (1998): 122-23.

⁷⁰ Joseph A Kechichian, "Trends in Saudi National Security," *The Middle East Journal* (1999): 234-37.

⁷¹ Ben Rich, "Gulf War 4.0: Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Complexification of the Persian Gulf Equation," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 4 (2012).

⁷² Toby Matthiesen, "Hizbullah Al-Hijaz: A History of the Most Radical Saudi Shi'a Opposition Group," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 2 (2010).

⁷³ Ismail, "The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia," 406.

Shi'a during the 1990s, many revivalist scholars and prominent government figures, such as then-interior minister Prince Naïf, continued to portray the Shi'a as "an enemy within" due to the nature of their faith and the external political affiliations that implied.⁷⁴ The Shi'a continued to be vocally criticised for the corruptive nature of their faith and their otherness with regards to the revivalist community, one scholar going so far as to argue that they had different physical characteristics from Sunnis.⁷⁵ Although the post-1979 environment saw the contrivance of a more diverse range of criticisms against the community by revivalist scholars, the use of the Shi'a as a readily identifiable other to justify political solidarity behind the Saudi regime was hardly a new phenomenon. The fact that revivalist discourse shifted its focus from Arab Nationalism and external states like Syria and Egypt to the Shi'a and Iran reflected the concerns of the Saudi state with regard to newly emergent geopolitical rivalries. Given the isolated and largely peaceful history of the Saudi Shi'a, the fact that the state has been able to market this ontological threat to its core support base without any major resistance suggests that the effects of the last two and a half centuries of racketeering have profoundly shaped the outlooks of many Saudis. Although the Shi'a have challenged the regime at several points over the past three decades, they have never directly confronted the revivalist community, nor the wider Sunni population. Despite this, many Saudi citizens continue to view the presence of Shi'a within and around Saudi territory as a corruptive threat to the religion. As the next chapter will demonstrate with regard to the Arab Spring, the neosecuritisation of Saudi Shi'a through the racket continues to be an effective tool to ensure Riyadh's grip on power during times of political crisis. As Matthiesen concludes in his work on Saudi Shi'a, "[as] long as the state legitimises itself through a religious nationalism based on [revivalism], the situation of Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia will remain precarious."⁷⁶

7.4 Paradoxes and Rejection

Despite attempts to segment, contain and reconcile the effects of modernisation on the entrenched traditionalism perpetuated under the racket, the intrinsically dislocative and innovative nature of these processes caused grievance for many in the revivalist community. This was exacerbated by the fact that, as in much of the rest of the post-colonial Arab world, reforms have been implemented by an elite, technocratic few with little real consultation with the society they preside over.⁷⁷ Despite attempts to limit the effects of reforms on the social sphere, however, a consistent outcome of rentier modernisation has been that the transformative processes unleashed rarely stay confined to the intended design.⁷⁸ While states may be able to mitigate these effects to some extent, even the most centralised and totalitarian of systems have been unable to fully curtail the unanticipated overflows of modernisation, either of their

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 407-08.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 412.

⁷⁶ Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 219.

⁷⁷ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," 745.

⁷⁸ Sven Oskarsson and Eric Ottosen, "Does Oil Still Hinder Democracy," *Journal of Development Studies* 46, no. 6 (2010): 1070.

own, or of states around them.⁷⁹ In the Saudi case this has led to persistent tension between the paradox of state-promoted traditionalism of the racket and the state-directed modernisation efforts. As indicated above, the Saudi state has largely failed to provide an updated ideology for its core extraction base that accommodates the effects of modernisation and provides the desired sense of ontological orientation and stability.⁸⁰ Both laymen and many in the lower ranks of the Saudi *ulema* have often criticised even the most minor elements of modernisation as forbidden and impermissible innovations that contradict Islam.⁸¹ Protests against new forms of technology and infrastructure have been common,⁸² as have attacks against progressive gender and social norms and policies.⁸³ Although such displays have generally been peaceful under the third state's reign, they have occasionally led to violence against the perceived symbols of such 'disruptions.' There have also been those whose desire for an authentic revivalist-model society has driven them towards a lifestyle of primordial asceticism. One such individual wrote:

I joined a hard-line Salafi group. I abandoned modern life and lived in a mud hut, apart from my family. Viewing modern education as corrupt and immoral, I joined a circle of scholars who taught the Islamic sciences in the classical way, just as they had been taught 1,200 years ago.⁸⁴

Many Saudis who pursued such an avenue simply withdrew peacefully from wider society. While they may have viewed the state's role as a moderniser of society as objectionable, in many cases Riyadh also made accommodations to allow for the existence of enclaves of such ultra-traditionalists. The largest group to pursue this path were the *Ikhwan* of Burayda, a holdout of exclusivist *ulema* and their followers who had been active since the early twentieth century. In this case, the state proved willing to patronise such eccentricities to a point, setting aside land and providing specific services to maintain the group's atavism.⁸⁵ While placating the group individually, within the security logic of the racket, such concessions demonstrated the regime's continuing commitment to providing protections for the religious desires of its subjects to the wider community, without challenging its overall authority.

Despite being outliers in the wider revivalist community, exclusivists like the *Ikhwan* of Burayda remained an intrinsic product of the racket's divisive and antimodernist narrative. Those willing to engage in violence to defend the revivalist identity adhere to the same essential logic, albeit with a different outcome. Historically, the most common type of violence related to the revivalist identity inside the

⁷⁹ Robert S. Boynton, "North Korea's Digital Underground," (2011), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/north-koreas-digital-underground/308414/>.

⁸⁰ Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," 243.

⁸¹ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 338.

⁸² Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 110-11.

⁸³ Asma Alsharif, "Saudi Clerics Protest against Appointing Women to Advisory Body," (2013), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/15/us-saudi-clerics-women-idUSBRE90E00020130115>.

⁸⁴ Mansour al-Nogaidan, "Losing My Jihadism," (2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/20/AR2007072001808.html>.

⁸⁵ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 103-08.

Kingdom has been what Hegghammer has termed “vigilantism.”⁸⁶ Here, the agent sees himself as enforcing correct revivalist principles when the state has failed in its role as religious moderator. As Sprinzak puts it:

What characterizes the vigilante mind is the profound conviction that the government and its agencies have failed to enforce the law or establish order in a particular area . . . [and that they must act] against criminal elements because the authorities are either too weak to enforce the law or negligent in their duties. (Parenthesis mine)⁸⁷

Vigilantism has existed throughout the experience of the third state, but became increasingly visible during the oil era, as economic and technological change and modernisation rapidly increased and generated increasing amounts of insecurity and social pressure in the revivalist community. Its manifestation appears to have come in waves, with the 1980s in particularly being devoid of notable incidents,⁸⁸ likely due to the regime’s ability to turn critical eyes towards the Soviet-Afghan war and instigate Sunni solidarity against revolutionary Shi’a Iran. Vigilante violence has traditionally targeted the perceived sources of society’s corruption, rather than the state itself. In 1964, for example, a group of students launched a campaign of vandalism, targeting women’s mannequins, photography studios and coffee houses. Educated and inspired in Medina’s Islamic university, the youths attempted to counter what they saw as the obvious collapse of traditional values in society.⁸⁹ Similarly, the story of the individual who joined the Salafi group discussed above continues:

My involvement with his group led me to violence, and landed me in prison. In 1991, I took part in firebombing video stores in Riyadh and a woman’s center in my home town of [Burayda], seeing them as symbols of sin in a society that was marching rapidly towards modernization. (Parenthesis mine)⁹⁰

What differentiates vigilantism produced by the racket from that outlined in Sprinzak’s thinking has been the state as a target of reprisals for the vigilantes. As Rasheed has observed, while revivalist discourse has remained a powerful tool to maintain the authority of the state throughout its reign, during times of upheaval its core philosophical principles have also be used by dissidents to highlight its impious hypocrisy and used to rationalise radical action against it.⁹¹ The two major manifestations of this dynamic have been the *Ikhwan* revolt and the 1979 Grand Mosque Siege, in which the militant group *al-Jamaa al-Salafiya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM) stormed the al-Masjid mosque Mecca, protesting the westernisation of Saudi

⁸⁶ Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6-7.

⁸⁷ Ehud Sprinzak, “Right-Wing Terrorism in Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegitimatization,” in *Terror from the Extreme Right*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 29.

⁸⁸ Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihad, Yes, but Not Revolution: Explaining the Extraversion of Islamist Violence in Saudi Arabia,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 399.

⁸⁹ Alsaid, “Relationship between State and Religion in Saudi Arabia: The Role of Wahabism in Governance,” 381.

⁹⁰ al-Nogaidan, “Losing My Jihadism”.

⁹¹ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 26.

society and the corrupting influence of the monarchy's modernisation efforts amongst other issues. Considerable work has been written on the siege⁹² and a detailed account of its complexities is beyond the scope of this research. As with the *Ikhwan* revolt, numerous other factors drove the actions of the JSM and its leader, Juhayman al-Utaybi, such as their millenarian predictions and crackdowns against them by Saudi authorities prior to the incident.⁹³ Nevertheless, the organisation remained isolated from other revolutionary Islamist movements occurring around the Middle Eastern region in 1979 in areas like Egypt and Iran and its critiques and world view were fundamentally formulated within the internal structures of the Saudi State.⁹⁴ As Kechichian has noted, the similarities between the reformist calls of the JSM during the siege and the *Ikhwan* during the revolt. He further stresses the importance of the Saudi educational system in influencing al-Utaybi, and specifically identifies the puritanical teachings of Grand Mufti Ibn Baz as a potential source for the terrorist leader's philosophical radicalisation.⁹⁵ The siege maintained a significant consistency with the *Ikhwan* revolt, as both arose as a result of the perceived failure of the state in its role as security provider. In the minds of both militant groups, the regime's support of modernisation activities conflicted with the central principles of revivalist traditionalism it propagated and claimed to uphold.

In both mentioned cases, the social and religious norms built and employed through racketeering to maintain state power paradoxically helped to create conditions in which a minority in the client population viewed the regime as either impassive to their security needs, worse, an impediment to them. As Alsaïd writes, "[the] idea was simply that the official religious establishment was no longer capable of shouldering the responsibility of spreading the call, and that its links to the state had become a major obstacle to the latter's progress."⁹⁶ Although the *Ikhwan* revolt and the Meccan siege had their own set of independent factors that contributed to the violence, a core grievance was formulated, framed and executed in response to the themes promoted by the racket, such as rejecting innovation and enforcing epistemological homogeneity. It was not happenstance that the *Ikhwan* and JSM's critiques of corrupt religious authorities and illegitimate and impious political regimes parroted the foundational call to arms of the first Saudi state, where:

[Revivalists] saw the existing religious authorities as subservient to political masters who themselves were betraying Islamic principles, oppressing the populations over which they were ruling and drawing illicit

⁹² See Thomas Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman Al-'Utaybi Revisted," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007). & Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*. & JM Berger, "The Siege at Mecca: A Sourcebook for Researchers," (Intel Wire Press, Oxford, 2006).

⁹³ Hegghammer and Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman Al-'Utaybi Revisted," 110.

⁹⁴ Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*.

⁹⁵ Joseph A. Kechichian, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986): 59.

⁹⁶ Alsaïd, "Relationship between State and Religion in Saudi Arabia: The Role of Wahabism in Governance," 382.

gains from their positions. They called for radical reform where Islamic belief and practice would be centred once more on the foundations of Islam. (Parenthesis mine)⁹⁷

Consequently, forces designed to legitimate the Saudi regime have, at numerous intervals, come to delegitimise it. Such a recurrent trend displays numerous features of Sprinzak's theory of "transformational delegitimation," in which a radical and militant movement emerges within a state as a response to perceived failures by the government to live up to its own espoused values.⁹⁸ Although Sprinzak stresses that this model is most commonly observed within democratic states over issues of democracy, the parallels in the Saudi context of racketeering remain striking.

Despite the state's attempts to control and institutionalise the revivalist *ulema*, the spirit of the movement remains open to challenging the regime's paradoxical behaviours under the right conditions. The aforementioned incidents highlight that although the state exerts a heavy influence within the revivalist dialectic, it remains a patron of the movement, not its dictator. As Niblock summarises:

The very vitality of the popular [revivalist] movement... has posed problems for both the religious and the political leaderships [of the Saudi state]. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's puritanical and inherently egalitarian message - where any Muslim could become a [religious scholar], live without the trappings of luxury and devote himself to promoting the creed - exerted a powerful hold on the popular consciousness. Those swayed by these ideas could turn against the state, and the religious leaders associated with the state, if they perceived [them] to have betrayed the [revivalist] ethos. This occurred at the end of the 1920s, when parts of the *Ikhwan* movement rose in revolt against 'Abd al-'Aziz, and more recently in the radical Islamist opposition which developed from the late 1970s, gaining initial prominence with the seizure of the Great Mosque in Makkah in November 1979. (Parenthesis mine)⁹⁹

Although there are other instances of political confrontation over the state's lack of religious piety, such as the *Sabwa* movement and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the drivers for these challenges appear to combine Saudi revivalist norms with foreign influences and ideologies, such as neo-jihadism¹⁰⁰ and Brotherhood-influenced Islamism. While the *Sabwa* drew on aspects of social conservatism in a manner consistent with some of the racket's restorative themes, its ideas on democratisation and Islamism have roots outside the Kingdom, which were crucial for its mobilisation. Similarly, it is undoubtable that the image of preservative traditionalism in the racketeering efforts of the Saudi state has numerous parallels with the mission of AQAP. As Steinberg has put it, "[the] Saudi militant Islamists who

⁹⁷ Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, 25.

⁹⁸ Ehud Sprinzak, "The Process of Delegitimation: Towards a Linkage Theory of Political Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (1991): 52.

⁹⁹ Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Lentini, *Neojihadism: Towards a New Understanding of Terrorism and Extremism?* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013).

have joined Usama bin Ladin's Al-Qa'ida are the descendants of [the] radical wings of [revivalism]."¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the latter's motivation to challenge the regime was largely formulated from its experiences in Afghanistan and the ideological cross-pollination that occurred there with non-revivalist Islamist scholars like Abdallah Azzam. In these cases, isolating the influence of domestic racketeering from the confounding external variables will require considerable future research and is outside the scope of the macro-level focus of this thesis.

7.5 Conclusion

Although the discovery of oil afforded the Saudi elite with a potent new method to retain their political power, the state continued its racketeering efforts based on the previous two centuries of successful experience. At times, the paradoxes of these two governing strategies led to unforeseen and problematic outcomes for Riyadh, but they generally existed in a complimentary and mutually beneficial equilibrium, with the state able to use its infrastructural power to mitigate negative consequences of such incompatibilities. Where rentierism helped to fulfil the Saudi populace's material needs and desires and check the power of external states, racketeering continued to provide a sense of consistency, continuity, community and identity in the midst of change that other emergent ideologies in the Middle East were unable to supplement in the Saudi context. As Kostiner and Tietlbaum put it, the modernisation period under Faisal and the rulers after him "constituted a drastic, unfamiliar innovation but was meant to satisfy all: to stimulate those who benefited from it and compensate those who were offended by the change."¹⁰² At the same time, the wealth, technological and organisational advantages afforded by oil enabled the state to gain increasing influence and oversight over revivalist thought. While this did not occur in a perfectly linear fashion and did not produce a statist monopoly over the sector, the general trend was to produce a religious establishment more integrated into the structures of the state than had existed under previous Saudi dynasties, allowing for greater centralisation and direction of racketeering efforts.

As in previous instances of Saudi rule, the primary target of the securitising discourse of revivalist scholars at any given time was almost inevitably those perceived as a political threat by the regime. While the public discussion of such subjects did certainly involve their political and military challenges to the state, rhetoric and discourse still heavily focused on the metaphysical integrity and survival of the revivalist community. Nasserites were not simply a risk because they could invade the Kingdom, but also because they brought with them the atheistic philosophies of Arab nationalism that threatened to eradicate Islam. Shi'a were not only potential fifth columnists for a rival regional power, but as always, a conduit through which corruption could flow into the pious community. Behind such discourses, the state would continue to fuel a social system that impressed the importance of such ideological and spiritual issues in its subjects, ensuring that it maintained a core extraction base of revivalists who would continue to view its role as guardian of Islam as a legitimate and vital one.

¹⁰¹ Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," 11.

¹⁰² Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 137.

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Chapter 8

Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring

Perhaps the most prominent recent impact of the Saudi state's efforts at racketeering can be observed in its behaviour and responses to the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. During this regional period of unrest, numerous states experienced drastic political, social and economic upheaval, as they have struggled to contend with populist uprisings. As each state struggled to formulate their own approach to counter the upheaval, the Saudi regime looked to employ old, reliable patterns of political crisis management it had utilised over the past 250 years. In this, identity racketeering figured prominently, as the state sought once again to portray itself as a guardian of a revivalist community and tarnish political challenges to its authority as a corruptive threat to Islam. This strategy was not employed unilaterally, however. Terrified of its potential vulnerability, Riyadh initiated a tripartite containment policy that focused on employing its racketeering efforts in tandem with fiscal incentives and the targeted use of force.

This chapter seeks to understand the balance of strategies employed by the Saudi regime in response to the Arab Spring and highlight the integral role played by racketeering in ensuring the regimes authoritarian hold on power. In doing so, it further clarifies why the state has continued to employ racketeering as a central pillar of its legitimisation, showcase how it has sought to shape revivalist demands towards its own ends and demonstrate the continuing relevance of the policy today. It briefly outlines the modern history of political resistance to the regime, to give readers a sense of issues confronted by the regime over the past five decades. It then focuses upon the use of two other major sources of regime power - rentierism and force - to disarm and suppress political grievance during the Arab Spring. It then concludes with a detailed analysis of how racketeering assisted the state in stymieing potential unrest resulting from the Spring, particularly through the securitisation of domestic and neighbouring communities of Shi'a to galvanise the wider Sunni populace behind the regime and delegitimise protest against its rule.

8.1 Modern Sources of Political Discontent inside the Kingdom

The past half century has seen various forms of political resistance to the regime within different sectors of Saudi society. At their most general, these groups can be classified within one of three categories: liberal, conservative and sectarian Shi'a. Fundamentally, however, these classifications represent umbrella terms which cover an array of subset actors with varying political goals and methodologies.

Organised resistance to the Saudi regime in the past few decades by conservative, traditionalist elements has largely taken two forms: the non-violent *Sabwa* movement and a range of jihadist groups either calling for or acting out Salafi militancy inside the Kingdom. The *Sabwa* have maintained a relatively

unified message of Islamist political reform, similar to the Muslim Brotherhood from which it was partially inspired. By contrast, jihadists and jihadist-supporters have been split over a number of different organisations; including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the so-called *al-Shu'aybi* School of radical clerics, and the millenarian JSM.¹ Each of these organisations has had their own specific diagnoses and prescriptions towards the political ills they perceived inside the Kingdom.

Overlap between conservative groups has been a mixed affair. The *al-Shu'aybi* faction, for example, rhetorically supported some of AQAP's actions following the 2003 Riyadh compound bombings, a position which ultimately found many of them incarcerated.² While there was a degree of mutual sympathy between the *Sabwa* and some militant Salafists during the 1990s, this relationship soured in the wake of the September Eleven attacks, as the many in the former group chose solidarity with the regime, rather than face its reprisals.³ Despite divisions, a consistency between the messaging of these varying actors has been critique of the Saudi regime for failing to live up to the qualities of Islamic leadership and guardianship it propagates through racketeering and a betrayal of its fundamental *raison d'être* of protecting the revivalist identity.

Torchbearers for liberal political and social reform have, by their very nature, been far more varied in their political and ideological goals and motivations than their conservative counterparts. As Beranek writes, "[today in Saudi Arabia] there is quite a large group of reform-minded liberals, many of them educated in the West, who make up a coalition of intellectuals and businesspeople as well as moderate religious leaders."⁴ While some have called for outright secularisation, others, like the "Islamoliberal"⁵ reformers in the country's sanctioned clergy, sometimes called *wasatiyyun* or *islabiyyun*, have tended to be more focused on democratisation and judicial reform within the rubric of Islamic governance. This been at the expense of supporting progressive social issues, particularly in the realm of gender equality.⁶ Nevertheless, such individuals have broken with many of the traditionalist patterns of the religious establishment, which one liberal cleric described as based around "an atmosphere of extremism."⁷

Liberal actions of political resistance and confrontation in the Saudi context have been peaceful in nature. These have mostly consisted of highly publicised petitions and demonstrations over issues such

¹ Thomas Hegghammer, *The Meccan Rebellion: The Story of Juhayman Al-'Utaybi Revisted* (Bristol: Amal Press, 2011).

² *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*, 83-98.

³ Beranek, "Divided We Survive: A Landscape of Fragmentation in Saudi Arabia," 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stéphane Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamoliberal" Reformists," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 3 (2004).

⁶ Joseph A. Kechichian, *Legal and Political Reforms in Sa'udi Arabia* (London: Routledge, 2013), 35-36.

⁷ Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamoliberal" Reformists," 350.

improving women's station in Saudi society,⁸ establishing consultative democratic institutions⁹ and decreasing the Islamisation of the education system. Writing in 2006, Sager noted five major petitions lodged in this manner since 1990 by various academics, public intellectuals and rights activists.¹⁰ Such petitions were not the product of an established and cohesive oppositional organisation, like the *Sabwa*, but produced by ad hoc cadres who acted in temporary unison upon a single set of issues. Organised liberal networks on the internet through websites like Twitter and Facebook, with prominent bloggers, such as Raif Badawi, have also begun to emerge recently as a distinct oppositional voice.¹¹ Despite the apparent advent of such technological tools of organisation, however, scholars like Al-Rasheed seriously question their ability to effect real-world change in the Saudi context, given the state's dependency on supporting conservative social and political structures to maintain power.¹²

Reluctance to engage in radical action amongst Saudi liberals has been partly due to the ongoing role of the state as patron to today's intelligentsia. As discussed in chapter nine, the existence of such 'modernisers' remains the direct outcome of regime efforts to begun by King Faisal in the 1960s.¹³ The ability of Saudi citizens to gain modern, Western-style educations and technical skills has been greatly assisted by the allocation of generous state grants, scholarships and other resources derived from oil rents. The state has also actively sought to moderate and manage the development of this class by maintaining a system of segmented clientelism that rewards loyalty to the state and disincentivises collective action against it.¹⁴ The state remains a guarantor of employment, livelihood and status for many in the Saudi liberal community. Non-governmental sectors remain overwhelmingly staffed by foreign workers, with data from 2011 indicating that Saudis occupied just eleven per cent of the seven million private sector jobs in the Kingdom.¹⁵ While Saudi ministry of labour data from 2013 suggest this issue might slowly be improving,¹⁶ the state remains the employer of many Saudi liberals, with an immense public sector staffed primarily by indigenous workers. This has left reluctance in many progressives to bite the proverbial hand that feeds too hard. Political recalcitrance over the past decade was further dissuaded by the actions of the late King Abdullah, who demonstrated a willingness to meet some of the calls for economic, social and

⁸ "Will Saudi Women Ever Be Allowed Behind the Wheel of a Car?" (2013), <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21588438-will-saudi-women-ever-be-allowed-behind-wheel-car-ovarian-issue>.

⁹ Beranek, "Divided We Survive: A Landscape of Fragmentation in Saudi Arabia," 4.

¹⁰ Abdulaziz O. Sager, "Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia," in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, ed. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (London: C Hurst & Co., 2006), 268-70.

¹¹ PEN Canada, "Liberalism and Apostasy in Saudi Arabia," (2014), <http://pencanada.ca/blog/liberalism-and-apostasy-in-saudi-arabia/>.

¹² Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: Local and Regional Challenges," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2013): 517.

¹³ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The Saudi Gazette, "Saudi Private Sector Employed 7m Workers in 2011," (2012), <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=20120211117320>.

¹⁶ Sultan al-Suhair, "1.5 Million Saudis Now Work in Private Sector," (2014), <http://www.arabnews.com/news/614541>.

political reform,¹⁷ although these became increasingly criticized by progressives towards the end of his life, particularly in the wake of Arab Spring. For advocates who have remained too vocally critical of the regime, however, Riyadh has often shown little hesitance to respond coercively, either by loss of position, imprisonment or corporal punishment for the dissident.¹⁸

The Kingdom's Shi'a population holds a third set of political grievances that have led to confrontation with the regime over the past three decades. Thanks to the chauvinistic sectarian tendencies of the revivalist doctrine, Saudi Shi'a have remained oppressed under the state's rule for the past three centuries. Tietlbaum points out that "[deep] inside the Shiite historical memory rests their persecution by the Saudis during the 18th and 19th centuries," adding "Saudi Shiites have never felt part of the state, and the government has rarely given them reason to."¹⁹ The minority group been treated with open hostility by many in the Kingdom's religious establishment and have had their culture and identity suppressed by the state as a direct result of this antipathy.²⁰ Resistance to the state has typically aimed at ending systemic discrimination and enabling greater religious, cultural and political autonomy for the Shi'a communities, particularly those in al-Hasa. Protest has seen the use of violence by groups like *Hizbullah al-Hijaz* during the 1980s,²¹ but has also been undertaken more commonly by groups that engage in petitions,²² peaceful demonstrations and attempt to engage non-violently with the Saudi authorities.²³

8.2 The Spring and Saudi Responses

The Saudi state's domestic perception of threat during the Arab Spring appears to have focused on three major areas. The first concerned organised resistance around progressive issues, such as unemployment, political representation, rule of law and women's rights. Given the experience of Tahrir square and the Tunisian uprisings, this was felt to be particularly concentrated amongst the youth. Another concern was the potential emboldening of Islamist political actors inside the Kingdom, inspired by the success of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Finally, Riyadh became increasingly anxious about a reinvigoration of Shi'a nationalism and solidarity bleeding over in the country's east from the Bahrain protests and the potential opportunities this may have afforded Iran, who it felt could tap into such sentiments given its status in the Shi'a world. In responding to these, Riyadh adopted three parallel strategies that drew on tested methods that had previously produced positive results during previous times of crisis: rentier-generated inducements, force and a renewed securitisation of the revivalist identity with relation to sectarian 'others.'

¹⁷ Kechichian, *Legal and Political Reforms in Sa'udi Arabia*, 45. & Nina Easton, "Did Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Have a Soft Spot for Women's Progress?," (2015), <http://fortune.com/2015/01/23/king-abdullah/>.

¹⁸ Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: Local and Regional Challenges," 30.

¹⁹ Joshua Tietelbaum, "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (2010): 2.

²⁰ Ismail, "The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia," 403-19.

²¹ Matthiesen, "Hizbullah Al-Hijaz: A History of the Most Radical Saudi Shi'a Opposition Group."

²² Sager, "Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia," 269.

²³ Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," 516-17.

The use of oil rents became an obvious, if temporary salve to many of the grievances of the Saudi public during the Spring, particularly those concerning financial stability, employment and welfare. Prior to the Spring, the Kingdom had struggled to sustainably accommodate the economic needs of an exploding population that rose from 20,145,000 in 2000, to 27,258,000 by 2011.²⁴ Demographic pressure on the regime's capacity has been identified as a point of concern by scholars for over ten years, as Goetz summarised in 2003, "growth in the Kingdom has rapidly outstripped the regime's ability to provide for it, undermining a key pillar of the ruling family's legitimacy."²⁵ While unemployment inside the Kingdom in 2013 was officially reported at 5.8 per cent, this statistic was obfuscated by the large numbers of foreign workers in the Kingdom's labour force. In reality, an International Monetary Fund report found that during the same year, unemployment rates for Saudi nationals hovered at around 12 per cent, while youth and female rates were 30 and 35 per cent respectively.²⁶ Job growth has risen inside the Kingdom over the past decade, but statistics from the period between 2009 and 2013 show that three quarters of the two million employed in such newly created positions were foreign nationals.²⁷ Such disproportions are further amplified in the private sector,²⁸ where indigenous Saudis make up just one in ten workers.²⁹ This represented a marked shift from earlier periods. In 1975, for example, 71.7 per cent of the Kingdom's entire 1.7 million non-governmental jobs were staffed by indigenous workers.³⁰ This decline has been in part thanks to the burgeoning oil wealth of the Saudi state which has allowed for the migration of large numbers of workers from South and Southeast Asia. Just as important, however, have been the attitudes of the business elite, many of whom have expressed concerns over the quality of the domestic Saudi labour force and displayed a reticence to hire locally.³¹

Saudi policy makers were clearly aware of the correlation between unemployment and the regional unrest of 2011³² and this reflected in their economic responses. Shortly after the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, Riyadh unveiled a series of domestic spending packages totalling over \$130 billion (US);³³ roughly 23 per cent of total Saudi reserve assets.³⁴ This was directed at social spending: pay rises, housing, debt forgiveness and the creation of new jobs for the younger generation. Such largesse aimed at renewing the image of the Saudi state as the great economic patron of its people established

²⁴ The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations Statistics Division, "Faostat".

²⁵ Adam N. Goetz, "Demographics: The Downfall of Saudi Arabia" (Naval Postgraduate School, 2003).

²⁶ "Imf Country Report No. 13/229," (Washington: The International Monetary Fund, 2013), 6.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁸ Gertjan Hoetjes, "Unemployment in Saudi Arabia: A Ticking Time Bomb?," (2013), <http://muftah.org/unemployment-in-saudi-arabia-a-ticking-time-bomb/#.VMTwNS5BOZF>.

²⁹ "Forty Eighth Annual Report," (Riyadh: Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, 2012), 28.

³⁰ Tim Niblock and Monica Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 91.

³¹ *Ibid*, 164-65.

³² Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal, "The Youth and the Arab Spring: Cohort Differences and Similarities," *Middle East Law and Governance* 4, no. 2012 (2012).

³³ "Amid Protests, Saudi King Raises Benefits but Strengthens Security," (2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/world/middleeast/19saudi.html?_r=0.

³⁴ The World Bank, "Total Reserves (Includes Gold, Current Us\$)" (2015), <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FI.RES.TOTL.CD>.

during the 1960s and 1970s within the new generation. While states such as Egypt and Tunisia lacked the wealth to redistribute in this capacity due to their weak economies, the vast currency reserves born from the Riyadh's natural resources afforded it an effective instrument for responding to the crisis.

The use of targeted injections of oil-derived capital to manage periods of change and uncertainty in this way was not new inside the Kingdom. Such a strategy had been a particularly prominent feature under King Faisal from the early 1960s until his assassination in 1975. During this period, the Saudi elite became increasingly concerned over the pattern of monarchical disestablishment along their periphery by leftist republicans in states like Iraq and Egypt thanks to the rise of Arab nationalism. In part a response to this dynamic, Faisal employed the country's rising oil wealth to establish and develop a vast, modernised and centralised bureaucracy that would enhance the state with greater economic, administrative and military capabilities, adding to its regional competitiveness. At the same time, this also acted to further legitimate the state domestically, with the expansion of public ministries providing widespread employment and welfare for citizens. The use of oil wealth served to not only placate the masses, but was also directed to specific members of the monarchy to stifle challenges to the regime from elite circles. The most prominent instance of this occurred in response to the free prince's movement, an organisation of Saudi male royals that called for a constitutional monarchy and a liberalization of the Kingdom's society during the 1950s and 1960s. Seeing the potential threat of this group, Faisal responded by offering considerable personal inducements in exchange for an agreement to desist in political activism.³⁵ The movement's rapid decline immediately after this was a testament to the strategy's efficacy.³⁶

Policy makers during the Spring were aware of the importance of maintaining a perception of the state as a reliable benefactor in the minds of the populace thanks to precedent. The rise of the *Sabwa* during the latter half of the 1980s, for example, can partially be attributed to the economic downturn during this period, which saw the per capita income drop by over half, from \$17,000 (US) in 1981 to 6,975 by 1993 thanks the collapse of oil prices during this period.³⁷ The decline in employment and welfare opportunities fostered widespread disenfranchisement within Saudi youth, who experienced a sense of relative deprivation, as the expected financial security and stability available to their parents failed to materialise. Combined with an array of other factors - such as Western intervention in the 1990/91 Gulf War, the influx of Muslim Brotherhood expatriates into the Saudi education system and the quietist Saudi religious establishment - this discontent served to foment a intersubjective grievance against the state, around which the *Sabwa* emerged. A series of Islamist protests undertaken by the *Sabwa* during early nineties represented the culmination of this discontent and Riyadh's subsequent use of co-option of the

³⁵ Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 135-37.

³⁶ Nehme, "Saudi Arabia 1950-80: Between Nationalism and Religion," 935.

³⁷ Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," 140.

movement highlighted the continued effectiveness of inducement in quieting political opposition.³⁸ Although the *Sabwa* were derailed, policy elites remained sensitive of the potential challenge to their power that could quickly emerge should the perception of the state as grand benefactor to the people be seen to falter.

The use of financial stimuli in the Saudi response to the Spring was hardly a novel strategy and served to highlight the Gulf state's continuing rentier advantage over many of its neighbours in the MENA. While the implementation of the stimulus packages used to curb potential unrest in 2011 were notable in their scale and speed, this was symptomatic of the panic of policy makers, as the region appeared to be entering a state of sudden political collapse. Given Riyadh's strong financial standing, the use of inducements to reaffirm its commitment to the population and sustain their loyalty was an obvious and predictable choice for King Abdullah and the Saudi elite. With the recent 'bonus packages' afforded to civil and military workers to smooth the transition of the newly crowned King Salman,³⁹ the use of this strategy shows no signs of abating.

8.3 Hard power, Security and Legal Strategies

Riyadh's second approach to containing the Spring rested on its use of security and military crackdowns with the backing of new legislation to further outlaw and penalise dissent. This was employed both domestically and along its eastern periphery in Bahrain.

Although Bahrain remains as a distinct state entity from Saudi Arabia, much of the success and endurance of its ruling elite since its decolonisation in 1971 have been predicated on patronage by the Saudi monarchy, which views the tiny island nation as a useful strategic satellite. Influence over Manama has long been a point of contention between the Saudis and Iran, stretching back to the pre-revolutionary era.⁴⁰ Riyadh has long held concern that unrest in Bahrain's Shi'a majority might easily transmit into its own indigenous Shi'a population in the eastern province. In 2011, when large-scale protests erupted in Bahrain against the ruling Khalifa family, the Saudis immediately interpreted the issue as a sectarian one. Although the Bahraini protesters consisted of both Shi'a and Sunnis⁴¹ and were, if anything, motivated by reformist and nationalist aspirations,⁴² Saudi authorities viewed the presence of Shi'a as representative of the entire movement and a potential avenue through which Iran could assert influence. As Salt put it:

³⁸ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*.

³⁹ Al Jazeera, "Saudi King Salman Cements Hold on Power," (2015), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/saudi-king-salman-cements-hold-power-150130032136422.html>.

⁴⁰ Faisal Bin Salman Al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power Politics in Transition* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2004).

⁴¹ Reza Aslan, "Bahrain's Fake Sectarian War," (2013), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/letters-from/bahrain-fake-sectarian-war>.

⁴² Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

Revolution was spreading across the region, but [Bahrain] in particular fully awakened the near paranoia of the Saudi ruling family at the extent of Shi'a power and influence, from Iran and the gulf through to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The Shi'a were demonstrating as Bahrainis but as far as the Saudis were concerned this was a Shi'a uprising fomented by Iran.⁴³

With the Riyadh interpreting the Bahraini protests as a manifestation of its regional competition with Iran, the Saudis showed little interest in opening dialogue with dissidents. On March 14th it dispatched a battalion-size force from the National Guard, supported by security officers from other GCC states.⁴⁴ These units were mobilised under the multinational Peninsula Shield Force framework and represented the first 'hot' deployment of its type since the 1990/91 Gulf War. This use of force had three primary goals: to save a client regime on the verge of collapse; to demonstrate to international and domestic onlookers that the Saudi regime would not tolerate revolution in its sphere of influence; and to show Iran that Saudi armed forces were capable of mobilising rapidly and effectively. The effects of this deployment were immediately apparent. What had appeared to be a revolution on the verge of success was quickly and violently suppressed.

Security forces were also deployed widely in response to the few protests that emerged domestically within the Kingdom itself, with suppression and crackdowns common. This occurred most prominently in the eastern provinces, where the largest rallies were held by Shi'a protestors. Policing units commonly utilised force to disperse crowds and in some cases employed live fire, leading to fatalities amongst protestors.⁴⁵ Direct force was accompanied by widespread arrests, once again largely targeting Shi'a dissidents.⁴⁶

Riyadh also sought to establish a greater legal rationale to justify future crackdowns and provide legislative deterrence to would-be protestors. In March 2014, the King approved a series of laws targeting the mechanics of protest. The articles classified numerous acts of non-violent civil disobedience and oppositional organisation as terrorism. These included:

Article 8: Seeking to shake the social fabric or national cohesion, or calling, participating, promoting, or inciting sit-ins, protests, meetings, or group statements in any form, or anyone who harms the unity or stability of the kingdom by any means.

⁴³ Jeremy Salt, "Containing the "Arab Spring", " *Interface* 4, no. 1 (2012): 62.

⁴⁴ Rich, "Gulf War 4.0: Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Complexification of the Persian Gulf Equation," 477.

⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, "Saudi Protest Crackdown Leaves Two Dead," (2012), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/07/20127819561763436.html>.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Arrests for Peaceful Protest on the Rise," (2011), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/27/saudi-arabia-arrests-peaceful-protest-rise>.

Article 9: Attending conferences, seminars, or meetings inside or outside [the Kingdom] targeting the security of society, or sowing discord in society.

Article 11: Inciting or making countries, committees, or international organizations antagonistic to the kingdom.⁴⁷

The laws were condemned by Human Rights Watch,⁴⁸ which pointed out that apart from their assault on rights of protest, they also employed vague key terms such as “harm,” “discord,” “hostile” and “antagonistic” that were legally ambiguous and open to interpretation. This was likely deliberate, as it afforded flexibility in tailoring charges against potential dissidents, while maintaining a veneer of legalistic legitimacy. The legislation was not simply designed to threaten, but was actively used to target dissidents, such as Raif Badawi’s lawyer, Waleed Abu al-Khair. In this case, the state employed article 11, citing his complicity in “making international organizations hostile to the [Kingdom]”⁴⁹ while defending his client. In issuing and enforcing the legislation, the regime was sending a strong message to any potential protestors that any form of support or participation in political resistance or confrontation with the regime, no matter how peaceful in nature, could potentially be responded to by the state in extremis.

Throughout the reign of the third Kingdom, the Saudi armed forces have been employed internationally for the purpose of achieving narrowly defined national interests in a relatively non-ideological, manner broadly consistent with realist thinking. The response in Bahrain, while miscalculating the composition and implications of the protest movement, nevertheless followed this trend; seeking to contain was perceived as the threat of revolution and the empowerment of a major regional competitor. In this regard, the action demonstrated numerous parallels with the state’s policy in the North Yemen civil war of the 1960s, where Saudi arms and mercenaries were utilised to repulse revolutionary Egyptian influence on its Southern periphery. Echoes of similar policies can be found in the use of Saudi forces against Iraq in 1990/91, in its recent strikes against the Islamic state in Syria and Iraq⁵⁰ and in its current military campaign against the Houthi revolutionary forces in Yemen.⁵¹ While in many cases the groups in question define themselves via some form of sectarian or ethnic framework, the Saudi response has largely emerged to achieve goals of *realpolitik* and security, not ideology. The use of the military in the context of

⁴⁷ Cited in "Saudi Arabia: New Terrorism Regulations Assault Rights," (2014), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/20/saudi-arabia-new-terrorism-regulations-assault-rights>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, "Ngos Call for Immediate Release of Saudi Human Rights Lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair," (2015), http://adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015.01.08_NGOs-Call-for-Immediate-Release-of-Saudi-Human-Rights-Lawyer-Waleed-Abu-al-Khair.pdf.

⁵⁰ Angus McDowall and Amena Baker, "Saudi Arabia Confirms Role in Strikes against Islamic State in Syria," (2014), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/23/us-syria-crisis-saudi-idUSKCN0HI1Y120140923>. & Bruce Riedel, "Islamic State Cell Strikes Shiites in Saudi Arabia," (2014), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/11/saudi-shiite-islamic-state-terrorism.html#>.& Jonathan Broder, "Fearing Isis, Saudi Arabia Turns Back to Washington," (2015), <http://www.newsweek.com/saudi-arabia-isis-islamic-state-united-states-299047>.

⁵¹

the Arab Spring was no exception to this pattern, with Saudi forces being utilised as proverbial ‘firefighters’ to contain conflagrations of threat to the national interest.

Police and other internal security force crackdowns on large-scale protests and demonstrations have similarly been a common response by the regime throughout, particularly in the country’s east against the Shi’a. During the banned Shi’ite holiday of Ashura in 1979, the Saudi National Guard dispatched around 20,000 troops to repress the attempted celebration by groups in defiance of strict laws banning such non-orthodox practices. A crackdown against similar demonstrations a year later led to numerous deaths.⁵² Heavy handed policing in the form of arrests, raids and imprisonment were also utilised to stifle the most outspoken elements of the *Sabma* movement during the mid-1990s.⁵³

The use of legislation to target and delegitimise political protest and dissidence, while not new, was notable in its scale, scope and tone. While previous legislation, such as the much-criticized cyber-crime laws of 2007,⁵⁴ had penalised challenges to the state and support of terrorist organisations in a relatively targeted manner, the 2014 legislation, effectively gave authorities sweeping powers and a blank cheque in who they could target and why.

8.4 Racketeering in the Spring

The effects and outcomes of racketeering were on full display during the Spring, with a key pillar of the Saudi response focusing on reframing political unrest and dissidence as a sectarian threat to the revivalist community. Riyadh invested considerable effort ensuring that Saudi subjects saw politically resistant activities as a threat to the conservative traditionalism of the Kingdom. This broadly existed in two distinct strains: the delegitimation of Sunni activists as a threat to traditionalism and the further securitisation of the Shi’a as a conduit for external corruptive forces.

As turmoil spread across the MENA, Riyadh was quick to renew its commitment to the traditionalist Islamic identity it had long promoted in the population. As in many times before, the state sought to portray itself as a paragon of religious protection, continuity and authenticity, while often denouncing challenges to its political authority in religious terms. A prominent *ulema*, Nasir al-Umar, argued that given that the Saudi state was based on religion, protests against its authority only served “the enemies of God.”⁵⁵ Similarly, the late crown prince Naïf repeatedly proclaimed the regime’s revivalist credentials and argued that democratic themes of the wider Spring were antithetical to authentic Islam.⁵⁶ At the same time, many in the revivalist religious establishment argued that the protests happening in

⁵² Al-Rasheed, "The Shia of Saudi Arabia: A Minority in Search of Cultural Authenticity," 122.

⁵³ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 205-07.

⁵⁴ Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, "Anti-Cyber Crime Law (8 Rabi 11428 / 26 March 2007)," (2010), <http://www.saudiembassy.net/announcement/announcement03260701.aspx>.

⁵⁵ Stephane Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," (London: London School of Economics, 2014), 14.

⁵⁶ Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: Local and Regional Challenges," 30-31.

other countries led to chaos, destabilisation and disarray akin to the pre-Islamic period and were forbidden to pious Muslims.⁵⁷ Such rulings echoed similar calls by earlier scholars, like Abdallah Abd al-Latif, who had initially attempted to curtail the Saudi civil war of the nineteenth century by stressing the religious imperative to avoid civil strife and remain loyal to the ruler at all costs so as to ensure the community remained protected from outsiders.⁵⁸ As a further show of commitment to stability and tradition, King Abdullah hosted a number of highly publicised events in which he received paid respects from the leaders of major tribal groups.⁵⁹ While taking tributes of loyalty from these groups, the regime demonstrated symbolic solidarity with them in return, publically punishing individuals seen to not show them the appropriate deference.⁶⁰

Riyadh's commitment to its role as protector of the revivalist community would expand further in 2014 with the passing of the aforementioned March counterterrorism legislation. In addition to further criminalising acts of political resistance, the new laws sought to delegitimise political dissidence by framing it as a challenge the revivalist character of the Kingdom. This priority was evident from the outset, with the first article classifying "[calling] for atheist thought in any form, or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based"⁶¹ as an act of terrorism. This was followed by article two, that similarly dubbed "[anyone] who throws away their loyalty to the country's rulers, or who swears allegiance to any party, organization, current [of thought], group, or individual inside or outside [the Kingdom]"⁶² as terrorists. As the NGO the International Coalition Against Blasphemy Laws wrote:

Since the government system is grounded in [Revivalist] interpretations of Islam, non-believers are assumed to be enemies of the Saudi state... This legislation not only frames non-believers as terrorists but, along with related royal decrees, creates a legal framework that outlaws as terrorism nearly all thought or expression critical of the government and its understanding of Islam. (Parenthesis mine)⁶³

The proximity and placement of these two articles at the forefront of the bill symbolised the state prioritising the integrity of the religious community over political concerns. In line with a pattern common throughout Saudi history, it sought to deter linkages to other potential sources of identity that might openly challenge the official, easily-securitized epistemology supported and purveyed by the state. This

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 33.

⁵⁸ Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," 779.

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Saudi Tribalism Lingers for Kingdom's Settled Bedouin," <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-tribalism-lingers-for-kingdom-s-settled-bedouin-443047.html?page=1>.

⁶⁰ Al Watan, "50 Lashes for a Young Man Who Abused His Tribe on "Twitter"," (2013), http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Nation/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=156307&CategoryID=3.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: New Terrorism Regulations Assault Rights".

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ The International Coalition Against Blasphemy Laws, "Saudi Arabia," (2015), <http://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/saudi-arabia/>.

aimed to help the state maintain a handle on the “truth management”⁶⁴ necessary to sustain the racket - a monopoly the regime has gradually lost as a result of the growing openness of Saudi society to process of globalisation. The articles reinforced revivalist Islam as an undisputable tenet inside Saudi territory and the state, as the guarantor of that same identity structure, as unquestionable by merit of this role. While anti-blasphemy laws were hardly a new phenomenon inside Saudi Arabia,⁶⁵ the 2014 legislation reaffirmed the state’s racketeering commitments as security guarantor. The new laws were also updated to reflect the modern vernacular, with the classification of those outside approved doctrine as ‘terrorists’ merely a contemporary form of the abject othering utilised so long by the state and the revivalist establishment.

At the same time that it was emphasising its commitment to the revivalist community, Riyadh aimed to stoke that same group’s latent insecurities regarding the Shi’a, both inside Kingdom and without. In what Al-Rasheed terms “sectarianism as counter-revolution,” the regime utilised a strategy that delegitimised visible Shi’a political dissidence by framing it as part of a regional sectarian plot with the aim of harming the revivalist community.⁶⁶ As Ismail puts it in the case of Bahrain, “[the] Saudi religious establishment [promoted] Sunni solidarity against the “deviant” Shi’a, thus defining the...uprisings as a sectarian conflict.”⁶⁷ This tactic was not restricted solely to instances of Shi’a activity, but also used to tarnish political dissidence amongst Saudi Sunnis at times, as well.⁶⁸ Internet websites designed to organise protests were hacked by Saudi intelligence, with Shi’a specific references injected to taint the legitimacy of activism.⁶⁹ Numerous regime-sanctioned scholars came to support uses of force against the Shi’a during this period, framing such activities within a wider rhetoric of sectarian struggle. In so doing, the sectarianism inherent to Saudi racketeering came to represent a powerful force for counterrevolution, as it reinvigorated a latently securitised view of the minority Shi’a as a threat to the community which encouraged loyalty, cohesion and solidarity with the state in a considerable portion of the Sunni majority.⁷⁰ For their part, Shi’a were incapable of defending themselves from such accusations thanks to a long history of discrimination, suspicion and marginalisation by both Saudi state and society. The subsequent efficacy of this approach highlighted the ongoing importance of the state’s continual efforts at racketeering. With many “long brought up on a sectarian discourse that denounces the Shi’a as heretics [and considers] their government as a protector against Shia conspiracies and foreign agents” there was a natural tendency amongst the much of population, particularly traditionalists, to view the *Rafida* as potential threats by default.⁷¹ In line with long-standing historical patterns, Shi’a were once again securitised as the old foe to the revivalist community to shore up the political power of the Saudi elite.

⁶⁴ Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*.

⁶⁵ The International Coalition Against Blasphemy Laws, "Saudi Arabia".

⁶⁶ Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," 514.

⁶⁷ Raihan Ismail, "The Saudi Religious Establishment and the Bahraini Uprisings " in *Change and Continuity in the Middle East and Central Asia* (Australian National University: Australian National University, 2012).

⁶⁸ Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," 520.

⁶⁹ Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," 13.

⁷⁰ Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring."

⁷¹ A pejorative used by many Saudi Sunni against Shi’a, meaning ‘those who reject’.

This approach worked; regardless of their actual motivation or demographical makeup, the state's depiction of the protests as a sectarian conspiracy successfully won the regime renewed allegiance and support from many of the Kingdom's Sunnis and quieted oppositional voices.⁷²

As with previous instances of racketeering, the sectarianisation of the Spring also imposed legibility on what was an inherently complex and often incomprehensible set of events and phenomena. By reducing the various political, economic and social grievances against the regime to a dichotomy between the sanctioned community and an old, familiar threat, revivalist discourse created a sense of continuity and contextualisation that undoubtedly afforded adherents considerable confidence and allayed anxieties. As with earlier brushes with colonialism, modernisation and westernisation, the uncertainty of the Spring's implications were reduced to a struggle over ensuring the survival of the heartland of Islam against infidels, corrupters and unbelievers. In this face of such a challenge, solidarity behind the regime was the one acceptable response. While it is likely that only a minority of Saudis found this narrative alone as grounds for their support of the regime, when combined with the other strategies described above, it nevertheless remained a powerful force for the ongoing legitimacy of the state.

As the events of the Arab Spring became evident, the reinvigorated securitisation of the Revivalist identity was a natural choice for the Saudi regime in its quest to quell popular dissent against its rule. The state has a long history with both committing itself to the defence of the Revivalist identity, a structure of which it was itself the architect, while at the same time using the Shi'a in this context as a buffer against domestic criticism. The racket itself showed little variance from traditional patterns in its execution; the state, perceiving a challenge from a geopolitical rival, sought to draw support from its domestic client population by embellishing and propagating the same conflict into one that threatened to undermine the ontological security of adherents to the Revivalist traditions. The integration of Iran into this framework simply represented an extrapolation of the classical threat perceived by the Revivalist Shi'a *ulema*. Iran as a subject of risk represented simply the growth of an older threat, not the manifestation of a new one.

8.5 Conclusion

Despite attempts by some Saudi subjects to incite the uprisings⁷³ of the Arab Spring inside Saudi Arabia, a so-called Sunni Day of Rage was never to manifest. In all reality, the potential for a proper oppositional mass movement to have manifested inside the Kingdom remains debatable.⁷⁴ With a regionally high standard of living in the majority of the population, a lack of organised opposition groups and a proactive

⁷² Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," 522.

⁷³ BBC, "Man Dies after Setting Himself on Fire in Saudi Arabia," (2011), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12260465>.

⁷⁴ Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Potential for Protest," Foreign Affairs, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/02/saudi_islamists_and_the_potential_for_protest.

and interventionist rentier state which retains considerable influence over the identity of subjects, the structural conditions within the Saudi borders differed considerably from the areas of the MENA most strongly impacted by the Arab uprisings. Nevertheless, be it from paranoia or sober assessment, the Saudi state felt compelled to pre-empt the rise of popular discontent, a task it undertook employing strategies grown from those that had long served it in maintaining its hold on power. Ultimately, the replication of such strategies was hardly surprising. As Mead has shown in the case of the United States, the experience of state formation, state development and crisis tend to subsequently shape and inform state behaviour at both the social and political levels for generations to come.⁷⁵ This argument has been further refined in the context MENA by MacQueen, who has demonstrated how successful authoritarian patterns of rule in the Middle East have tended to replicate themselves across multiple centuries.⁷⁶

The use of racketeering by the Saudi state in the Arab Spring was largely consistent with the Kingdom's long use of the strategy. Just as in its confrontation with the Ottomans and the British in the eighteenth century, its actions during World War One, its rivalry with Nasser's Egypt, its proxy conflict with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and its brief war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1990/91, the state portrayed threats to itself as threats to an Islam of which it had long helped to define. For those unswayed by such principles, acceptance of the state's primacy could be extracted either through inducement or through its monopoly on violence. With the aforementioned structural preconditions in play, it is difficult to gauge the true efficacy of this tripartite policy employed by Riyadh to derail the Arab Spring in its immediate vicinity. Given their previous efficiency in stymieing regional trends, such as Arab nationalism, however, it is likely that combined they remained a powerful deterrent to the events of 2011.

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⁷⁵ Mead, "The Jacksonian Tradition and American Foreign Policy."

⁷⁶ MacQueen, *An Introduction to Middle East Politics*, 171-200.

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Conclusion

The legitimacy of contemporary Saudi Arabia is a paradox, mixing policies that appear as if they should collapse under the weight of their own contradictions. Yet, despite some flaws, this balance endures and is often seen to prosper. As the previous eight chapters have shown, a foundational and persistent element of the state's pattern of rule has rested on its ability to spread, maintain and securitise the metaphysical anxieties associated with sectarian pluralism, change and innovation in the minds of a key portion of its subjects: those adhering to the revivalist movement. Under the rule of the first state this manifested in a framework that promoted offensive expansionism and allowed for a rapid physical growth of Saudi power within an environment characterised by power vacuums and little colonial interest. During the second state, racketeering shifted to a defensive focus and was employed to ensure the regime's survival as it was confronted with an array of powerful and often hostile imperial actors whose material and military capacity far outstripped its own. Under the third state, the use of racketeering has diminished alongside an array of other strategies, but remains a powerful tool for regime legitimacy, often most visible during periods of crisis management as a tool for regime defense. The system displayed a protean duality in legitimating the state, being capable of moulding itself to strategic, geopolitical conditions, while simultaneously rapidly responding to tactical crises. This longstanding system has acted to reinforce the state as a necessary structure in the minds of the client revivalist movement, a demographic which today constitutes an estimated 23 percent of the Saudi population.¹ The foundations for this system were established in Central Arabia during the eighteenth century. The synergy generated by Muhammad ibn Saud's ability to co-opt the revivalist movement and its *asabiyya*² through his commitment of military power to its religious and social vision enabled a process of state building to emerge in an environment where such a process seemed unlikely. While this project would ultimately take centuries to germinate into a modern state, it nevertheless established the foundational trajectory for the regime we know today as Saudi Arabia. The successes wrought by this arrangement between state and movement saw the system's integration into subsequent manifestations of Saudi rule, its efficacy perceived by elites as necessary to their hold on power.

What began as a grass roots movement co-opted by the state has gradually shifted towards a top-down system overseen by political elites in a manner that channels the energies of its outcomes towards their political goals. Although the state has historically had to contend with a degree of power sharing with a semi-autonomous religious bloc during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as its centralisation and capacity have expanded, this division has become less and less prominent in favour of the regime. Contemporary Saudi government has absorbed the majority of the country's revivalist scholars into its

¹ Izady, "Demography of Religion in the Persian Gulf."

² Darling, "Social Cohesion ('Asabiyya) and Justice in the Late Medieval Middle East."

structures and employs legal and social means to marginalise those outside of this cadre. The institutionalisation of the *ulema* has granted the third regime greater and greater influence over the religious discourse occurring within its borders, particularly when contrast with its predecessors. Although this does not constitute a totalitarian monopolisation of revivalist thought - with autonomy still granted to individual *ulema*³ and dissidents still able to tap into revivalist concepts to justify their actions⁴ - the state possesses a considerable degree of both indirect and direct authority and responsibility in determining the ontological parameters of those affiliated with the movement.

Since the dawn of Saudi rule, whenever the state has found its authority confronted by external or internal actors, it has relied on the racket to portray such threats to as a challenge to the epistemic integrity of the revivalist community. The regime then offers itself and its services as a panacea by reaffirming its commitment as a protector of Islam, fulfilling the security needs of an audience it consistently expends considerable infrastructural power in moulding. This acts as a socio-religious rallying cry to generate solidarity around the state from key demographics of the Saudi public during times of political uncertainty and risk. Such behaviour has been observable throughout Saudi history: from the early formation and expansion period; to its confrontations with the imperial powers during the nineteenth century; to its geopolitical competition with regional powers such as Egypt and during the Cold War; to its management of the Arab Spring internally and on its periphery. While the system has been a peer to an array of other legitimating mechanisms, such as rentierism, inter-tribal alliance building, supporting the interests of business elites and the use of force, it remains prominent instrument in the wider toolkit of Saudi state legitimation today.

As the Arab Spring has highlighted, the racketeering system is more than just a historical curiosity. Its effects continue to play an important role in the governing strategies of the contemporary state and the fallout of this pervades Saudi politics and society today. As a result, racketeering will continue to hold critical implications for those considering future security issues and social, education and political reforms inside the Kingdom.

9.1 Racketeering and Future Security Issues

The racketeering efforts of the Kingdom pose numerous challenges to the wider security environment within the Gulf today, as well as further abroad in other regional theatres. Numerous scholars have indirectly noted that the application of racketeering within the context of the Arab Spring has served to stoke pre-existing sectarian divisions across the Arabian Peninsula. As chapter nine detailed, the regime's ongoing employment of sectarian binary to delegitimise political dissidence has contributed to rising tensions between Sunni and Shi'a populations across the MENA. By framing the events of the Spring in the GCC as a Shi'a assault against Sunnis, the state ensures such communities remain divided and

³ al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 61.

⁴ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*.

suspicious of one another. There have been few short-term negative consequences for the regime in employing such a strategy, as international criticism is muted and Shi'a groups possess little means of resisting its advances. Although the sectarianism of the Gulf is not the sole result of the Saudi state's racketeering, the regime retains significant capacity to keep these tensions alive and emboldened in the wider Sunni consciousness. Saudi elites continue to believe they are "capable of managing the ways sectarianism gets used politically in the region and at home"⁵ in a manner that helps them realise their geopolitical ends. By cultivating division, the state seeks to weaken the possibility of cross-sectarian mobilisation against it and create solidarity around it. In this regard, it has been successful. As Matthiesen and al-Rasheed has shown, many Saudi Sunnis came to view political protest against monarchical elites as synonymous with Shi'a radicalism and were thus deterred from it and chose to support the regime due to fears of wider sectarian strife.⁶ The continuing efficacy of this strategy⁷ as a method of counter-revolution and state legitimation during times of political crisis suggests that Saudi elites will continue to employ it whenever possible for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the current war in Yemen has been portrayed by numerous revivalist *ulema* through the lens of religious purification. As one cleric put it "Jihad against the Houthis is required and it is a religious obligation for the people of Yemen to unite against them."⁸ Similarly, a documentary run by the state run channel al-Ekhbariya portrayed territory in the conflict as under invasion by polytheistic Persians.⁹ In March of 2015, the Council of Senior *Ulema*, the country's highest religious authority, issued a religious edict declaring the conflict as religious, declaring any soldier dying in the Yemen a martyr and stating "[one] of the greatest ways to draw closer to God almighty is to defend the sanctity of religion and Muslims."¹⁰ Although tensions between the Sunni and Shi'a communities in Saudi Arabia have historically rarely led to major incidents of violence between citizens over the past century, the long-term implications of a policy that ensures latent hostility between two communities in a region wracked by sectarian violence is concerning, particularly if political, social or economic conditions suddenly shift dramatically.¹¹ As one report commissioned by the conservative think-tank the 'Foundation for Defence of Democracies' in 2012 found, while overtly violent online rhetoric by Saudis is in decline, sectarian attitudes remain extremely high.¹²

⁵ Toby Jones, "Saudi Arabia's Not So New Anti-Shi'ism," *Middle East Report* (2007): 32.

⁶ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*.

⁷ Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring."

⁸ Akhbaar24, "Tarifi: Jihad against the Houthi Is a Religious Duty," (2015), <http://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/186895>.

⁹ Saudi Arabia News Channel, "Ahwaz Arab and Persian Occupation," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0ePkoqgWuc>.

¹⁰ Aya Batrawy, "Clerics in Saudi Arabia, Iran Cast Political Rivalry over Yemen as Sectarian Struggle," (2015), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/16/saudi-iran-rivalry-sectarianism_n_7081880.html.

¹¹ Toby Matthiesen, "Sectarianism Comes Back to Bite Saudi Arabia," *The Washington Post*, November 18 (2014).

¹² Jonathan Schanzer and Steven Miller, "Facebook Fatwa: Saudi Clerics, Wahhabi Islam and Social Media," (Washington: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2012).

Another notable implication of the racketeering system concerns the high number of Saudi foreign fighter participants in Salafi-jihadist groups abroad. There is little credible evidence that Riyadh has directly encouraged its citizens to join groups such as the Islamic State and al Qaeda.¹³ The regime has, at the very least, been a historical target of derision and violence of such groups.¹⁴ Riyadh commonly condemns militant groups via the religious rulings of its *ulema* and through public statements of senior officials.¹⁵ The Kingdom has also been an ongoing partner in the Global War on Terror, although some have questioned its commitment to this effort.¹⁶ Despite the state's official position and actions, however, Saudis have historically constituted a high percentage of many of the most puritan jihadist foreign fighter groups. During the Russo-Chechen wars of 1990s and 2000s, Saudis made up 59 per cent of foreign fighter participants and played a key role in injecting a current of Salafi jihadism into the conflict that fundamentally altered its character and delegitimised the original secular nationalist secessionist cause of the indigenous Chechen opposition.¹⁷ Documents recovered in 2006¹⁸ following the US invasion of Iraq indicated that Saudis represented 41 per cent of al Qaeda Iraq's (AQI) membership, the largest single demographic.¹⁹ More recent reports on ISIS suggest a similar trend, with Saudis being the most likely foreigners to join the group.²⁰ Although the regime cannot be held directly responsible for these numbers, its racketeering encourages a strict sectarian dichotomisation of the world that holds many parallels with the philosophies of these organisations and may leave a notable minority of its subjects susceptible to their ideas and recruitment. Such groups often emulate the role of the Saudi state in the racket by enforcing an ultra-conservative Islamic epistemic hegemony in the territory they controls and neutralising competing philosophies through violence and suppression. ISIS in particular mirrors the behaviour of the first Saudi emirate, engaging in an expansive jihad that rejects international norms in favour of asserting what it views as a revivalist, authentic Islam in line with first society under Muhammad and the early caliphs. As Matthiesen put it in an interview in 2015, "what IS is doing right now is

¹³ The 9/11 Commission, "The 9/11 Commission Report," (Washington, DC: The 9/11 Commission, 2004).

¹⁴ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*.

¹⁵ See Mohammed bin Nawaf Al Saud, "Saudi Arabia Does Not Support Islamic State Terrorists – or Any Others" *The Guardian* (2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/17/saudi-arabia-not-support-islamic-state-terrorists>. & Al Arabiya, "Isis Is Enemy No. 1 of Islam,' Says Saudi Grand Mufti," (2014), <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/08/19/Saudi-mufti-ISIS-is-enemy-No-1-of-Islam-.html>. & The Guardian, "Saudi Pilots Receive Online Death Threats after Air Strikes on Isis" *The Guardian* (2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/24/saudi-pilots-online-death-threats-twitter-air-strikes-isis>.

¹⁶ See Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, *Saudi Arabia: Friend of Foe in the War on Terror*, 2005. & F. Gregory Gause, "Saudi Arabia and the War on Terrorism," in *A Practical Guide to Winning the War on Terrorism*, ed. Adam Garfinkle (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 94-102.

¹⁷ Ben Rich and Dara Conduit, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters on Indigenous Secular-Nationalist Causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2015): 3.

¹⁸ Al Qaeda Iraq, "The Sinjar Record," (Iraq2006).

¹⁹ Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records," (New York: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), 9.

²⁰ Middle East Monitor, "Saudis Most Likely to Join Isis, 10% of Group's Fighters Are Women," (2014), <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/14758-saudis-most-likely-to-join-isis-10-of-groups-fighters-are-women>.

implementing the hostile sectarian rhetoric that the Gulf states have used for a long time."²¹ This is not to imply that the state's racketeering efforts are solely responsible for the numbers and patterns of Saudi foreign fighters. As Hegghammer has shown, the extroversion of Saudi jihadists can be attributed to a confluence of factors and many of the ideological underpinnings of prominent militant groups they come to affiliate with build their ideologies out of transnational, hybridised that originate from thinkers of many different national origins. Further, while Saudis do have high representation in many jihadist foreign fighter groups, they are far from the only participants. As Felter and Fishman have pointed out, although Saudis represented the single largest demographic in AQI, Libyans constituted the highest per capita participation in the group.²² Clearly, if the sole independent variable for Jihadist foreign fighter mobilisation was the presence of a regime of state racketeering, then one would expect all states with high representations in such groups to undertake similar governing strategies. This is clearly not the case and as Horgan has shown, radicalisation processes are complex and result from the input of a wide array of interplaying factors and happenstance.²³ Nevertheless, the Saudi state's proven capacity and willingness to shape the society it oversees through racketeering remains an important consideration in the radicalisation of its subjects. Simply put, in a country without the socioeconomic disparity and deprivation of many of its neighbours and where the state doesn't actively sponsor terrorism, it seems probable that by minimising attempts to securitise sectarian division for political purposes, the regime could correspondingly lower the amount of Saudi participants in foreign Salafi jihadist organisations such as ISIS.

A third implication of modern racketeering concerns the state's commitment to upholding its role as protector of the revivalist community in the face of other pragmatic security considerations and the corresponding domestic fallout of such political decisions. The past century of Saudi rule has seen a number of moments in which the regime has been confronted with a zero-sum decision between maintaining the state's security and the revivalist movement's epistemic integrity; a security imperative dilemma in which it must choose to either act pragmatically or maintain ideological fidelity. In effectively all cases where the state has not been able to balance these issues during a time of crisis or intense competition, it chooses the former and attempts to manage the consequences of not upholding the latter. When confronted with a growing number of regional competitor states during the Cold War, Riyadh opted to initiate a series of reforms and alliances that conflicted with the essential preservative premise of revivalism. Although King Faisal and his successors dedicated considerable resources to cushioning the dislocative blow modernisation unleashed on the traditionalist social patterns inside the Kingdom, the policy still served to offend and aggrieve some in the revivalist community and led to outbreaks of

²¹ Willem Staes, "'Beware of Entrepreneurs in Sectarian Identity'," (2015), <http://www.mo.be/en/interview/beware-entrepreneurs-ins-sectarian-identity>.

²² Felter and Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records," 7-8.

²³ John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Routledge, 2009).

domestic violence in response. Similarly, the decision to invite Western forces into Saudi Arabia to deter and combat the expansive goals of Saddam Hussein was a prudent decision to ensure the Monarchy's survival, yet severely challenged the Kingdom's claimed role as security provider to revivalists, despite the efforts to attain religious sanctions for the action from senior *ulema* affiliated with the movement. The wider Saudi security relationship with the United States follows a similar theme, whereby the regime is seen to compromise its fundamental values as a guarantor of Islamic orthodoxy for banal and cynical reasons by some critics. Such cases illustrate several key implications for the future. First, the Saudi regime, at its core, is motivated by political pragmatism and regime survival and not ideology. Although the regime views its ability to proliferate and manipulate ideology through the mechanisms of racketeering as a useful political instrument, it does view itself as beholden to these same forces. Whenever the state is forced to choose between what it perceives as an existential security decision and ideological fidelity, it will always opt for survival. Second, despite being able to rely on senior establishment clerics to sanction such decisions, the state can almost always count on a domestic political confrontation with factions of revivalists who view the incompatibility between racketeering and pragmatic state behaviour as a matter of extreme import. Groups such as the *Ikhwan*, the *JSM*, the *Sabwa*, the Shu'aybi school and even AQAP all fit this mould to one degree or another, albeit each with a varying array of other motivating factors. Despite the diversity of motivations, however, the state has consistently been challenged by radical groups in the wake of pragmatic political decisions that conflict with its responsibilities in the racket, and attempts to co-opt such elements have often simply led to the emergence of new radical groups that claim to be more authentic and observant than their predecessors.²⁴ There is little suggestion that this pattern will diminish in the near future and as the state inevitably opts to make ideological concessions in its foreign and domestic policies, it will likely confront similar aggrieved radical actors demanding a return to the authentic and willing to confront the state, often with violence, over such issues.

9.2 Racketeering as an Obstacles to Social and Political Reform

Another area of consideration rests with the racket's ongoing obstruction to social and educational reforms. Although the Arab Spring did not lead to massive protests amongst the Kingdom's Sunni majority, it has served to embolden numerous reform-oriented groups inside Saudi Arabia. The post-2011 environment has seen a rise in women's rights activism, democratisation advocacy, internet dissidence and as attempts to establish several independent human rights NGOs to monitor behaviour of the regime.²⁵ In many respects, this upsurge can be linked to the disappointing performance of the regime of King Abdullah, which promised much in the way of positive social and legal reform,²⁶ but ultimately delivered little. Despite the growth of activism, the state remains opposed to major reforms. As the NGO Human Rights Watch put it in 2015, the state continues to oversee a system of "[systemic] discrimination against

²⁴ Steinberg, "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to Present," 33.

²⁵ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*.

²⁶ Kechichian, *Legal and Political Reforms in Sa'udi Arabia*.

women and religious minorities"²⁷ that still views the crucifixion of Shi'a minors as an appropriate punishment for political dissidence.²⁸ While resistance to political and social reforms is a natural product of the authoritarianism characteristic of the wider Middle East, the racketeering commitments of the Saudi state also pose specific impediments to such activities distinct to the Saudi case. Reforms championed under women's and religious minority rights often run contrary to the essential ethos of Najdi revivalist traditionalism that emphasises strict gender hierarchy and codified discrimination against divergent sects and ideologies. By making concessions to activists and committing to social and political reforms the state would simultaneously weaken its image as a guarantor of revivalist social conservatism. Although reformists can make powerful ethical, moral and economic arguments for their cases, the state has rarely committed large resources to the former two without a compelling political incentive, while its vast oil wealth has enabled it to ignore many of the latter's imperatives thus far. At the same time the nature of reformist demands places them in direct competition with the racket's traditional core client base, while offering the regime untested and uncertain outcomes that may very well weaken its hold on power by creating increasing room for people to question its fundamental purpose. Currently, ignoring activists and limiting concessions to token gestures towards their causes has little real negative consequences for the regime, as calls for liberal reforms inside the Kingdom remain restricted to a vocal minority with little actual power and influence. This triply disincentives the current regime to commit to any meaningful social or political overhauls and will likely ensure a "business as usual" mentality amongst dominant Saudi policy elites until the extraction benefits of racketeering are perceived to diminish or concessions to reformists can supplant racketeering in maintaining the regime's survival.

Outside of direct disincentives for concessions, the tendency of the regime to fall back on racketeering during times of crisis also jeopardises the permanence of even the smallest of social and political reforms. Such efforts have proven easily undone if the state feels under threat and wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the revivalist movement by sacrificing an easy target to appease the client base. Prior to the Arab Spring, for example, King Abdullah sponsored a series of national dialogues that were aimed at developing understanding between Sunni and Shi'a communities. While these were undertaken without any sort of corresponding developmental or legal commitments, they appeared to represent a modest and symbolic move toward promoting intercommunal tolerance by the state. Riyadh's decision to resecuritize the Shi'a to a willing audience during the Spring would rapidly undo any gains made by the program, however, any semblance of mutual respect for diversity "replaced by bigotry and sectarian hatred."²⁹ This incident represents just one of many instances where initiatives that are seen to challenge the dominance of revivalist narrative inside the Saudi borders have been rolled back to mollify the movement during a time of political turmoil with little to no negative consequences for the regime. To the

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2015: Saudi Arabia," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2015).

²⁸ Kellan Howell, "Saudi Prisoner, Arrested at Age 17, Faces Death by Crucifixion " (2015), <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/sep/18/saudi-prisoner-arrested-at-age-17-faces-death-by-c/>.

²⁹ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*.

contrary, as chapter nine demonstrated, the grand effect of the policy was to create solidarity behind the regime in its crackdowns against political unrest. As long as the state continues to racketeer successfully, the temptation to respond to political challenges utilising the capital afforded by this process and subsequently generate more of that capital will remain high and will impede those wishing to spur social, political and economic reform.

Another flashpoint between reform and the racketeering system centres on the Kingdom's educational system and its use to promote revivalist concepts of sectarian division and exclusivism. Critiques against this issue became particularly poignant internationally in the wake of the September 11 attacks, leading to the publications of a number of reports that claimed Saudi schooling promoted intolerance and violence in students.³⁰ Riyadh begrudgingly committed to reforming the sector after 2001 and claimed the issue was the result of a cadre of radical outlier educators and not the system itself. Critiques against the system are not solely from external sources. Despite a claim in 2012 that it had sacked over 3,500 "radical" teachers,³¹ in June of 2014, then minister of education prince Khalid al-Faisal openly admitted that the Kingdom's education system continued to play a key source of radicalisation in the Saudi populace towards groups like IS.³² Following the May 2015 bombing of a Shia mosque in al-Qatif, Khaled Almaeena, a prominent liberal and editor-in-chief of the Saudi Gazette blasted the tokenistic efforts of the state with regard to education reforms, writing:

We did not do anything and watched silently as some imams spewed hatred and spread falsehood about Muslims of other sects...Many of us had hoped that the Center for National Dialogue would play a bigger role in addressing the sectarian divide and in uniting our nation...[unfortunately] the organization only paid lip service to the problem and failed to eliminate these dangerous phenomena...[its] inaction allowed the influence of the preachers of hate to spread and pollute the minds of the young and old with their poisonous beliefs.(Parenthesis mine)³³

While Almaeena took pains to initially refer to such individuals as radicals within the system, his language and the scope of his criticism indicate that the phenomenon remains far more pervasive than just a few extremist outliers. Although the textbooks employed in religious education tend to avoid directly advocating for violence against non-believers, they continue to preach intolerance towards non-revivalists

³⁰ The Hudson Institute, "Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance," (Washington, D.C.: The Hudson Institute, 2008). & Freedom House, "Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies: Arabic with English Translation," (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2006).

³¹ The Saudi Gazette, "3,500 Saudi Imams Dismissed to Curb Extremism," (2013), <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20130722174420>.

³² Abdullah Hamidaddin, "De-Radicalize and Re-Energize Saudi Education," (2014), <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/06/06/-De-radicalize-and-re-energize-Saudi-education-.html>.

³³ Khaled Almaeena, "The Sectarian Divide Threatens National Unity," (2015), <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20150524244779>.

and unbelievers and promote a paranoid, sectarian siege mentality.³⁴ Further, such texts emphasise the territorial importance of the Saudi state for the religious community in a manner relatively consistent with patterns that emerged in revivalist discourse during the nineteenth century that challenged the authenticity of non-Saudi Muslims.³⁵ As one analyst wrote in 2010:

The current textbooks do not spare most Muslims from the accusations of polytheism, deviance, hypocrisy, and outright apostasy. For example, the 12th grade book on 'monotheism' claims that many in the Muslim world community have returned to polytheism.³⁶

What critical discourse around Saudi educational reform has generally avoided discussing is the purpose of such a polarising curriculum and how it tied in with the governing strategy of the state. For centuries, the regime has relied on education to propagate the racket and ensure it has a client base receptive to its offers of metaphysical protection. A major component of the history taught in Saudi schools emphasises the “the negative and divisive nature of sects”³⁷ and demonises those that are seen to corrupt the original, undivided and idealised form of Islam. The use of education to influence a populous towards the regime’s end is far from unique to the Saudi case. Control of education remains a powerful tool for shaping society. As Willis notes in the case of Tunisia, for example, widespread exposure to the Parisian tertiary education system left transformed many in the North African country’s middle class into supporters of centrally directed liberal reforms during the 1930s.³⁸ The sectarian dichotomisation of today’s Saudi education system today follows a similar pattern, helping to perpetuate the efficacy of the racket and ensure a demand for the state’s services. This suggests that the state will continue to resist major reforms in the education sector as long as it continues to view promoting exclusivist concepts as beneficial to its hold on power. As in other issues of reform, activists are faced with a long-established system that provides tangible benefits to the government with negative outcomes that have, up until this point, been far outweighed by the positive for the regime. Although there has been some international pressure on Riyadh to reform the Saudi curriculum, this has largely been restricted to muted rhetoric thanks to the country’s ongoing critical role in the global energy market and its close security relationships with many western powers.

³⁴ Excerpts of Saudi textbooks that promote such an image can be found in a number of studies, including Freedom House, "Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies: Arabic with English Translation." & The Hudson Institute, "Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance." & "Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia's Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence," (Washington, D.C.: The Hudson Institute, 2011). & Judith Ingram, "Uscirf Confirms Material Inciting Violence, Intolerance Remains in Textbooks Used at Saudi Government's Islamic Saudi Academy," (2008), <http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases/saudi-arabia-uscirf-confirms-material-inciting-violence-intolerance-remains>.

³⁵ Prokop, "The War of Ideas: Education in Saudi Arabia," 60.

³⁶ Ali al-Ahmed, "This Medieval Saudi Education System Must Be Reformed," (2010), <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/nov/26/saudi-arabia-religious-education>.

³⁷ al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 190.

³⁸ Michael Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (London: Hurst and Company, 2012), 21.

With only limited external pressures to reform, a divided and diluted internal liberal opposition and an enduring prerogative from the revivalist community to maintain practices of racketeering, the Saudi state lacks a compelling impetus to seriously consider major social, political or educational reforms. As long as the racketeering system's positive feedback loop continues to function within acceptable margins, dominant Saudi elites will likely wish to avoid enacting policy that may jeopardise its proven benefits. Reformists wishing to work within the existing political order must thus contend with a system in which even the most minor of social concessions on the part of the regime can be perceived by state and religious elites as a loss of personal and institutional power. Those wishing to champion such initiatives without committing to outright revolution must thus devise effective means of presenting their ideas in a manner that can accommodate or surmount several formidable hurdles presented by the existence of a racketeering system. The first of these remains obtaining commitments by elites to meaningful reforms in the first place, an extremely difficult task given the primacy the state places upon racketeering and its natural reticence to undermine the status quo. The second is the need to minimise counter-reformist pushback by revivalist groups once such reforms are implemented, so as to not derail the process by placing the state in a zero-sum decision dilemma in which it is forced to choose between placating its traditional base of power and reforms. The third hurdle is the need for concrete legislative protection of any such reforms that shields them from pushback by revivalist elites and checks the state during times of crisis, as will likely happen in future. While the realistic potential of reformist to address these three criteria remains debatable for the moment, they will continue to impede any such initiatives and should remain a prime consideration in the wider strategic outlooks of liberal activists.

9.3 Conclusion: An Enduring, Robust System

The purpose of this thesis has been to offer a systematised and mechanical theory on the manner in which Saudi elites have employed a racketeering regime of religious identity securitisation towards an end of authoritarian state formation, expansion and development. By examining the four-century span of Saudi history, we can see that this approach has existed since the inception of the first regime. Although the means and precise focus of securitisation have shifted with time and circumstance, its basic features of the system and its outcomes have remained remarkably consistent. Since 1744, the state has sought to promote a revivalist Islamic identity hypersensitive to even the mildest notions of change or innovation presented by alternative identities, ideologies and the shifting material world itself. Although the state's capacity has ebbed and flowed, since the eighteenth century it has displayed an ability to exploit the latent fragility of this identity and present an array of context-specific ontological threats to subscribers that incentivises their submission to the extractive demands of the regime. In an overwhelming number of these cases, the ultimate responsibility for the existence of this type of threat species or its gratuitous inflation lays with the state itself. Whether it be through the propagation of the revivalist identity, the contrivance of a sense of metaphysical risk, or the regime's statist behaviour that brings revivalists into contact with outsiders through warfare, the promotion of international trade, or alliances with other

countries, the Saudi state has played a key role in ensuring the identity of powerful minority of its citizens remains insecure and open to the protections it offers as a defender of Islam.

Despite the apparent perversity of this system, its endurance over multiple centuries and concurrent regimes remains testament to its efficacy. The state's reliance on sectarianism as a key component of its counter-revolution offensive during the Arab Spring showed that racketeering is not simply a historical curiosity, but a powerful political tool of regime elites able to heavily influence contemporary Saudi society. The system remains pervasive and has profound flow on effects outside the revivalist population of the Saudi state, encouraging sectarian hostility and suspicion in Sunni communities in the Gulf and its surrounds as a flow effect of the sheer infrastructural scale, weight and energy dedicated to ensuring the endurance of this core clientele.³⁹

Whether racketeering will retain its efficacy over the next few decades remains an open question. A 2013 study conducted by De Jong and Moaddel surveying Saudi social attitudes between 2003 and 2011 found that national identity has overtaken religious identity in Saudi youth in the past decade. The same study also found rising support for gender equality in those under 54 and a loss of confidence in both Sharia as a system of governance and the religious institutions of the state across all age groups. Although the data is skewed by oversampling of Shi'a, what such findings suggest is that the effectiveness of a system that emphasises authoritarian religious traditionalism as the embodiment of security should be diminishing in the Saudi context. Nevertheless, the widespread acceptance of a sectarian narrative during the Arab Spring shows that the effects of racketeering remain highly ingrained in Saudi society and that, despite the apparent shift in attitudes, the state is still highly capable of exploiting such tensions when need be. Such reversions may very well become more common place in the future, as the state's rentier capacity diminishes and it is forced to rely on other methods to sustain its legitimacy. The Saudi regime's rentierism remains highly vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices,⁴⁰ a fact highlighted by the recent social spending cuts in the wake of a global decline in crude prices.⁴¹ A sustained reduction in this regard will force the regime to seek alternative means of legitimation to ensure its ongoing survival and it is likely, as during the 1980s recession, this will lead to a reemphasis on racketeering as a tried and tested method.

Whatever the future holds for the Saudi Kingdom, it seems that Riyadh will continue to employ racketeering as a crucial component of its own legitimation. By emphasising the metaphysical risks posed by those outside the community and constructing or inflating the threat posed by subjects that demonstrate this narrative, the state will continue to extract a crucial resource for its rule: loyalty. Although the regime employs numerous approaches to secure domestic solidarity, the longevity and

³⁹ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*.

⁴⁰ F. Gregory Gause, "Saudi Arabia over a Barrel," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2000).

⁴¹ BBC, "Saudi Arabia to Cut Spending after Oil Price Decline," (2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-34168659>.

proven efficacy of racketeering makes its abandonment by the regime particularly unlikely in the near-term. Revivalists constitute just one of several large demographics in the Kingdom today, it is true, but their existence has been historical crucial to the state's absolutist form of rule and the power and prestige of its elites.

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