Madawi Al-Rasheed

Contesting the Saudi State

Islamic Voices from a New Generation

Contesting the Saudi State

The terms Wahhabi or Salafi are seen as interchangeable and frequently misunderstood by outsiders. However, as Madawi Al-Rasheed explains in a fascinating exploration of Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century, even Saudis do not agree on their meaning. Under the influence of mass education, printing, new communication technology, and global media, they are forming their own conclusions and debating religion and politics in traditional and novel venues, often violating official taboos and the conservative values of Saudi society. Drawing on classical religious sources, contemporary readings and interviews, Al-Rasheed presents an ethnography of consent and contest, exploring the fluidity of the boundaries between the religious and political. Bridging the gap between text and context, the author also examines how states and citizens manipulate religious discourse for purely political ends, and how this manipulation generates unpredictable reactions whose control escapes those who initiated them.

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Madawi Al-Rasheed
University of London

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A prince is always compelled to injure those who have made him the new ruler, subjecting them to the troops and imposing the endless other hardships which his new conquest entails

Niccolo Machiavelli *The Prince*

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Glossary

ahfad al-sahaba	grandsons of the companions of the Prophet
ahl al-dhimma	people of the book, Christians and Jews
ahl al-hadith	those who interpret the Prophetic tradition literally
ahl al-hall wa ʾl-ʿaqd	decision makers (lit. 'people who loose and tie')
ahl al-qibla	people who face Mecca for prayer
ahl al-sunna wa ʾl-jamaʿa	Sunnis (lit. 'people of the tradition of the Prophet and community')
ahl al-tawhid	people of monotheism
aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya	Najdi religious scholars
amir (pl. *umara*)	ruler, prince
amr bi ʾl-maʿruf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar	promotion of virtue and prohibition of vice
ʿaqida	creed
asl	principle
baghi (pl. *bughat*)	usurper
baraʾ	dissociation from infidels
bayʿa	oath of allegiance
bidʿa	innovation, heresy
bilad al-haramayn	the Land of the Two Holy Mosques
daʿif	weak
daʿiyya (f. *daʿiyyat*; pl. *duʿat*)	preacher
daʿwa	religious call, mission
dawla	state
dawlat al-tawhid	monotheist polity
dhal	one who has gone astray
dhalal	debauchery, obscurity
duʿat al-islah	reformers
fajir	sinful, despotic
fard ʿayn	an obligation incumbent upon every Muslim

fard kifaya	an obligation performed by a sufficient number of Muslims
fasiq	debauched
fatwa	religious opinion issued by *shariʿa* expert
al-fiʾa al-dhalla	the group that has gone astray
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
fitna	strife, dissent
Hadith	tradition, saying of the Prophet
hajr al-mubtaʿdiʿ	ostracisation of innovators
hakim	ruler
hakimiyya	sovereignty
haraki	politicised activist
haram	forbidden
harb ʿala al-kuffar	a battle against the infidels
hayat al-amr biʾl-ma ʿruf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar	Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice
hijra	migration
hizb al-ghulat	radicals
hizbiyya	adherence to party politics
hizb al-wulat	loyalists
ʿibada (pl. *ʿibadat*)	Islamic rituals, worship
ijtihad	applying reason to reach a religious ruling
ʿilm	knowledge
ʿilmani (pl. *ʿilmaniyyun*)	secular, secularist
imama	state, leadership of the Muslim state
inkar al-munkar	disavowing the abominable
iqamat al-hadd (pl. *iqamat al-hudud*)	punishment
islah	reform
islahi (f. *islahiyya*; pl. *islahiyyin*, *islahiyyat*)	reformer
jahil	one who is ignorant
jahiliyya	the age of ignorance
jaʾir	despot
jamiʿat al-ʿulama	association of *ʿulama*
jazirat al-ʿarab/jazira al-ʿarabiyya	the Arabian Peninsula
jihad	exertion, struggle for the way of God
kafir (pl. *kafirun*)	unbeliever, blasphemous
khawarij al-ʿasr	contemporary Kharijites
al-khitab al-dini	religious discourse
khuruj bi ʾl-sayf	violent rebellion

khuruj siyasi	political rebellion
khuruj ʿala wali al-amr/ khuruj ʿala al-hakim	rebellion against the ruler
kitab	book
kufr	unbelief, blasphemy
kufr bawwah/kufran bawahan	obvious blasphemy
maʿasi	minor sins
madhhab (pl. *madhahib*)	school of jurisprudence
majlis	meeting, council, study circle
majlis al-hiwar al-watani	National Dialogue Forum
majlis al-shura	consultative council
maʿruf	that which is known in *shariʿa*
maslaha	interest, public good
muʿahadin	infidels enjoying a protected contractual relationship with Muslims
muʿamalat jaʾiza	permissible relations
mufti	jurisconsult, highest religious authority
al-muhajirun	the Muslims who migrated from Mecca with the Prophet
mujahidun	Jihadis
munafiq (pl. *munafiqun*)	hypocrite
munkar	evil
murabitun ʿala al-thugur	'tied to the fortresses'
mushrik (pl. *mushrikun*)	polytheists, blasphemers
mutʿa	temporary marriage
mutawaʿ (pl. *mutawaʾa*)	religious specialist
muthaqaf	intellectual associated with acquiring Western knowledge
muwahhidun	monotheists
naqidh lil islam (pl. *nawaqidh al-Islam*)	that which removes a Muslim from the religious community and Islam
nidham	legislation
nidham kufr	a blasphemous regime
nifaq	hypocrisy
nukhba	elite
al-nukhba al-fikriyya	intellectual elite
qadi	judge
qaʿidun	those left behind (lit. 'sitting')
qiyas	deduction by analogy
raʿiyya	subjects
al-sahabiyyat	early female companions

sahwa	awakening
al-salaf al-salih	pious ancestors
shabab	youth
shariʿa	Islamic legal codes and rules
sheikh	tribal leader, religious scholar, notable
shirk	blasphemy, heresy, polytheism
shubuhat (sg. *shubuha*)	misguided opinions
shura	consultation
sunna	tradition of the Prophet (words and deeds)
sura	Quranic verse
taghut (pl. *tawaghit*)	despot, idol
tajdid al-khitab al-dini	renewing religious discourse
takfir	excommunication
takfir al-muʿayan	the excommunication of an individual
takfir al-mujtamaʿ	the excommunication of an entire society
takfir al-ʿumum	mass excommunication
tarajuʿat	going back on previous opinions, repentance
tarajuʿat qasriyya	forced repentance
tariqa (pl. *turuq*)	Sufi way
tawba	repentance
tawhid	doctrine of the oneness of God
tawwali	subservience through loyalty
tawwali al-kuffar	subservience to infidels
tayar	movement, trend
tayar al-haraki	organised Islamist movement
tazkiyya	an approval certificate
ʿulama (sg. *ʿalim*)	religious scholar, scientist
ʿulama al-sultan	the religious establishment
umami	global
umma	the Muslim community
walaʾ	association, loyalty
al-walaʾ wa ʾl-baraʾ	association with Muslims and dissociation from infidels
wali al-amr (pl. *wulat al-amr*)	ruler, the one who is in charge of affairs
wasat (n. *wasatiyya*)	centrist
watan	homeland
wataniyya	citizenship
zaffat al-shahid	celebration of a martyr
zakat	Islamic tax

Foreign words and phrases

ʿash ʿash fiha al-shaytan	the abode of Satan
ʿahd	oath
ahfad al-sahaba	grandsons of the companions of the Prophet
ʿahirat al-rum	'Roman prostitutes' (Pejoratively American female soldiers on Saudi soil)
ahkam	rules
ahl al-dhalal	those who have gone astray
ahl al-dhimma	people of the book, Christians and Jews
ahl al-fiqh	people of jurisprudence
ahl al-hadith	those who interpret the Prophetic tradition literally
ahl al-hall wa ʾl-ʿaqd	decision makers (lit. 'people who loose and tie')
ahl al-qibla	people who face Mecca for prayer
ahl-al-sulban	Christians (lit. 'people of the cross')
ahl al-sunna wa ʾl-jamaʿa	Sunnis (lit. 'people of the tradition of the Prophet and community')
ahl al-tawhid	people of monotheism
ahzab siyasiyya	political parties
ʾaima	religious scholars
aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya	Najdi religious scholars
ajnabi	foreigner
ʿajuz	old
akhtar ghaltha	more harsh
aman	peace
amir (pl *umara*)	ruler, prince
ʿamm	public
amr bi ʾl-maʿruf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar	promotion of virtue and prohibition of vice
ansab	genealogies
al-ansar	supporters of the early Muslim immigrants in Madina
ʿaqida	creed
ʿaql	reason
aqwal al-sahaba	sayings of the Prophet's companions
ʿaris	bridegroom
ʿarus	bride
asl	principle
ʾasr	captivity

al-awliya	pious men
ayam al-dhalal	days of obscurity
azma	crisis
bagdhaʾ	hatred
baghi (pl. *bughat*)	usurper
baraʾ	dissociation from infidels
bayʿa	oath of allegiance
bayn dhuhrani al-mushrikin	living among polytheists
bidʿa	innovation, heresy
bilad al-haramayn	the Land of the Two Holy Mosques
burqaʿ	veil that allows only the eyes to appear
daʿif	weak
daʿiyya (f. *daʿiyyat*; pl. *duʿat*)	preacher
daʿwa	religious call, mission
dawla	state
dawlat al-tawhid	monotheist polity
dayuuth	pimp
dhal	one who has gone astray
dhalal	debauchery, obscurity
dhikr	devotional recitation
diya	blood money
duʿat al-islah	reformers
fajir	sinful, despotic
faqih (pl. *fuqahaʾ*)	jurist, jurisprudent
fard ʿayn	an obligation incumbent upon every Muslim
fard kifaya	an obligation performed by a sufficient number of Muslims
faridha	duty, obligation
fasad	corruption
fasiq	debauched
fatwa (pl. *fatawa*)	religious opinion issued by *shariʿa* expert
al-fiʾa al-dhalla	the group that has gone astray
fidaʾiyyin	soldiers, comrades
fikr shadh	perverse thought
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
fiqh al-halal wa ʾl-haram	jurisprudence of the permissible and the forbidden
fiqh al-ʿibadat	jurisprudence of worship
al-firqa al-dhalla	those who have gone astray
fitna	strife, dissent
fitra	instinct, nature

gafwa	sleep
ghadh al-basar	lowering the gaze
ghazu	raid
ghulat	religious extremists
ghulu	radicalism
ghutra	white headcover
hadith	tradition, saying of the Prophet
hafadhat Quran	people who memorised the Quran
hajj	pilgrimage
hajr al-mubtadiʿ	ostracisation of innovators
hakim	ruler
hakimiyya	sovereignty
hakim jaʾir	a despotic ruler
hakim kafir	a blasphemous ruler
al-hakim al-munafiq	the hypocrite ruler
haraki	politicised activist
haram	forbidden
harb ʿala al-kuffar	a battle against the infidels
harbi	aggressive
hasad	envy
hayat al-amr biʾl-maʿruf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar	Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice
hayba	aura, authority
hijab	veil
hijra	migration
himla salibiyya	a crusade
hisba	accountability
hizb al-ghulat	radicals
hizbiyya	adherence to party politics
hizb al-wulat	loyalists
hudud	punishments
hukam al-riyadh	(pejoratively) the rulers of Riyadh
al-hukm al-jabri	coercive rule
hurra	free woman
ʿibada (pl. *ʿibadat*)	Islamic rituals, worship
iftar	breakfast
ijmaʿ	consensus
ijtihad	applying reason to reach a religious ruling
ʿilm	knowledge
ʿilmani (pl. *ʿilmaniyyun*)	secular, secularist
iltizam	commitment to the tradition
imama	state, leadership of the Muslim state

inhizamiyyat al-umma	the defeatist attitude of the *umma*
inkar al-munkar	disavowing the abominable
iqamat al-hadd (pl. *iqamat al-hudud*)	punishment
islah	reform
islahi (f. *islahiyya*; pl. *islahiyyin*, *islahiyyat*)	reformer
islah al-mawruth al-ijtimaʿi	reform of social heritage
istiʿana	assistance
istila	seizure of power by force
istirahat al-muharib	a temporary period of rest
itisal	communication
jadwal zamani	timetable
jahil	one who is ignorant
jahiliyya	the age of ignorance
jaʾir	despot
jaʾiz	permissible
jamiʿat al-ʿulama	association of *ʿulamaʾ*
jariyya	a female slave
jazirat al-ʿarab, *jazirat al-arabiyya*	the Arabian Peninsula
jihad	exertion, struggle for the way of God
jihad ʿamali	practical *jihad*
jihad dafʿi	defensive *jihad*
jihad hadari	civilisational struggle
jihad madani	a civil *jihad*
jihad nadhari	theoretical *jihad*
jihad qitali	military struggle
jihad talab	offensive *jihad*
junun al-ʿadhama	grandiose madness
kaffara	compensation in money or deeds
kafir (pl. *kafirun*)	unbeliever, blasphemous
kahanut	clergy
al-kalima	'the word'
khalʿ	forcing a ruler to leave office
al-khassa	an elite minority
khawarij al-ʿasr	contemporary Kharijites
al-khitab al-dini	religious discourse
khubth	filth
khuruj ʿaqaʾidi	religious rebellion
khuruj bi al-sayf	violent rebellion
khuruj siyasi	political rebellion

khuruj ʿala wali al-amr/ khuruj ʿala al-hakim	rebellion against the ruler
kitab	book
al-kitab wa ʾl-sunna	the book and the deeds of the Prophet
kitman	concealing God's message as revealed in the Quran
kufr	unbelief, blasphemy
kufr bawwah/kufran bawahan	obvious blasphemy
maʿahid	institutes
maʿasi	minor sins
madhhab (pl. *madhahib*)	school of jurisprudence
madrasa	school
mafahim	understanding
mahram	male guardian
maharim	forbidden women (close relatives such as mother, sister etc.)
majlis	meeting, council, study circle
majlis al-hiwar al-watani	National Dialogue Forum
majlis nuwab	a parliament
majlis al-shura	consultative council
maqasid al-shariʿa	the objectives of *shariʿa*
maʿruf	that which is known in *shariʿa*
mashaykh al-haydh	'the sheikhs of menstruation'
maʿsiyya	sins
maslaha	interest, public good
mawada	affection
al-mawruth al-ijtimaʿi	inherited social tradition
millat al-kufr	the religion of blasphemy
mithaq	treaty
muʿahadin	infidels enjoying a protected contractual relationship with Muslims
muʿamalat jaʾiza	permissible relationship
al-muʾawal	interpreted religious discourse
mubdiʿun	innovators
mubiqat	grave sins
mufakir Islami	a Muslim thinker
mufaraqat al-hayat	leaving life
mufti	jurisconsult, highest religious authority
al-muhajirun	the Muslims who migrated from Mecca with the Prophet
mujahidun	Jihadis
mujtahid	scholar entitled to give individual opinions

mukataba	writing (to the ruler)
mukhalafat	errors
mulhid	atheist
mulk	kingship
munafiq (pl. *munafiqun*)	hypocrite
munathirun	armchair theoreticians
al-munazal	revealed religious discourse
munkar	evil
muqalid	follower of a previous generation of scholars
murabitun ʿala al-thugur	'tied to the battlefield'
murtadd	apostate
mushʿawithun	charlatans
mushrik (pl. *mushrikun*)	polytheists, blasphemers
al-mustabid al-ʿadil	a just despot
mustahab	desirable
mustawtanat	(colonial) settlements
mutʿa	temporary marriage
mutadayin	religious, observant
mutawa (pl. *mutawaʿa*)	religious specialist
mutawwaʿin	low-ranking Wahhabi preachers
muthaqaf	intellectual associated with acquiring Western knowledge
muwahhidun	monotheists
muwalat	an affectionate relationship with infidels
najs	impure, polluting
naqidh lil islam (pl. *nawaqidh al-Islam*)	that which removes a Muslim from the religious community and Islam
naql	tradition
nashid	songs
nasiha	advice
nidham	new legislation
nidham kufr	a blasphemous regime
nifaq	hypocrisy
nifaq ʿamali	practical hypocrisy
nifaq ʿaqadi	'creed' hypocrisy
niʿma	grace
nukhba	elite
al-nukhba al-fikriyya	intellectual elite
qadi	judge
qahr	coercion
qaʿidun	those left behind (lit. 'sitting')

qawi	strong
qiyas	deduction by analogy
quburi	grave-worshipper
al-quwa al-mutadharira	those who are hurt by reform
rafidha	rejectionists
rahat	crowd
raʿiyya	subjects
rijal din	clergy
sabb	insult
sad al-thara'iʿ	prohibition of acts that might violate the law (lit. 'blocking the means')
al-sahabiyyat	early Muslim women
sahwa	awakening
al-salaf al-salih	pious ancestors
al-shaʿb	the people
shabab	youth
shabab al-sahwa	the youth of the awakening
al-shahada	the Muslim declaration of faith
al-shaʾn al-ʿam	public affairs
shariʿa	Islamic legal codes and rules
sheikh	tribal leader, religious scholar, notable
shirk	blasphemy, heresy, polytheism
shirk asghar	'the minor association', a lesser blasphemy
shirk akbar	'the great association', a major blasphemy
shirk jadid	new blasphemy
shubuhat (sg. *shubuha*)	misguided opinions
shura	consultation
sunna	tradition of the Prophet (words and deeds)
sura	Quranic verse
taʿasub	fanaticism
taghut (pl. *tawaghit*)	despot, idol
tahkim al-sharʿ	application of *shariʿa*
taʾiyyin	the appointment of a successor by the current ruler (hereditary rule)
tajdid al-khitab al-dini	renewing religious discourse
takfir	excommunication
takfir al-muʿayan	the excommunication of an individual
takfir al-mujtamaʿ	the excommunication of an entire society
takfir al-ʿumum	mass excommunication
tamasuh	touching
tanbih	to alert
taraf fikri	intellectual luxury

taraju'at	going back on previous opinions, repentance
taraju'at qasriyya	forced repentance
tarasubat wa tarakumat ijtima'iyya	social norms
tari'	temporary, accidental
tariqa (pl. *turuq*)	Sufi way
tarikh	history
tashabuh bi 'l-kuffar	imitating infidels
al-tatarus bi 'l-nisa	using women as human shields in time of combat
tatbiqat	application
ta'til faridhat al-jihad	suspending the obligation of *jihad*
tawba	repentance
tawhid	doctrine of the oneness of God
ta'wil	interpretation
tawwali	subservience through loyalty
tawwali al-kuffar	subservience to infidels
tayar	movement
tayar al-haraki	organised Islamist movement
tazkiyat al-hakim	praising the ruler
tazkiyya	an approval certificate
thaqafat al-jihad	a culture of *jihad*
thawb	male robes
thulathi al-takfir	trinity of excommunication
tughyan	oppression, despotism
turath	heritage
'ulama (sing. *'alim*)	religious scholar, scientist
'ulama al-sultan	the religious establishment
uli al-amr	those charged with authority
'ulum shari'yya	religious knowledge
'umala	traitors
umami	global
umma	Muslim community
al-umma al-muntasira	'the victorious party'
'umra	minor pilgrimage
al-'unsor al-da'if	the weak element
'unsoriyya	racist
'uqal	head-rope
'uyub	faults, shameful behaviour
wala'	association, loyalty
al-wala' wa 'l-bara'	association with Muslims and dissociation from infidels

wali al-amr (pl. *wulat al-amr*)	ruler, the one who is in charge of affairs
warathat al-anbiya'	heirs of the Prophets
wasat (n. *wasatiyya*)	centrist
watan	homeland
wataniyya	citizenship
wilaya 'ama	high leadership
yahsum al-khiyar	a final resolution
zaffa	wedding celebration
zaffat al-shahid	celebration of a martyr
zakat	Islamic tax
zawaj al-misyar	'visiting marriage', a marriage without formal obligations
ziyara	visit

Map 1. Saudi Arabia, main regions and cities.

Source: F. Clements, *Saudi Arabia*, *World Bibliographical Series* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1979; reprinted 1988). Courtesy of Clio Press.

Introduction: debating religion and politics in the twenty-first century

This book is an ethnography of consent and contestation. It is about contemporary Saudis who debate politics and religion. Outsiders often refer to Saudis as Wahhabis or Salafis, but in the twenty-first century Saudis themselves no longer agree on the meaning of these terms and many do not accept their validity. Most Saudis believe that there is no separation between religion and politics at the level of public discourse. Yet the majority agree that in practice there is a separation between the professed religious rhetoric of the state, on the one hand, and the reality of political practice, on the other. Calls for the reformation of state and society always invoke religion and politics together in a single framework. This book focuses on what I call Wahhabi religio-political discourse, the sum total of interpretations that draw on religion to comprehend, justify, sanction or challenge politics. This discourse is rooted in the Wahhabi tradition and the intellectual heritage of its *ʿulama*. Wahhabi interpretations are the dominant intellectual reference point.

Some scholars claim that authoritarianism generates conceptual impotence. Others argue that authoritarian rule produces development outcomes that are either very good or very bad. In the Saudi case, authoritarianism has generated consenting subjects, incomplete projects, diverted journeys, betrayal and opportunism – but not intellectual impotence. Saudi authoritarianism has led to consent and confrontation at the same time. The regime, together with a mushrooming religious bureaucracy, created a world that insisted on complete submission to political authority while preaching total submission to God. Rather than being paralysed by impotence, the Saudis have produced a complex intellectual tapestry, woven by debating subjects, some of whom consent while others confront. Against the background of authoritarianism, vibrant diversity, pluralism and debate has arisen. There is also blind and indiscriminate violence. Violence is committed by a state that demands complete surrender to its will and by a minority that challenges this surrender. Both the state and its subjects are engaged in perpetual cycle of real and symbolic violence. The majority of ordinary Saudis are either

spectators or active participants in volatile debates about religion, politics and society.

Wahhabiyya and Salafiyya

Wahhabiyya is a label imposed on people who would rather call themselves simply Muslims. In the past, so-called Wahhabis preferred to be known as *al-muwahhidun* or *ahl al-tawhid* (monotheists), but today this appellation is rather archaic. Many *al-muwahhidun* would probably prefer to be known as Salafiyyun. In this book, I will retain the name Wahhabiyya to refer to the Saudi variant of Salafiyya, thus applying the Arab saying that 'a known error is better than an unknown correctness' ('khata shai' ahsan min sawab majhul'). My justification for retaining the name Wahhabiyya is based on the assumption that there is a body of religious knowledge that has common intellectual ancestry, without assuming that this factor gives the discourse rigid unity or coherence.

In this study, Wahhabiyya is considered a fragmented but hegemonic religious discourse. It is distinguished from other Sunni Muslim religious discourses by its own specific interpretations and interpreters. Wahhabiyya is simply a religious worldview that can promote both consent and contestation, depending on the context in which its teachings and texts are interpreted. This book tries to bridge the gap between text and context. Politically, Wahhabiyya can be both quietist and revolutionary, as will be shown here.

In its early eighteenth-century phase, Wahhabiyya[1] proved to be conducive to political centralisation, and did contribute to the formation of the first Saudi–Wahhabi emirate (1744–1818).[2] The historical alliance between sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud led to the formation of the first Saudi state. This state expanded in Arabia under the pretext of purifying faith from innovation and applying Islamic law. Wahhabi enthusiasm and military expansion led to the Egyptian invasion of Arabia, under the patronage of the Ottoman sultan, early in the nineteenth century. While the political leadership, mainly the Al-Saud, were temporarily removed from the Arabian scene, the Wahhabi movement remained alive, although it avoided direct confrontation with the Ottoman empire after the Egyptian invasion. However, it seems that Wahhabis learned a serious lesson from the Egyptian annihilation of their power base in Deriyyah in 1818: they learned to be pragmatic. Wahhabis survived afterwards because they supported political power, which meant moderating religious zeal. Since then, Wahhabi scholars have accepted a subservient position. They lived in the shadow of the sultan. While this history does not concern us here, it is important to remember its contours

because it continues to affect the way religion and politics coexist in Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century.

Salafiyya is a methodology that invokes the literal interpretation of religious texts, and the return to the early tradition of the pious companions of the Prophet. It must be said that there is no consensus among Sunni Muslims on who the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*) were, although the majority of scholars would probably identify them as including the first generation that accompanied the Prophet. Other Sunnis might stretch the *salaf* to include three generations after the Prophet. For some contemporary advocates, Salafiyya dates back to the works of medieval scholars who called for literal interpretations of religious texts. Some contemporary Islamists argue that Salafiyya is rooted in medieval theology, especially the early calls to return to the Quran and Sunna (tradition of the Prophet), associated with Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855), Ibn Taymiyya (1268–1328) and their followers.

As a descriptor, Salafiyya is a modern term, dating back to the late nineteenth-century Islamic reformist movements, especially the one associated with Azharite Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) and the activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–97). The Saudi Wahhabi Salafiyya does not have much in common with this modernist Salafiyya. Muhammad Abduh preached a reformist–modernist Salafiyya while Wahhabiyya was a revivalist Salafi movement, concerned mainly with the purification of religious practice and the application of *shari'a*. Modernist Salafiyya grew as a result of the encounter with the West and as the result of a quest for advancement. The Wahhabi Salafiyya emerged in central Arabia prior to this encounter, although Western powers were beginning to encircle Arabia in the eighteenth century. Its main objective was the purification of faith and worship. The eighteenth-century Wahhabi Salafi tradition had a more limited objective than that propagated by modernist Salafis. When contemporary Wahhabis invoke *al-salaf al-salih*, one is led to believe that Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab could be counted among them, but not many Sunni Muslims would agree.

In the twenty-first century, those who call themselves Salafis are engaged in fierce debate among themselves to define who is a Salafi and who is not. As there is no agreement over the meaning of Salafiyya or who is a Salafi, I am inclined to consider it an elastic identity that is invoked to convey a meaning or several meanings. In the West today, Salafiyya represents extreme radicalism, intolerance, backwardness and violence. In Western media and even scholarly work, Salafis are portrayed as 'fundamentalists' and potential terrorists. Yet for others outside the West, Salafiyya represents authentic, unmediated Islam. For those people, Salafiyya means worshipping God according to the Quran and the

tradition of the Prophet, transmitted by those who were his contemporaries, without the mediation of later generations.[3] According to advocates of Salafiyya, the movement empowers the ordinary worshipper, who is no longer dependent on a wide circle of interpreters. A Salafi can be actively involved in interpretation himself, provided that he has a basic standard of knowledge and literacy. Modernity encouraged and perpetuated Salafiyya. Literacy and mass communication favour its survival in contemporary Muslim society. Salafiyya and modernity are inseparable.

Eighteenth-century Wahhabiyya was the main impetus behind political centralisation in Arabia. Without Wahhabiyya, there would have been no Al-Saud and no Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, in the twenty-first century, Wahhabiyya continues to support the power it created and defended. In its official version, Wahhabiyya is the discourse of power legitimisation. From its early eighteenth-century history, it developed religious interpretations to legitimise political power which led to deep grounding in authoritarianism, and even despotism, within Islam. Wahhabiyya sanctioned a regime that claims to rule according to Islam but in reality in the twenty first century retains only Islamic rhetoric and external trappings. The latter include public beheadings, excluding women from the public sphere, closing shops for prayers as well as other orchestrated and dramatised displays of religiosity. The exclusion and confinement of women have become a symbol for the piety of the Saudi state. Islam is consequently reduced to this dimension. In reality the regime operates according to personalised political gains rather than religious dogma or national interest.

Under state control Wahhabi interpreters – for example, *'ulama*, intellectuals and activists – gradually developed into a class of *noblesse d'état*. Although Saudi *'ulama* appear to enjoy more power, financial resources, prestige and privileges than their counterparts elsewhere in the Muslim world, it must be emphasised that the modern state has pushed them towards a ceremonial role. This does not rule out influence and control: unlike their counterparts in other Arab countries, Wahhabi scholars have considerable control over the social sphere. However, like other official religious scholars in the Arab world, Wahhabis lost control over policy and politics to royalty and state bureaucrats and technocrats – the political sphere is beyond Wahhabi control. In order to survive in a changing world, interpreters of Wahhabiyya accepted this reality, which had serious consequences. The Saudi state is not a Wahhabi state, as claimed by amateur observers. State policy is determined by a coterie of individuals who do not have Wahhabiyya as their reference paradigm, but who use it as a convenient device to cloak their personal political activities. Outside observers often do not distinguish between the 'Wahhabised' social sphere and Saudi politics.

Like the political regime it supports and sanctions, Wahhabiyya is authoritarian. It does not tolerate difference in opinion, and fears any theological debate which may result in questioning either its own monopoly over religious interpretation or the legitimacy of the political power it supports. It abides by the maxim of *hajr al-mubtaʿdi*, an old principle grounded in religious texts that calls for the ostracisation of innovators, defined as those who do not share Wahhabi teachings. Wahhabis ostracise the 'other', especially the Muslim other. They shun their adversaries for fear of contaminating or shaking their own beliefs. Yet Wahhabiyya is constantly engaged in vigorous preaching (*dʿawa*), both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. This, however, is different from debate with the other, who does not share Wahhabi interpretations. Official Wahhabiyya is religiously dogmatic, socially conservative and politically acquiescent.

Saudi Arabia may have a single dominant official religious discourse, commonly referred to as Salafi Wahhabiyya, but in the shadow of this discourse there are people who are engaged in challenging, redefining, destroying and reinterpreting it. Today in Saudi Arabia, as elsewhere in the world, there is no monopoly over religious knowledge, thanks to new communication technology, literacy and printing. A religious tradition such as the Wahhabiyya was based on the interpretation of a closed circle of scholars, who trace their intellectual genealogy to the interpretations of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Today, Wahhabiyya itself is not produced and reproduced only by this closed circle; it is both asserted and challenged by people who are brought up on its teachings but who may belong to regions in Saudi Arabia outside that of its earlier advocates. *ʿUlama*, intellectuals and laymen are engaged in a fierce debate that not only touches upon religious matters but spills over to politics, history and society. Yet in the twenty-first century Wahhabiyya remains the main intellectual background against which both consent and confrontation are understood, assessed and measured.

Given the historical marginality of central Arabia where Wahhabiyya originated in the eighteenth century, the movement would most probably have shared the fate of other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivalist movements in the Muslim world:[4] it would have gone down in historical imagination as a nuisance to the Ottoman Empire in one of its most far-flung, insignificant territories. However, the Saudi regime hoped that the combination of *daʿwa* (call) and *dawla* (state), together with a changing regional Arab power context would shift the centre from Egypt to Saudi Arabia in the second half of the twentieth century.[5] This granted Wahhabiyya a hegemonic status unmatched by its early humble eighteenth-century intellectual credentials. The small size of the Saudi population and its limited development at the time militated against

Saudi Arabia replacing Egypt but it became more influential. Since the 1970s, oil wealth has allowed this religious tradition greater visibility – not only in Saudi Arabia, but also abroad.

Wahhabiyya's historical alliance with an absolutist monarchical state under the leadership of the dynastic Al-Saud family, which became extremely rich as a result of oil revenues, allowed the movement greater visibility while at the same time bestowing legitimacy on the political leadership. Oil wealth brought to Saudi Arabia mass education, printing, communication technology, and easy travel and movement: all facilitated the consolidation of Wahhabiyya. Hence Najdi Wahhabiyya became prematurely transnationalised under the patronage of the Saudi regime. The religious treatises and epistles of its founding fathers and its latter advocates travelled to all continents. Oil wealth allowed the Saudi regime to be recognised as a major international player, but Wahhabiyya granted it Islamic legitimacy among Muslims, not only in Saudi Arabia, but also worldwide. This legitimacy derived from the claim that the Saudi state is a monotheist state that upholds *shari'a* and Islamic values, in addition to being the protector of the most sacred Islamic shrines, although it only assumed that role in the late 1920s.

Wahhabi discourse generated consent among people who were not naturally predisposed to submit to the political authority that carried its banner. Wahhabiyya not only facilitated conquest but ensured consent after battle. From the very beginning, the Saudi–Wahhabi project was centred on accusing the people of Arabia of being polytheists whose religion needed to be purified and corrected. This required them to submit to the political will of the Al-Saud. Rebelling against the Saudis was no longer a political act but a sin, a violation of the principles of monotheism. Therefore, obeying rulers became a religious duty, part and parcel of worshipping God. This consenting Wahhabi religio-political discourse is today contested from within.

It is ironic that the forces that consolidated the consenting Wahhabi religio-political discourse are also responsible for its contestation. Under state control, Wahhabi discourse mutated and fragmented in an attempt to escape the straitjacket imposed by political power. Furthermore, communication technology, mass education and printing, while allowing the consolidation of this discourse, also led to confrontation with Wahhabiyya. The oil wealth that consolidated Wahhabiyya generated challenging voices. Schisms within Wahhabiyya characterise its religio-political discourse at the turn of the twenty-first century. While the world fears Wahhabiyya, Wahhabiyya itself fears the schisms within its own rank and file. While the Western world condemns Wahhabiyya, Wahhabiyya itself condemns its own people, especially when those people challenge it from within.

Wahhabiyya in the eyes of others

As a religious movement that was tied up with a political project, Wahhabiyyya was always a contested tradition within the Sunni world of Islam. *ʿUlama* in the immediate vicinity of the centre of Wahhabiyya,[6] together with those in Mecca and Madina,[7] devoted considerable energy to refuting its claims and interpretations. Some local Najdi *ʿulama* referred to it as 'the fifth *madhhab*', which Sunni *ʿulama* in Istanbul, Mecca, Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad[8] denounced in long treatises that circulated across the Ottoman Empire.[9] Wahhabiyya regarded Islam in these lands as corrupted, and even as closer to polytheism than to monotheism. It was only natural for those Muslims to defend their religious practices and tradition.

Non-Sunni Muslims – for example, Shiʿis, Ismailis, Zaydis and others – immediately felt the greater danger of Wahhabi teaching, which denounced their traditions as contemporary forms of innovation, and even blasphemy.[10] Non-Sunni *ʿulama* rejected what they regarded as bigoted and uncompromising radicalism associated with the call of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Intellectual battles between Wahhabi advocates and their critics have continued throughout the last 250 years. While on the surface these conflicts were grounded in religion, they nevertheless reflected political concerns. To understand the various responses to Wahhabiyya, one must situate the polemic in the context of competition and rivalry between various power centres and regional groups in the pre-modern world of Islam – mainly Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Arabia. The debates between Wahhabis and other Muslims continue until the present day.

For many decades, Western academic wisdom on Wahhabiyya accepted the old Philby–Rentz[11] thesis, which regarded the movement as an authentic revivalist Unitarian Muslim tradition. It was agreed that Wahhabiyya can be rather excessive and rigorous but in no way constitutes a threat to the West, as long as its advocates remained under the control of the Al-Saud. Wahhabiyya even proved to be capable of rendering great services to the Western project of defeating communism in the context of the Cold War and the liberation of Afghanistan. For decades, Western governments whose nationals worked and benefited from Saudi oil had faith in the ability of the Al-Saud to keep the so-called Wahhabis under control by ensuring minimal contact between the expatriate Western minority and Saudi society. For this purpose, the regime confined the Western expatriate elite to luxurious residential compounds while Saudis built high walls around their abodes to 'protect' themselves against the influx of 'infidels'. They also clung to a mixture of religious

and social tradition that favoured not only exclusion of the other but also its demonisation. This was neither a sign of an inherent xenophobia nor a national characteristic. It was a defensive reaction to the sudden inundation of 'aliens' with whom there were no common cultural or linguistic grounds. This was clearly reflected in the residential segregation that most Saudi cities experienced since the 1970s.

In the twentieth century, the expatriate Western residential compounds in major Saudi cities constituted a porous boundary, a physical and moral ghetto that a small minority of Saudi locals admired as a refuge from their own restrictive traditions. Such Saudis considered these compounds an escape from rigid morality, excessive prohibitions and surveillance. Other Saudis condemned this segregated physical space, the ghetto that came to symbolise foreign domination, moral bankruptcy, debauchery, corruption and sin. Most, however, tried to ignore the existence of what they regarded a necessary physical evil in the midst of a vast land of piety. Western residential compounds became oases in a Muslim conservative desert. As such they were and still are contested and dangerous 'liminal' spaces. Recently a very small minority endeavoured to eliminate these compounds physically, depicting them as colonial settlements (*mustawtanat*). It is not without significance that the residential expatriate compound was the prime target during the wave of violence that swept Saudi Arabia in 2003.

Common Western wisdom regarded Wahhabis as enigmatic puritans who were best left to their own devices. In the past many Western scholars celebrated the stabilising effect of Wahhabiyya at the level of politics but resented its excessive social conservatism. They would have preferred a socially lax Wahhabiyya that allowed them greater access to Saudi society or more freedoms in this society but guaranteed the stability of the political regime that is seen by many as a 'friend'. But social conservatism and political acquiescence are inseparable in a context such as Saudi Arabia. Nothing annoyed Westerners in Saudi Arabia more than the social aspects of Wahhabiyya – for example, its uncompromising views on sex segregation, the ban on alcohol and women driving, public beheadings and other 'idiosyncrasies', which they did not encounter elsewhere in the Muslim world. For years the West was happy to live with this social conservatism. Westerners recognised that there is often a little price to be paid for untaxed income, lavish financial contracts, weapon purchases, commissions, investment and an ongoing flow of oil at reasonable prices. For the Western world, Saudi Arabia has a double significance, as it remains both a prime producer of important energy and an avid consumer of Western goods.

After the events of 11 September 2001, Wahhabiyya and terrorism became connected in the minds of many Westerners. The attack on New

York and the Pentagon, in which fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudis, changed many things, one of which was Western perceptions of Wahhabiyya. Its Western critics suddenly became louder. The movement and its supporters were accused of generating terrorism, intolerance and hatred towards the West. Wahhabi discourse was suddenly held responsible for delaying the emancipation of Saudi women, abuse of human rights and discrimination against religious Muslim minorities – for example, Saudi Shi'is, Ismailis and Sufis, long-forgotten groups whose plight nobody had until then bothered to highlight in the West. Moreover, the movement was accused of providing the religious justification for denouncing Jews and Christians and promoting a culture of confrontation with the West in general. Suddenly Wahhabiyya moved from being the 'puritanical' Unitarian movement that had created a glorious empire, according to ARAMCO American historian George Rentz, to being the discourse of hatred, intolerance and terrorism.

The events of 11 September brought about new dimensions in the controversy surrounding Wahhabiyya. The West, through its academic community, media specialists and think-tank consultants, became an active agent in the debate about Wahhabiyya. While not all this debate is based on scholarly assessment aimed at understanding contemporary Saudi–Wahhabi religious discourse,[12] serious effort was put into identifying the origins of terrorism, with the result that the Wahhabis were directly accused of promoting religiously motivated and sanctioned violence.[13] Despite official Saudi attempts to dissociate their state religion from the atrocities of 11 September, such accusations against Wahhabiyya continued to flourish. These were given substance and credibility by Saudi political activists, both inside the country and abroad, some of whom had a vested interest in demonising Wahhabiyya.[14] The war on Iraq in 2003 contributed to the further demonisation of Wahhabiyya, especially after it transpired that Saudis were active participants in the *jihad* against Americans as part of the Iraqi resistance. Almost all observers assumed that those Saudis were acting in the name of Wahhabiyya, after being indoctrinated in its teachings in Saudi schools. In those commentators' minds, by the age of eighteen Saudi men are fully prepared to launch *jihad* against 'infidels'. Saudi males suddenly became suspect potential terrorists; there were calls for their eyes to be screened and kept on record, along with their fingerprints. If not Wahhabis, they are assumed to be Salafi fanatics. In the minds of many outsiders, Wahhabiyya and Salafiyya are synonymous, both standing for fanaticism and violence.

In response to the events of 11 September, the Saudi regime quickly encouraged academic studies in English, in addition to religious publications,[15] to restore its own image and that of the Wahhabiyya in the

Western English-speaking world.[16] Conferences sponsored by Saudi embassies were held in Washington, London and Paris to improve the standing of Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi tradition. The country opened the once almost impenetrable borders for Western researchers, graduate students, journalists and other visitors to scrutinise local society. Books in English appeared, presenting Wahhabiyya as a peaceful tradition that encourages dialogue with the other and respects women's rights and minorities. For example, a defense of Wahhabiyya, under the patronage of Saudi princes and research centres was written by Natana DeLong-Bas. In this book, the author contests negative images of Wahhabiyya and absolves it from any responsibility for twenty-first-century terrorism.[17] The Saudi regime insisted that it was a victim rather than an incubator of terrorism. Sponsored publications absolved Wahhabiyya from any responsibility for the atrocities of 11 September. These propaganda publications lay the blame on modern imported Islamist movements and ideologies such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and militant Jihadi movements.[18] While evaluating Western accusations is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to emphasise that, despite Saudi efforts, Wahhabiyya became in Western popular imagination a model of the uncompromising and radical religious interpretation that inspires violence. Many Muslims, including Saudis, share this view.

These negative accounts ignore a long history of Western–Saudi harmony. Scholars in the West overlook the fact that the Al-Saud were more than happy to seek military and financial help from so-called infidels as early as 1915, and even to pursue a policy that was subservient to imperial powers. Saudi–British relations prove that the Saudi leadership was capable of making compromises, or even turning a blind eye to intimate relations with a foreign power, defined in Wahhabi world view as a *kafir* state. Most Western accounts of official Wahhabiyya do not make distinctions between the movement's religious intolerance of other Muslims, on the one hand, and its acceptance of Western influence in Saudi Arabia, on the other. They fail to highlight that political acquiescence and subservience to political authority is an important characteristic of the domesticated tradition that grew in the shadow of Saudi kings.[19] When Ibn Saud clashed with the Ikhwan fighters in the 1920s, it was assumed that this resulted from their objections to his relations with 'infidel' Britain. In fact the conflict with the Ikhwan was more to do with the marginalisation of the tribal population and the failure of its leadership to secure a place in the new Saudi polity, after its military contribution to the Al-Saud project. The Ikhwan rebellion was not simply a rebellion against Ibn Saud's subservience to Britain. It was a last cry against Ibn Saud's Machiavillian policy that required eliminating those who brought him to power.

Wahhabi social conservatism is often held responsible for terrorism directed against the West. Wahhabiyya can be an idiom of resistance to foreign domination, but it can equally be a discourse that enforces obedience to political authority. Official Wahhabiyya has no problem with princes making alliances with 'infidels' – Christians, and even Jews. After all, the Prophet himself sought refuge for his followers with Christians in Abyssinia and Jews in Madina. Some Wahhabis believe that their contemporary Imam, the Saudi king, follows these glorious political examples of ancient political wisdom. After all, the Imam knows best what is in the people's interest and the public good. Wahhabis would rather not interfere as long as they continue to control the domestic social sphere, which must be kept uncontaminated by signs of blasphemy – for example, worshipping trees, visiting tombs and seeking knowledge from charlatans and sorcerers posing as holy men. Purifying Arabia from these signs of *shirk* (blasphemy) is more important than formulating a Muslim foreign policy. They are happy to leave the latter to the *wali al-amr*, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

Western accusations of Wahhabiyya remain controversial, as they fall short of explaining political development inside Saudi Arabia – let alone world terrorism, international relations and current affairs. The accusers assume that there is one Wahhabiyya, that can potentially breed violence and confrontation. The reality is that there are several brands within this Salafi movement.[20] At one end there is the extremely subservient and pragmatic tradition associated with official Wahhabiyya, described in the first chapter, while at the opposite end there is the revolutionary brand that is often associated with Jihadi groups. All groups are socially conservative, although the pragmatism of official Wahhabiya may lead to some flexibility even in social matters: it would not be a surprise if Wahhabi scholars issued a *fatwa* in support of women driving in the near future. The main difference between various Wahhabi–Salafi trends relates to their political discourse and strategies regarding resistance, relations with the ruler and non-Muslims and political activism.

Reducing world terrorism to the influence of Wahhabiyya is a misguided approach that attributes more influence, power and organisational potential to this movement than it is actually capable of generating. Moreover, such an oversimplification ignores aggressive American intervention in the Muslim world and the US misguided foreign policy. It also overlooks the fact that for decades the USA was the strongest supporter of many regimes seen by their subjects as oppressive and authoritarian. It goes without saying that fighting terrorism requires more than changing the Saudi religious education curriculum. Western accusations are founded on the assumption that there is a single Wahhabiyya–Salafiyya

that embodies a radical call for violence against the West; in fact, historically most Wahhabi violence was directed against other Muslims.

It is doubtful whether the masterminds of the attacks on New York, mainly Osama bin Laden and his aides, can be easily described as Wahhabis. While they would most probably accept being called Salafis, they may well feel that the label Wahhabi does not reflect the global message of al-Qa'ida. It is certain that Bin Laden does not subscribe to the official Wahhabi religio-political discourse described in the first chapter of this book. This discourse is but one strand within the spectrum of interpretations that constitute Salafiyya. Bin Laden may be selective when it comes to formulating a revolutionary worldview based on particular interpretations of religious texts. He seems to adopt a post-modern mix-and-match approach to theorise and justify violence against the West and its 'local Muslim agents'. This approach certainly incorporates the idiom of leftist revolutionary and nationalist struggles that swept the world in the twentieth century.[21] If one is to edit his speeches and cut out religious references, his rhetoric cannot be very clearly distinguished from early revolutionary slogans that drew on Western rather than Islamic intellectual traditions. Bin Laden does not call upon all workers of the world to break their chains: he calls upon all Muslims to do so. He does not reject Western capitalism: he calls for an alternative Islamic capitalist mode of production. But there is a strong mystical Islamic dimension to Bin Laden that is not well captured by statements likening him to early leftist, nationalist revolutionaries or contemporary anti-globalisation and environmentalist militants.[22]

This book is not about Wahhabiyya as a theological body of religious knowledge produced over 250 years, nor is it an exposition of the main teachings of the movement. I am not concerned here with Wahhabi debate on God and his names and adjectives, or with definitions of polytheism, or salvation by faith and deeds. I do not deal with Wahhabi debates on *naql* (tradition) and *ʿaql* (reason). I overlook Wahhabi theological positions on Sufism and other Sunni schools and sects in Islam. I only consider these aspects as long as they are relevant to the political debate that is continuing in Saudi Arabia.

The focus of the book

This book examines Wahhabiyya in the twenty-first century as a contested intellectual, religious and political field, which is currently appropriated by several actors. My aim is to capture the ongoing public debate. Like other Muslims, Saudis are engaged in debating religion, which touches upon politics. According to Dale Eickelman, 'the combination of

mass education and mass communications is transforming this world . . . the faithful . . . are examining and debating the fundamentals of Muslim belief and practice in ways that their less self-conscious predecessors would never have imagined'.[23] However, Muslims have always debated religion and politics. What is new is the speed of the debate and the circles in which it revolves. Its contemporary manifestations are characterised by the participation of a wider circle. Today, regardless of their level of education, all Muslims – including Saudis – can engage in this debate, both as recipients and participants. They do not even need to be literate: religious cassettes and television screens bridge the gap between the literates and the illiterates of the Muslim world. New media, especially satellite television, have contributed to the consolidation of an audio-visual rather than a literate culture. The religious cassette is more powerful than several printed books. The revolutionary religious Jihadi *nashid* (songs and recitations) is more inspiring than volumes of ancient theological texts.

There is a darker side to this ongoing debate. Since the 1990s, political violence has shattered the myth about Saudi Arabia as a secure country. In 2003, the situation deteriorated. Suicide attacks on residential compounds occupied mainly by non-Saudis, skirmishes amounting to battles between security forces and al-Qa'ida members, the assassination of public figures in remote towns and the unfolding of plots to assassinate members of the royal family all point to the escalation of the battle between the state and sections of society. More than at any other time, Saudi society is polarised over religious interpretation and political aspirations. Without ignoring the impact of rapid social and economic change, the polarisation is primarily a product of the widening gap between professed symbols and reality. The ongoing debate, together with increased violence, simply indicates that Saudi Arabia is undergoing a transformation rather than a reformation. The latter is a term deeply rooted in European history with no applicability in a context such as Saudi Arabia. Surveying the religious scene, one is struck by the absence of a Saudi Luther. This is not surprising. Despite regime attempts to circumvent and control religious interpretation, there has never been a pope in Saudi Arabia. Without a pope there will never be a Luther.

The televised repentance of the 'misguided' *'ulama*, especially Jihadi ideologues, invokes the image of repenting witches. Similarly, the *taraju'at* (those going back on previous opinions) find their way to the local and international press. This is a phenomenon in which individuals who are in the process of changing their convictions, renouncing violence or developing new worldviews pose in front of television cameras, playing the role of sages, and narrating their intellectual journey and its hazards. By the age of thirty, many such men have experimented with various religious

interpretations and acted in accordance with them. A number of individuals move from 'radicalism' to the so-called middle path (*wasatiyya*), or even to a new religiosity, searching for a humanist Islam.[24] Such individuals claim to have abandoned Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in favour of Locke and Voltaire. Those who move in this direction are celebrated in local and international media as people who have abandoned misguided thoughts in favour of true moderate Islam. Other Saudis condemn them as heretics who sin by promoting a rather unusual interpretation of Islam. Many Saudis move in the opposite direction. We only know about those when they blow themselves up or die in shoot-outs with security forces.

Official Saudi discourse highlights reasons for radicalism and terrorism, and celebrates the conversion of specific individuals to more moderate views. As this book will show, some 'conversions' and 'confessions' are expressed in less conventional ways, mainly in internet discussion boards and, obviously, violence. These confessions tend to be in the opposite direction, from moderate Islamism to radicalism, if we can invoke such problematic classifications with ease. Saudi discourse is characterised by shifting boundaries rather than clear-cut intellectual paradigms.

In capturing the contours of Saudi religio-political debate, this book tries to identify what is being debated (the main contested social, religious and political areas); who claims to have the authority and knowledge to contribute to the debate (state actors, *ʿulama*, intellectuals and laymen) and where the debate takes place (public forums, the press and the internet).

Given that religious discourse permeates all aspects of public debate, it is very difficult to draw the boundaries between the religious, the political and the social. Public debate revolves around key questions relating to the nature of the state and its relationship with religion. More and more Saudis are questioning whether their state is an Islamic state, something which had been taken for granted for most of the twentieth century – at least in public forums. Some are concerned with 'theorising' the nature of the rightful Islamic government and the nature of the *bayʿa* (the oath of allegiance) to the legitimate ruler, another question ignored by an earlier generation of *ʿulama* and intellectuals. Who selects the leader of the Muslim community? Is it a small circle of *ahl al-hall wa ʾl-ʿaqd* (lit. 'people who loose and tie': selected and appointed decision makers), or every adult male member of the community? Are women eligible to select the ruler and give *bayʿa*? Or is this a theoretical question in the absence of mechanisms allowing men to choose the ruler? These issues are no longer the territory of *al-nukhba*, a small circle of the educated, articulate and outspoken intelligentsia who engage in *taraf fikri* (intellectual luxuries),

but are now urgent matters attracting the attention of a wide circle of men and women. Furthermore, relations with the outside world, mainly the USA, and the Saudi role in the world are central in public debate.

The ongoing public debate in the twenty-first century is no longer the one that dominated the second half of the twentieth century. Previously Saudis discussed how to modernise while remaining faithful to the authentic Islamic tradition. Today, the debate moves on to more complex and focused questions relating to increasing political participation, social justice, the rights of women and minorities, freedom of speech, an independent judiciary and other urgent issues which many Saudis feel are neither properly addressed nor fully applied by the current regime. These concerns have emerged from the bottom up rather than as a result of royal patronage or outside pressure. Saudi society debated these matters before 11 September and before a royal decree established the *majlis al-hiwar al-watani* (National Dialogue Forum) in 2003. This confined and state-controlled space does not move beyond being a public-relations exercise envisaged to absorb public frustration and anger over the political paralysis of the top leadership since the 1990s and the less than satisfactory reforms of King Abdullah.

At the religious level, for the first time the debate centres on how Saudi religious discourse deals with the 'Muslim other', who today is not far away but is in the midst of the country. State-appointed religious scholars, independent and dissident *ʿulama* and ordinary Saudis are all engaged in a reflection on the status of other Muslims in their own country. A minority among them questions interpretations which demonised the other – for example, Sufis, Shiʿis, Ismailis and followers of other *madhahib* (Hanafis, Shafiʿis, Malikis). Some Saudis go as far as questioning the merit of the office of grand mufti (jurisconsult), considering it an invention, a *bidʿa* (innovation), circumscribing religious interpretation and creating *kahanut* (clergy). Others debate the benefits of the state-appointed Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice, *hayat al-amr biʾl–maʿruf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar*. They criticise its restriction to the guarding of public morality while ignoring corruption and deviation among the higher echelons of the political princely elite. Some argue that the meaning of *hisba* (accountability) in Islam must be wider than controlling the wearing of the *hijab* in the public sphere by women or the flirtation of *shabab* (youth). Yet a small minority of Saudis would prefer to abolish the institution altogether.

An integral part of public debate is the question of the status of women. A distinction is beginning to emerge between the *shariʿa* position on gender issues and what is referred to as *tarasubat wa tarakumat ijtimaʿiyya* (social norms). Some Saudis call for a clear distinction between what

Islam allows women to do and what social norms dictate. For the first time Saudis are making a public distinction between the religious field and social tradition. In short, today they no longer shy away from discussing important religious principles and interpretations, to the extent that some are openly reconsidering the heritage of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, whose message has held hegemonic status for almost 250 years.

This book addresses the question of who is entitled to lead the debate and formulate opinions about the above-mentioned political and religious issues. It identifies an emerging intellectual elite, *al-nukhba al-fikriyya*, consisting of *'ulama* and judges, intellectuals, professionals, dissidents, writers close to the centre of power and others who are outside the political patronage networks. While the book gives substantial space to those who articulate a vision embedded in speech, text and other media, considerable attention is paid to a novel field, that of the internet discussion boards, opposition media networks and the discourse of ordinary Saudis. Because of continuous state censorship, oppression of dissidents and the imprisonment and torture of those who offer alternative visions, radical public calls for the reformation of religion and politics increasingly take place behind the scenes and are partially dependent on people who write using pseudonyms. While the state builds and consolidates its own media empire, dissident voices are successful in establishing alternative media forums, thus challenging the official political and religious narrative. Similarly, print and electronic publications have proved to be effective means for the dissemination of alternative views and an entry into the debate, which hitherto may have seemed elitist and exclusive.

The book gives special attention to the internet, which has become the battleground of groups that are struggling to reinterpret religious concepts, challenge established religious scholars, undermine religious authority and thwart state politics. At the same time, internet discussion boards are used to consolidate and spread official religious interpretations. Although the Saudi regime succeeded in establishing tight censorship of this novel communication channel,[25] Saudis with sufficient financial resources purchase computer programs that allow them to avoid censorship. More recently, radio channels broadcasting from London (previously Islah Radio and now Debate Radio and Tajdid Radio) have become accessible media outlets, as they can be listened to on satellite television and the internet. The interactive style, together with the topics discussed – especially criticism of the government and the traditional religious establishment – make such channels popular among Saudis searching for outlets to express forbidden alternative opinions. The discussions captured in this book draw on these sources, in addition to lengthy interviews and correspondence with Saudis.

Today debating religion and politics is no longer the monopoly of a small circle of privileged individuals. Several groups are formulating the agenda, participating in the debate and struggling to control the outcome. These include the state, the traditional religious establishment, dissident *ʿulama*, Islamist intellectuals, liberal activists and ordinary Saudis. The picture is complicated further by external pressure and the exposure of Saudi Arabia to outside scrutiny after 11 September. In order to understand the debate described here, the role of the USA (administration, media and scholarly community) must be taken into account to assess the extent to which global pressure influences local religio-political debates and outcomes.

The chapters

It is important to avoid easy classifications of those who are engaged in the debate in a world dominated by multiple interpretations. Fluidity of discourse, shifting boundaries and the ease with which people switch from one position to another militate against clear-cut categories. Classifications such as moderate, traditional, secular, liberal, centrist, radical, Salafi and Sufi reflect the attempts of those who classify to fix sometimes illusory boundaries rather than the way Saudis identify themselves.[26] In their quest to define for policy makers 'who is friend and who is foe', analysts propose typologies often more accurately reflecting the power of word-processing programs than the reality of the diverse Muslim tradition in the twenty-first century. We can recall that Sufis, who are currently hailed as among the greatest pacifists of all times, can be extremely revolutionary, anti-Western and even radical. Those who are classified as traditional, preaching vigorous commitment to Islamic rituals, can easily inflame the imagination of young Muslims who are united by common faith and worship.

It must be said that after fourteen centuries of its existence, neither Muslim governments nor colonial powers have been able to control religious debate within Islam. Throughout Muslim history scholars and others had to live with religious diversity and a general inability to control religious interpretation. In fact, the more they tried to control religious interpretation, the more such interpretations proliferated. As a world religion with a sacred text that is constantly interpreted in specific contexts, Islam, its interpreters and their interpretations can never be successfully controlled or pointed in a particular direction.

In order to promote the kind of Islam desired by Western governments, the context in which the interpretation of texts takes place must be the right one. While texts can be easily censored, modified, altered, shortened

and expanded, their interpretations remain firmly grounded in specific contexts. In addition, while mosque preachers, religious teachers and instructors can be imprisoned, eliminated or rehabilitated and taught new interpretations, their new preaching will have limited impact if the right context is simply not there.

Unfortunately the Muslim world in general and Saudi Arabia in particular does not find itself at the moment in a context that favours the promotion and internalisation of the discourse that celebrates peace, tolerance and harmony, as desired by the West, repressive governments in the region and the majority of Muslims. In fact, both the West and such governments created contexts in which these desired interpretations are impossible to emerge. A combination of factors, agents and powerful media images combined to consolidate a social and political context in which uncompromising interpretations increasingly find resonance. In the twenty-first century, Saudis resent their political vulnerability against a background of economic prosperity, dependence on the West against a rhetoric of sovereignty and pride, political impotence against rhetoric that glorifies their historical role in spreading Islam and their inability to translate wealth into real power. There is tension between globalised deterritorialised religious identity, based on belief in common Islamic values and celebrated in the idiom of the unity of the Muslim *umma*, and underdeveloped nationalist sentiments. National identities are undermined by localised regional, tribal and sectarian belonging. In the modern world of Saudi Arabia, globalised and localised identities are articulated at the expense of national belonging.

Notwithstanding the fluidity of the religio-political debate and the ability of those who are engaged in it to cross boundaries and change positions, presenting the debate in a book imposes its own rules. Writing about this ongoing debate requires the author to organise the material in chapters, which immediately imposes a classification and a way of organising the data. I chose to present the data in six chapters, each capturing a glimpse of the main features and concerns of a specific trend. However, it must be kept in mind that each chapter refers to arguments and interpretations promoted by groups who escape easy classification. One of the main themes is to show that people can frequently switch allegiance and change direction. Another theme is to show that interpretations grounded in one particular trend (or chapter) can be used and interpreted to mean anything but what was initially intended. A religious scholar can easily situate himself in the discourse of official *'ulama*, then move to a Sahwi position, but later end up as a Jihadi ideologue. He can easily do that while invoking the same religious texts as the official religious establishment. The journey in the opposite direction is equally possible.

The first chapter deals with the religio-political discourse of those who may or may not be employed by the state but who all endorse interpretations that promote consent and obedience to rulers. Such scholars and laymen draw on the Wahhabi tradition and its early disciples. They are referred to as official *ʿulama* because they not only legitimise power but also condemn attempts to challenge this power. The chapter discusses the genealogy and geography of this discourse. It traces its development and describes its objectives, mainly the consolidation of consenting subjects, people who leave politics to those who know better. This chapter challenges the view that the Saudi state of today is an Islamic Wahhabi state. It argues that there is a clear distinction between the Islamised public social sphere and politics. Politics is disenchanted in Saudi Arabia. It is no longer anchored in Islam as claimed by the leadership

Against this disenchantment, some Saudis have struggled for the past three decades to re-enchant politics, the subject of chapter 2. The so-called Sahwis represent an attempt to contest the status quo, namely the disenchantment of the world of politics and power. Regardless of their party affiliation, Sahwis represented a plea to Islamise politics after the regime departed from what they regarded as Islamic principles. The story of Sahwa (*sahwa*: awakening) is well documented but its later development is not so well known. Chapter 2 captures the debate within Sahwa after 11 September when this so-called awakening came under pressure from the regime and other sections of Saudi society to reconsider its early positions.

Chapter 3 traces the transnationalisation of Saudi religio-political discourse as it travelled under regime sponsorship to places such as Afghanistan and London. I argue that this discourse prematurely moved from obvious localism to transnationalism with unintended consequences for the Saudi regime. In Afghanistan, Wahhabiyya freed itself from its status as parasitic discourse that had grown in the shadow of the sultan. Regardless of how strong or efficient the sponsors of transnational flows were, the outcome escaped their control. Sometimes it seemed that the more the Saudi regime spent on spreading its religious discourse, the more promoters and recipients of this discourse resisted Saudi hegemony and asserted their own autonomy. Some propagators of Saudi religious flows proved to be autonomous agents once they found themselves beyond the reach of Saudi authoritarianism. The transnationalised consenting Wahhabi tradition generated serious contestation of the Islamic credentials of the Saudi regime itself. In Afghanistan and London, competing with heavy Saudi spending on religious flows, there appeared the most revolutionary rhetoric that not only challenged the Saudi regime but also accused it of blasphemy.

Chapter 4 analyses Jihadi discourse as presented by dissident *ʿulama*, activists and laymen. I argue that far from being an imported Islamist ideology, Jihadism is a local tradition that resonates with cultural, religious and political contexts. It invokes shared meanings and symbols. *Jihad* is not only about archaic words and religious interpretations. Neither is it a quest for the 'Talibanisation' of Saudi Arabia, as claimed by Saudi princes addressing Western audiences. In the twenty-first century, Jihadism is a performance that captures the imagination of many Saudi men and women who are not necessarily poor, alienated and downtrodden. It invokes meanings which are at the heart of the Wahhabi tradition. Its discourse flourishes because there is a political and social context which makes it resonate with people.

Through the life of one Saudi, chapter 5 traces the personal journey of a young Jihadi man called Lewis and his navigation of a very difficult and complex religio-political field. An analysis of his words and autobiography allows us to see the world through his own eyes. It also allows us to comprehend why an educated Saudi invokes Islam to articulate a desire to change the world. Having spent years acquiring a Western education, Lewis returns to reassert his Arabian and Muslim identity. While he definitely has multiple identities, he celebrates only one.

The final chapter examines the Saudi quest for the unmediated word of God. The quest is a product of modernity rather than archaic and obscurantist inclinations. To worship God without mediators is an idiom that inspires many Saudis to challenge political hierarchies and religious monopolies. Furthermore, to worship God without mediators is the ultimate outcome of modernity that empowers man to seek direct relationship with the divine, a relationship that is not 'corrupted' or 'violated' by the intervention of another human. Mass education and literacy allow this to happen. This quest threatens to erode the pillars of authoritarian rule: history, theology and politics.

The book depends on a mixture of methodologies. I consulted classical works by the early generation of *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya* (Najdi religious scholars) from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to Abdulaziz Ibn Baz. I have supplemented classical texts with an analysis of public lectures, mosque sermons and media statements. To capture the growing debate, especially that which is still unacceptable in public, I consulted many internet websites and discussion boards. Finally, I have interviewed many Saudis; some I came to know very well, while others will remain virtual. I exchanged e-mails with strangers and even spoke to them on the phone without knowing their real identity. I initiated contacts with some, while a few contacted me directly. They knew me but I will probably never know their real names. They opened up and presented a rich tapestry of

arguments, evidence and analysis of their own. They were great conversationalists, open discussants and daring voices, once they found themselves outside the restrictions of official religion and politics. I will always remember their anonymous voices and aliases. As far as I was concerned, guessing the symbolic significance of their *noms de plume* proved to be one of the most challenging but intellectually rewarding experiences.

This book is written neither to glorify Wahhabiyya nor to condemn it. There are hundreds of books that seek to do both. My objective is to capture contemporary debate about religion and politics. I have an advantage as a result of my presence outside Saudi Arabia, which grants me the freedom to subject Wahhabiyya, its advocates and adversaries to serious scrutiny, drawing on interpretive and analytical tools – an impossible academic endeavour in Saudi Arabia itself. I examine Wahhabiyya as a religious discourse produced by people rather than as a sacred tradition. I have not come across an impartial sociological or anthropological study of religion and religious practice or a scholarly work on contemporary *ʿulama* or the royal family conducted by a Saudi researcher.[27] If such studies exist, they tend to glorify the *ʿulama*'s role without critical evaluation. There are several chronicles and biographies of famous *ʿulama* and *umara* (princes). But these are a different kind of work. Scholarly investigation of the *umara* and *ʿulama* remains taboo. To study religion and politics from a social scientific perspective, without demonstrating the *umara* and *ʿulama*'s contribution to Islam and Muslims, violates the taboo. To study both and conclude that they mystify the world, legitimise authoritarian rule, sanction despotism and produce both consenting and rebellious subjects amounts to blasphemy. To capture the ongoing Saudi debate that contests official religious discourse amounts to privileging the despised and dangerous other. I have violated the taboo with a clear conscience. As a result of this academic exercise, my faith is solid and is in fact stronger. I continue to retain one aspect of Wahhabiyya, namely worshipping God without mediators but I strongly reject its claim that obeying the Al-Saud rulers and Wahhabi *ʿulama* is part of obeying God and the Prophet.

Saudis inside the country debate Wahhabiyya. Those who go 'too far' are usually imprisoned and subjected to restrictions and harassment. Daring arguments are often veiled under pseudonyms and anonymous internet discussion boards. This book is an attempt to unveil the debate. The unveiling proved to me that it is easy to explain why people rebel but much harder to explain why they consent. This book is an attempt to address both.

1 Consenting subjects: official Wahhabi religio-political discourse

> O ye who believe Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer to God and His Messenger, if ye
>
> Do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination. Quran, Sura al-nisa, verse 59

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Wahhabi chronicles claimed that the message of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92) in Deriyyah aimed to revive religion by returning to the Quran, Sunna and the tradition of the pious ancestors. While the sheikh and his followers never accepted the label Wahhabis, they considered themselves to be *ahl al-sunna wa 'l-jama'a* (people of tradition and community), or *ahl al-tawhid* (*al-muwahhidun*: the people of monotheism). In contemporary scholarship, they represent one of the Salafi trends within Sunni Islam.[1] The return to the tradition of the pious ancestors was meant to remove religious innovations, and apply the *shari'a* at a time when the population of Arabia was believed to have degenerated into blasphemy, corrupt religious practices and laxity. This allegedly took place mainly under Ottoman rule,[2] whose religious traditions, particularly Sufism, incorporated interpretations and practices considered outside the realm of true Islam. The rhetoric of the return to the pious ancestors and the sacred text, in addition to rejecting *madhahib* (schools of jurisprudence), allows Wahhabiyya to be counted as a Salafi movement.

Wahhabiyya painted an image of Arabia as the land of blasphemy and savagery. The myth that Arabian society was blasphemous prior to the rise of Wahhabiyya is taken for granted by many Saudi and Western scholars without any serious attempt to revisit what has become a 'divine wisdom' initially propagated by the supporters of Wahhabiyya, and later on by outside commentators. In a recent assessment of the evolution of Wahhabiyya, the blasphemy of other Muslims is taken for granted as a historical fact without any serious attempt to question the validity and

accuracy of this assumption.[3] Like the Saudi royal family, Wahhabi descriptions of the past are sacrosanct.

Throughout the twentieth century, many – but not all – Saudis regarded the Salafi–Wahhabi movement as a solution to heterodoxy, religious laxity, saint veneration, immorality and superstition. Wahhabiyya claimed to safeguard the souls of its followers against the misguided Islam of others, such as other Sunnis, Shi'is, Sufis, Zaydis, Ismailis and grave-worshippers (known as *quburi*s).[4] It was also regarded as a shield against subsequent 'corrupting' Western influences, undesirable social behaviour and immoral and unacceptable alien ideas such as secularism, nationalism, communism and liberalism. Wahhabiyya promised liberation from heterodox religious worship and folk Islam, the Islam practised by either a *jahil* (ignorant), or *dhal* (one who has gone astray). So-called misguided Muslims who deviated in their creed and worship from the right path were seen as practising a corrupted religion, often dominated by *mush'awithun* (charlatans) parading as holy men, witches, sorcerers and mystics. Such 'corrupted' Islam is centred on excessive ritual and festivity, punctuated by tomb visiting, intercession and mediation. Saudis viewed the religious practices dominant among Sunnis in other Arab countries as impure and corrupted. Wahhabiyya condemned all these folk practices as innovations and privileged the literal interpretation of sacred texts, the Quran and the Sunna, and called for an unmediated relationship with the divine, required by *tawhid*, the oneness of God. In religious discourse, the *umma* consists of sinners who need to be reprimanded and brought back to the true path.

Wahhabi demonisation of Arabian society in both past and present stems from the movement's desire to control and gain legitimacy. Wahhabi legitimacy today rests on a myth that was perpetuated by generations of Wahhabi writers, historians, religious scholars and laymen, as well as royalty. The myth claims that Muslims in Arabia were and are blasphemous, and their salvation is entirely dependent on the message of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the political power that endorsed his message, the Al-Saud family. The Wahhabi narrative of the past undermines the seventh-century message of the Prophet Muhammad. If one is to believe this narrative, one must accept that the Prophet's message had virtually no lasting influence. The teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab were therefore needed to correct corruption and ignorance that had crept into the religion. If Wahhabiyya and the Al-Saud were accomplices in the salvation of Arabian society, then they must be obeyed, revered and sanctified. Saudi–Wahhabi efforts at mystifying the past have resulted in the disappearance of sources that might have challenged the myth about the alleged blasphemy in Arabia in the pre-Wahhabi era. Even

if tomb visiting, saint veneration or tree worship was practised in Arabian society, it cannot be taken for granted that all members of that society indulged in such practices. It is possible that they only existed among a minority of the population. However, such myths have continued to dominate the historiography of the movement, often written by its own *ʿulama*.[5] This demonisation of Arabian society continued in the twentieth century in order to justify the establishment of the modern Saudi state.[6]

The war against the so-called blasphemous religious practices that survived despite the sacred message of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century and a later wave of religious revivalism and purification in the eighteenth century by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was always in need of a political authority.[7] In Wahhabi discourse, an executive power is needed to protect faith from corruption, uphold the Salafi tradition and punish transgressors. Only a strong and pious state can practise the fundamental Islamic obligation of *amr bi ʾl-maʿruf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar* (the promotion of virtue and prohibition of vice).[8]

It is important, however, to emphasise that describing the Wahhabi movement as a puritan tradition does not necessarily imply austerity or asceticism. While the ecology of the area where Wahhabiyya originated was austere in the past, the advocates of the movement were partly driven by a desire to amass wealth and treasures from the conquered territories, to compensate for the poverty of their homeland. Wahhabi historians celebrated the collection of booty from the conquered territories with a strong sense of pleasure and satisfaction as they described the newly acquired treasures that were brought first to Deriyyah and later Riyadh. The conquests did not only mean the spread of monotheism, as claimed, but also the seizure of camels, horses, weapons and coins.[9]

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab considered it a characteristic of the people in the age of ignorance to 'worship God through prohibiting the permissible', implying that excessive austerity does not make one closer to the divine.[10] Oil wealth and consumerism enabled Wahhabi *ʿulama*, the ruling group and Saudi society in general to indulge in a great degree of material consumption and the fulfilment of all worldly desires, within the limits prescribed in the holy book and the tradition of the Prophet – at least in public. The *daʿwa* (call) was from the very beginning a project to create an Islamised personality, society and state, according to Wahhabi criteria. An Islamised personality is not necessarily one that abstains from worldly pleasures, as often mistakenly projected in some outside accounts of the movement. In fact, it indulges itself fully in all permissible pleasures, according to Islamic tradition in general, and the Wahhabi variant in particular. An Islamised personality also enjoys the gains that accrue to it as a result of God's *niʿma* (grace). In the past this grace had come from

conquering new territories and looting its population, whereas in modern times oil became the main source. Wahhabis may be seen as excessive in resorting to the principle of *sad al-thara'i'* ('blocking the means') – for example, when they continue to prohibit certain practices in order to prevent possible sins (for example the ban on women driving), yet they do not and cannot forbid pleasures that are divinely permitted.[11] However, a group of religious scholars is always needed to define and regulate the permissible, while the state ensures that the prohibited does not become permissible, at least in theory.

In the twentieth century a state was born, under the pretext of fighting religious innovations, to protect the realm and ensure its purity against the return of such innovations. With excessive coercion, Wahhabiyya was extremely successful in eradicating most but not all so-called religious innovations in the Arabian Peninsula. With the establishment of the modern Saudi state, Wahhabiyya became a hegemonic discourse supported, protected and promoted by political authority. However, although Wahhabi *'ulama* and preachers were convinced that the state reflected Wahhabi teachings, this was an illusion. Wahhabi scholars controlled nothing but religious praxis and the social sphere, while royalty and a group of technocrats with modern educations were in full control of politics, the economy, foreign relations and defence matters.[12] The state needed Wahhabi *'ulama* to control the social sphere in such a way as to ensure compliance. The appearance of an Islamised social sphere was mistakenly taken to represent an Islamic polity.

Under state control, there were in fact multiple interpretations within the hegemonic Wahhabi discourse. While the state strove to contain Wahhabi discourse through its institutionalisation, alternative interpretations and marginal but challenging Wahhabi voices continued to appear throughout the twentieth century. These voices articulated alternative visions, which occasionally resulted in violence, as the history of Salafi dissidence in the country demonstrated.[13] State control of Wahhabiyya was directly proportionate to the violence that erupted. The proliferation of state-financed and controlled religious institutions, ministries and hierarchies generated co-opted and independent scholars; the first enforced loyalty to the state while the second remained a potential threat. Through its substantial wealth, the state patronised circles of religious knowledge. The state created co-opted networks but some remained outside the circle of royal patronage. As relations between royalty and religious notables were personalised, there were bound to be certain individuals outside the circle.

Who has corrupted the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the chain of scholars known as *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya*, the *imams*

of the Najdi call? Who has remained faithful to these teachings? These are central questions that accompanied the institutionalisation of Wahhabiyya in the second half of the twentieth century and the search for answers continues in the twenty-first century. The question for Wahhabis was not the legitimacy of their previous claims about Arabian society and its alleged blasphemy, but about the degree to which contemporary royalty, Wahhabi *ʿulama* and laymen have remained faithful to the message of the founder. Because of censorship and heavy sanctions against dissident voices, both religious and political, violence accompanied the process of state subjugation of Wahhabiyya, which began to fragment into several strands. Today debating the movement does not take place among a small and limited group of *ʿulama*. A wide circle of people discuss controversial religious matters, thanks to mass education and media. Violence in the twenty-first century is yet another episode of alternative Wahhabi interpretations erupting, this time not only in Saudi Arabia, but also worldwide, especially among groups that claim ideological and organisational connections with the original Wahhabiyya.

Under Saudi control, Wahhabiyya became a religious discourse used by political authority against society and a weapon wielded by society against this authority. Its interpretations are neither representative of the Sunni tradition nor a culmination of consensus among the people known as *ahl al-sunna wa ʾl-jamaʿa*. It is, in fact, a hybrid tradition that matured under royal authority. While it draws on well-known Hanbali sources without becoming a monolithic tradition, Wahhabiyya is a product of the historical and political context of growing in the 'shadow of the Saudi sultan'. It is a religious discourse that evolved in response to the concerns of political authority. As such, it was subject to schisms, dissent, transformation and mutation.

In the twenty-first century official Wahhabiyya is a discourse of consent. It propagates religious interpretations that require subservience to political authority. This chapter traces the contours of Wahhabi religio-political discourse, especially that related to the mystification of the world for the purpose of consolidating the state and perpetuating obedience to rulers. To understand the Wahhabi contribution to state formation and its later perpetuation of a tradition of total subservience to power, the narrative in this chapter moves from the original sources (mainly the writings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab) to the contemporary invocations of the Wahhabi tradition.[14] It demonstrates how the establishment of the current Saudi state, together with the forces of modernity, contributed to two outcomes as far as Wahhabiyya is concerned. Both the state and the forces of modernity led both to the consolidation of a consenting Wahhabi discourse and the contestation of this discourse. Under the

banner of the contemporary Saudi state, Wahhabiyya developed this double discourse. It is important to begin by introducing the interpreters of Wahhabiyya.

Genealogies and geographies of people of knowledge

Like any religious discourse, Wahhabiyya is dependent on the so-called 'people of knowledge', who claim to articulate its message, uphold its tradition and guard its spirit. Wahhabiyya depended both on people of knowledge and on the protection of political power, without which it was at the risk of disintegrating and vanishing. As it lacked the power of persuasion in the early decades of the eighteenth century, it needed the sword. Yet this sword had to be Islamised to be effective.

From the eighteenth century Wahhabi discourse was developed and defended by those locally known as *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*, 'religious notables' who were closely associated with central Arabia, the geographical region known as Najd. To be more precise, the early advocates of Wahhabiyya were drawn from southern Najd, mainly the small towns, oases and villages to the south and south-west of Riyadh.[15] Their opponents in Najd referred to Wahhabiyya as the 'new religion of al-Aridh', a reference to the region where it originated. Yet in the minds of outsiders, Najd and Wahhabiyya are mistakenly considered inseparable. Similarly, Wahhabiyya and the sedentary Banu Tamim, the tribe to which the Al-Shaykh family of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and substantial sections of the sedentary population of Arabia belonged, are closely interrelated in the imagination and historiography of the region.[16] From Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Al-Shaykh to present Saudi mufti Abdulaziz Al-Shaykh, one can count at least fifteen al-Shaykh scholars who occupied very important posts in the religious hierarchy. In 2005 both the mufti and the minister of religious affairs belonged to Al-Shaykh. The highest religious authority had always been occupied by an Al-Shaykh, although *mufti* Abdulaziz ibn Baz (1912–99) was an exception. However, although the so-called *aima* (religious scholars) belonging to the Al-Shaykh family were prominent and had a near monopoly on high religious posts, other Najdi families were among those who preserved and developed the Wahhabi tradition.[17]

While the socio-economic background of the *aima* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well documented,[18] we need merely say here that the genealogy of the Wahhabi religious tradition was historically anchored in the sedentary families of southern Najd, with very limited infiltration from families from other provinces in the Arabian Peninsula, other tribal groups or the Muslim world in general. The so-called *ʿulama*

of Najd who were counted as part of *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya* included members from families such as al-Bassam, al-Bulayhid, al-Angari, al-Sayf, al-Mutawa, al-Atiq, al-Fawzan and others.[19] Members of these families and their descendants became the state religious notables. Today scholars belonging to these families represent a contemporary *noblesse d'état* who delivered to the state vast numbers of docile subjects. They were the intellectual instruments of political domination par excellence.[20] Wahhabiyya remained a regional religious tradition kept alive by the sedentary southern Najdi religious families for over two hundred years.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and specifically in the later decades, advocates of Wahhabi–Salafi discourse began to be drawn from a wider circle of people belonging to families and regions recently converted to Wahhabiyya as a result of their incorporation in the Saudi realm in 1932. Bligh argues that since the 1940, there has been a decline in the number of *ʿulama* belonging to Al-Shaykh because they were less polygamous than royalty, and several members of the family chose non-religious careers.[21] It is also possible that the Al-Saud wanted to widen the circle of religious experts to weaken the monopoly of Al-Shaykh over religious discourse. The state itself opened the *noblesse d'état* to a wide circle as it established its hegemony over newly conquered territories that needed to internalise the consenting discourse. Widening the circle was also a strategy to counter reliance on one kinship solidarity group. Furthermore, it is perhaps easier to dominate religious scholars who belong to less prominent families than those belonging to well-established religious lineages. This 'opening up' of the religious circle both geographically and genealogically was also a product of Wahhabi proselytising beyond the limited geography of southern Najd, Qasim and its environs.

State control over religious discourse manifested itself clearly after the termination of the Ikhwan rebellion in 1927 when Wahhabiyya was institutionalised and Ibn Saud declared that only a number of named religious scholars were entitled to give religious opinion and issue *fatwa*s. This circle became the nucleus of the *noblesse d'état*. Scholars who were not approved by the Riyadh *ʿulama* were not allowed to preach or interpret texts. The approved were Abdullah ibn Abd al-Latif Al-Shaykh, Saad ibn Atiq, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif al-Shaykh, Abdullah al-Angari, Abdullah ibn Sulaym, and Abdulrahman ibn Salim, a coterie that included the most loyal *ʿulama*.[22] This royal decision, supported by other loyal Riyadh-based *ʿulama*, together with later bureaucratisation and further institutionalisation, set the scene not only for the emergence of schisms within Wahhabiyya but also for its later contestation in the twentieth century.

With the establishment of the modern state in 1932, both the genealogies and geographies of religion were stretched beyond Najd and its

religious families. The Najdi *imams*, although initially a very small group, travelled from Riyadh to preach and apply the *shari'a* in distant lands – for example, in the Hijaz, Asir, and the Northern and Eastern provinces. A Salafi tradition existed in the Hijaz before the new conquest; it was not, however, the only religious tradition or even the dominant one, but coexisted with other Islamic schools and Sufi *turuq* (sg. *tariqa*). With the expansion of the modern state, the situation changed. Wahhabi interpretations dominated the religious field while other discourses and practices went underground.

While some scholars left the capital, other people came to Riyadh to seek religious knowledge directly from the *aima*, mainly the al-Shaykh scholars and their intimate circle of disciples. Famous *aima* served as important transmitters of religious knowledge, while their intellectual genealogies anchored their discourse in the tradition of the early scholars. Migration to and emigration from Riyadh were two parallel movements that widened the circle of recruits and ensured the traditional transmission of religious knowledge to a new generation at a time when there were no formal religious educational institutions in the country. Both masters and disciples[23] continued to be drawn mainly from the sedentary communities of the Arabian Peninsula. In the pre-oil period, their livelihood depended on a combination of agriculture, trade and very simple cottage industries. In the new state after 1932, traditional religious education guaranteed social mobility both from the geographical periphery and from the margins of society to the centre of religious learning and political power. Religious education offered the prospect of employment as preacher, judge and mosque *imam* in territories that had been recently incorporated into the realm and had to be initiated into the new religio-political tradition. Migration to Riyadh in pursuit of religious knowledge was also a move to prosperity from the poverty-stricken peripheral regions in the pre-oil period. Riyadh became the religious centre par excellence, the seat of the *noblesse d'état*, at the expense of the historically and religiously more important centres, Mecca and Madina. The establishment of the Saudi state marginalised these individual centres of religious learning, as its conquests were religious as well as military and territorial. The state sent its own people of knowledge, emissaries whose aim was to 'Saudise' and 'Wahhabise' newly conquered territories, thus ensuring their political subjugation and loyalty. New disciples turned up in Riyadh to be closer not only to the pillars of religious knowledge but also to political power. Religious indoctrination was a solid foundation for political subservience. It promised domesticated and acquiescent subjects.

The biographies of two important *aima* members of the religious *noblesse d'état*, who played a central role in the consolidation of Wahhabi

discourse in the twentieth century are revealing, as they reflect the changing geographies and genealogies of religion under the auspices of the modern state. The first is the biography of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Latif Al-Shaykh (1311–86/1890–1969), a descendant of the Al-Shaykh family, the religious nobility of the Najdi mission, who for a long time maintained a historical monopoly over the highest religious posts in the kingdom in return for an undisputed loyalty to the Al-Saud.[24] The second biography is that of Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Baz, who was outside that religious nobility but managed to become the highest religious authority as mufti until his death in 1999. Both sheikhs were Najdis, however: the first represented the monopoly of the closed circle of al-Shaykh, whereas the second embodied the opening up of the closed circle, which began to include in its rank and file people drawn from other less prominent families both inside and outside southern Najd.

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim served the Saudi state between 1932 and 1969, occupying about eighteen posts, assisted by brothers, sons and cousins. He was born in Riyadh in 1311 (1890). He learnt the Quran at the age of ten and became blind at the age of sixteen. His father, Sheikh Ibrahim, was the *qadi* of Riyadh. In addition to his father and uncles, his mentors were the famous *'ulama* of Riyadh, for example Saad ibn Atiq, Hamad ibn Faris, and Abdullah ibn Rashid.[25] He is described as having grown up in a wealthy household, which freed him from poverty. In addition, he grew up in Riyadh, described as 'the capital where students take refuge to study and work. They lived in an atmosphere that encourages competition for religious excellence.'[26] According to his biographers, he benefited from the fact that 'Najdi ulama enjoyed a distinguished status among both the authority and the people'.[27] For thirty years (1340–70AH) 'he listened to readers of the Quran with attention, until God opened the chests of the earth [a reference to oil], then Riyadh became a centre attracting *ulama* from different parts of the world'.[28]

Muhammad ibn Ibrahim is described as someone who

> witnessed the changes that swept Saudi Arabia, especially the rejection of all things old, people began to see pious men as backward. People abandoned religious knowledge (*'ulum shari'yya*) in favour of foreign languages, and natural sciences. The Sheikh warned against this sudden change, which was a direct reflection of modernisation arriving in Saudi Arabia. He advised *wulat al-amr* to open *al-ma'ahid al-'ilmiyya* [colleges that teach Arabic and *shari'a*]. The *'ulama* lured students with gifts and rewards. The Sheikh was responsible for the colleges.[29]

Muhammad ibn Ibrahim was behind establishing the Islamic University in Madina, whose purpose was to train students from all over the Muslim world and enhance the call to religion. In its early days, the university recruited 75 per cent of its students from the Muslim world and

25 per cent from Saudi Arabia. He was also responsible for the education of girls through his appointed aide, Nasir al-Rashid. His biographer lists sixty-seven famous scholars and judges who trained with him, among them Abdulaziz ibn Baz, Abdullah ibn Humaid, Salih al-Shaykh, Abdullah ibn Jibrin, Abdullah al-Masari, Hamad ibn Jasir and Salih al-Lohaydan, the core of the *noblesse d'état* that dominated the Saudi religious field in the second half of the twentieth century.[30]

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim's famous epistle, *Risalat tahkim al-qawanin*, in which he denounced secular labour legislation, is held in esteem among his followers and contemporary Salafis, especially those who lament the *'ulama*'s loss of freedom and independence.[31] In this epistle, the sheikh announced that it is a great blasphemy to introduce new legislation because 'the *shari'a* is the source of all legislation'.[32] Today he is regarded by several Jihadi ideologues as one of the *'ulama* who was most faithful to the original message of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This perhaps prompted contemporary Jihadi Sheikh Nasir al-Fahad to write a biography of this *'alim*. According to this biography, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim married six times, and at the time of his death he had three wives. His responsibilities included leading prayers, preaching and teaching in his mosque, as well as more advanced posts such as chief of justice, mufti, head of the founding council of Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami and director of the Islamic University. As a religious authority, his legacy survived in his disciples, among them Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Baz. His lessons also attracted royalty. It was reported that Prince Muhammad ibn Abdulaziz ibn Saud (a son of Ibn Saud) and Prince Musaid ibn Abdurahman ibn Saud (brother of Ibn Saud) were regular visitors to his study circle. Scholars from the Muslim world were known to have visited him and benefited from his knowledge, for example Sheikhs Ahmad Shakir, Muhammad Hamid al-Faqi, and Muhammad al-Shanqiti.[33]

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim's study circle attracted those who sought religious knowledge and training. In the age prior to mass education, it was the centre par excellence. He was a descendant of the famous Al-Shaykh family, which made him the model of the revered Wahhabi *'alim*. Genealogy guaranteed Muhammad ibn Ibrahim a special status in the eyes of his disciples. He lived through that transitional period in which the monopoly of his family began to be broken down as a result of the transformation of the circle of knowledge. It was a twilight zone, when Saudi Arabia was beginning to gradually shed its past without being yet firmly anchored in the new age. New disciples outside the traditional religious families began to be incorporated into the circle of religious scholars. After Ibn Ibrahim's death, King Faysal announced the establishment

of a seventeen-member Council of Senior Ulama in 1971. This was the beginning of the institutionalisation of Wahhabiyya, although its subjugation to political authority dates back to the 1920s.[34]

One disciple of the sheikh was the famous Abdulaziz ibn Baz (1912–99). Ibn Baz succeeded Muhammad ibn Ibrahim as one of the most influential non-Al-Shaykh Wahhabi scholars since the 1970s. The biography of Sheikh Ibn Baz demonstrates the expansion of the circle of *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya* beyond the well-known al-Shaykh. According to his biography, Ibn Baz's family originally came from Madina to Deriyyah. Later the family moved to Hawtat Bani Tamim. He grew up in Riyadh and never left it except for the pilgrimage. He belonged to a family whose members practised trade and agriculture and which produced several religious scholars.[35] Like his mentor, Sheikh Ibn Baz became blind later in life. Nevertheless he has memorised the Quran at an early age, helped by the Riyadh *ʿulama* and readers. He occupied the post of judge in several towns before he returned to Riyadh and became member of the Council of Senior Ulama and later the mufti of Saudi Arabia in 1993, a post that had remained vacant after the death of Ibn Ibrahim in 1969.

It is at the hands of sheikhs such as Ibn Baz, together with sheikhs Muhammad al-Uthaymin, Abd al-Muhsin al-Obaykan, Salih al-Fawzan, the current mufti Abdulaziz Al-Shaykh and many others that the Wahhabi tradition underwent a transformation beyond genealogy and geography. Under their guidance Wahhabiyya ceased to be a religious revivalist Salafi movement and became an apologetic institutionalised religious discourse intimately tied to political authority. Ibn Baz and other members of the Council of Senior Ulama provided the intellectual input, namely the religious discourse which confirmed the servitude of religion to the state. Ibn Baz's inability to engage with the politics of the modern world and the superficiality of his religious opinions and interpretations contributed to the trivialisation of the Wahhabi message. Ibn Baz, however, is perhaps more famous for several controversial opinions, one of which was the *fatwa* justifying the invitation of foreign troops to Saudi Arabia during the 1990–1 Gulf War and his 1993 *fatwa* legitimising peace with Israel.[36] These religious opinions confirmed official Wahhabiyya in its role as a state religion and the official people of knowledge as subservient 'clergy'.

In order to survive as traditional religious notables in an age where the state began to be dominated by technocrats who were mainly educated abroad, the official Wahhabi *ʿulama*, under the religious leadership of Ibn Baz, ceased to be independent mediators between government and governed; they confined themselves to being guardians of public morality.

This amounted to enforcing the appearance of a highly Islamised public sphere, represented by the number of mosques in cities, minarets calling for prayers, predominance of religious education, segregation of the sexes, government spending on proselytising inside the country and abroad, and other related matters of appearance. Official Wahhabi *ʿulama* abandoned their role as loosely organised religious intellectuals who guard the sacred tradition, interpret it to the public and mediate between state and society. This mediating role was what Saudis expected from them. With state co-optation they developed into a class in its own right and with its own interests. The majority of them confirmed political decisions by providing a religious seal of approval for policy matters.[37] Official *ʿulama* sanctioned authoritarian rule and anchored it in religious interpretations.

Official Wahhabi *ʿulama* turned to defensive conservatism as they encountered the drastic changes that swept the country in the second half of the twentieth century. They continued to discipline society, in some instances a practice amounting to coercion, while state politics – mainly foreign relations, defence and the economy – remained beyond their reach and religious rulings. Although the Council of Senior Ulama was meant to provide general guidance on all aspects of policy and decisions taken by the state, it became a legitimisation umbrella. In order to remain in control of the only space left for them, the social public sphere, official *ʿulama* glorified the state that guaranteed them such monopoly. They promised the state acquiescent and subservient subjects, despite a strong tradition calling for subservience only to God, expressed clearly in *tawhid*, as explained in the undisputed message of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

Throughout the twentieth century, senior *ʿulama* belonged to the al-Shaykh family and other well-known Najdi groups. As a commoner of a humble origin, Sheikh Ibn Baz was an exception. Other non-Najdi Saudi *ʿulama* entered the intellectual field together with other Arab and Muslim interpreters of the tradition. A recent survey of *duʿat* (preachers) in Riyadh lists sixty-nine sheikhs from various regions and tribal groups. Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Abdullah al-Shaykh occupies the first position on the list, followed by sheikhs belonging to known Najdi religious families (for example al-Bassam, al-Barak, al-Awdah, al-Lohaydan, al-Obaykan, al-Fawzan, al-Zamil) together with others who are newly recruited disciples (al-Ghamdi, al-Qahtani, al-Asmari, al-Yami, al-Zahrani). The new disciples belong to tribes in the west and south-west of the country, historically outside Saudi–Wahhabi domination. The list is meant to identify those sheikhs who are considered as authorities in Wahhabi religious discourse. Listing them in a Wahhabi website automatically grants

them *tazkiyya* (an approval certificate). Visitors to the web page are encouraged to invite these *aima* to give lectures in mosques, consult them and attend their lectures in centres where they normally preach.[38]

Today, it is slightly inaccurate to claim that Wahhabiyya represents Najdi discourse, because those who participate in its articulation are no longer exclusively drawn from this region. As mentioned before, from the very beginning Wahhabiyya was the religious discourse of the area south and south west of Riyadh rather than Najd as a whole. However, despite the hybridity of the scholars who are intellectually loyal to the Wahhabiyya today and their geographical diversity, the tradition retained some important core characteristics, reflecting its original message and homeland.

Consolidating the state: mystification of the world

Twentieth-century official Wahhabi scholars used three mechanisms to consolidate the political realm. *Hijra* (migration), *takfir* (excommunication) and *jihad* (struggle in the way of God) are religious concepts that were conducive to domesticating the population and ensuring total control over the public sphere. It is ironic that these old concepts that consolidated the state are currently used to denounce it and even destroy it.

Hijra

Hijra is a boundary-drawing mechanism that requires an individual to migrate to the realm of the pious state, established by Wahhabi efforts: the Saudi state.[39] The tradition was invoked in the eighteenth century to distinguish between the realm created in central Arabia and other provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, in the nineteenth century the land that fell into the hands of the invading Egyptian troops who landed on the shores of the Arabian Peninsula was regarded as an unsuitable abode for true Muslims, who were therefore required to emigrate to the land where authentic Islam still prevailed.[40] Finally, in the twentieth century, the modern Saudi state was founded as a result of invoking the tradition of *hijra*, which required true Muslims to leave not only their traditional land but also way of life in order to migrate to the land of Islam, the Saudi–Wahhabi realm.[41] Abode in this land of Islam became compulsory, while travelling to the land of non-Muslims – a wide category that included not only Christians and Jews but also other Muslims – is forbidden. The fact that other Muslims were known to be part of *ahl al-qibla* (people who face Mecca for prayer) did not suffice to make their territory permissible as an abode for true Muslims. This distinction was based not

just on a physical migration but also on a moral one, that involved abandoning the realms of blasphemy, religious innovation and, ultimately, misguidance. The migration includes prohibitions and restrictions on travelling to such blasphemous areas in times of peace. This application of the concept of migration was closely associated with the *ʿulama* of Riyadh and its environs, who were most radical in their distinction between the land of Muslims and that of non-Muslims. In pre-oil Arabia such areas had no commercial interest. In other towns in central Arabia – for example, Unayzah and Hayil – where there were more developed commercial interests with the outside world, scholars were more lenient in applying the prohibition on travel to the land of infidels. The commercial interests of these two towns required such a moderate theological position.[42]

With the growing number of Saudi students sent on government scholarships to study in the land of blasphemy, the West, Ibn Baz was asked for a religious opinion regarding the permissibility of such behaviour. The following dialogue is recorded in his famous collection of *fatwa*s:

Q: In recent years young men travel to the land of blasphemy to study, do you think they need a special Committee to instruct them in good behaviour?

IBN BAZ: No doubt travelling to the land of blasphemy is a very dangerous matter. Its negative consequences are enormous. I have issued opinions warning against this danger. If there is no way of avoiding this travel, it is better to send old men who have in-depth knowledge of their religion. Also it is important to send with them pious people to watch them abroad.[43]

Ibn Baz saw great danger in sending the youth of the country to study in the West. This also applied to those traders and entrepreneurs who sought to establish commercial networks in distant non-Muslim lands. He ruled that to avoid a great danger, the process must be under the control of those who know religion.

But what is the ruling regarding inviting infidels and blasphemous people into the abode of Muslims? What is Ibn Baz's opinion regarding the millions of foreign workers who have been a constant feature of Saudi Arabia since the discovery of oil in the 1930s? These questions became urgent as Saudi Arabia hosted more than 6 million foreign workers by the end of the twentieth century and over 8 million foreigners in 2004. Ibn Baz gave his opinion:

Q: What is your opinion regarding institutions that import *kafir* labourers?

IBN BAZ: It is prohibited to import *kafir* labourers to the Arabian Peninsula because the Prophet advised to 'Remove the infidels from the Arabian Peninsula'. He also said that no two religions should coexist in this land . . . We drew the attention of *wulat al-amr* [rulers] to this important matter in various media programmes and newspaper articles. The infidels are not meant to

> make the Arabian Peninsula their place of residence. Also it is prohibited to give them nationality. They should not be allowed to practice the rituals of their religion. It is also prohibited to import them as labourers. Muslim labourers should be used instead. *Wali al-amr* can ask infidels to work here only in those situations where a Muslim cannot be found to do the job. After they perform this function, they should be deported to their country. This follows the tradition of the Prophet who allowed Jews to stay in Kheybar because of a need but Caliph Omar deported them when there was no need for them.[44]

As demonstrated by this opinion, Ibn Baz invokes two Prophetic traditions, one related to the obligation to remove infidels from the Arabian Peninsula, and the second to the fact that no two religions should coexist in this territory. A literalist interpretation of these Hadiths predisposes Ibn Baz to rule out reliance on infidels for labour. He, however, goes further than this. A Muslim should not initiate the act of greeting infidels during social and informal encounters,[45] but according to Ibn Baz, withholding greetings is not enough; he goes as far as ordering Muslims to nourish *bagdha'* (hatred) rather than *mawada* (affection) in their hearts for infidels.

Ibn Baz allowed the ruler some freedom in applying the Prophetic tradition. If special skills are required that only infidels possess, the ruler is allowed to import them for a short time, after which he is obliged to expel them. Ibn Baz's uncompromising view on economic and personal relations with infidels is at odds with his extremely flexible position regarding calling upon infidels for military assistance against fellow Muslims. His famous *fatwa* justifying inviting American troops to Saudi Arabia to liberate Kuwait from the army of Saddam – an infidel in his opinion – is a clear case of political pragmatism. Again, Ibn Baz demonstrated with clarity the position of official Wahhabiyya, which is radical in its judgement of social matters but extremely accommodating of political decisions made on the basis of expediency and necessity.[46]

To preserve the Saudi state, Wahhabi *'ulama* stretched the limits of Salafi theology; self-preservation, rather than the literal interpretation of scripture, was the ultimate criterion. Official *'ulama* confirmed political decisions, yet in social matters they expressed an uncompromising and coercive role, perhaps a substitute for loss of authority over rulers. Violence in Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century is the outcome of contradictions in religious discourse. While an ordinary Muslim is not meant to greet infidels in the streets, host them in his country as labourers except if they are invited by the ruler and never travel to their lands unless under supervision, he is allowed to fight behind their army generals in the battlefield. Official Wahhabi scholars retained the social aspect of *al-bara'* (dissociation from infidels), which relates to personal relations between Muslims and non-Muslims represented in nourishing hatred

and rejecting friendship, but they endorsed and even legitimised political *wala'* (subservience) to so-called infidels, exemplified by their total silence over Saudi foreign policy, foreign military bases in the country and other manifestations of Saudi alliances with the West. Again, Wahhabi discourse embodied contradictions that freed the political sphere from their jurisdiction while maintaining their control of the social.

The above-mentioned Prophetic traditions have become famous slogans adopted by Saudi Jihadis in their struggle against so-called infidels. After 11 September, and the outbreak of violence inside the country, this Hadith tradition underwent a reinterpretation. As Jihadis waged war under the banner of removing infidels from the Arabian Peninsula, in 2004 Sheikh al-Obaykan offered an interpretation that accommodates infidels rather than denounces them. He offers five clarifications. First, the land specified in Hadith refers only to the two holy mosques (Mecca and Madina). Second, the verb 'remove' applies to infidels who have permanent places of worship – for example, churches. Third, the Hadith addresses rulers rather than people, Fourth, infidels should be removed but their honour and wealth should be protected while removing them. And fifth, their removal is related to *maslaha* (interest). Al-Obaykan's interpretation implies that infidels in Saudi Arabia are *mu'ahadin*, enjoying a contractual relationship guaranteed by the ruler and the subjects that makes the shedding of their blood forbidden. This is one of the reinterpretations that official Wahhabi scholars are currently engaged in formulating in response to outside pressure and local Jihadi violence.[47]

Takfir

The second mechanism deployed in consolidating and expanding the political realm was excommunication. The practice of *takfir* against those whose Islam does not correspond to that defined by the state *'ulama* not only controlled social and religious 'deviance', as defined by Wahhabi interpretation, but also expanded the political realm under the pretext of correcting the blasphemy of others.

While there is extensive debate and documentation of Muslim opinions regarding the status of non-Muslims and near consensus over the terminology used to refer to them, depending on whether they are people of the book or others,[48] the labelling of other Muslims as *kafir* has always been problematic in Islamic history. Excommunication of other Muslims is a practice that draws the boundaries in between Muslims rather than dividing Muslims from non-Muslims. In practice it amounts to symbolic violence against the 'enemy within' by drawing on religious discourse and evidence, usually by an expert – a judge or religious scholar – in order to

remove an insider from the community of the faithful. Historians of the Islamic tradition emphasise that *takfir* was common in the small study circles of religious scholars, especially in the medieval period. They agree that it remained confined to a limited circle of scholars who accused each other of blasphemy and heresy.[49] This practice became problematic, threatening internal dissent and precipitating chaos and discord. The historical case of the Kharijites, who excommunicated both the Caliph Ali and governor Muawiya, thus precipitating political chaos and dissent, is viewed with fear and abhorrence by Muslims up to the present day.[50] It is also argued that when 'mobs', a reference to people with little or no knowledge grounded in serious study of the Islamic tradition and jurisprudence, participated in the definition and labelling of others as *kafir*, disaster was bound to happen. Moreover, the intervention of political authority – for example, the ruler and his manipulation of excommunication for purely dynastic purposes such as the elimination of competitors and rebels – was bound to endow this practice with new and dangerous dimensions. Many early religious scholars warned against such intervention and foresaw its potential detrimental consequences. Some scholars felt uncomfortable with both mass excommunication (*takfir al-ʿumum*) – for example, when whole communities of Muslims are labelled *kafir* – and specific excommunication (*takfir al-muʿayan*) – that is, labelling one individual as *kafir*. Others considered failure to identify a *kafir* as an act of *kufr* (blasphemy), thus making it incumbent on people of knowledge to identify a *kafir*. This latter position tends to be dominant in Wahhabi teachings.

In extreme cases the act of removing the *kafir* from the realm of the community is not only symbolic but real – for example, a death sentence after being given the opportunity to repent. While excommunication remains the prerogative of a small circle of religious experts and judges, the punishment of the person accused of *kufr* is usually the responsibility of political authority. The ruler is responsible for *iqamat al-hadd* (punishment). Excommunication can eventually lead to action against a person labelled a *kafir*, whose blood can be shed, wealth confiscated and marriage annulled. In general, excommunication removes the individual from the realm of the Muslim community.

Excommunicating Muslims as groups was a mechanism for state expansion in the Wahhabi tradition. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab declared, 'I excommunicate the one who knows the religion of the Prophet, and then he insults the religion, and forbids people to follow it, and becomes an enemy of those who know religion. This is the one that I excommunicate.'[51] Ibn Abd al-Wahhab refutes the accusation that he was excessive in excommunicating whole communities. In response to a question about excommunication and violence, he explains that those who do not declare faith

and perform the remaining four pillars of Islam (Prayer, fast, alms, and pilgrimage) are *kafir*s. He specifies four categories of *kafir*. First is one who knows *tawhid* but does not act according to its principle. This is a *kafir* whom we fight as a result of his blasphemy (*'nuqatiluhu bi kufrihi'*). Second is one who knows *tawhid* but insults religion and prefers polytheists to monotheists. Third is one who knows, loves, and follows *tawhid*, but hates those who accept it. Fourth is one who knows *tawhid* but whose own people (for example, family or local community) are polytheists; he supports them against monotheists because he is fond of them and cannot leave them.[52]

In the Wahhabi tradition, *nawaqidh al-Islam* (factors that remove a person from the realm of Islam) are polytheism; association with God; failing to excommunicate polytheists; preferring another authority to that of Islam; hating part of the Prophet's message; ridiculing the Prophet's message; sorcery; assisting infidels against Muslims (under the concept of *al-wala' wa 'l-bara'*); excluding some people from the rule of Islam; and disrespecting Islam's teachings. The violation of one of the above removes the person from Islam, (*'kufr mukhrij min al-milla'*).[53]

However, it is well documented that Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his later disciples followed a well-known formula in addressing other Muslims and calling upon them to become true Muslims by abandoning their *shirk* (polytheism). In a letter to all Muslims, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab says: 'The polytheists of our time are more numerous than the infidels at the time of the Prophet. They call upon angels, saints and pious people asking for forgiveness . . . Muslims know that *tawhid* is worshipping God. This is the religion of the messengers starting with Noah and the last one is Muhammad.'[54] This is clear evidence of *takfir al-'umum*, general excommunication of other Muslims.

Twentieth-century Wahhabi letters to other Muslims often start with a known formula. An example is a letter by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif in 1918. The sheikh begins: 'From Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif to the people of Asir, Hijaz and Yemen, may God guide them to Islam', implying that they are not true Muslims. As for the people of Najd, 'they had been subjected to the work of Satan and they succumbed to his bad ways'; for example:

> They visited the tomb of Zayd ibn al-Khattab to ask for favours, their women were immoral. When their husbands were absent they visited palm trees and other trees, one of which was called Tarafiyya. They hugged the trees and asked favours. In Deriyyah itself, before the *da'wa*, there was a man called Taj who claimed holiness. People came to him asking for favours . . . In Taif, the tomb of Ibn Abbas was a place where associationist practices were performed, In Madina, the same associationist practices prevailed. In Egypt, paganism and associationist traditions prevailed. Also in Yemen, Sanaa, Hadramawt, Aleppo, Damascus,

Mosul, the land of the Kurds, and Mashhad, In general in all these lands clear *kufr* was demonstrated.[55]

In 1918 Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif wrote a letter describing his horror over the blasphemy he witnessed in the Hijaz:

Our rightful Imam, the glorious most respected, the one who has happiness and authority Abdulaziz ibn Abdulrahman ibn Saud, may God elevate him and keep him for Muslims to teach what God instructed his slaves. We have come back from the land of Hijaz and we have seen how Satan lived in this land among its people. Your people abstained from seeing light and guidance. They have fallen into a dangerous ignorance. They are on the verge of a burning hell. They worship tombs and trees. They venerate dead saints. This is the religion of the people of the first age of ignorance to whom the Prophet was sent.[56]

It is certain that the frequency of excommunication fluctuated according to the requirements of specific historical and political contexts rather than theological concerns. The above letter demonises Hijazis and reprimands them for their polytheism, certainly a justification for attacking them in the name of Islam and correcting their so-called Satanic religious practices. Although the practice of labelling other groups of Muslims – for example, Shiʿis, Sufis, Ismailis and even other Sunni Muslims – as *mushrikun* (polytheists) or *mubdiʿun* (innovators) continued throughout the twentieth century, specific individuals within these communities were rarely branded as such. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the practice of excommunicating specific individuals was more or less under control, for obvious reasons.

There were isolated occasions whereby a religious scholar issued an opinion describing someone as *mulhid* (atheist) and, by implication, a *kafir*. Scholars who applied such labels to an individual – especially among those called *ʿilmaniyyun* (secularists) – engaged in the controversial and dangerous practice of *takfir al-muʿayan*, the excommunication of specific individuals. Saudi writers who are considered to transgress and use language deemed offensive against religion are often targets of the practice of *takfir*: for example, Abdullah al-Qasimi, Ghazi al-Qusaybi and Turki al-Hamad. Abdullah al-Qasimi (1907–96) moved from Wahhabiyya to atheism, and was excommunicated as a result. According to his biographer, al-Qasimi lived in Cairo, possibly under the patronage of a Saudi prince, until his death.[57] Princes often provided refuge for excommunicated persons. King Abdullah (2005–) took the novelist Turki al-Hamad under his patronage although he was labelled *kafir*. In 2006 al-Hamad declared that King Abdullah offered him his pen as a gift. Religious scholars who offer alternative religious interpretations or question the premises of the Wahhabi tradition can also be subject to the *takfir* ruling – for example, the Sufi sheikh Muhammad Ulwi al-Maliki

(d. 2004), regarded by the Committee of Senior Ulama as *dhal* (one who has gone astray), and described as belonging to the religion of blasphemy (*millat al-kufr*).[58] Sheikh al-Maliki was suspended from preaching and teaching in the Hijaz. Another sheikh who challenged Wahhabi interpretations, Hasan Farhan al-Maliki, discussed later in this book, was also subjected to a similar ruling. However, punishment – usually a death sentence after the offer of repentance – rarely followed such judgments. The political authorities either ignored such rulings or offered protection to those labelled blasphemous by their own religious institution, another manifestation of the contradiction between Saudi religious rhetoric and reality. The determining factor was political expediency rather than religious opinion, and the Saudi royal family and the religious establishment were accomplices in enforcing control. The damage to individuals and their reputation was, however, great. Ordinary Saudis had to navigate a difficult terrain of contradictions between religious doctrine and political expediency.

Saudi religious scholars easily practised *takfir* against other Arab leaders, such as Nasser, Qadafi and Saddam, as well as Khomeini, all of whom challenged Saudi royal politics. Sheikh Ibn Baz clearly stated that 'Saddam is *kafir*, even though he says there is no God but Allah, and even though he prays and fasts. As long as he does not abandon his Baʿthist atheism and repents, he will remain a *kafir*.'[59] Such opinions were extremely important for the political leadership as it embarked on a war to liberate Kuwait from Saddam's army.

Throughout the history of the present Saudi state no ruler has ever been labelled *kafir*. Most Wahhabi *ʿulama* would accept a usurper because they believed in the legitimacy of seizing power by force: 'a tyrannical sultan was better than perpetual strife'.[60] In the twentieth century, the legitimacy of Ibn Saud was questioned by the Ikhwan in 1927. While the Ikhwan did not practise *takfir al-muʿayan* against Ibn Saud, they clearly considered some of his actions, especially his alliance with and subservience to Britain, as acts of *kufr*.[61] The same position was adopted by Juhayman al-Otaybi during his rebellion in the Holy Mosque in 1979 as he demonstrated in his *rasa'il* the blasphemous practices of the Saudi regime.[62] More recently, a similar ruling was passed on the Saudi regime with the publication of *al-Kawashif al-jalliyya fi kufr al-dawla al-saudiyya* (Clear Evidence of the Blasphemy of the Saudi Regime). While the author, known as Abu al-Bara al-Najdi (Asim al-Barqawi al-Maqdisi), was not Saudi, the book draws heavily on *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*.[63] Two other books by Saudi dissidents drew similar conclusions relating to the blasphemous nature of the regime while refraining from naming individuals within it as *kafir*.[64]

The history of excommunication entered a new phase. Young *ʿulama* and political activists whose writings indirectly implied that the Saudi regime itself is blasphemous cited the practice of association with unbelievers against believers and *al-hukum bi ghayr ma anzala allah* (rule which does not comply with God's revealed message). Western-style banking is often cited as an example of violating the revealed message. In such dissident literature not identifying a *kafir* is considered *kufr* in itself, a typical Wahhabi position.

State Wahhabiyya refrained from excessive application of *takfir* against specific individuals inside Saudi Arabia. Even when religious scholars issued opinions in which they excommunicated a specific person, the state often ignored them. However, the social impact of such opinions remained extremely important and the consequences for the accused were grave. Wahhbai discourse stretched the limits when excommunicating whole communities of other Muslims or other Muslim leaders who challenged Saudi authority in the Arab world. Excommunication remained one of the most controversial issues debated between Wahhabi scholars and their opponents. While some of their opponents accepted their pure monotheism and other matters related to religious practice and worship, they challenged the Wahhabi interpretation of excommunication. With the strong emphasis on total obedience to the ruler, excommunicating him becomes the only mechanism justifying armed rebellion.

Jihad

The third mechanism consolidating the state was *jihad*, the 'struggle in the way of God'. In Wahhabi interpretations, *jihad* was defined and executed in several ways, violence being only one of them.[65] Armed *jihad* under the banner of the ruler is considered an aspect of obeying him. While most Wahhabi scholars believed in peaceful *daʿwa*, they privileged *jihad* wars against a whole range of so-called infidels, a category that included several Muslim groups, nationalities and sects. While the position of the founder of Wahhabiyya on *jihad* is well documented,[66] it is important to focus on how the duty of *jihad* was articulated by twentieth-century official Wahhabi scholars.

In contrast with the antagonistic attitude towards other Muslims, who were regarded as worse than the infidels of Quraysh during the times of the Prophet, official Wahhabiyya not only cooperated with but also accommodated Christians, who came to Arabia with the approval of the ruler. For example, Wahhabi scholars who surrounded Ibn Saud in Riyadh early in the twentieth century had no qualms about the British officer Shakespear fighting side by side with Ibn Saud's Ikhwan troops,

who played an important role in consolidating his rule under the banner of enforcing monotheism. Shakespear died in battle while he was in Ibn Saud's military camp in 1916.[67] In the 1920s *jihad* against other Muslims – for example, the people of Qasim and Hail – was fought with subsidies that clearly came from the purse of so-called infidels: the British government.[68] When it became clear to the Ikhwan that their ruler, the rightful Imam to whom they swore allegiance, was obviously operating within the British sphere of influence, they rebelled against him, an incident that threatened to undermine the newly created realm. Their rebellion was not, however, solely about relations with infidels. It was primarily a rebellion against their marginalisation after they secured the ream for Ibn Saud. The Ikhwan rebellion was motivated by worldly matters and power sharing. However, in the rhetoric of the rebels, it was above all a protest against the violation of one of the ten principles that remove a Muslim from Islam: *al-wala' wa 'l-bara'* (association with Muslims and dissociation from infidels), a principle at the heart of Jihadi struggle in the twenty-first century. While the rebellion failed to achieve its objectives, it nevertheless created a schism within the Wahhabi religious community that has not yet been repaired, namely the division between those pragmatic Wahhabis who were close to political authority in Riyadh and those who maintained their autonomy and allegiance to God rather than worldly authority. Unfortunately, there is no elaborate historiography of the religious scholars who sided with the Ikhwan rebels, a function of the triumph of the state in eliminating their rebellion.[69] Although the Ikhwan fighters were defeated by 1930, the religious heritage that justified their rebellion remained a dormant trend within Wahhabiyya. The *'ulama* who sympathised with the Ikhwan rebels in their hearts remained marginal; nevertheless, their interpretations continued to erupt in the public sphere against a background of strict government control and co-optation. Contemporary Jihadi Sheikh Nasir al-Fahad, whose work on the blasphemy of assisting Americans in their wars against Muslims will be discussed later in this book, is but one young religious scholar whose intellectual genealogy includes important figures among *aimat al-da'wa al- najdiyya*, from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to Safar al-Hawali.

After the Second World War, Saudi Arabia moved from the British sphere of influence to that of the United States. Official Wahhabiyya remained silent on the political alliance with the USA and its various phases throughout the twentieth century. Both oil wealth and the institutionalisation of religious discourse proved to be influential weapons against dissenting voices within the Wahhabi tradition. However, neither was totally successful.

On one occasion, before he became grand mufti, Sheikh Ibn Baz criticised the influx of what he called the infidels, who in the 1940s were mainly American engineers working on agricultural projects in al-Kharj, where he was judge. Ibn Baz was summoned to the court of Ibn Saud, where he was told not to interfere in such matters.[70] However, Ibn Baz remained a strong believer in keeping the Arabian Peninsula free of infidels and other religious traditions, in respect for the Hadith cited earlier. Nevertheless, he expressed great tolerance for 'infidel' soldiers defending the realm in his *fatwa* justifying the invitation of foreign troops to liberate Kuwait in 1990–1. This controversial *fatwa* has been subject to scrutiny in several studies, but most agree that those who produced it 'were discharging an odious duty wanted by none. But discharge it they did. After all, the *ulama* were in the business of defending the realm and they were not going to repeat the mistakes of yore where ideological purity came at the expense of practical survival.'[71]

Official Wahhabi discourse denounced infidels without specifying the USA, even in the explosive context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Since 11 September, mosque *imams* have been prohibited from mentioning the USA by name in their supplication during Friday sermons, which traditionally include a denunciation of the 'enemies of Islam' and a call for the victory of Muslims. In 2001 the war on Afghanistan by the USA was conducted without the official Wahhabiyya being able to denounce it as an attack on Muslims. Only dissident Wahhabi *'ulama* denounced the war, and described it as a new Crusade.[72] The Saudi regime was one of the first to recognise the Taliban state, but was also one of the first to end diplomatic relations with the Taliban, just before the American invasion took place.

Since the invasion of Iraq by US troops in 2003, official religious scholars have denounced resistance in Iraq as an illegitimate war, refusing to call it *jihad*. Despite the silence of the religious establishment on the issue, Chief Justice Sheikh Salih al-Lohaydan was caught on tape preaching to a Saudi audience that the situation in Iraq requires *jihad*: 'If someone knows that he is capable of entering Iraq in order to join the fight, and if his intention is to raise up the word of God, then he is free to do so.'[73]

The release of this tape coincided with Crown Prince Abdullah's visit to Crawford, Texas in April 2005. It was obvious that this tape was meant to embarrass the Saudi leadership at a time when Saudi–US relations had suffered a setback after 11 September. Sheikh al-Lohaydan was quick to issue a letter clarifying his position regarding violence in Iraq, which he refused to describe as *jihad*.[74] He withdrew his early enthusiasm for *jihad* in Iraq, which was clearly represented in the smuggled tape. He attributed the release of the tape to what he called the 'enemies of Islam', the

Washington-based, Shiʿi-run Saudi Institute, an organisation that claims to defend democracy and human rights in Saudi Arabia.[75] While al-Lohaydan denounced the Saudi Shiʿis as being behind the tape, he condemned the killing of members of Iraqi Shiʿi National Guard at the hands of the Iraqi resistance. Al-Lohaydan's clarification reflected the political pressures that were exerted on the Wahhabi establishment, especially after clear evidence suggesting the participation of young Saudis in the fighting in Iraq, which increased in 2004–5.

It is ironic that the call for *jihad* (with the tongue, heart and sword) was historically launched against fellow Muslims whose Islam was seen as corrupt or misguided, a situation that puts such Muslims in a category worse than the polytheists of Quraysh. It is a historical fact that most Wahhabi violence has targeted other Muslims rather than non-Muslims. This is not surprising, given that Wahhabi discourse continued to denounce Muslims whose Islam deviated from the true path as *ahl al-dhalal* (those who have gone astray). Punishing errant Muslims should be harsher, according to Wahhabi interpretations. And resisting foreign occupation – for example, in Afghanistan and Iraq – is regarded by official Wahhabi scholars as illegitimate violence.

Hijra, *takfir* and *jihad* were three mechanisms used not only to enforce the boundaries of the pious state but also to ensure total obedience to rulers. While *hijra* advocated migration to the pious realm, *takfir* encouraged expulsion from it. *Jihad*, both peaceful and violent, rendered life a perpetual struggle in the way of God, but in reality it was transformed into a political strategy applied only to enhance the authority of the rulers. The three concepts were emptied of their religious meaning and turned into political weapons to consolidate the realm and its moral guardians, the *ʿulama*. Official Wahhabi *ʿulama* turned their backs on the scholar who had served as their role model, Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), who is described as the model of the critic-scholar. In matters political, Wahhabi *ʿulama* followed the model of realist Mamluk scholar Badr al-Din ibn Jamaʿa (1241–1333), who preached 'obedience to any lawfully constituted authority'.[76]

Political innovations

In the process of establishing a state, Wahhabiyya confirmed several political innovations that have accompanied the development of Islamic history and civilisation. Wahhabiyya is described as a religious revivalist movement, but it certainly did not offer any political vision or theory different from those already in place within the Sunni tradition. In a desperate attempt to safeguard itself against annihilation of the religious call,

marginalisation of the Najdi class of *'ulama* and the disintegration of the Saudi realm, Wahhabiyya supported and defended, with text and practice, two of the most controversial but dominant political innovations in Islamic history: hereditary rule and absolute obedience to political authority. It eventually deprived the Muslim community of its right to have a say in political matters. The only legitimate criticism of political authority was initiated in secrecy, between scholars and rulers: the latter are not in theory under any obligation to act according to the advice of the former.

During an encounter between Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud in 1744, the former confirmed the latter in the position of *imama* (leadership of the Muslim state), and confirmed his descendants in their role as future Imams. It is reported that in Deriyyah around 1744 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab said to Muhammad Ibn Saud: 'The people of Najd are now ignorant polytheists, divided and diverse. They fight each other. I hope you will be the Imam around whom Muslims can gather and your children after you become successive imams. The Imam [Ibn Saud] welcomed him and gave him shelter.'[77] Wahhabiyya confirmed two mechanisms for the foundation of political power: *istila'* (seizing power by force), and *ta'iyyin* (the appointment of a successor by the current ruler (hereditary rule), while paying lip service to the third principle: *shura* (consultation).[78] The oath of allegiance (*bay'a*), normally given by both a loosely defined group called *ahl al-hall wa 'l-'aqd* ('the people who tie and loose') and the *ra'iyya* (subjects) became a dramatic ritual of obedience, and even more so with the advent of new communication technology.[79] Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab decreed that it is compulsory to 'listen to and obey the ruler, even if he is a despot (*ja'ir*) and debauched (*fasiq*), as long as he does not order people to disobey God. People should gather around the one who assumes the caliphate and accept him. If he got the caliphate with his sword, he should be obeyed. Rebellion against a usurper is forbidden.'[80] As a Salafi movement that draws on the tradition of the pious ancestors, Wahhabiyya did not give sufficient significance to the succession of the first caliph, which other contemporary Salafis consider as the first *shura* experience in Islam. This sets the Wahhabi movement apart from other Salafi trends, especially contemporary variants that question the principle of total obedience to rulers and hereditary rule. Wahhabiyya is also different from the nineteenth-century modernist Salafiyya, which insisted on giving the *umma* an important role in the decision-making process.[81]

While twentieth-century Wahhabi scholars were constantly preoccupied with questions of ritual performance, tomb-visiting, intercession and other so-called polytheist innovations, they failed to produce a single treatise on the nature of the Islamic state and political authority. This was

partly because they seriously believed in the Islamic nature of the state they had created, and then felt that there was no need to provide religious theorising for something that already existed, and partly because of the sensitivity of political theorising in Saudi Arabia, even that originating in religious circles. Ignoring Islamic political thought has been a feature of Wahhabiyya since its inception.[82] As a revivalist movement similar to other eighteenth-century movements, it was concerned above all with religious rather than political reform. Its most famous scholars were *fuqaha'* (jurists) and *qadi*s (judges) rather than political ideologues. Its low-ranking preachers were *mutawa'a*, volunteers who disciplined bodies and souls even though they had very little literacy and knowledge of their own religious sources. Historically, the majority of the *mutawa'a* were *hafadhat Quran*, people who memorised the Quran or sections of it and had no other religious training.[83] According to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's biographer, the sheikh did not concern himself with writing treatises discussing the nature of the Islamic *imama* (leadership of the Muslim state).[84] The *hakim* (ruler) and his characteristics are mentioned in passing. The ruler is also mentioned in the context of elaborating on *taghut*, a word literally meaning 'idols' but often translated as 'despot', with an obvious association with oppression, *tughyan*. In discussing the five types of *taghut*, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab lists the following categories: first, Satan, who calls people to worship those other than God; second, the despotic ruler who changes God's law; third, the ruler who does not govern in accordance with the revealed message of God; fourth, the one who claims knowledge of the unknown; and fifth, the one who accepts worship instead of God.

Most Wahhabi scholars do not go beyond the Sunni tradition, specifying that the ruler should be a free Muslim male. He should also be just, knowledgeable of *shari'a* and capable of public administration.[85] If such characteristics are present in a person from Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, then he has priority over others; otherwise the position is open to all Muslims. Some scholars insist that Arab descent is preferred. The ruler is appointed as a result of the consensus of *ahl al-hall wa 'l-'aqd*, a reference to people of knowledge, as well as other important members of society. The current ruler can also appoint a successor, or a future ruler can seize power by force. In all situations, he must be obeyed.

One can only speculate on why Wahhabi discourse fell short of producing a political treatise that deals with urgent matters related to the Islamic polity. Perhaps its early and later advocates were unprepared for such an intellectual luxury in a context characterised by their geographical and social marginality in the Muslim world.[86] Perhaps Wahhabi scholars regarded their movement as too all-encompassing and holistic to be concerned with a limited area such as state and polity. However, it is clear

that Wahhabi religio-political discourse failed to rise above its own social and environmental context. In political matters, Wahhabi scholars confirmed social rather than religious practices. Hereditary rule was one such practice that dominated political life among the sedentary population of the region where Wahhabiyya originated.[87] In political matters, Wahhabiyya confirmed *al-mawruth al-ijtimaʿi* (inherited social tradition) rather than challenging it. Another reason relates to Wahhabi suspicion of the masses, the *umma*, who are believed to degenerate easily into religious laxity and blasphemy. The *umma* can in no way be given a say in important matters such as politics. Although Wahhabi scholars reiterate the traditional formula that the *umma* does not consent to wrong decisions (*ʿla tajtami al-umma ʿala dhalal*), in practice they took it for granted that the *umma* is potentially wrong. In their political preaching Wahhabi scholars continued to invoke a group that remains not so well defined, 'those who tie and loose', a significant unelected body in which they must be the dominant majority to correct *al-dhalal* (debauchery).

It is clear from the copious body of Wahhabi literature devoted to matters related to creed and worship that the movement's stated objective remained the purification and renewal of faith through the reform of religious practices. This preoccupation was conducive to the political hegemony of the state. Yet Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab also implemented a vigorous application of the *shariʿa*, which was very much dependent on the establishment of a pious state.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's understanding of the Islamic state was limited to applying *shariʿa* and fighting religious innovation, without paying attention to the most important pillar in state formation – the principle by which a ruler is chosen, made accountable and changed if transgression from the true path is apparent. In fact, Wahhabi discourse rules out the possibility of the *umma* actively changing the ruler. While any violent rebellion is abhorred and prohibited, unless it is initiated by advocates of the movement, there is room only for an unbinding advice, with the hope that this would change any behaviour or policy not in accordance with the revealed message. In the Wahhabi worldview, the rightful ruler is the one who calls for and leads prayer (*uqim al-salah*). Only if such a ruler prohibits the performance of prayer can Muslims contemplate a hypothetical rebellion, which, as far as Islamic history is concerned, is without precedent. Even when Muslim territories fell under foreign and non-Muslim rulers, it was rare that Muslims were not allowed to perform communal prayer. Wahhabi perception of political issues had always been determined by a reiteration of selected medieval Muslim treatises that highlighted acquiescence and submission. While most Wahhabis revere the medieval jurists Sheikh Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ahmad ibn Taymiyya, it is ironic that they

have not followed their footsteps in some political matters. In politics, Wahhabi scholars overlooked revealed religious discourse, *al-munazal* (i.e. in the Quran), in favour of a politically subservient approach that endorsed constructed and interpreted religious discourse, *al-mu'awal*, which belonged to a later generation of Sunni *'ulama*.[88]

In Wahhabi discourse, the survival of Muslim society is dependent on the strength of the state. Without the call, the state loses its *raison d'être*, and without the state the call is weakened and risks being undermined by the return of the forces of misguided Islam and the confounding of the permissible and prohibited. Consequently, the Islamised person and *umma* are constantly at risk of regressing to the *status quo ante*, the age of ignorance, in terms of personal piety, worship and societal relations. The concept of *jahiliyya* (the age of ignorance) was an integral part of Wahhabi discourse from the eighteenth century. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab wrote a book that deals with aspects of the so-called ignorant society. The age of ignorance was a label used to describe the population of Arabia at the time of the call of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. In *Masail al-jahiliyya*, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab described a series of beliefs and practices associated with the age of ignorance, which prevailed before the call of the Prophet. The message was clear: the first age of ignorance was being repeated in Arabia in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's time. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab described the population of his time as being 'worse than the *kafir*s of Quraysh', who were known to 'disobey *wali al amr* [the ruler]'. Among the people of ignorance, 'refusing to obey the ruler is a virtue, some made this practice a religion. The Prophet ordered them to be patient when confronted with the repression of rulers. He ordered them to listen to such a ruler, obey him, and advise him.'[89]

Wahhabi discourse preceded modern twentieth-century Islamist theorisations of the concept of the age of ignorance, the most famous of which was that of Egyptian Muhammad Qutb.[90] In Wahhabiyya, the personal, social and political were interrelated in a web that required the control of the person and society by the state and religious scholars. The question of obeying both the state and the *'ulama* is therefore crucial. Theorising obedience is perhaps the only exception to the rule in the Wahhabi tradition –its general neglect of theorising politics, as discussed earlier.

In the Wahhabi worldview, three levels of obedience have equal status: obedience to God; obedience to the Prophet; and obedience to those charged with authority, defined as the princes (*umara*) and the people of knowledge (*'ulama*). In a lecture delivered at the Great Mosque in Riyadh, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Baz interpreted an important Quranic verse cited above: 'O ye who believe Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you.'[91] The title of the lecture was 'Explaining the Rights of Those Charged with Authority'.

He stated that the route to happiness and guidance is obedience to God, the Messenger and those charged with authority. Obeying those in authority follows on from fulfilling the obligation to obey God and the messenger. He defined those charged with authority as the *umara* and *ʿulama*. Obedience must be to *maʿruf* (that which is known in *shariʿa*); no obedience is permitted to *maʿsiyya* (sins).[92] In this interpretation, Ibn Baz follows a well-established tradition. Early Wahhabi scholars confirmed 'that a Muslim should obey the rightful imam regardless of whether he is *fajir* [despotic], or *fasiq* [debauched], offer him *zakat*, perform *jihad* under his banner, give him booty after battle, and never rebel against him using the sword. A final word, obey him until God finds you a way out. Any rebellious person is an innovator and a rejectionist who abandons the community, threatening dissent. A final advice is given to the true Muslim. Hold yourself during dissent because it is a prophetic tradition.'[93] Moreover, the prohibition of violent rebellion is extended to include public criticism of the ruler.

Although Ibn Baz's interpretation of the Quranic verse on obedience to rulers is the one adopted by the Saudi–Wahhabi religious establishment, it is not the only interpretation possible, nor is it the only one acceptable to all Sunni scholars. According to one Salafi source, Ibn Baz's interpretation of the Quranic verse overlooks the absence of the verb obey, *atiu*, when the text refers to the third element in the chain of obedience, *uli al-amr* (those charged with authority). The sura orders Muslims to obey God, and obey the Prophet, repeating the verb 'obey'. However, obeying rulers is added using the letter *waw* ('and') in Arabic. Some interpreters of the text argue that obeying the leader cannot be placed on equal footing as obeying God and his Prophet, and that this is demonstrated by the absence of the verb 'obey' before the order to include *uli al-amr* in the sura.[94] With the outbreak of violence and calls to disobey a ruler who fails to demonstrate his Islamic credentials and pursue an Islamic policy, Ibn Baz's interpretation of obedience to the ruler remains an important weapon against dissidence and rebellion. Obedience is a constant theme that dominates religious programmes. Rebellion encompasses a wide range of acts in official Wahhabi discourse. At one end stands violence (*khuruj bi ʾl-sayf*), while at the other, writing an article critical of the regime, sending an informative fax or advising the ruler in public are glossed as acts of *khurujʾ ala wali al-amr* (rebellion against the ruler). Recently, actions such as expressing an alternative political vision or signing a petition calling for reform have been defined as *khuruj ʿala wali al-amr*, according to Wahhabi judges.[95]

The interpretation of the Quranic verse relating to obeying those charged with authority, now considered part and parcel of obeying God

and his Prophet, automatically outlaws armed rebellion against rulers, except in very limited circumstances. Most twentieth-century Wahhabi scholars insist that rebellion can be sanctioned in certain limited situations, but in practice they refrain from clarifying the conditions that allow such rebellion to take place without violating creed and faith. If the ruler displays *kufr bawwah* (obvious blasphemy), for example forbidding the performance of public prayers in mosques, the question of whether armed rebellion may or may not be justified is left unanswered, although hypothetically forbidding prayer is an act of blasphemy that justifies armed rebellion.

Responding to a question regarding whether a ruler who issues new secular laws deserves to be reprimanded or even disobeyed, Sheikh Ibn Baz replied that if new laws do not contradict *shari'a*, it is permissible for the ruler to do so, as there might be good for Muslims behind such new legislation. However, if legislation contradicts or replaces *shari'a*, this is not permissible. He gives the example of suspending punishment for acts such as fornication, alcohol consumption and theft. If the ruler suspends *shari'a* in such cases, he is regarded as *kafir* (blasphemous). How do Muslims deal with a ruler who suspends *shari'a* or enacts legislation that contradicts it? Ibn Baz confirms that good Muslims should obey such a ruler in *ma'ruf* (that which is known in *shari'a*) and not in *ma'siyya* (sin), until God changes him ('ubadilu hu allah').[96] Note that Ibn Baz does not contemplate confronting the ruler even if he suspends divine law or introduces legislation that does not conform to *shari'a*. He emphasises obedience to such a ruler until God decides to replace him or repudiate his actions, thus ruling out the possibility of the community taking any active political position. In this official Wahhabi political worldview, political activism is *khuruj 'ala al-hakim*, an abhorred rebellion that leads to chaos and discord, thus threatening religion. A good Muslim should wait for God to act in this particular situation, a position that represents the views of some but not all Sunni scholars. This interpretation is conducive to the rule of sultans and hereditary office, and historically such interpretations flourished in royal courts. Ibn Baz is a later addition to the chain of religious *noblesse d'état*.

While not distinguishing between various forms of armed rebellion and peaceful criticism, in general official Wahhabi scholars confuse political rebellion (*khuruj siyasi*) with religious rebellion that challenges creed (*khuruj 'aqa'idi*).[97] The first type is a rebellion against worldly power, and its permissibility is subject to debate among Muslim scholars, whereas the second is a rebellion against the divine message, where there is a near-consensus among scholars that it is forbidden. This confusion among official Wahhabi scholars regarding *khuruj siyasi* contributes to the mystification of politics, thus granting sanctity to those charged with worldly

authority, for example the *umara*, and those in charge of interpreting the divine message, the *ʿulama*. Peaceful political activism, passive resistance and armed rebellion are confused and rendered prohibited behaviour punishable by God and state. Under the patronage of the *umara*, Wahhabi *ʿulama* sealed the fate of political activism, both armed and peaceful, by describing it as sinful behaviour that challenges creed (*al-ʿaqida*).

The overwhelming importance of submission to the ruler, once such submission was equated with submission to God and the Prophet, silenced any questioning of the role of those in power or criticism of their policies. In its extreme manifestation, this theological position encouraged total acquiescence and discouraged even the mildest public criticism of those charged with authority. Open criticism or even evaluation of the role of the ruler is confused with *al-sabb* (insult), an unforgivable great *munkar*, an evil calling for evil. Having established the obligation to obey the rulers and people of knowledge, Sheikh Ibn Baz gave a religious opinion regarding those who 'insult the *umara* and *ʿulama*'.[98] The subjects (*al-raʿiyya*) are under obligation to praise the ruler rather than criticise him, and to applaud his deeds rather than expose his faults. In the same interview, Sheikh Ibn Baz was asked whether the 'word' (*al-kalima*), implying public advice using the press for example, influences the country's security, especially that which comes by fax from outside and is issued by those 'who bear grudges against the land and its people of authority'. Sheikh Ibn Baz described this kind of word as the worst evil, which must be avoided.[99] The sanctity of the *umara* that Ibn Baz promotes is shared by the *ʿulama*, mainly those tied through state institutions to the ruling group. Criticising them amounts to insulting them.

A contemporary popular version of the emphasis on subservience to the ruler continues to appear in Saudi-approved internet discussion boards. Sheikhs post articles and treatises on how to deal with rulers according to the Islamic tradition, drawing on a style that invokes the words of God (Quranic verses), Hadith and the sayings of a long list of pious *ʿulama*, all arguing that it is incumbent upon a Muslim to obey the ruler. In one article, Sheikh Osama al-Otaybi cites three sources to authenticate the obligation to obey by grounding it in solid Islamic Salafi sources. The message targets the 'young' who are in his opinion confused about what is expected of them. He lists several obligations that a Muslim should respect in relation with the ruler. A Muslim is under the obligation to give the ruler the oath of allegiance; listen and obey; respect him; ask God to protect him and refrain from asking God to harm him; pray behind him; give him *zakat*; perform pilgrimage and *jihad* with him; advise him in secrecy not in public; abstain from insulting him; remain within the consensus of the community; and never rebel against him, even

with the word. Failure to do so consigns a person to the realm of the prohibited. Again and again official Wahhabis confuse religious and political rebellions. They also confuse peaceful resistance with armed rebellion. Such treatises always end with a clear message. Al-Otaybi concludes his message to the youth of the country:

> It is clear that the rulers of the Saudi state must be given the oath of allegiance. This is an obligation. The people who tie and loose have given the king the *bayʿa*; therefore, all Saudis are under the obligation to give it. The rulers of the Saudi state must be respected. You must supplicate asking God to protect them. You must pray behind them and pay them *zakat*. You must perform the pilgrimage and *jihad* with them. You must advise them secretly not in public. You must not gossip about them. You must not insult them and show their sins. It is forbidden to rebel against them. You must not help those who rebel against them even with the word. I ask God to protect them and guide them to all good for the country and the people.[100]

If ever the *ʿulama* want to express reservations on policy and policy makers, such expression must follow an acceptable and legitimate formula. Advising the ruler (*nasiha*), writing to him (*mukataba*) and alerting him (*tanbih*) must be performed in secrecy, initially taking the form of 'congratulating' and 'praising' him for his good behaviour, and mildly encouraging him to reconsider matters relating to policy. All this should be done away from the gaze of the masses or the press for fear of undermining the stature of the ruler. Sheikh Ibn Baz abhors the idea that the ruler's *ʿuyub* (faults or shameful behaviour) should be discussed using a public platform such as mosque minarets or transmitted by faxes to the public. Later official scholars emphasised that resorting to the media to criticise the *umara* and *ʿulama* is also forbidden, a clear reference to Saudi opposition radio stations al-Islah and al-Tajdid, which broadcast from London in 2003. Alternative views on the form and substance of advice to rulers insist that secret advice is suitable only when *maʿsiyya* (sin) is secretive. However, when sins are public, they deserve a public response from the Muslim community. Furthermore, in the absence of legitimate channels and institutions for the delivery of advice, the *umma* must express criticism in the public sphere.

Such uncompromising insistence on total submission to political authority consolidated the powers of the state and those who grew in its shadow, the *ʿulama*. The emphasis on total obedience neutralises any political activism that might challenge the leadership, and has serious political consequences. Saudi dissidents who objected to the ruler or aspects of his behaviour have resorted to *takfir* (excommunication) of the ruler in order to justify their disobedience. Disobedience becomes permissible only in a situation where the ruler is labelled *kafir*

(blasphemous). Wahhabi dissidence in 1927, 1979 and the 1990s was justified on the basis of the ruler displaying *al-kufr al-bawwah* (clear blasphemy). Jihadi discourse in the twenty-first century is entirely grounded in a theological position that allows dissidence and even armed struggle against a 'blasphemous' ruler. In the absence of other means of expressing difference, criticism or disagreement with the ruler, excommunicating him becomes the only possible mechanism; violence becomes the only means of changing the situation.

Having nurtured political acquiescence and promised divine punishment for those who disobey the ruler, Wahhabiyya itself thrived on state-sponsored modernisation and oil wealth. It was propagated and enforced not only in mosques, scholars' study circles and pious shopkeepers' private *majlis*, but also in ultra-modern university lecture halls, international conferences, pan-Islamic organisations and, since the 1990s, internet websites and satellite television.

In summary, official Wahhabi religio-political discourse was characterised by a number of principles. These included accepting the legitimacy of the ruler regardless of how he seized power; denial of the *umma*'s political participation, as it is innately wrong; granting the ruler unlimited powers in politics; allowing various powerful rulers to contest power without interference from the community; refusal to distinguish between armed rebellion and political change by peaceful means; confirmation of the permissibility of giving secret, non-binding advice to rulers; and neglected the accountability of rulers. Official Wahhabi discourse produced consenting subjects rather than citizens.

Engaging with modernity

Before mid-twentieth century, Wahhabi *'ulama* were literate men in an illiterate society. With the establishment of the state and the advent of oil wealth and mass education, they became one group among several capable of articulating religious ideas and interpretations. Their engagement with modernity centred on formulating opinions on whether aspects of modernity were permissible or prohibited. In addition to their long-established expertise in creed and ritual purity, official *'ulama* developed religious rulings regarding technological aspects of modernity (cars, aeroplanes, radio, television, cassettes, faxes and the internet), and its economic challenges (banking, insurance and other new economic innovations). Socially, official Wahhabi scholars devoted considerable energy to issuing opinions that maintained strict control over men and women. Their *fatwa*s on sex segregation, women's attire, false eyelashes, sports centres, body massage, hair removal and other innovations related to

social and physical femininity are notorious.[101] A survey of volumes of Wahhabi *fatwa*s, together with thousands of sound bites on local and satellite Saudi television channels, indicates the centrality of ritual practices in Wahhabi thought and expertise, used to control the social sphere. These *fatwa*s reflect a desperate attempt by the *ʿulama* to remain relevant in a changing world.

These *fatwas* also demonstrate the failure of Wahhabi *ʿulama* to engage with modernity beyond formulating opinions on the permissible and the prohibited in the social sphere and in ritual practice. These concerns stem from their desire to control an Islamised public sphere, taken to measure the piety of state and society.

Modernity paved the way for the emergence of the young, articulate, computer literate and cosmopolitan Wahhabi scholar. Today most official Saudi *ʿulama* and preachers have their own websites. The Wahhabi message is no longer preserved in handwritten chronicles and epistles, copied on small wooden boards or paper, which was in short supply only half a century ago. Today the tradition is continued in polished and elegantly bound high-quality volumes, CD ROMs, and internet web pages.

The life expectancy of the interpreters and guardians of the Wahhabiyya is stretched beyond the imagination of their predecessors, who until recently suffered blindness and chronic deadly illnesses, including cholera, chicken pox and measles.[102] Today state *ʿulama* travel abroad for medical treatment, live in luxurious villas, receive substantial sums of money for their noble services to political authority, Islam and Muslims, and preside over committees, charitable organisations and international religious conferences attended not only by the faithful from the main local historic centres of Wahhabi religious learning, but also from places as close as Mecca and Medina and as far away as Jakarta, New Delhi, Lagos and London. The image of the blind, miserable and poor scholar, living on a meagre income in return for religious services, has given way to wealthy guardians of the tradition, who are seen on television screens greeting princes and international delegations visiting the country. The early scholars whose names were linked to entrepreneurial commercial families are now wealthier, more influential and more connected with the world of power, money and scholarship, thanks to a solid alliance with the ruling family and generous handouts that cement loyalty and dependency. Being part of religious industry and bureaucracy has proved to be a good mechanism for social and economic mobility. While modern society needed scientists, doctors and engineers, it also needed religious scholars to ensure that no blasphemous aspects of modernity are incorporated or endorsed.

Wahhabi *ʿulama* today play an important ceremonial role in the patina of Islam that covers Saudi society. Scholars distinguished by their beards,

special headgear that is not tied by *ʿuqal* (head-rope), and ankle-length *thawb* (male robes) have become an indispensable chorus in the drama of power that unfolds daily on Saudi local and satellite television and in the print media. Senior princes must be seen greeting important scholars during all national events, just as they need to be seen distributing prizes to students who have excelled in memorising the Quran and *shariʿa* sciences. Religious scholars rush to greet princes at airports and in glamorous public places surrounded by media and well-wishers. They play the role of ritual elders who claim the power to interpret sacred texts, sanction power and enchant the audience.

Official Wahhabis accepted and endorsed aspects of modernity only if these fell under their control. For example, after objecting to female education in the early 1960s, they accepted it after being put in charge of the female curriculum and schools.[103] Similarly, in the early 1960s they objected to television, but later agreed to it when they were assured that they would dominate broadcasting. In the 1990s they denounced satellite television, but later endorsed it after they were guaranteed constant appearances on religious programmes. Today they have their own television channels, for example Iqra and al-Majd. They originally denounced the internet as immoral, but since 1998 they have become active participants in cyberspace through personal websites and discussion boards. After decades of considering elections *bidʿa* (an un-Islamic alien innovation),[104] in 2005 they not only accepted partial municipal elections but endorsed and patronised the candidates. Important scholars visited contestants in their campaign tents and made it known that they offered informal certificates of good conduct (*tazkiyya*). It is unlikely that they would object to general elections if they are promised control over the process, a development that would also be welcomed by the political authority.

The innovations of modernity, together with communication technology, have allowed both the consolidation and contestation of official Wahhabi discourse. Official Wahhabiyya has showed great flexibility and pragmatism. However, this was entirely dependent on the gains that would accrue to its most prominent figures as a result of accepting and legitimising innovations. While modernity consolidated and spread Wahhabi discourse both in Saudi Arabia and abroad, it resulted simultaneously in its contestation. Both advocates and critics of Wahhabiyya have endorsed modern technology for the promotion of their message. While the means for the dissemination of Wahhbaiyya has become ultra-modern, the message remains far removed from the spirit of political modernity.

Official Wahhabi *ʿulama* have failed to deal with the political and ethical aspects of modernity. Politics has remained a prohibited field, discussed

only by *al-khassa*, a minority of chosen people, mainly the *umara* and themselves, who are endowed with the ability to interpret sacred texts and advise the ruler accordingly. However, this ability to interpret the sacred is now shared with a whole range of other non-official *ʿulama*, intellectuals and laymen, all a product of increased literacy and education. Official Wahhabiyya has watched the proliferation of religious discourse with great alarm.

Wahhabi scholars preferred to leave politics to the state while concentrating on matters related to *fiqh al-halal wa ʾl-haram* (jurisprudence of the permissible and the forbidden) and *fiqh al-ʿibadat* (jurisprudence of worship). Traditional Wahhabiyya shied away from engaging with obvious and important polemics related to the nature of the Islamic state, the selection of the Muslim ruler, the status of kingship in Islam (*al-mulk*), the accountability of rulers and other political matters. No important theological doctrine was developed in these areas because of their political sensitivity, which such intellectual exercise would expose. Wahhabi *ʿulama* continued to reiterate opinions of selected scholars of the medieval period without serious engagement with contemporary political issues. Their excuse was that they are Salafis, following in the footsteps of an earlier generation of pious ancestors.

The official *ʿulama* failed to reflect on their own role in the modern Saudi state. They refrained from critically examining this role and tracing its evolving nature. Simply content with being guardians of the moral order while leaving political power in the hands of the ruling family and an expanding class of bureaucrats and technocrats, they lacked self-consciousness and awareness. The Saudi *ʿulama* accepted the *de facto* separation between religion and politics, while adopting a narrow definition of religion as all matters relating to personal conduct and *ʿibada* (worship). They excelled in controlling the social sphere while leaving the political field in the hands of the state. The Wahhabi *ʿulama* contributed to the consolidation of a state that is politically secular and socially religious. This enigmatic duality is an important feature of the contemporary Saudi regime, often overlooked in scholarly work on the country.

Traditional *ʿulama* engaged with modernity through the prism of the permissible and prohibited. This is not surprising given their training and expertise. After all, their occupation requires them to formulate such opinions. However, their only engagement with contemporary problems has been to condemn modern society for its alleged corruption, consumerism, moral laxity and degeneration. The view that society consists of potential sinners cannot be conducive to any form of democratic government or political participation. How can society give its opinion on important political matters when it is potentially *dhal* (astray or

debauched)? This position stands in opposition to the Prophetic tradition, which clearly states that Muhammad's *umma* cannot agree upon error. Official Wahhabiyya coerced society morally, symbolically and physically in order to ensure its 'Islamisation', thus theoretically ensuring good Islamic government and political acquiescence. This position served the interests of the state, since the state was keen to be seen as guarding the Islamic moral order.

Official *'ulama* were far removed from urgent issues that dominated the intellectual scene in the Arab and Islamic world such as questions of social justice, political participation, the rights of women and minorities, the relationship between the modern nation-state and the wider Muslim world, relations with the international community, membership in international organisations and other urgent matters that flooded public debate in the second half of the twentieth century. Official Wahhabis remained oblivious to these matters while celebrating the Muslim state created under the banner of the Al-Saud and allegedly according to the principles of *tawhid* (the oneness of God). The failure of official Wahhabiyya to engage with the more problematic political aspects of modernity, in addition to its rejection of other Muslim traditions, led to the movement becoming a contested religious field in its own society and by people who claim to be Salafis. Today official Wahhabiyya is entangled in serious intellectual battles with diverse opponents, some of whom are its previous disciples (for example Sahwis and Jihadis) whereas others are historical enemies (for example Saudi liberals, Shi'is, Sufis and Ismailis). In Saudi Arabia today, official Wahhabiyya is one Salafiyya among others.

The relationship between religion and politics in Saudi Arabia clearly illustrates that the state is not a 'theocratic unitarian state', as described by an earlier generation of scholars and often repeated in the Western media.[105] The Saudi regime is a hybrid formation that subjects religion to political will. It is neither fully secular nor religious. It is a pragmatic entity that has survived as a result of the strength of the power of oil and mystification, both internal and external. It is best described as a post-modern pastiche. The gap between the social sphere controlled by religious scholars and the political sphere controlled by royalty is responsible for serious contradictions experienced at the level of the individual and society. It is this contradiction that is a fertile incubator for the violence that is unfolding in Saudi Arabia. While some Saudis continue to regard their Islamised social public sphere as a reflection of Islamic government, others are aware of the contradiction between rhetoric and reality. In debating this reality some have resorted to the word, whereas others have preferred the sword. In both situations, the consenting Wahhabi religio-political discourse carried the seeds of its own contestation.

2 Re-enchanting politics: Sahwis from contestation to co-optation

> We, the youth of Islam, were able to dismantle the circle of subservience to the West, reject its deceiving civilisation, know its conspiracies, but so far we do not know the reality of who we are . . . I am surprised that the vanguards of the Islamic call think that the religion of the people of Sunna and *jamma'a* is about theoretical propositions relating to the unknown world rather than about a call for reform and change.
>
> Sheikh Safar al-Hawali, *Sharh*, p. 9

Official Wahhabiyya created consenting subjects. Wealth allowed the Saudi regime to consolidate aspects of religion in the public sphere while pursuing gradual but determined political secularisation.[1] Saudi society and the public sphere were 'Islamised' while politics and the modern state remained an autonomous field beyond the reach of most senior religious scholars. Official *'ulama* developed a discourse that sanctioned this schism. The Wahhabi tradition described in the last chapter ensured that politics remained in the hands of those who claim to know people's interest. The guiding principle was – and still is – 'al-hukam a'lam bi al-maslaha' (the rulers know the public good). Official Wahhabi scholars removed not only themselves but the rest of society from political matters. They prohibited engagement in public affairs. Their religious discourse, especially that which confirmed the potential corruption and blasphemy of the *umma*, reinforced the marginalisation of the public and their exclusion from the political decision-making process. Under the banner of the state, official Wahhabiyya refined and consolidated a religious discourse that disenfranchised society and disenchanted politics.

The official Wahhabi tradition led to the consolidation of a society predominantly preoccupied with ritualistic Islam. Society evolved into a community of the faithful who vigorously engage in controlled *'ibadat* (rituals of worship), both communal and individual, that are regularly displayed in the public sphere. Such display is strictly controlled, and any deviation is condemned as innovation. Prayer, fasting and pilgrimage have been turned into spectacles regularly dramatised on local and satellite television channels. The enchantment of society, however, was

restricted to the level of religious practice. In politics, only an enchanting rhetoric was retained while state practice attested to a different reality. In its propaganda, the Saudi regime reiterates that it is *dawlat al-tawhid* (the monotheist polity) that governs according to the revealed message of God. In practice, many Saudis see a different reality.

Nothing exemplifies the enchantment of Saudi society like a local television programme called Fatwa on Air, a special performance normally hosting a religious scholar who responds to questions posed by the public. The programme started in the 1960s and continues to the present day. A scholar issues religious opinions regarding the questions asked. Callers usually ask very specific questions. A woman wants to know whether menstruating for three weeks qualifies as menstruation, thus preventing her from performing prayers. A man asks whether it is permissible to borrow money to allow his mother to perform the pilgrimage. A third person asks whether high heels are permissible for women and whether diamond rings are a legitimate accessory for men. The repetitiveness and regularity of these television programmes confirm Saudi society as obsessively concerned with the ritualistic aspect of Islam. Such programmes reduce a world religion to a set of prohibited and permissible actions for the sake of demonstrating the religiosity of power. Questioning, offering advice to or criticising the political authorities is prohibited on television as much as it is elsewhere.

With the spread of new communication technology such as the internet, Saudi religious scholars who have their own websites often include a subsection, entitled 'Fatwa on line', where they respond to questions often very similar to, if not more daring than, those posed by television viewers. These sites are very popular, and continue to grow. Recently, a single young Saudi posed a question to an important and famous religious scholar regarding whether he could have sexual relations with his Filipino maid. He asked whether in this modern day a maid imported from abroad and receiving a monthly salary can be considered *jariyya*, a female slave, with whom sexual relations are licit in Islam. Women pose questions whether cosmetic surgery, false eyelashes, trousers and high heels are permissible. Religious scholars always find answers either based on a clear textual reference from the Quran or Hadith or using other methods for arriving at a ruling.

The procedure for issuing a religious ruling follows a well-known formula. It starts with 'God said', thus citing one or two Quranic verses, then 'the Prophet said', citing a Hadith, followed by quotations from the sayings of *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors). In most cases the three citations can easily be provided. However, new areas of social life for which there are no clear verses to be cited are dealt with differently using *ijtihad*

(exertion in search of religious ruling) and *qiyas* (deduction by analogy) or other well-known methods. On television, it is almost impossible to come across callers who openly question religious scholars on public issues relating to government policy, religious interpretations or any contested and controversial topics. Callers avoid political issues such as democracy and Islam, human rights in Islam, and how to deal with differences in religious interpretations. No discussion of obedience to rulers, the nature of public advice to rulers or other politically sensitive matters is expected. *Fatwa*s are always concerned with the minute details of everyday life such as personal piety or relations between individuals. Relations between ruler and subjects are often discussed in public lectures where an audience listens to lectures calling upon the faithful to obey. These lectures faithfully repeat the discourse discussed in the last chapter.

The state is heavily involved in the religious sphere, not only as sponsor but also as controller. Princes are always seen distributing prizes among people who serve religion, for example clever boys who memorise the Quran at an early age, scholars who write religious treatises denouncing the enemies of the regime, preachers who dedicate their lives to spreading the official Wahhabi version of Islam, and so on. Princes often donate vast sums for visible and prestigious Islamic projects that add to their standing both locally and internationally. Saudis experience an enchanted world and a mystified public sphere with several thousand religious specialists contributing to maintaining this state of enchantment. It is estimated, however, that of the approximately one million sermons and religious lessons in mosques, only 300,000 are authorised by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.[2]

Issuing *fatwa*s and religious instruction in general have been transformed into highly professional activities that needed an expanding specialist religious bureaucracy, educational institutions and organisations. The 'people of knowledge' are no longer a small coterie, educated in Riyadh and drawn from its environs. By the end of the twentieth century, the category included – in addition to the Najdi–Wahhabi core – thousands of *'ulama*, preachers, educators, university lecturers, ideologues and others who came from various regions.

While official religious knowledge prepared a generation of consenting subjects, in addition to *'ulama*, religious teachers and preachers, a doctorate in religious studies was a novelty that accompanied the establishment of the 'religious university'.[3] Saudi Arabia had never had the equivalent of al-Azhar, al-Qairawan or al-Najaf, where an ancient tradition of religious learning was established. In modern times, the informal study circles that flourished in the main holy cities, Mecca and Madina, lagged behind their counterparts in other parts of the Muslim world. Oil money allowed

Saudi Arabia the luxury, prestige and legitimacy associated with the most sacred of knowledge: religious education.

The first Islamic university was established in Madina in 1961. In the 1990s, with a budget over $US50 million, the various faculties had 378 members of staff specialising in linguistics, Islamic literature, jurisprudence, Islamic law, *shari'a*, Hadith, *da'wa* and other branches of religious studies.[4] According to Saudi sources, in 2000–1, more than two thousand students were registered at the university; 80 per cent of the total enrolment were Saudis, with the remaining students coming from more than seventy countries.[5]

In Riyadh, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University was granted university status in 1974 to cater for a local rather than an international student population. Various religious colleges in Riyadh, such as the Scientific Institute founded in 1950, and other small colleges in Qasim were consolidated under the umbrella of this institution. With a budget of $US280 million in 1990, the university had branches in several cities, producing a total of over twenty thousand graduates every year.[6] In 2000–1 the university had more than 1,300 teachers and more than 23,000 students, of whom 643 were female.[7]

In the early 1990s the Islamic University granted 131 doctorates and the Imam University 264. While the universally accepted definition of a doctorate assumes originality and critical thinking, a doctorate from one of these universities may not meet these criteria. It is argued that 'research is commonly invoked and methodology courses are prescribed, but the success of these efforts is uncertain, especially since the parameters of research – the implicit "red lines" of permissible enquiry – are understood . . . real controversy is avoided, and any hint of criticism of government policies is non-existent'.[8] Like religious television programmes, many doctoral theses are studies of the minute details of worship.[9] Others deal with sectarian differences among Muslims, confirming that the 'other' is either outside Islam or an innovator. The red lines that are never crossed by graduate students are often related to the religio-political Wahhabi discourse, which remains unchallenged at least in a Wahhabi university. However, as the university aimed to generate consent, contestation was a by-product.

A doctorate in religious knowledge was a total innovation in the Wahhabi tradition; nevertheless, it symbolised the transformation of the consolidation and transmission of this knowledge. Historically not many Wahhabi *'ulama* engaged in writing theoretical treatises. The previous generation of *'ulama*, including Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself, were 'problem-solvers' and jurists rather than religious intellectuals. With the arrival of the modern university, religious knowledge moved from the

traditional study circles in the mosques and small *maʿahid* (institutes) of Riyadh, Buraydah, Unayzah and Hail, where established religious figures taught their followers, to the modern surroundings of the urban university where a new modern-style education was adopted.[10] Religious universities, in addition to other centres of higher learning where a religious education is a compulsory component of the curriculum, produced not only the modern religious scholar but also the Islamic intellectual. The latter may or may not have specialised in religious knowledge but has enough understanding of the tradition to articulate opinions and offer interpretations.

Historically, major centres of religious learning in the Muslim world were truly transnational spaces where a tradition evolved as a result of the cross-fertilisation of ideas and scholars who had roots in different parts of the Islamic world. Mecca, Damascus, Baghdad and later Cairo where most of the Sunni Islamic tradition was produced over generations were real transnational centres. Al-Azhar in Cairo was the Mecca of Sunni scholars. Minor centres in North Africa and the Near East were not in a position to compete with al-Azhar.

Riyadh, with its religious institutes and newly established religious universities, and even Madina, where the first Islamic university was founded in the country, could not initially compete with the early centres of religious learning in the Arab world. Although Saudi Arabia received hundreds of scholars and thinkers from the Arab and Islamic world, its official *ʿulama* resisted any opening up to other Muslims, who were defined as 'foreign'. They welcomed foreign *ʿulama* only to convert them to their cause. They refrained from debating with other Muslim scholars as they applied the principle of *hajr al-mubtaʿdi* (the ostracisation of innovators): those who could not be 'converted' must be ostracised. They feared that such foreign scholars might not conform to Saudi religious interpretations. Foreigners had to be 'controlled' and 'guided' to avoid corrupting the local tradition. Educational institutions and religious instruction were from the very beginning put under the control of local Najdi *ʿulama*. Foreign educators were enlisted to 'deliver' the curriculum rather than interpret it. The latter was the prerogative of a closed circle which was not even open for Saudis outside the traditional religious centre, let alone (Arab and Muslim) foreigners. The state allowed its *ʿulama* to administer and control the dissemination of religious knowledge by foreign instructors to ensure that the latter did not promote any religio-political interpretations that could threaten the discourse of consent or introduce religious innovations. The state rewarded the *ʿulama* who were in charge of perpetuating and refining the discourse of consent by granting them a monopoly over religious interpretation. It was in the interest of both the

state and the *ulama* to maintain control and surveillance. The religious establishment, staffed by loyalist Wahhabi–Salafi *ʿulama*, resisted any manifestation of, for example, imported foreign (Egyptian and Syrian) Ikhwani (Muslim Brotherhood) ideas into the classroom and the mosque to safeguard against contestation. However, an undeclared 'hidden war' was raging in study circles, intellectual centres and even summer camps between local official Wahhabi Salafiyya and so-called 'foreign' interpretations. The war ceased to be hidden after 11 September when official Saudi religious discourse started openly to attack the foreign Muslim Brotherhood and other *haraki* Islamists. According to one author, to function in Saudi Arabia one must wear the Salafi cloak like an official uniform'.[11] In fact, many Egyptian and Syrian religious scholars and educators did adopt Saudi attire. They looked Saudi but spoke in their local regional accents. Many abandoned the Egyptian or Syrian headgear associated with religious scholars in favour of the Saudi 'Salafi–Wahhabi' uniform, consisting of a rather short shirt and head cover, always worn untied with a head-rope. Unlike their colleagues who remained at home, they stopped trimming their beards.

Society and local scholars remained suspicious of the Islam of 'others', namely other Saudis and the newly arriving Muslim immigrants and exiles. The latter were employed as teachers and religious instructors and were under strict orders to respect the 'Saudi religious curriculum'. Their integration remained fraught with tension and suspicion inside Saudi Arabia. Immigrants, especially those who belonged to the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhoods, refrained from questioning Saudi–Wahhabi religio-political interpretations, if they wanted to remain in their jobs. Occasionally an immigrant *ʿalim* or Muslim thinker would be expelled, or 'sent abroad' on a religious mission. While Saudi Arabia adopted an 'open-door policy' towards the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s, to serve its own battle against Nasserites and Baʿthists, immigrants knew that they could not openly contest the religious interpretations of their host. Several scholars assimilated Saudi religio-political discourse in their own worldview. This resulted in the emergence of hybrid and cross-fertilised religious interpretations.

Modernity brought the university, which in turn produced individuals who were not only religious in the traditional ritualistic sense of the term but also conscious of their religious knowledge. The university produced graduates who could articulate this consciousness and express it in a modern language that appeals to a public wider than the traditional specialist *ʿulama* study circle. It produced interpreters of religion who engage with the social and political realities of contemporary society. This engagement distinguished the new *ʿulama* and intellectuals from the previous

generation that dominated the religious scene in the pre-oil era. The university, together with printing and audio media, allowed the dissemination of religious knowledge to a wide audience. The religious text became available beyond the limited study circle of scholars. Moreover, the same university produced people who 'are not bound by traditional norms and rules of religious discursive activity . . . the modern intellectual will be able to read deeper into the text in a critical, imaginative manner'.[12]

With the formalisation and modernisation of the environment in which religious knowledge develops, highly articulate voices appeared, aware of the wide gap between the enchanted Islamised consenting public sphere and the secularised political domain. For this generation, the dramatised ritualistic Islam was simply not enough. From within the Wahhabi tradition and among people who were brought up on its teachings, voices emerged that expressed uneasiness about the evolution of Wahhabiyya under state control. It is important to emphasise that not all those who expressed this uneasiness are young men. Some important figures are old members of the previous *'ulama* generation, thus belonging to the traditional Wahhabi *'ulama* group. While most of the new generation of *'ulama* and intellectuals endorsed Wahhabi social conservatism, they were uncomfortable with the religio-political aspect of that tradition. This new generation refers to itself as *shabab al-sahwa* (the youth of the awakening), or Sahwis (the awakened), a self-adopted appellation that carries multiple implications. While Wahhabiyya was in general a name imposed by outsiders on the teachings of *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya*, the name Sahwa is willingly adopted by those who regard themselves as part of it – the Sahwis themselves. In this chapter, I trace the changing nature of Sahwa and its evolution from contestation to co-optation.

The meaning of Sahwa: re-enchanting politics

Several studies have now traced the development of the new Sahwi trend in Saudi Arabia since the 1990s. Studies in Western languages offered detailed biographies of famous Sahwis such as Sheikhs Salman al-Awdah, Safar al-Hawali and Nasir al-Omar, documented their rhetoric and followed their engagement with politics over a critical decade in the history of the country. Most previous research focused on Sahwis as a local Saudi variant of political Islam, Islamists and recently radical Salafi groups. Saudi sources also identified Sahwa as a manifestation of what is pejoratively referred to by Saudi liberals as Islamawis, defined as an uncompromising group who 'use' and 'abuse' Islam in pursuit of ideological aspirations and political careers.[13] In most liberal and official Wahhabi discourse, Sahwa is seen as a product of alien religious interpretations

and Islamist political movements, mainly the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Qutbist[14] ideologies and Jihadi trends. It is ironic that both Saudi liberals and official religious scholars detest Sahwa and Sahwis. Both realise the threatening potential of Sahwis who call not only for the Islamisation of society, as society is already Islamised, but – more importantly – for the deconstruction of the quiescent official Wahhabi discourse and its replacement with a discourse of contestation. Liberals and official Wahhabis both fear the revolutionary potential of Sahwi religio-political discourse, which threatens to dismantle the monopoly of liberals over the affairs of state and the official *ʿulama* over the religious domain. Sahwis are detested because they undermine the age-old division between the religious society and secular politics. In short, they threaten the schism that grew and flourished under the state and official Wahhabi religio-political discourse. A Saudi preacher by the name of Musa al-Abdulaziz, the editor of a very marginal magazine called *Salafiyyah*, declared that liberals are closer to Islam and Salafiyya than Sahwi Qutbis. He argued that liberals have a better instinct (*fitra*).[15]

Traditional and official Wahhabi scholars are scathing in their attacks on Sahwis.[16] My intention here is to consider Sahwa as a state of mind and a plan of action. Sahwa is built on a realisation that ordinary man can be at the centre of his own destiny. Sahwa is neither creed nor worship; it is neither religion nor politics: it is both.

Sahwis are a loose and fluid sub-group within the community of the faithful who from the 1970s strove to establish a distinct identity for themselves. The mentors of the first generation of Sahwis were in fact the traditional Wahhabi *ʿulama*, assisted by a group of Arab religious scholars and educators, mainly from Egypt and Syria, who migrated – voluntarily or involuntarily – to Saudi Arabia in the 1960s. Two Arab *ʿulama* are often cited as influencing Sahwa: an Egyptian, Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb; and a Syrian, Sheikh Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin. Both taught in Saudi educational institutions in the 1960s. While some studies have highlighted the influence of these 'foreign' scholars who settled in Saudi Arabia, it is important to examine Sahwism as an autonomous Saudi phenomenon that lies at the heart of political activism in the country. While Sahwis may have been influenced by outside intellectuals and religious scholars, they are a manifestation of a local evolution in Saudi society that began in the 1970s. While external influences on Sahwis are often exaggerated, the way Saudi Sahwis, especially the Salafis amongst them, influenced other Islamists abroad is often ignored. Some famous Saudi Sahwis are no longer local figures; their lectures are heard among Muslims worldwide. Saudi Sahwis have blurred the boundaries between the local and the global. One can read their

publications anywhere in the world, and access their mosque sermons, seminars and lectures on the internet. Today one can easily switch from Sheikh Ibn Baz's lecture on obedience to *wali al-amr* to Salman al-Awdah's lecture on the fall of nations, passing by Nasir al-Omar's sermons on resistance in Iraq.

In an increasingly connected world, it is very difficult to identify the boundaries between the local and the global. There is no doubt that the Sahwa was influenced by external ideas. Nevertheless, it is grounded in local discourse, and later spread its influence beyond the geographical territory of its own homeland. More importantly, Sahwi thought is a hybrid tradition that rediscovered the revolutionary potential of Wahhabi religio-political discourse and rearticulated it in a modern language accessible to all. This rediscovery was perhaps assisted by various outside influences that arrived in Saudi Arabia in the second half of the twentieth century. It may well be that Qutbi or Muslim Brotherhood discourse and figures facilitated this rediscovery. The Muslim Brotherhood may have had an important influence, but to forge a causal relationship serves only political purposes, for example absolving Saudis from any responsibility for violence. The aim here is not to blame an external group or ideology for 'radicalising Saudi youth' or 'leading them astray', as often claimed in official Saudi statements, but rather to show the complexity of the religio-political field and how it may evade simple reductionist causal explanations.

In the Saudi context Sahwa is a movement that strives to re-enchant a politically dis-enchanted world. According to Sheikh Salman al-Awdah, Sahwa is concerned with *inkar al-munkar alanan* (disavowing the abominable in public). This is a political act that is guided by religious interpretation. In Saudi Arabia only the state and its official *'ulama* have the right and power to reject the abominable. Al-Awdah challenges this view, as he considers it the responsibility of all.

A Sahwi has an awareness of his religiosity which distinguishes him from those whose religiosity is habitual and traditional. Sahwis do not simply perform religious rituals out of habit; they often exhibit an awareness of their engagement, not only with such rituals but also in public affairs. For the majority of Sahwis, Islam is not simply a set of repetitive rituals (*'ibadat*): it is a psychological state and a blueprint for social and political engagement with the contemporary world. Islam is a project whose realisation starts with the self through *iltizam*, commitment not only to the prescribed five pillars of the tradition but also to what is considered its 'essence'. Bringing out the so-called 'essence' requires a vision of the present and future that privileges religious texts and identity. This tends to be ignored in discussion of Sahwis. It is often argued that the discourse about the return to the tradition of the great pious ancestors

represents nostalgia to the glorious past – in the language of Saudi critics of Sahwa, a desire to return to an archaic and pre-modern existence. This is an inaccurate understanding of the Salafi Sahwi rhetoric that invokes the past. Salafi Sahwis use the rhetoric of the past to manipulate the present and build the future. They are grounded in current concerns. Sahwis use modern technology to disseminate a modern message, although this message is grounded in the rhetoric of the past and the ancestors. Like a tribe's obsession with genealogies, Sahwis' 'obsession' with the past is rooted in contemporary society and modern concerns. Aidh al-Qarni, a famous Sahwi sheikh, defines the Islamic awakening as 'renewal of religion while retaining its authenticity. It means that we return to religion in order to deal with contemporary and very new concerns that dominate civilisation and society . . . Sahwa means to return to the roots after a long period of *ightirab* [alienation, exile] and static existence.'[17] While Sahwa may represent itself through increased commitment to ritualistic Islam, it is above all a state of mind that allows a Muslim to have Islam and only Islam as a reference point for all aspects of life, including public political affairs. At the individual level, Sahwis have a commitment not only to the salvation of the self but also to society.

Sahwis include formally trained religious scholars who qualify as members of the *'ulama* class, in addition to ordinary men. Some Sahwis are scientists, doctors, engineers, chemists, writers and journalists, but may have studied religion as part of their education. They all therefore have some degree of religious knowledge that enables them to articulate opinions on religious texts. This puts them in the category of what is known as Islamic intellectuals, who constitute a category between the traditional *'ulama* and laymen. They do not qualify as religious scholars, who can issue *fatwa*s, yet they have enough knowledge of the tradition to invoke its texts and interpretation as need arises. Unlike those who are traditionally religious, they are aware of the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings that can be attributed to the religious text. This does not mean that Sahwis can be automatically considered strong believers in the diversity of religious interpretation. It simply means that they are aware of the diversity, although they may not accept it. They can be as dogmatic as any other social category in Saudi society.

All Sahwi intellectuals are products of the modern education system in Saudi Arabia and a substantial number hold doctorates in various branches of the sciences. Many Sahwi intellectuals follow a Sahwi sheikh, a scholar upon whom they depend for *'ilm shari'* (*shari'a* knowledge), inspiration and authenticity. By claiming to be among the followers of a Sahwi sheikh, they seek recognition by proxy. Such a Sahwi intellectual would often be known as *mufakir Islami* (a Muslim thinker). They are

rarely referred to as *muthaqaf* – an intellectual who is often associated with acquiring Western knowledge, especially in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Sahwi intellectuals disseminate their ideas in books, newspaper articles, sermons, lectures and sometimes their own websites. While their position between laymen and *ʿulama* can be an advantage in an increasingly literate and connected society, it also carries a problematic ambiguity. Sahwi intellectuals defend their venturing into religious interpretation on the basis that in Islam there is no such category as *rijal din* (clergy), as each Muslim is required to know religion. In the opinion of many Sahwis, the word *ʿulama* simply refers to those who know, regardless of the substance of their knowledge.

Saudi Sahwis are engaged in this world, especially its politics. All Sahwis subscribe to the view that the world can be changed, modified, altered and improved by communal human action that draws on religious sources, mainly the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet. Organising society in small groups, attending lectures, debating politics and religion – and even secret meetings – are all legitimate means to engage with public affairs. Above all, Sahwis strongly believe in their right to issue public advice on current affairs, and openly to criticise government policies, thus violating an important official Wahhabi dogma. They believe that the duty of publicly disavowing the abominable (*inkar al-munkar*), including telling the ruler that he has committed an abominable act or violated the rule of *shariʿa*, is incumbent upon all Muslims, rather than a small coterie of *ʿulama*. Sahwis criticise the religious establishment for publicly condemning the abominable only if committed by laymen, and since the early 1990s, Sahwis have distinguished themselves by carrying out this duty, and especially by condemning abominable or inappropriate actions on the part of the rulers.

Sahwis do not subscribe to a single well-defined political party or organisation. They may belong to various Islamist movements. There are, for example, groups identified with the Muslim Brotherhood in its two variants: followers of Hasan al-Banna and those of Sayyid Qutb. These tend to be concentrated in several national and pan-Islamic organisations, in addition to universities and intellectual circles. It seems, however, that in general the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood have remained conspicuous by their absence. They have stayed away from populist politics and remained an intellectual trend without a wide populist public base. However, this assessment remains impressionistic and is based on a description by Saudi Ikhwanis of their own position on the religio-political map of Saudi Arabia.[18]

There are also groups whose political orientation derives from the Syrian sheikh Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin, a Salafi Ikhwani

scholar, who separated from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and set up his own tradition. It is often claimed that his followers in Saudi Arabia are the most numerous among Sahwis. His tradition will be discussed later in this chapter, but suffice here to say that the sheikh's name is often mentioned in conjunction with discussion of the Saudi Sahwa.

Other Sahwis follow global political movements, for example Hizb al-Tahrir and al-Qa'ida. Supporters of the Movement for Islamic Renewal, al-Tajdid, based in London and led by Muhammad al-Masari, adopt the intellectual orientation of Hizb al-Tahrir. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula invokes a clear association with Osama bin Laden. Its followers are often called Salafi Jihadis.

Regardless of their political affiliation, most Sahwis are easily identified as *haraki* Islamists. The fact that political parties are banned in Saudi Arabia makes it difficult to identify the main political trends and their membership. Not many Sahwis will voluntarily declare their party affiliation, if they have one. However, with the arrival of the internet in 1998, Saudi Sahwis made the most of this new communication technology to create virtual communities that share similar religious and ideological orientation. The well-known among them have their own websites and discussion boards, while their followers contribute to the debate under pseudonyms as a protection against arrest and other hazards. Some Sahwi *'ulama* have their own electronic newsletters.

The Saudi awakening is about the realisation that it is religiously incumbent on society to be engaged with politics. *Sahwa* is contrasted with an opposite state of mind, *gafwa* (deep sleep), comparable to inertia and indifference. Sahwis are political activists. They do not accept that calling for the oneness of God (*al-tawhid*) is the primary purpose of Islam, a position that distinguishes them from the religious establishment. In the opinion of one Saudi, the Prophet called for the declaration that 'there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger', not for the establishment of an Islamic state.[19] Therefore, purifying religious practice from *shirk* (blasphemy) becomes the primary obligation. For Sahwis, the Islamic call is a call for the establishment of the Islamic polity, and the application of *shari'a* (*tahkim al-shar'*). Their philosophy goes far beyond purifying religion from heterodoxy.

Neither the *'ulama* nor the intellectuals among the Sahwis shy away from venturing into territory often regarded as taboo in Saudi Arabia. Sahwis volunteer public interpretations of foreign relations, international politics and the role of Saudi Arabia in the world, all traditionally the prerogative of a small coterie of royalty and assistants, who operate behind closed doors. Sahwi *'ulama* write both theological treatises and political pamphlets concerned with world affairs.[20] Sahwis challenge the

official worldview that politics is the prerogative of the ruler and his entourage. They believe that public affairs are the concern of the community of the faithful, and see themselves at the centre of *al-sha'n al'-am* (public affairs). Sahwis initially claimed that the appearance of an Islamised society does not automatically mean an Islamic polity, although it is essentially the first step towards creating one. An Islamic polity needs more than ritualistic Islam. Its realisation requires Muslims to be vigorously engaged in public affairs through communal organisation and activism, a vision that is challenging to both the state and the official religious worldview described in the last chapter. Sahwis blur the boundaries between religion and politics – boundaries that the official Wahhabi establishment managed to keep separate, with the sanction of the Saudi regime while retaining the rhetoric of the monotheist state (*dawlat al-tawhid*). Blurring the boundaries between religion and politics makes it incumbent upon Sahwis to take a position vis-à-vis political authority and the guardians of the official Wahhabi tradition. This, they claim, is guided by an interpretation of the religious texts.

Sahwis differ in their attitude to political authority. In general, they can be divided into two camps, those who accept it as legitimate government, but in need of reform, and those who reject it altogether as an illegitimate authority. Those who publicly accept the legitimacy of the Saudi regime strive peacefully to 'influence' it and make it correspond more to their vision of the rightful Islamic polity. Those who reject the existing authorities altogether work towards undermining and eventually overthrowing the regime, by either peaceful means or violence. All Sahwi sub-groups are a product of the Sahwi belief in the ability of the individual and society to change the world through various means. All Sahwis share the belief that the existing government is imperfect.

All Sahwis have reservations about the religio-political discourse of the official Wahhabi establishment that denounces their political activism, and have a contentious and strained relationship with its main figures. They have problems accepting some aspects of this tradition as it became institutionalised in Saudi Arabia in the last decades of the twentieth century. Sahwis who are Salafis accept Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's theology but may have reservations regarding the current Saudi state and its *'ulama*. Such Sahwis glorify the first state of the eighteenth century, but have serious reservations about the current one. Some argue that the present regime has failed to fulfil the spirit of the early message. They point out that current Wahhabi *'ulama* have abandoned the teachings of an early generation of strong and brave *'ulama* who maintained their independence vis-à-vis previous Saudi imams and kings.

All Sahwis challenge the official religious interpretation that disenfranchises society when it comes to political matters. They do not accept that only a small group of people distinguished by either their religious knowledge or secular expertise has the right to monopolise state policy and strategy. They aspire towards greater say in urgent social, political and economic issues. While the Sahwi *ʿulama* aspire to replace the traditional *ʿulama*, intellectuals among them aim to occupy a privileged public position in state bureaucracy and apparatus.

Nevertheless, the boundaries between the various Sahwi positions have always been fluid and unclear. In a country such as Saudi Arabia, where censorship of the religious and political domains remains very strong, it is extremely difficult for any analysis to go beyond what is publicly declared and stated by outspoken Sahwis. Throughout this research many Sahwis have pointed my attention to the fact that Sahwis who publicly accept the Saudi regime denounce it in the privacy of their closed meetings. During the 1990s several Sahwi activists were put in prison for expressing political views that undermined government decisions, an episode in Saudi history that is now well documented.[21] Several Sahwi *ʿulama*, for example Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah, and other Sahwi intellectuals, such as Abdulaziz al-Qasim, Muhammad al-Hodhayf, Muhsin al-Awajy, Saad al-Faqih and Muhammad al-Masari, spent some time in prison as a result of activism that was deemed challenging to the government. Government oppression of such figures was not challenged by the official Wahhabi tradition, especially Grand Mufti Abdulaziz ibn Baz. In the early 1990s, Sahwis were considered *personae non gratae* who undermined unity and cohesion among the believers. While most intellectuals spent a short time in prison, some Sahwi *ʿulama* were jailed for over five years. Most activists lost their previous jobs and were banned from public preaching, lecturing and study circles. Sahwis remember the 1990s as the decade of imprisonment, which, although characterised by loss of personal freedom and rights, was also a time that allowed many of them to build a symbolic capital manifested in popularity, prestige and fame. Imprisonment fixed Sahwis in the historical imagination of their followers as courageous activists who sacrificed personal benefit in the pursuit of public good. Their opponents, mainly Saudi liberals and official government spokesmen, often hold them responsible for radicalising the young population and creating the grounds for the violent Jihadi trend.

One Sahwi group among others

As mentioned earlier, pluralism, more recently amounting to fragmentation and even hostility between various Sahwi groups, is one important

aspect of the Saudi Sahwa. One influential Sahwi sub-group is often referred to in the public sphere as Sururis, a reference to followers of Syrian sheikh Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin, hereafter Muhammad Surur. This appellation is rejected by both the sheikh himself and by those who may have drawn on aspects of his thought. The sheikh states: 'I do not know of a group called Sururi. I have never been responsible for such a group. If somebody says to me "I am a Sururi," I will disown him.'[22]

The name Sururi is, however, retained by outsiders, either to emphasise the 'foreignness' of this sub-group or its *hizbiyya* (adherence to party politics). In this section I shall draw a picture of the sheikh's intellectual heritage as a prelude to discussing the evolution of Saudi Sahwis who are often identified by outsiders as being his followers. Sheikh Muhammad Surur may have inspired some Saudi sheikhs while he was a religious teacher in the religious institutes and schools of Buraydah, the home town of Salman al-Awdah.

Sheikh Muhammad Surur came to Saudi Arabia in 1965. He is known as a Syrian Muslim Brotherhood supporter who had fled his country under the pressure of the Baʿth party. He is also known to have founded his own movement, which split from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. However, his ideas, published in several books, journals and on his al-Sunnah website, demonstrate a strong Salafi orientation mixed with the organisational capabilities of the Muslim Brotherhood, hence the name Salafi Ikhwani. A central feature of his religious view relates to a critical stance vis-à-vis 'official *ʿulama*', in the Muslim world in general as well as in Saudi Arabia. After spending eight years in Saudi Arabia, it seems that he left, or was asked to leave, around 1973.

In most accounts of the influence of 'outside agents' on the Saudi religio-political field, Sahwis are portrayed as unquestioning followers of Islamist exiles from Syria and Egypt, including Sheikh Muhammad Surur. Gilles Kepel tends to reiterate this view.[23] He depicts an image of Saudi Sahwis as passive recipients of a foreign, politicised Islam that grew in response to Baʿthist and Nasserite oppression and was brought to Saudi Arabia by exiles. This view is also held by the Saudi regime. Perhaps Kepel's inability to realise the full potential of Wahhabi discourse and the social evolution of Saudi society in the 1970s made him reach such unjustified conclusions. In his account, he does not entertain the possibility that Sheikh Muhammad Surur himself and many other exiles may have themselves incorporated aspects of Salafi Wahhabi thought which they initially did not subscribe to. This remains a possibility that cannot be ruled out. An examination of the Syrian sheikh's writings reveals clearly that he incorporated aspects of the Salafi Wahhabi tradition, given his references to several Najdi scholars. Saudi Sahwis remain

autonomous agents who can mix and match rather than blindly follow this Syrian Salafi sheikh, or any other foreign sheikh.

On a rainy London morning, Sheikh Muhammd Surur received me in the company of his young son. After a couple of hours, a friend and a colleague of the sheikh joined us. I had already asked the sheikh whether he would allow me to interview him. When I assured him that the interview would not be used for media purposes but was part of an academic study, he agreed. The sheikh was an imposing old man with a long Salafi beard. He wore what appeared to be a Saudi *thawb* (white dress) and *ghutra* (white headcover) which hung down on his shoulders without the traditional black *ʿuqal* (tying rope), an attire very different from that worn by traditional Levantine religious scholars. All items of clothing indicated a strong association with Salafism rather than the Muslim Brotherhood. The sheikh wore the symbols of an intellectual stand and a religious identity. A sense of wisdom and serenity emanated from him as he talked to me about his experience in Saudi Arabia, always avoiding eye-contact, in fulfilment of *ghadh al-basar* (lowering the gaze) in the presence of a woman. In the context of cosmopolitan London, he could be mistaken for an oriental mystic or sage. However, he was far removed from mysticism.

The sheikh was grounded in the real world, and fully conversant in its affairs. He combined religious knowledge with an ability to deal with current affairs. He runs a publishing house in Birmingham and a website. He left his homeland in Hawran (Syria) under political pressure, and moved to Buraydah in 1965. In 1973 he went to Kuwait, then moved to London in 1983. He later moved between London and Birmingham. In 2004–5 he left London permanently, and moved to Amman. Muhammad Surur is a transnational Salafi sheikh par excellence. He may move and build encapsulated niches around himself, but does not aim to integrate himself in the wider culture in which he finds himself.[24]

The sheikh's assessment of the relationship with Saudi *ʿulama* since the 1960s highlights a process whereby 'we influenced them and they influenced us', which is probably a more accurate description than the one often acknowledged by outside observers. He holds a high opinion of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Latif Al-Shaykh (d. 1969), mentioned in the last chapter. He values the independence of this Saudi mufti, maintained because he was not 'an employee of the government'. He was a responsible man. Even King Faysal, who was the strongest of all Saudi kings, used to fear him. When he died Saudi Arabia did not have a mufti for almost twenty-five years. People wanted to divide and distribute Ibn Ibrahim's heritage. In the early 1990s Ibn Baz became a mufti but he was not like Ibn Ibrahim. After Ibn Ibrahim the mufti became an employee of the government.'[25]

According to Sheikh Muhammad Surur, the independence of the *ʿulama* should be protected and cherished. This protection can be achieved through the establishment of what he calls *jamiʿat al-ʿulama*, an *ʿulama* association that is not subservient to the state. He adds: 'This association must have financial independence and must be in control of endowments. But the state does not want this. It wants to control everything. The *ʿulama* association should be different from *hayat kibar al-ʿulama*, the Council of Senior *ʿulama*.' On the obligation to obey the ruler, Sheikh Muhammad Surur believes that rebelling against a ruler with the sword (*khuruj bi ʾl-sayf*) is *fitna*, a cause for discord among Muslims. He argues: 'I was against Jihadi movements that fought Arab regimes because they precipitate internal struggle. But I am also against formulating an Islam that suits the ruler.'[26]

The sheikh distinguishes between two types of Salafiyya, preferring to call them *hizb al-wulat* (loyalists) and *hizb al-ghulat* (radicals). He positions himself as a Wasati, a free Centrist, an affiliation that became prominent in Saudi Arabia after 11 September, as we shall see later.

> *Hizb al-wulat*, the loyalists, believe in unconditional obedience to [those] whom they consider to be rulers of Muslims. Their followers are chaotic; they are incapable of controlling their members except in obeying the ruler. In Saudi Arabia, the loyalists appeared after the Gulf War [1990] and their main preoccupation is to destroy the real callers for Salafi thought. They work hard to spy on free *ʿulama* and report them to the authorities. Their sheikh is Rabi al-Madkhali. He uses the name Qutbi and Sururi to refer to all those who disagree with him. We cannot distinguish between al-Madkhali and the policies of his government. The loyalists denounce all those denounced by the government. This party claims that the princes know better and politics is their own business only. The loyalists accuse other Salafis of ignoring the call for *tawhid* and focusing more on *hakimiyya* [rule of God], which they claim led to political dissent and confrontation with the rulers.[27]

The sheikh distances himself from *hizb al-ghulat*. Here he distinguishes between the ancient radicalism that plagued Islamic civilisation (for example the Kharijites) and the new contemporary manifestations of radicalism. What concerns us here is the new radicalism, described by the sheikh as a product of prisons, torture and oppression of Muslims. He details cases of oppression in Syrian and Egyptian prisons to conclude that these cases encouraged radicalism, and outlines the characteristics of the radicals: they shed the of blood of their opponents; they are not qualified to issue *fatwa*s; and they monopolise truth and interpretation. Contemporary radicals are young and inexperienced men. They are distinguished by an ability to recite Quran and Hadith without serious reflection on their meanings. They use violence indiscriminately, blowing

up Muslim civilians and attacking the *ʿulama* who challenge their interpretations. The sheikh laments the polarisation of the Muslim community between the loyalists and the radicals.

In one of his publications, Sheikh Muhammad Surur defends the concern with *hakimiyya* (sovereignty, rule of God) by referring to the work of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. According to Sheikh Muhammad Surur, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab regarded those who prefer the rule of *taghut* as *kafir*s. He asks whether 'the loyalists are aware of Muhammad ibn Ibrahim's epistle in which he stated that the rule of *shariʿa* is an aspect of worshipping God alone. It is the struggle where swords have been used.'[28]

According to the Syrian sheikh, Saudi loyalists condemned the free Wasati Salafis. Asked about the future of *ʿulama* in Saudi Arabia, he declared that 'Sheikh Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah are the future generation, the real *ʿulama*'. They must resist the conspiracies of the sultan. On the rule of the sultan, the sheikh writes:

> The sultan is mischievous. He uses his intelligence services and his resources to lure the *ʿulama*. He offers them important posts and promises to work with them to initiate reform. After the *ʿulama* fall in his hand, they become accustomed to seeing sins. They redefine the forbidden and the permissible. They accuse all those who disagree with them. They call his opponents Kharijites, innovators, radicals and terrorists.[29]

Sheikh Muhammad Surur says that the sultan's *ʿulama* should follow the example of those who resist political authority. He cites examples of early pious *ʿulama*, such as Abu Hanifa, Malik ibn Anas, Sufyan al-Thawri, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Imam Bukhari, Imam Nawawi, and al-Iz ibn Abd al-Salam, and says that contemporary *ʿulama* should be informed by Ibn Taymiyya's famous statement, 'I am a man of religion not a man of state,' thus emphasising that the *ʿulama*'s main concern should be loyalty to faith rather than state. The sheikh encourages participation in elections, although he himself has no interest in directly participating in the political process. He remains an *ʿalim*.

The sheikh places himself between the loyalists and the radicals, a position which is adopted by some Saudi Sahwis. The central feature of his approach is the combination of *ʿaqida* (creed) and a serious engagement with politics and public affairs. This means that if ever there is a Sururi trend, it will be distinguished by a vigorous commitment to Islamic creed and practices combined with political involvement. This is contrasted with two other trends: the official Wahhabi tradition, which concerned itself primarily with creed rather than politics; and the traditional Muslim Brotherhood, which is primarily concerned with politics rather than the purification of faith and the enforcement of orthodoxy.

Sheikh Muhammad Surur combines creed with politics, thus revolutionising both traditional Salafiyya and the Muslim Brotherhood.[30]

11 September: an accused and divided Sahwa

As the two most famous Sahwis, Sheikhs Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah, were released from prison in 1999, they and their followers were caught between loyalty to call and loyalty to state. The first required disavowing the abominable in public. The second demanded an acquiescent position, in practice amounting to either withdrawal from public life or a positive sanctioning of government policies. As Sahwi sheikhs they continued to believe in their duty to change the world by action, including the spoken and written word. The world they thought was in need of change was not only social but also political. The experience of prison granted the sheikhs a glorious status in the eyes of their followers. Those Sahwis who fled the country in the early 1990s, for example Saad al-Faqih and Muhammad al-Masari, reconstituted their separate movements in exile but continued to play the role of advocates for the Sahwi sheikhs while the latter were still in prison. After their release, the Sahwa faced a serious challenge, represented by the attack on New York and the increase in Jihadi violence in Saudi Arabia afterwards. After 11 September, Sahwis were prime suspects. Three groups denounced them: certain princes within the Saudi regime; the official religious establishment; and Saudi liberals. When Sahwis publicly condemned Jihadi violence inside Saudi Arabia, they incurred the wrath of followers of this trend.

Minister of Interior Prince Nayef accused the Muslim Brotherhood variant of the Sahwis of standing behind the violence in Saudi Arabia. He repeatedly claimed that the inspiration for violence is alien to Saudi Arabia. According to Prince Nayef, violence is imported from Egypt by those who were welcomed in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s. A member of the Shura Council, Muhammad al-Zulfa, repeated the prince's accusation. He argued that the Muslim Brotherhood introduced radical Islam into Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, a rather surprising comment by a historian.[31] The governor of Asir, Prince Khalid al-Faysal, directly accused the Sahwis of being responsible for the 'new religious trend', which generated violence in recent years. In several newspaper articles and television interviews, he made it clear that 'the extremist ideology is alien to us. It spread in schools, mosques, and everywhere. In our schools and mosques there are young men who deliver sermons as though they are senior clerics.'[32] In a speech given in Abha, the prince claimed that those who are now calling for Wasatiyya, the middle path, are 'the very ones who disseminated the thought of Sayyid Qutb and al-Mawdudi, and they are among

the students of Muhammad Qutb'.[33] Many senior princes capitalised on the events of 11 September and later local violence to condemn Sahwa and settle old scores. This was to be expected, as the regime could not tolerate any intellectual or religious trend that questions its policy or threatens its survival. However, we should not take individual princely attacks on Sahwa to be representative of the government's position.

In response to 11 September, official Wahhabis redefined the meaning of 'Sahwa' in terms of increased religiosity in the public sphere and more commitment to ritualistic Islam, thus emptying Sahwa of its most obvious meaning: political activism that reaches beyond religious rituals. Official Wahhabiyya, which had always regarded Sahwis as either competitors or adversaries, was quick to issue its own condemnation. A senior scholar, Sheikh Abdulmuhsin al-Obaykan, had his own views on the Sahwis. He reiterated that violence is a product of alien ideas that have dominated Saudi Arabia's intellectual field.[34] He disseminated these ideas on the pages of the London-based Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat*. In 2005 a Saudi Salafi sheikh, Musa al-Abdulaziz, argued that the Muslim Brotherhood conspired to ruin Saudi Arabia's amicable relations with the USA when they attacked New York and enlisted Saudis for the attack. He praised Saudi liberals whom he described as closer to the spirit of Islam than Sahwis, especially the Qutbis. He chose to denounce Sahwis in the context of an interview broadcast on a liberal Saudi-owned satellite channel.[35] Another well-known religious scholar, Rabi al-Madkhali, who had always been hostile to Sahwis, argued that 'Sahwis (Ikhwanis and Qutbis) are more dangerous than the *kafir* groups fought by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century. Qutbis disguise themselves under the label Salafiyya but they are worst than the obvious *kafir*s. Muslims cannot be deceived by real *kafir*s but they are deceived by those innovators who lead people astray.'[36] This is a typical position that draws on early Wahhabi religious texts, which always insisted that other so-called Muslims are worse than the *kafir*s of Quraysh. Al-Madkhali and his followers resorted to lectures and tapes to propagate their message against Sahwis. The attack on New York, which resulted in Western media becoming increasingly critical of Saudi Arabia, along with local violence, freed traditional Salafis from any constraint when attacking those who are their brothers in creed but opponents in political orientation.

Many Saudi writers joined in the denunciation of Sahwa and its advocates. After 11 September, the most critical voices were those of ex-Sahwis, who 'revised' their views and began to distance themselves from radicalism. After 11 September, the catchphrase among Saudi Islamists was *taraju'at*, reconsideration of previous opinions, thus invoking the same phenomenon that dominated the Egyptian Islamist scene almost a

decade ago.[37] After several years of flirting with radicalism and excommunicating other Muslims, well-known figures who had spent time in prison, such as Mansur al-Noqaydan and Mishari al-Thaydi, moved from radicalism to calling for a reconsideration of Sahwa, and even Wahhabi doctrine, while still under the age of thirty. They published their revised positions in both traditional and new media. Western media quickly adopted their stories and hailed them as brave and courageous men who shed radicalism and terrorism.[38] Inside the country, they incurred the wrath of several groups, including, of course, their ex-comrades. Against official rhetoric blaming 'foreign Muslim Brotherhood' influence on young Saudis, al-Noqaydan wrote that radicalism is a local product and had nothing to do with alien ideas. He argued that violent Jihadis draw not on Muhmmad Qutb, Abu Ala al-Mawdudi or Hasan al-Banna but on Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya and Najdi scholars such as Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Ibn Sahman and Ibn Atiq. He concluded that radical thought is in fact rooted in Saudi Arabia.[39]

Locally, in an article entitled 'Sururis and Jihadis: The Raging Wolf and the Buried Snake', Khalid al-Ghannami, a young writer recently turned to liberalism, argues that the two Sahwi trends (Jihadis and Ikhwanis) are related intellectually 'but one prefers to kill openly while the other remains hidden until it is safe to emerge from its hole'.[40] This was one of the most direct accusations against Sururi Sahwis, holding them responsible for the spread of violence, radicalism and intolerance among the youth of the country. Al-Ghannami claims that Sururis are dormant *takfiri*s (practising excommunication of other Muslims), although they do not call for armed rebellion – at least openly – against the rulers or those who differ from them. He claims that they differ from violent *takfiri*s, those who resort to the sword. The latter tend to be simple and young, and have no detailed knowledge of religion except for memorising verses of the Quran and the Prophet's tradition. However, those ignorant young men are easily converted back to the right path, as they are loosely organised and tend to operate alone without an umbrella organisation. In the author's opinion, Sururis are the womb that produces violent individuals. He compares the movement to a snake hiding in a hole.

Another author, Saud al-Qahtani, argues that 'Sahwis were able to construct Islamic discourse relating to political, social, psychological, and intellectual matters'. This was beyond the ability of traditional Wahhabi *'ulama*. Sahwis were loyal to the religious dimension of Wahhabiyya but disloyal to its political views. According to this author, Sahwi preaching eroded the concept of obedience to *wali al-amr* and encouraged rebellion.[41] Al-Qahtani identified the most important aspect of Sahwa as its rejection of the absolute obedience to rulers promoted by Sheikh ibn Baz.

He argued that Sahwis remained Wahhabis in their creed but in their political views they adopted the Ikhwani intellectual activist heritage.[42] In his opinion Sahwa is an unofficial political party, independent and hegemonic. He described it as a new church, monopolising religious interpretation and demonising its opponents.

One of the most scathing attacks on Sahwa was voiced by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif al-Shaykh, who argued that 'official Wahhabiyya is a call that resulted in the birth of the Islamic state. Traditional Wahhabis protect the state whereas Sahwis destroy it. The first manipulates religious texts to support the state while the latter manipulates religious texts to destroy it.'[43] Official Wahhabiyya is seen here as a religious interpretation that promotes the state and builds a nation, whereas Sahwa is presented as a discourse of destruction, fragmentation and discord. Today official discourse tries to convince the world that Wahhabiyya is a tradition of tolerance and respect while the alien Sahwi ideas are a religion of violence and confrontation. Some scholars in the West adopt this official Saudi discourse.

These accusations, however, ignore the complexity of the process by which various Sahwi Islamist groups can be classified and how their discourse can easily change in response to political contexts. Sahwis draw on a complex and fluid religio-political discourse that generated several subgroups, at any one time agreeing on some issues and differing on others. Western scholarship on Saudi Islamists, however, continues to search for neat categories with the hope of identifying groups that easily fit ready-made labels such as 'traditional', 'radical', 'moderate', 'reformist', 'Islamo-liberal', 'rejectionist', 'Jihadi' and others.[44] The Saudi Islamist field proved to be both diverse and difficult to classify. As long as open and organised groups are forbidden, Sahwis will remain difficult to identify as belonging to clear-cut political parties and organisations. Sahwism is a fluid philosophy that responds rapidly to changing local and international politics. As such, individuals can easily situate themselves in one category while retaining the ability to move between groups. Moreover, any attempt to situate Islamist political discourse in one tradition – Wahhabi, Ikhwani, Qutbi, Salafi Jihadi or any other – proves to be a futile attempt in the search for origins. While Saudi Arabia had its own religio-political discourse, it influenced and was influenced by several other interpretations.

Accusations and counter-accusations mirror a witch-hunt that must be understood in the context of international politics and official Saudi attempts to absolve the regime and its Wahhabi foundation from any responsibility for terrorism. The regime obviously seeks to establish not only its innocence but also that of its religious establishment. In February

2005, the regime took the lead in organising an international counter-terrorism conference, depicting itself as a victim of terrorism in a desperate attempt to dispel the accusations of sponsoring or harbouring terrorists that erupted in Western media after 11 September.[45] Any outside accusation is often portrayed by the regime as an onslaught on Islam, in an attempt to dilute the criticism and rally support from a wide constituency. By so doing, it mobilises nationalism and religious sentiments in its own support. Outspoken princes and officials deny that there is such a thing called Wahhabiyya and therefore that Wahhabi discourse can be responsible for violence.

While these accusations did not subside in the years that followed 11 September, a new, more important, development began to crystallise. In order to survive the wave of demonisation, the Sahwis had to prove their innocence. In Saudi Arabia, there was only one way to do so.

Sahwa: from contestation to co-optation

The events of 11 September coincided with a weak and discredited official Wahhabi establishment that had just lost two of its most important figures, who had dominated religious discourse for almost half a century. Sheikh Abdulaziz Ibn Baz, the grand mufti, and Muhammad al-Uthaymin, a member of the Council of Senior Ulama, died of old age in 1999 and 2001 respectively. The government appointed Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Shaykh as grand mufti. However, it was obvious that the new mufti had neither the intellectual vigour nor the prestige enjoyed by Ibn Baz prior to his two most controversial *fatwa*s, the 1990 *fatwa* legitimising the invitation to foreign troops and the 1993 one legitimising peace with Israel. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the official Wahhabi establishment seemed weak, fragmented and less credible. It had lost its monopoly over religious knowledge with the advent of the modern university and the appearance of multiple religious interpretations. It retained the support of the regime, and in return it supported the regime. Yet there emerged a religious vacuum ready to be occupied.

Although senior princes attacked Sahwis in public, the regime enlisted famous Sahwis to perform two tasks – one intellectual and one practical. The first involved preaching the religious discourse that denounced Jihadis as activists who failed to understand the meaning of *jihad*. The second task involved negotiating with Jihadis in the hopes of delivering them to the regime. Sahwi figures 'volunteered' to bring back those who had gone astray, mainly Jihadis who used violence against the state and people. Only famous Sahwi scholars such as Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah were able to play the double role of preaching against violence

and neutralising violent actors. Less prominent famous Sahwis became so co-opted by the regime that they lost the credibility among their own followers, let alone their ex-comrades, to play any significant role. Others removed themselves from the public eye.

If the 1990s were years of contestation, the twenty-first century started with Sahwis moving towards mediation. Far from losing their popularity after prison, Sahwis remained active in two domains, one domestic and one international.

The domestic political front

At the domestic level, the state is aware of the continuing popularity of famous Sahwi sheikhs, whom it imprisoned almost a decade ago. Such sheikhs were younger than members of the religious establishment, more accessible and more engaged with current affairs. Most importantly, they were not so obviously connected to government bureaucracy. In order to be rehabilitated after release from prison, Sahwis, both sheikhs and intellectuals, showed good intentions by pursuing the official agenda. The agenda was to defeat Jihadis, condemn violence and praise the regime – or at least abstain from criticising it. In the official view, it was assumed that Sahwis were 'so close' to Jihadis ideologically that they could be enlisted in pacifying them and delivering them to the state. The Sahwis had no choice but to succumb to government pressure and deliver.

As popular quasi-'independent' *'ulama*, al-Hawali and al-Awdah served the agenda of the government in an efficient way while aiming to be rehabilitated after the years of confrontation with the regime. Today a quasi-independent and loosely organised Sahwi establishment serves the state better as a result of its relative freedom. At the same time the government realised that it is beneficial to maintain two religious establishments, one traditional and one Sahwi, thus upholding the divide-and-rule principle. It seems that the state can accommodate two religious establishments only if they are both willing to serve its own interests. After 11 September, the state wanted to mobilise both establishments against the common enemy, the Jihadis and the Islamist opposition abroad, both sprung out of the awakening itself.

Both al-Hawali and al-Awdah are Salafi sheikhs who accept the credal aspects of Wahhabiyya and the sanctity of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab but may have reservations on whether the contemporary Saudi state is still faithful to his teachings. Both went further than the traditional Wahhabi scholars were prepared to go. Sahwi sheikhs retained the Wahhabi interpretation of creed but combined it with political activism. In this way, they can be considered closer to the ideas of Sheikh Muhammad

Surur than to official Wahhabiyya. They were distinct from their Wahhabi masters not in matters related to creed but in practice.

It is important to note that Sahwis' relationship with the government and the Wahhabi establishment went through a period of contestation (1990–4), imprisonment (1994–9) and co-optation (from 1999). The first and second phases are well documented.[46] Sahwis initially avoided confrontation with the religious establishment until around the time of the Gulf War in 1990–1. After that, they generally refused to accept the legitimacy of the *fatwa* initiated by Ibn Baz in 1990 sanctioning the invitation of foreign troops to defend the country and his 1993 *fatwa* legitimising peace with Israel. As Sahwis adopted a defiant, anti-American mood and critical position vis-à-vis the government, they were imprisoned. We should focus here on the third phase, which followed their release from prison in 1999.

After 11 September and the wave of violence that swept Saudi cities, it was clear that leading Sahwis were put on the defensive. At this critical time, the relationship between the government and Sahwis was characterised by mutual interdependence. With the accusations continuing, Sahwis distanced themselves not only from the global discourse of Osama bin Laden and local Jihadi ideologues, but also from dissident Saudi Islamists abroad. Immediately after one of the most devastating terrorist attacks, in May 2003, al-Hawali, al-Awdah and many other Sahwi sheikhs issued a statement condemning the attacks and denouncing the Jihadis as ignorant and misguided young men. It has since become routine to issue such statements after every terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia and abroad. As the government issued its terrorist wanted lists – three lists were released by June 2005 – Sahwi sheikhs called upon Jihadis to give themselves up and avoid further bloodshed and discord.

In order to absolve themselves from any responsibility for the resurgence of *jihad* and Jihadis, Sahwi sheikhs endeavoured to issue clarification statements in which they defined the Sahwi position on *jihad*. On Salman al-Awdah's Islamtoday website, an article appeared in which the author explains the position of Sahwa on this important Islamic obligation. The author argued that *jihad* is one of the most noble duties, and Jihadi education is a legitimate obligation that must be performed by Muslims. He added: 'No Sahwi abandoned this obligation. In fact they are proud of calling for it and are passionate about it. However, Sahwis distinguish between *jihad* as a value and a principle and its application on the ground in countries like Egypt, Algeria and especially Saudi Arabia.'[47]

Sahwis clearly stated that violence in Saudi Arabia under the slogan 'removing infidels from the Arabian Peninsula', which became the motto of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, is illegitimate. On the same

website, Sheikh Abd al-Wahab al-Turayry clarifies this motto, which rests on a famous Prophetic Hadith, the subject of great discussion in the following two chapters. He asserts that this is an authentic and strong Hadith attributed to the Prophet. He argues that the Prophet did not object to the physical presence of Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula, but that he ordered Muslims not to allow them to make this region their permanent home or abode. Their presence should be temporary/accidental (*tari'*). This temporary presence should be subjected to contractual arrangement, and in return infidels should be given peace. This Hadith should not be interpreted as a licence to kill infidels and shed their blood. Removing them does not mean killing them. Also the Prophetic tradition is not addressed to ordinary people but to *wulat al-amr*, leaders of the community who are required to act in this situation. Al-Turayry reminds his readers not to allow their anger and frustration over Western injustices against Muslims to let them misinterpret the sayings of the Prophet. He warns young Muslims that the presence of infidels was accepted by early knowledgeable *'ulama* (including Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, Abdulaziz ibn Baz and Muhammad ibn Uthaymin), who better understand the meaning of the Hadith. Their tradition should be followed, he concludes.[48] This interpretation, as we shall see later in this book, is contested by Jihadis. Here the Sahwi sheikh takes away the responsibility for removing infidels from the Peninsula from the hands of ordinary Muslims and makes it the sole prerogative of the ruler, thus confirming official Wahhabi views that 'al-umara alam bi al-maslaha' (princes know better).

Sahwis are aware that in the public sphere they are 'mistakenly considered to be the political wing of Jihadi movements and those calling for armed struggle'. They are bitter about the alleged cooperation of the official religious establishment with Saudi liberals in order to link Sahwis to the violent Jihadis. However, in the context of Saudi Arabia today, Sahwis have had to revise their position and avoid open confrontation not only with the religious establishment but more importantly with a state that is willing to deploy all its coercive power against those who disagree publicly with its policies or put pressure on it to take action it does not want to take.

Against the background of the most violent years in Saudi history, Safar al-Hawali launched a campaign 'to resist aggression' against Muslims. He chose the context of an interview for a programme called Bila hudud (Without Frontiers), with al-Jazeera on 5 November 2003 to announce 'al-himla al-alamiyya li muqawamat al-udwan', an international campaign to resist aggression.[49] The campaign was initially called Mecca but later changed its name. In this television programme, the

sheikh declared that '*wali al-amr* is a father and we are his sons'. The campaign had several stated objectives. It was meant to educate people; resist aggression using legitimate means; clarify the true spirit of Islam by showing its humanitarian and moral message; and coordinate social and governmental efforts to fulfil these objectives. Al-Hawali promised cooperation with international institutions that reject injustice and oppression. There was also a hint that cooperation with international churches and those who respect Islam is desirable. The campaign also promised to include other non-Saudi Islamist personalities such as Fahmi Huwaidy and Muhammad Amara, both Egyptian intellectuals associated with modernist Islam rather than traditional Salafi thought.

The campaign aimed to curb the spread of violence in Saudi Arabia and demonstrate loyalty to the regime. Sheikh al-Hawali called upon Jihadis to give up their weapons and abandon armed struggle. He declared: 'We call upon the youth of the country to use the language of the tongue [words] rather than swords', and added, 'We must instruct the youth to fight the real enemy of the *umma*.' The sheikh reminded the audience that the Saudi government was to announce an initiative accepting negotiation and reconciliation with the hope of granting amnesty to the youth. He referred to Jihadis as 'our brothers who belong to the Jihadi trend'. He said that the success of the campaign was dependent on a general amnesty, trials for those who torture prisoners, the reinstatement of those who had been expelled from their jobs and respect for people's rights. Al-Hawali offered his religious skills and power of persuasion to avoid further discord. However, he presented himself as someone who could 'negotiate' on behalf of the government if it would be willing to treat him appropriately and listen to his own demands. He was not proposing to play the role of envoy or employee of the regime. His confidence was perhaps based on the backing of Shabab al-Sahwa, the Sahwi youth movement.

Using his personal popularity, al-Hawali was able to convince a few al-Qa'ida suspects such as Ali al-Faqasi to give themselves up to the authorities with the hope of amnesty, or at least a lenient sentence. Al-Hawali's call to another Jihadi ideologue, Faris al-Zahrani, was, however, unheeded. As a Ghamdi from al-Baha, al-Hawali used his tribal connections to lure famous Jihadi ideologues from the same tribe to give themselves up after the government promised fair trials to those involved in violence and amnesty to those without criminal records.

The Saudi government denied that Safar al-Hawali or any other group played a mediating or negotiating role. The fact that Sahwis were negotiating with Jihadis was, however, confirmed by the spokesman of the campaign, Muhsin al-Awajy, at American Arabic television station al-Hurra

in May 2004. Al-Awajy justified the government's denial by saying that 'governments do not like to admit negotiating with terrorists. They have their own reasons.' Many Sahwis argue that had the state given Sahwis more freedom, recognition and visibility, they would have absorbed the radical Jihadis before the outbreak of violence. In discussing Jihadi violence, the Sahwi sheikhs acting as negotiators avoided outright condemnation and preferred to describe Jihadis as 'ignorant young men who rebel against elders'. This is contrasted with official rhetoric that depicts Jihadis as 'criminals' and 'thirsty bloodsuckers'. Sahwis hint at the difficulties they face in their mediation role, which they attribute to the previous failure of the justice system and its lack of transparency and independence.

Playing the role of mediators involves delivering those who threaten national security to the state with the hope of scoring political gains. However, the sheikhs have emphasised the difficulties they face as they try to convince Jihadis to return to the right path and abandon violence. In the media, al-Hawali pointed out that the Saudi judiciary is not totally independent, a factor that may influence the way Jihadis responds to mediation. He noted that some judges might be ignorant of the changes that have swept society. He also announced that some judges might issue sentences that contradict *shariʿa*. Al-Hawali concluded that the Sahwis are seeking reconciliation between Jihadis and the state as a step towards reform.

While Sahwi sheikhs continued their efforts to bring Jihadis into the fold, they directed their attention to another group of dissidents who had sprung from their own ranks. The Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA), led by Saad al-Faqih, and the Movement for Islamic Renewal, led by Muhammad al-Masari, both based in London, emerged as two separate opposition movements out of the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Arabia in the mid-1990s. The two movements had one common denominator: both rejected the Saudi regime and considered it impossible to reform; both called for the removal of the regime altogether. The two movements have other significant political and religious differences, however.

The Movement for Islamic Reform was a product of Sahwa. Throughout the 1990s it publicised the plight of the imprisoned Sahwi *ʿulama* and their followers. With the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia after 11 September, Sahwis launched a demonisation campaign against MIRA and its director. A previous Sahwi comrade, Muhsin al-Awajy, took the lead in launching personal attacks on Saad al-Faqih. He never tired of calling upon al-Faqih to repent and return home. After a successful call for a demonstration in support of respect for human rights and the freeing of political prisoners in Riyadh in October 2003, Saad al-Faqih

called from London for several demonstrations to take place in Saudi cities in December 2004. Sahwi *'ulama* issued a statement against those 'based abroad who want to undermine our security and prosperity'. Sahwis adopted the official Wahhabi view condemning demonstrations as illegitimate political activism. In January 2005 forty-one sheikhs signed a statement denouncing 'actions that cause *fitna*'.

Sahwis demonstrated their good intentions once again when important figures participated in the National Dialogue Forum, together with people they had previously regarded as a threat to Islam and Muslims, mainly Saudi liberals and groups whom they had previously considered to be outside true Islam, such as Shi'is. Sahwi names appeared among lists of invited participants in several meetings of the National Dialogue Forum. Several Sahwi signatories endorsed the content of an important declaration called How We Can Coexist. They reiterated the sanctity of human life, condemned imposing religion by force, and called for respect of the other. The declaration emphasised that the United States continues to dominate the Muslim world, a factor that explains the animosity. The declaration calls upon the West to 'realise that most of the Islamic movements throughout the Muslim world are essentially moderate . . . We are committed to fighting against terrorism.'[50] While this declaration was definitely targeting the outside world in an attempt to explain and clarify the position of a wide section of Saudi society, including Sahwis, other Sahwi efforts were a response to local developments.

One outcome of 11 September is the fact that Wahhabiyya became a contested religious discourse in its own home and among those who have been brought up on its teachings. While official Saudi propaganda continues to deny the very existence of a religious discourse that can be described as Wahhabi,[51] Sahwi *'ulama*, intellectuals and political activists are currently engaged in an unofficial debate about the Wahhabi movement. In the public sphere there is a serious effort to discuss religious discourse, without actually naming this discourse or even referring to the teachings of Wahhbi *'ulama* over the last 250 years. Such efforts are portrayed as attempts to renew religious discourse (*tajdid al-khitab al-dini*) or reform social heritage (*islah al-mawruth al-ijtima'i'*), in the context of 'drying up the wells of terrorism'. This debate remains in great measure hesitant and superficial in the official public sphere, because it lacks an open declaration about the sources of terrorism without invoking outside influences and other foreign agents. A more open and honest debate flourishes in printed books published outside Saudi Arabia and in internet discussion boards. Only occasionally does a glimpse of this frank and sometimes daring debate erupt into the official Saudi public sphere. It is interesting that Sahwis have participated in this debate, now that the

official Wahhabi establishment has lost some of its credibility. More importantly, the regime has sanctioned and even adopted 'revisionist' positions.

In one session of the National Dialogue Forum and after several critical articles that appeared in the Western press denouncing the Saudi religious curriculum for spreading hate against the West, Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Qasim, a young Sahwi who spent some time in prison in the early 1990s, presented a research paper which tested the hypothesis that the religious curriculum produced radical young people. A grandson of an important Salafi Wahhabi religious scholar associated with editing and publishing the monumental sixteen-volume Wahhabi collection of religious opinions *al-Durar al-saniyya fi al-ajwiba al-najdiyya*, al-Qasim presented his evaluation of the curriculum. He had been involved in the establishment of the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights and the circulation of the Memorandum of Advice in the 1990s. In his research paper, al-Qasim asks, 'Where is the Fault?' His response confirms that Saudi religious education, which draws heavily on Wahhabi texts and interpretations, falls short of being appropriate for modern times. The judge does not name any famous religious scholar whose interpretation is considered inappropriate. Yet it is clear that al-Qasim is critical of the official Wahhabi tradition as it unfolds in the school curriculum. However, in al-Qasim's evaluation of the Saudi curriculum, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and later scholars remain a taboo. His references draw on the various books used in schools without naming the original sources upon which the curriculum draws. The reader is left to wonder how the curriculum is formulated and who the original intellectual authorities behind the school texts are. Al-Qasim concludes that 'it is an exaggeration to claim that our religious curriculum bears the responsibility for violence against the West. In fact the faults of the current education poison relations between Muslims more than between Muslims and non-Muslims.'[52] While this is a clear condemnation of the Saudi religious curriculum, it falls short of apportioning any blame to the original masters and their disciples. Furthermore, al-Qasim could not voice a single word of criticism against the religio-political discourse or the role of the state in enforcing and financing this discourse. His assessment of religious education fell short of highlighting the contradiction between Saudi religious discourse and the reality of politics. This policy paper, together with media statements and other short publications, allowed the ex-Sahwi to redefine himself. Nowadays, after every terrorist attack, al-Qasim and other Sahwis are given a platform to denounce violence and renew their allegiance to the regime. In one interview, he declared: 'There are problems of corruption but the royal family represents an equilibrium for stability. It is not in the

interest of anybody in society to have the state destablised.'[53] Today al-Qasim is regarded as a 'modernist' sheikh or as an Islamo-liberal, although both labels are perhaps likely to be rejected by al-Qasim himself. Other Sahwis denounced al-Qasim's assessment of the education curriculum as misguided and inaccurate. In a long review of al-Qasim's policy paper, Sheikh Salman al-Kharashi launched a detailed refutation of the argument and concluded that any change to the curriculum could be interpreted as succumbing to outside pressure and a threat to Islam.

With the taming of their political discourse and the obvious willingness of Sahwis to work with the government, it seems that the only domain left in which to express 'independent' and 'defiant' views was the social and educational realms. In response to al-Qasim's assessment paper and the willingness of the government to change the education curriculum under what appeared to be American pressure, 156 *'ulama*, the majority of whom were Sahwis, issued a statement denouncing any attempt to change or modify religious education.

After 11 September, having lost all ability to resist the regime at the political level, Sahwis devoted all their attention to resisting social change. Today Sahwis 'resist' by rejecting and obstructing social change, especially that which they define as 'coming from abroad' or which corresponds to Saudi liberal agendas. Some Sahwis have focused their defiance on two areas: women and minority rights.

The social and political emancipation of Saudi women became the contested arena between the government and opposition groups. Having lost their ability to re-enchant politics, Sahwis pursued conservative interpretations of the status of women. Safar al-Hawali issued a religious opinion after being asked by someone from his home town, al-Baha, whether girls should be sent to Mecca and Jiddah for higher education, as al-Baha does not have a university. Al-Hawali answered:

> I say what is the benefit of continuing education and what is its value? Girls are born to become mothers and educators of the future generation. If a woman stayed at home, did not beautify herself, and performed her religious duties, and obeyed her husband, she will be the queen in her kingdom. This is true happiness that all women, including Western *fajirat* [immoral women], aspire to. *Kafir*s in the West are beginning to wake up and provide women with subsidies if they stayed at home and raised their children. But we are going back on ourselves by asking women to go out of their houses . . . Working women get tired. They menstruate every month, they become weak. They have nervous breakdowns. To serve the nation, women must stay at home. They should not go to Jiddah in search of a university. The dormitories are full of *fasad* [corruption] and mixing.[54]

On another Sahwi website, an opinion on women's participation in elections was posted to coincide with the first Saudi municipal elections in

February 2005. In this first round, Saudi women were completely absent as candidates and as voters. A Sahwi sheikh responds to a question regarding whether the old classical *bayʿa* is comparable to modern elections and whether women's participation in offering *bayʿa* to the Prophet can be understood today as a way of justifying their participation in modern elections. The sheikh replies:

> *Bayʿa* is not the same as elections. Early Muslim men and women did not 'elect' the Prophet; they believed in his message and his prophecy. They offered *bayʿa* for that. I do not know of women who offered *bayʿa* to the early caliphs as this was not their business. Elections are concerned with choosing someone to perform a task. It is a modern phenomenon guided by a special law and place.[55]

Sahwis appropriated gender relations and positioned themselves as 'guardians' of the values and rights of women, a position they share with Jihadis, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. The state and the official religious establishment also appropriate women's issues, and both claim to guard the women of the country. Today some Sahwis resist through adopting a conservative view towards female education, participation in elections and other matters. Others, like al-Qasim, show greater flexibility in dealing with women's issues. Al-Qasim tries to draw a line between religious rulings and social tradition. He sometimes argues that religious scholars do not always make that distinction, thus prohibiting certain issues when there is no clear textual reference or injunction. This line of analysis is adopted by Sheikh Salman al-Awdah, who for one month appeared daily on MBC satellite television, to propagate new interpretations. Al-Awdah is now positioning himself as the rational and modern voice of Islam in Saudi Arabia. This confirms the view that Sahwis are political actors before being religious agents.

Sahwis seem to conduct their resistance by adopting a critical stance vis-à-vis calls for greater recognition of minority rights, which have come from abroad and from the minorities themselves. The government seemed responsive to such calls in an attempt to contain potential dissidence. In 2003 a group of Shiʿi activists sent a petition to the crown prince calling for greater religious freedom, equality and partnership. Safar al-Hawali wrote a scathing refutation of their demands under an ironical title. In 'When the Minority Rules over the Majority', he states:

> In this country Shiʿis are born Shiʿis, practise their tradition and die as Shiʿis. Nobody asks them to change their beliefs. This is freedom. There are other minorities that do not call for having a minister or a politician representing them. The Shiʿis adopted a tone that seeks revenge not dialogue. They either want a Shiʿi government that imposes Shiʿism on all or a secular government that allows everyone to fight for his religion under the false pretext of freedom. A civil war will then be imminent. Shiʿis imply that if not given their rights they will cooperate

with foreign governments. This reminds us of al-Alqami who was an ally of foreign invaders and conspired to kill the Abbasid Caliph . . . We are concerned that Shiʿis find the right path so that they can escape misery in the afterlife. We support their worldly demands and they should take these demands to the relevant government agencies. But we should discuss with them the true nature of monotheism, dissociation from blasphemy and recognition of our four Caliphs.[56]

Al-Hawali then highlights his concern over Shiʿi claims that they are deprived and excluded. He argues that if Shiʿis are poor,

it is because of the exploitation of their own religious scholars who extract one fifth of their income for their own purposes . . . The people who really deserve to be given their rights are the people of Tihama, between Jiddah and Yemen [al-Hawali's own region], which has a fraction of the services that the Shiʿis have in their own area. Succumbing to Shiʿi pressure will lead to other groups, for example Hijazi Sufis who are now allies of certain ruling families in the Arab world, to ask for the internationalisation (*tadwil*) of the Hijaz under the leadership of the Ashraf, whose claim for leadership together with the tribe of Quraysh, may be supported by religious texts.[57]

In denouncing Shiʿi demands, al-Hawali sends a strong warning signal to the government. He projects these demands as misguided and possibly directed from abroad to undermine the unity of the Saudi state and eventually lead to its disintegration. His references to the possible return of the rule of the Sharifs and Quraysh touches a very raw nerve in the ruling family, as the Sharifs of the Hijaz were the major contestants for leadership, not only in the Arabian Peninsula but beyond that. His message is clear and direct. As a Sahwi, he defends the realm under the banner of the Al-Saud, and any concessions to so-called religious minorities will no doubt lead to undesirable consequences. His discourse focuses on other deprived regions in the north and south, which according to recent research are subject to exclusion and marginalisation.[58]

On the domestic front the previous confrontation and contestation between Sahwis and the government have subsided and given way to negotiation and mediation. It remains to be seen whether the truce will hold. Accommodation is definitely maintained while the security situation is still unstable. More Jihadi violence will no doubt bring the state and Sahwis closer. Each will try hard to postpone exerting unbearable pressure on the other.

The regional and international front

Sahwis today face the same fate as the official religious establishment. They cannot voice serious critical political opinions on domestic issues. However, they have found enough regional and international fronts to

re-establish their credibility against the background of co-optation experienced in the domestic arena.

In order to compensate for their co-optation at home, Sahwis turned their attention to regional and international conflicts. At the regional level, they remained faithful to their 1990s anti-American rhetoric without invoking *jihad* in Saudi Arabia or removing infidels from the Arabian Peninsula. The increasingly unfavourable reporting on Saudi Arabia in the Western media following 11 September was countered locally by anti-Americanism that dominated most Sahwi publications, as well as others. Criticising American policies in the Middle East on the pages of the local Saudi press was mistakenly considered as genuine 'freedom of expression'. The so-called Riyadh Spring in 2002–3 was partly about the freedom to criticise the USA rather than the regime. Sahwis eagerly participated in the denunciation of the USA.

Having curbed their confrontational discourse at home, Sahwis channelled their Jihadi rhetoric to other hot-spots in the Muslim and Arab world, of which there were several. Mainstream Sahwis objected to the attack on Afghanistan and the demise of the Taliban in 2001–2. However, many did not dare openly support the Taliban or express sympathy for a state that hosted Osama bin Laden. Scholars who overtly denounced American aggression against the Taliban proved to belong to the Jihadi sub-group, mainly associated with sheikhs such as al-Khodayr, al-Oqla and al-Fahad. Suffice it to say that the majority of mainstream Sahwis remained silent while warning against providing any logistical help to the invading American army. As one of the main objectives of the US campaign at the time was to capture Osama bin Laden, many Sahwis kept a low profile, given the Saudi government's denunciation of the al-Qa'ida leader. Any objection to the campaign would have been immediately understood as sympathy for Bin Laden. Sahwis restrained themselves at a time when their reputation was being tested. Some wrote about American aggression, mainly on the internet, denouncing the killing of Muslims and glorifying resistance as if to maintain Sahwi reputation among their followers. Few Sahwi sheikhs issued statements calling upon Muslims to go for *jihad* in Afghanistan in a way similar to previous *fatwa*s regarding *jihad* against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Famous Sahwi sheikhs had reservations even on that first experience of *jihad*.

Many Sahwis had preferred young Muslim men to stay at home and deal with the deteriorating domestic situation. It was rumoured that famous Sahwis, for example Safar al-Hawali, opposed the participation of Saudis in the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviet Union while the official Wahhabi establishment represented by Ibn Baz encouraged it as *fard kifaya* (an obligation performed on behalf of the whole community).

Al-Hawali is known to have warned against the consequences of sending young men to Afghanistan to fight the Russians, pointing out that Afghanistan was a trap for young Muslims. It is claimed that he anticipated the negative outcomes of the Afghan *jihad*.[59]

The US occupation of Iraq and the fall of Baghdad in April 2003 proved to be a different matter. Given that the Saudi government was trying hard to rebuild amicable relations with the USA and recast itself as a moderate force in the region, Sahwis, by strongly endorsing the anti-war attitude, proved that they could still embarrass their government.[60] Groups including radical Jihadis, Islamist Centrist reformers, religious scholars and exiled Islamists all advocated a total rejection of the war, which was condemned with such slogans as a 'Christian–Zionist imperialist plot' and a 'New Crusade'.[61] The fragmentation and pluralism of Sahwa melted away with the collapse of Saddam's statue in the central square of Baghdad. At the same time, Sahwi differences disappeared, as they all shared an overwhelming rejection of Saddam Hussein, seen as the 'other face of American imperialism'. A famous Sahwi scholar, Nasir al-Omar, wrote an extended essay entitled, 'Waylun lil ʿarab min sharin qad iqtarab' (Arabs, Beware of an Approaching Evil). He raised seven points relating to the Iraqi crisis:

1. The war is not between Bush and Saddam or the American government and the Baʾth regime. It is yet another episode in a series of crusades announced by Bush. The first one took place when America used Saddam to hit Iran, followed by the Gulf War of 1990, followed by the American invasion of Afghanistan.
2. Our enmity against Saddam and his atheist regime is not a justification for the war.
3. The war on Iraq is an unjust crime and Sunni Iraqis will bear the heaviest loss.
4. It is an Islamic obligation to support our brothers in Iraq rather than support the regime.
5. A serious disaster stems from the relationship between the Muslim *umma* and its illegitimate governments, which have supported American interests throughout the modern period.
6. The responsibility for resisting this invasion falls on Muslims, who should abandon their preoccupation with trivial matters and concentrate on the real issue – that is, resisting the invasion.
7. American strategic plans for the Muslim world are long term. America will use all means available to dominate the Muslim world. Therefore, Muslims should resist by applying all means, including education, military confrontation, economic pressure and social and psychological force.[62]

Saudi Sahwis issued a joint declaration whose signatories included Muslim scholars and professionals from Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco and Palestine. The declaration summarised their position:

> America's objective in this war is to destroy the Muslim identity of the region and replace it with American culture. America seeks to control the economic wealth of the country to cover up its failure in Afghanistan. It also aims to occupy the region with more war and unrest to protect the security of Israel and destroy the Palestinian uprising.[63]

The overwhelming Islamist consensus concealed latent divisions within the outspoken groups. Sahwis asked whether the Saudi government and the established religious scholars would issue a *fatwa* supporting *jihad* in Iraq, thus bringing to mind their position during the liberation of Afghanistan from the Soviet Union. Hardline Islamists, often working abroad or clandestinely, exposed contradictions in the official Saudi position and among the established *'ulama*, none of whom called publicly for a *jihad* in Iraq. Throughout the Iraqi crisis the official religious establishment refused to give a religious legitimacy to resistance in Iraq. Sahwis were disappointed as several official religious scholars declared that the violence against civilians in Iraq is not *jihad*, and should be denounced as *fitna*. This did not deter Sahwis, who were enraged by the level of American aggression against the Sunni cities of Iraq, from issuing their own *fatwa*.

In November 2004 and with American troops tightening their grip over the Iraqi city of Falluja, twenty-six *'ulama*, mainly Sahwis, issued a statement denouncing American aggression and legitimising resistance by calling it *jihad*. The list of signatories included famous names such as Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-Awdah, Nasir al-Omar, Sulayman al-Rushudi, Said al-Ghamdi and Awadh al-Qarni.[64] The statement, entitled 'Saudi Ulama Letter Regarding Jihad in Falluja' and published on several Sahwi websites, classified resistance in Iraq as *jihad daf'i* (defensive *jihad*), an obligation that is incumbent on every capable Iraqi male. The signatories clarified that this *jihad* does not need to be fought under the banner of a known leader, as each individual must take the initiative and resist foreign domination. The statement also called upon Iraqis, both Sunnis and Shi'is, to unite and avoid the disintegration of the country. Jihadis are advised to protect innocent civilians and their property. The statement urged Iraqis not to cooperate with the US army and to protect Jihadis.

Sahwi sheikh Salman al-Awdah openly declared that Iraqis must resist foreign occupation, but issued clear statements against Saudi participation in the Iraqi resistance. He called it a legitimate Islamic duty that is also sanctioned by international law.[65] He added that Iraqis should

physically help the resistance while the rest of the Arab and Muslim world must support this effort in other ways, for example in international forums. However, al-Awdah advised against Saudi men joining the *jihad* in Iraq. He argued that if non-Iraqis participate in this *jihad*, they may cause chaos because of lack of coordination. Foreign Jihadis might have agendas that are not compatible with local concerns and orientations. *Jihad* in Iraq must have a clear objective, i.e. throwing out foreign occupation. Those who have grand objectives such as establishing a Muslim polity or reviving the caliphate are dreaming.

Was Sahwi denunciation of the American occupation of Iraq a hesitant attempt to regain credibility after a period of acquiescence – even subservience – to the regime? Sahwi sheikh Safar al-Hawali still commands respect among his followers. In June 2005 he was admitted to hospital in Mecca after a serious stroke. He was later transferred to a hospital in Jiddah. His illness coincided with King Fahd's admission to hospital after several years of ill health. Saudi internet sites were preoccupied with the illness of the Sahwi sheikh, while the King's deteriorating health went almost unnoticed. Prince Sultan (since 2005 Crown Prince) offered to send Sheikh al-Hawali abroad for treatment. After years in prison and a long time as a 'suspect', Sheikh Safar was 'rehabilitated' by the regime. It remains to be seen whether his illness will precipitate a complete withdrawal from public life. It seems unlikely that the sheikh will be able to resume his normal activities. There is no doubt, however, that his legacy will continue to inspire many Saudis. Safar al-Hawali will go down in history as the Ghamdi sheikh who was truly caught between the state and the call. He will also be remembered as a sheikh who penetrated the circle of *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya* despite sharing neither the geography nor the genealogy of this group. Al-Hawali honoured the intellectual heritage of the early Wahhabis but had serious reservations about his contemporaries, especially those directly tied to government agendas. The state broke his will but failed to undermine his popularity among his followers completely.

A triumphant or bitter and twisted Sahwa?

Sahwi *ʿulama* such as Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah were able to retreat into their *shariʿa* knowledge and protect themselves against further loss of credibility resulting from increasing association with government agendas. After all, they can claim that they are men of religion rather than men of state. Regardless of whether it was acquired in a traditional setting or a modern university, religious knowledge still commands respect in Saudi Arabia.

By 2005 most Sahwi activists seemed to be enjoying far more freedom than they had had in the early 1990s. They have gained access to media channels, and some Sahwi groups have their own satellite television, electronic newsletters, discussion boards and other communication channels. After almost a decade of confrontation, Sahwis and the state reached a modus vivendi. Sahwis accepted the old schism between the secular state and the religious coterie. They retreated into their educational programmes, thus socialising society into Islam while leaving politics to the government. Today they concentrate on healing society and its ills. In a manner reminiscent of their mentors, the official Wahhbi establishment, they blame society's ignorance, tribalism, corruption, regionalism, opportunism and other negative traits for social problems. While a previous generation of *ʿulama* reprimanded society for exhibiting *shirk* (blasphemy and heterodoxy), today the same society is condemned for allegedly immersing itself in modern sins resulting from either its traditional social organisation (tribalism) or its enthusiasm for Westernisation and modern innovations. Sahwis have moved from blaming the regime for the ills of society to blaming society itself, as a way out of a dilemma. Reforming society is today an alternative to reforming the state. But can society be reformed according to Sahwi agenda without fundamental political change? After all, their early 1990 petitions demanded an overhaul of the Saudi political system rather than the transformation of society. Will a reformed society take the lead in establishing the rightful polity that Sahwis aspire to? Many Sahwis believe that reforming each part (the individual) of society will lead to a better whole. While this logic is sound, it cannot be taken for granted that such a reformed society will automatically lead to a reformed pious Islamic state.

When Sahwis venture into domestic politics, their rhetoric is general and ambiguous. Today they criticise 'all Arab regimes', when they really mean the Saudi one. Sahwis started out with an attempt to re-enchant politics, but they failed miserably. They have readjusted their rhetoric in response to a local and international context that considers revolutionary political change a kind of terrorism. While Sahwis never admit that they have changed their position on several important issues, it is obvious that they have. They have increased their visibility as a group while individual members are co-opted and rewarded. Today Sahwis call for Islamising society and applying *shariʿa*, but refrain from criticising the government for introducing new legislation or removing judicial decisions in certain areas from the hands of *shariʿa* courts. In Saudi Arabia, there are several legal systems, each applying to an area of public life. While personal law remains in the hands of *shariʿa* courts, the economy and the media are dealt with according to new legislation, often referred to as *nidham*.

Sahwis call for reform in Saudi Arabia but condemn any attempt to exert pressure on the government through demonstrations or public criticism. They condemn America's aggression against Muslims, but never hint that the Saudi royal family is one of the Arab and Muslim regimes most loyal to the power they define as the 'aggressor'. They celebrate a transnational Islam while respecting national boundaries. They glorify the Muslim *umma*, which is bound only by religious bonds, but unwillingly accept man-made national boundaries. In their rhetoric, the establishment of a Muslim polity is an unrealistic dream, and so is armed struggle against the so-called enemies of Islam. In the present circumstances, the imbalance in power between Muslims and the 'dominating' nations requires Sahwis to resist aggression by non-violent means. In return, Sahwis have gained the trust of the regime. They are no longer the first enemy. The Jihadis, together with other peaceful Islamists abroad, occupy this position.

Sahwis are more vocal when they launch verbal attacks on the West, especially the United States. The latter gave them plenty of opportunities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. The American media's negative portrayal of Saudi Arabia and its religious education required a counter-campaign to resist the various manifestations of 'outside aggression'. Sahwis retained the language of the 'crusades' and the 'clash of civilisations'. They gave 'independent' opinions on *jihad* abroad and volunteered *fatwa*s that made it compulsory in 'occupied territories' but forbade it in their own homeland. They distinguished between 'killing Americans' in Iraq and slaughtering them in Saudi Arabia. They sanctioned Iraqi men fighting the occupiers but had reservations regarding Saudi men travelling to the battlefield. As public figures who were given the green light to express opinions, Sahwis were interviewed by the international media, including the CNN, BBC, Reuters and AFP. They presented themselves and were presented as the Islamists of Saudi Arabia. Sahwi sheikhs formed a quasi-independent religious establishment – more accurately a church in waiting. Some have argued that the Sahwa was able to 'impose' itself on the government. This has manifested itself in government recognition of Sahwi figures, who now enjoy more freedom to express the 'diluted' statements mentioned above. Others see the Sahwa as a co-opted movement that has succumbed to government pressure without any obvious gains – for example, achieving aspects of the reform they called for in their famous 1990 Memorandum of Advice.

With the accommodation between Sahwa and state, Sahwi intellectuals are perhaps less fortunate than Sahwi *'ulama*. Some of those who count themselves as Sahwi Islamic intellectuals seem to be less able to withstand

the price not only of changing their views but of openly supporting government agendas. The pragmatism shown by Sahwi activists – some would say opportunism – could not be justified on the grounds of revising religious texts or offering new interpretations. After all, the *ʿulama* are known to be *mujtahid*s (entitled to give individual opinions) – if they formulate a wrong opinion, they are granted one reward; if they are right, they are granted two rewards, according to the Prophetic tradition. This statement is not extended to include Sahwi activists, whose change of views and accommodation – and even support – of government can only be interpreted as political manoeuvring, pragmatism and opportunism. To avoid being labelled opportunistic or pragmatic, some Sahwi activists have retreated from the public eye, choosing a quietist position. Others have become unashamedly entangled with the regime while launching a bitter campaign against their ex-comrades.

One example was Sahwi Muhsin al-Awajy, who today not only defends Sahwa against its enemies, but also defends the state. A specialist in agriculture and holder of a doctorate in this subject from a British university, he is different from the famous Sahwi sheikhs. His regular appearances in the media, his website and his various articles have gradually eroded a symbolic capital, gained as a result of having been a political activist involved in the work that led to the release of the Memorandum of Advice and the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Arabia in the early 1990s. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison but released after four years. He lost his university job and had his passport confiscated. After 11 September, he emerged as an unofficial spokesman of the Sahwa – but also of the government. Between 2004 and 2005, al-Awajy specialised in launching personal attacks on a whole range of activists, Sahwis and liberals, both men and women.[66] As he claimed to be involved in 'negotiating with Jihadis', he appeared on Arab satellite television, especially al-Jazeera, to comment on government success in pacifying terrorists, dismantling violent cells, negotiating with Jihadis, and praised official wisdom in dealing with the security problem. Al-Awajy played the role of the unofficial spokesman of the Ministry of Interior. While the government imprisoned several Saudi intellectuals, activists and religious scholars who volunteered comments on al-Jazeera without permission, he had official approval.[67] When Saudi human rights activists and lawyers criticised the government's record on freedom of expression, al-Awajy praised the regime for its understanding and tolerance. He labelled all those who call for reform from abroad as either agents of Western domination, corrupted liberals or revenge-seeking persons determined to undermine the *umma*'s security and prosperity.[68] Regarding those who call for reform from within Saudi Arabia, al-Awajy proposes sorting out

the real reformers from those who undermine religion and state. Several days after the government sent Abdullah al-Hamid, Matruk al-Falih, and Ali al-Damini, three reformers associated with calls for constitutional monarchy, to prison for writing petitions that al-Awajy himself had signed, he wrote in the local press: 'We denounce those who have contacts with foreign powers especially the crusades. We must choose the hell of our own society rather than the heaven of the colonialists.'[69] Al-Awajy repeated the government's accusations against the three imprisoned reformers.

While in his media statements and publications, al-Awajy claims to be close to Sheikh al-Hawali, the latter in an interview hinted at a personal dispute between them, which al-Hawali prefers to leave buried. Has the main pillar of the Sahwa disowned al-Awajy? Or is al-Hawali's response a way of reprimanding a follower who has gone a bit too far? It is impossible to know as long as al-Hawali remains silent. Al-Awajy's constant references to Sheikh al-Hawali and his invocation of the name of this religious scholar are desperate attempts to regain some kind of legitimacy and recognition at a time when his credibility was seriously eroded. While some Sahwi religious scholars retained some kind of dignity deriving from their religious capital, al-Awajy represents the section of Sahwa that has become 'bitter and twisted'.

In 2001 al-Awajy set up a website called al-Wasatiyya. He posts his articles on this site, which has a discussion board dealing with social, religious, political and contemporary affairs. Al-Awajy's website allows the posting of serious criticism of the Wahhabi tradition, discussion of minority-related matters, criticism of the royal family and other controversial issues. It does not, however, seem to be very popular. After reasonable success in 2001–2, it seems to have lost much of its credibility. Topics on the site do not change regularly, while the number of visitors at any particular moment remains small compared to other Saudi-run websites and discussion boards. Al-Awajy's articles dealing with domestic issues receive mixed responses, including some highly negative personal comments about him. His domestic articles receive damning comments on other Islamist and liberal discussion boards. Publications that glorify Jihadi resistance to the American occupation of Iraq are positively received. Those articles dealing with foreign matters appear as a desperate attempt to regain some of the lost credibility on the domestic front. In Saudi Arabia, like much of the Arab and Muslim world, denouncing American policies, especially neo-conservative strategies, is always hailed as an honest and brave position, a cathartic mechanism that guarantees positive responses among a population that is still deprived of freedom to evaluate the policies of its own government.

One might argue that the mixed responses to al-Awajy's views are only natural, as Saudis are just beginning to learn how to voice their opinions in the public sphere after years without any dissident voices or frank evaluation of public figures. However, in al-Awajy's case, mixed responses are symptomatic of many negative developments that the Sahwa is trying hard to contain. It seems that there are numerous specific reasons behind the mixed responses that al-Awajy has received. As a Sahwi he incurs the wrath of both Saudi liberals and the official Wahhabi establishment. The latter became more critical as he began to voice criticism of the Wahhabi tradition under the guise of 'renewing religious discourse', a cliche catchphrase that masks criticism of official Wahhabiyya without naming it. As an ex-Sahwi, al-Awajy must have had reservations about the official religious discourse that created consenting subjects. However, as he went further in his criticism to accommodate moderate or less conservative views on society, women and the Shi'i minority, he incurred the wrath of not only the Wahhabi establishment but also his own Sahwi comrades. When he condemned Jihadi violence in his articles, he incurred a severe blow from Jihadis themselves, who denounced him in a long treatise published in al-Qa'ida electronic journals and discussion boards.[70] When he publicly condemned his closest Sahwi comrades outside Saudi Arabia, he revealed an opportunism that was linked to his close relations with the regime. Today al-Awajy's controversial and ambiguous status among various groups in Saudi society is symptomatic of the problems faced by Sahwi activists as they were drawn into government agenda. Loss of credibility at a time when no obvious gains were visible was bound to accompany Sahwa's shift from confrontation with the regime to accommodation, and an ongoing co-optation. A Saudi commentator on al-Awajy's latest transformation argues: 'Al-Awajy burnt all his boats. He is standing all alone on the sandy shores of hope. He disowned Wahhabis and they disowned him. He was disowned by terrorists who rejected his mediation. One terrorist described him as the fertiliser specialist [a reference to al-Awajy's doctorate in agriculture], a crow who leads people to the corpse.'[71]

While 'burning all boats' accompanied co-optation by the government, other Sahwis have gradually drifted towards the Jihadi trend. The story of Lewis Atiyat Allah in this book is an example of a Sahwi who abandoned Sahwa in favour of the Jihadis. Other Sahwis abandoned the local variant of the awakening in favour of other Saudi Islamists abroad. A third group preferred to move out of Islamism altogether and join Saudi liberals, becoming examples of 'courageous and brave revisionists' who enjoy reading Martin Luther King and other enlightened characters. Under state oppression and co-optation, the Sahwa fragmented.

In June 2005, while Sheikh Safar al-Hawali was fighting for his life in a Jiddah hospital, the government announced its third list of wanted terrorists. Immediately, another Sahwi sheikh, Salman al-Awdah, stepped into the vacuum. He called upon the suspects to give themselves up in a manner reminiscent of Safar's approach. The Sahwa was confirmed in its new mediating role.

It remains to be seen whether Sahwi *ʿulama* will be crowned as the new religious establishment that will dominate the Saudi religio-political field in the twenty-first century. However, it seems that the Sahwa serves the regime better if it remains outside the circle of official religio-political discourse. Perhaps the state has realised that it is more beneficial to keep two religious establishments. An official one can curb Sahwi influence by resorting to the old conviction relating to the obligation to obey rulers and advise them privately. The official religious establishment remains in control of the courts that may in the future deal with dissident Sahwis and others. It remains important for the socialisation of the next generation of acquiescent subjects. On the other hand, an unofficial Sahwi establishment can mediate between the state and Jihadis, absorb social unrest among the youth, and channel local revolutionary sentiments abroad.

After 11 September Sahwa began to devour its own children. It might seem that the earlier contestation which gave way to co-optation led to the state being the obvious winner while the official religious establishment was the obvious loser. However, the Saudi scene is more complicated than that, and is less likely to generate clear-cut boundaries between winners and losers. Sahwi *ʿulama* initially sought the blessing of official *ʿulama*, but later they competed with them. The official *ʿulama* seem to have lost their monopoly not only over religious interpretation but also the hearts and minds of many young Saudis, while remaining in control of a huge religious bureaucracy including education and the judiciary. It seems that the Saudi regime is grooming Sahwi sheikh Salman al-Awdah to rise to eminence, with the help of pan-Arab media, mostly sponsored by Saudi money.[72]

3 Struggling in the way of God abroad: from localism to transnationalism

> It was the right thing for Saudi Arabia to send Jihadis to Afghanistan. All Saudi Jihadis came back in 1992. They were nice people. We did not have *takfiri*s in Saudi Arabia. *Takfiri*s were all produced in Afghanistan. The worst among them are in London. The likes of Abu Hamza, Abu Qatada and al-Masari are the worst ones.
>
> Jamal Khashogji, spokesman for Prince Turki al-Faysal, Saudi ambassador in Washington (Idhaat, al-Arabiyya TV Channel, 14 September 2005)

> He was young, enjoying his seventeenth spring when he told his mother that he is going to Afghanistan. She begged him not to go but he always said, it is *fard ʿayn* . . . it is *fard ʿayn*. Sheikh Muhsin issued him a fatwa that he did not need his father's permission because it is *jihad dafʿi* to defend Muslims against an aggressive enemy.
>
> Year later the mother turned the radio off as Sheikh Muhsin was instructing parents to protect their children and prevent them from going to those places where they learn to excommunicate rulers.
>
> Mr Jamil was talking on television about terrorism and Jihadis. Years ago he went to support Jihad in Afghanistan. One of the girls watching the television show spat on this *jasus* (spy). Ahmad said that Mr Jamil was clandestinely spying on the Jihadis while pretending to be a voluntary aid worker.
>
> Muhammad al-Hodhayf, *Nuqtat taftish*

To say that Saudi Arabia was a zone free of *takfiri*s, a label that is used to describe those who excommunicate others (as individuals or en masse), implying an uncompromising Islamic position, is an unconvincing statement. As mentioned earlier, the Saudi regime itself was founded on 'excommunicating other Muslims', an exercise in demonising the population of Arabia – mainly all those Muslims who resisted its hegemony. Saudi official *ʿulama*, under state patronage, have practised *takfir al-mujtamaʿ* (the excommunication of a whole society) since the eighteenth century. The early letters of *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya* attest to a strong tradition of denouncing other Muslims. Yet throughout their history, the *aima* refrained from excommunicating specific rulers, descendants of the Al-Saud. On one occasion, one Saudi ruler was

described as *baghi* (usurper), rather than *kafir*, when he sought help from the Ottomans against his brother in the 1870s.[1] Similarly, the Ikhwan rebels of the 1920s fell short of describing Ibn Saud as *kafir*.[2] In 1979 Juhayman al-Otaybi did not excommunicate specific Saudi rulers, although he declared the regime as a whole a *kafir* regime.

As Wahhabi religious discourse travelled to Afghanistan and other destinations, it carried with it the practice of excommunication. While contemporary Islamists (for example, Egyptian Jihadis)[3] had already developed such theological positions, Saudis had their own contribution to make. In 1979, Juhayman al-Otaybi's movement was clearly a local tradition rather than an import from other Islamist movements. The Afghan experience only sharpened the Saudi *takfiri* tradition. In Afghanistan *takfir* was used against those who initially theorised it: the official Saudi *'ulama* and their sponsors, the Al-Saud. Saudis did not need to travel to Afghanistan to 'learn' the discourse of excommunication. They carried it with them. In Afghanistan, they simply applied it to their own rulers.

Before Wahhabi discourse could be refined, or even freed from the domination of the state, it travelled to distant locations very different from its original habitat. Not even the influx of Muslim scholars to Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, the majority of whom arrived as immigrants or state guests delivering sermons in prestigious government-sponsored Islamic conferences and universities, provided sufficient conditions for its universalisation. Saudi religious discourse travelled to Africa, Europe, Asia and North America. This transnationalisation took place in times of both peace and war. It is important to emphasise that this transnationalisation was initially dependent on Arabs and Muslims, who were either sent from Saudi Arabia itself or were inhabitants of these foreign destinations. In the 1980s the situation became slightly different with the maturation of a literate Saudi 'religious' generation that was sent abroad to spread the call.

At this juncture Saudi religio-political discourse was severely inhibited by its overwhelming parochialism, which meant that it lacked a universal orientation, and its premature transnationalisation under the auspices of the modern state meant that it did not find an easy reception out of Saudi Arabia. Most Saudi religious scholars never travel abroad, and not a single one rose to international eminence and gained recognition among Muslims worldwide, despite massive resources. (Egypt, for example, produced *'ulama* who gained pan-Islamic reputations; the contemporary Egyptian Sheikh Yusif al-Qardawi is perhaps a late addition to the list.) Only with oil wealth did Saudi religious scholars achieve eminence abroad. Moreover, Wahhabi discourse failed to engage with the intellectual and political problems that occupied Muslim scholars, thinkers and activists

throughout the twentieth century. It was very much concerned with ritualistic aspects of worship at the expense of developing universal messages or responses to the challenges of modernity, apart from prohibiting or permitting the use of some technological innovations. Under the patronage of the state the Wahhabi tradition failed to tackle issues related to social justice, the role of women and minorities, the Islamic state, political consultation, elections and participation. These remained taboo topics. Wahhabi discourse excelled in theorising the confrontation with the 'infidel' West, rejection of other Islamic traditions (for example other Sunni interpretations and those of the Shi'is) and glorification of the concept of *jihad*, without being able to put its theories into practice inside the country.

The transnationalisation of Saudi religious discourse created a volatile situation, with dramatic consequences not only for Saudis but also for the receiving societies. The discourse of exclusion and demonisation of other Muslims and 'infidels' developed by Saudi official *'ulama*, while extremely important for mobilising Jihadis in a war situation, proved disastrous in times of peace elsewhere.

The premature transnationalisation of Saudi religious discourse involved the worldwide propagation of local Saudi religious interpretations. These are the intellectual product of people with genealogical links to *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya*, the majority of whom were and are drawn from the oases and towns of central Arabia, especially Qasim and the area around Riyadh. Most of the so-called higher *'ulama* had never travelled outside Saudi Arabia, and many of those who occupied the highest posts were blind, a handicap that could not be overcome in a world dominated by images and visual media.[4] Being blind is not necessarily a serious disadvantage, but it added to the parochialism and localism of this discourse. Although this discourse is founded on the assumption that it is an embodiment of the universal tradition of *ahl al-sunna wa 'l-jama'a*, it failed to develop beyond its localism. It should not be forgotten that part of this localism was related to the fact that the discourse grew in the shadow of a political power desperate for legitimacy. From its early days, creating consenting subjects and legitimising the status quo left their marks on this religious tradition. When Wahhabi religio-political discourse began to be transnationalised in the last decades of the twentieth century, it travelled with its potential for both consent and contestation. Both at home and abroad, it carried the seeds of its own mutation.

A critical year: 1979

After the defeat of Egypt in 1967, Saudi Arabia enjoyed a short period of being seen as the centre of the Arab Islamic world. Its newly acquired

wealth, religious rhetoric and the symbolism of its geography created the conditions for the country's pre-eminence. After a long period of claiming the special status of a pious Islamic state, Saudi Arabia was able to impose itself on the Arab–Islamic scene thanks to its wealth. President Sadat's peace treaty with Israel, a move against Arab consensus at the time, facilitated Saudi Arabia's triumphant rhetoric as the guardian not only of the two holy mosques but also Muslim interests worldwide. In the Arab world, Egypt was no longer a competitor. After Sadat's visit to Israel, the Saudi regime crowned itself as the sole defender of Arab and Muslim causes. This monopoly proved to be short-lived.

In 1979 Saudi Arabia faced the challenge of Iran, which, after the revolution, was ruled by mullahs who, like the Saudi *noblesse d'état*, claimed to apply the *shari'a* and defend Islam and Muslim causes. However, while Iranian mullahs became the state itself, their Saudi counterparts accepted a 'secretive advisory role', under the patronage of the state. Jealous of their counterparts in Iran, Saudi Sahwis asked for a greater role, which led to confrontation with the regime by the early 1990s. Iran, whose Shi'i tradition had always been denounced by Saudi *'ulama*, became a competitor. Saudi Arabia and Iran struggled to win the hearts of Muslims; each paid vast sums to promote religious literature that denounced the other. Both competed to sponsor religious education, mosques, Islamic conferences and other highly visible projects outside their territories. Sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shi'is had always been divisive in Islamic history, but from now on the politicisation of sectarian identities in Saudi Arabia as well as in the Gulf, Pakistan, India and other Muslim areas became more visible and volatile, thanks to Saudi and Iranian interventions. The 1980s were known as the decade of increased sectarian tension, which the Saudi–Iranian political rivalry only aggravated. Iranian revolutionary rhetoric denounced 'imperialists and their agents' in the Muslim world. The Saudi regime felt the pressure. While Saudi religious discourse denounced Western infidels, the Saudi leadership was moving closer towards Western agenda. Its own Eastern Province Shi'i community rioted and demanded equality and recognition.[5] While these riots were severely suppressed, the danger from Iran took a new dimension with the onset of the Iran–Iraq War. The American intervention in Iraq in 2003 exacerbated the confrontation.

The year 1979 also saw Islam and Muslims 'being humiliated' by the forces of atheism in a Sunni-majority country. The Soviet Union, long branded the enemy of Muslims in Saudi official religious rhetoric, occupied Afghanistan. The occupation of a Muslim country by 'infidels' offered Saudi Arabia a golden opportunity to consolidate its reputation as defender of faith and the faithful. While the liberation of Afghanistan

from Soviet occupation was a Western goal, adopted by the USA and its allies in the context of the Cold War, it inevitably became a Saudi project. The USA had always defined the danger for Saudi Arabia as coming from Communist Russia. A Saudi religio-political discourse that glorified *jihad al-daf'i* (a struggle to defend Muslims against aggressors) but had had to be content with theory rather than practice since1932, was now given an opportunity to redirect religious zeal abroad.

A chilling message was sent to the Saudi regime with Juhayman al-Otaybi's seizure of the Mecca mosque in 1979: the regime was no longer Islamic, at least in the eyes of the small group who took sanctuary in Mecca.[6] Instead of continuing the tradition of *jihad* against infidels, Juhayman accused the regime of cooperating with infidels, introducing their ways of life into the country and promoting peaceful relations with them – all actions that were considered a violation and a nullification of faith. Juhayman's movement was at the time considered a form of revival of the discourse of *ahl al-hadith* and the Saudi Ikhwan tradition. Juhayman's discourse was grounded in the Wahhabi tradition. The Saudi government was taken by surprise by the outburst of fanaticism that erupted violently in the most sacred of territories. It hoped that redirecting this zeal abroad would be both a confirmation of Saudi religious credentials and a way to absorb local discontent and contestation. With the accession of King Fahd – hardly an example of the pious Muslim Rightful Imam – to the throne in 1982, the Afghan *jihad* seemed God sent. It became a political strategy for turbulent times.

Transnationalising Saudi religio-political discourse took place at a critical historical moment, when three factors, all with the potential of eroding Saudi religious credentials, pushed Saudi Arabia in that direction. Iran, Afghanistan and Juhayman sent a wake-up call to the Saudi regime. The government had to be seen to be supporting Muslim causes.

Struggle in the way of God abroad

Phase 1 (the 1980s): early transnational encounters

The first phase of *jihad* abroad (1979–89) was perhaps dominated by Saudis who remained loyal to their sponsors.[7] Throughout the 1980s Osama bin Laden was the sheikh of *jihad*. According to Sheikhs Ibn Baz and al-Uthaymin, he and other famous Jihadis such as the Palestinian Abdullah Azzam were true believers who fought the infidel Communists, and Bin Laden performed the obligation of *jihad al-daf'i*. When Osama bin Laden was furthering the US–Saudi project in Afghanistan, he was a 'nice' Jihadi, to use Khashogji's words. In the

1980s, Saudi Jihadis participated in the war to liberate Afghanistan from atheist Communism under the blessing of several sponsors, including the Saudi government and the official Wahhabi establishment.

To contain the rising religious enthusiasm of a whole generation of young Saudis, the government decided to facilitate the export of its own young subjects to the land of war. Afghanistan became the land where one sought martyrdom. The highest religious authority, Sheikh Ibn Baz, sanctioned this *jihad* against Communism: 'We thank God who is generous. He allows us to issue a *fatwa* stating that one should perform *jihad* in Afghanistan against the enemies of religion. Muslims from all over the world came to help, asking for reward and for heaven. *Jihad* was confirmed in its global Islamic image.'[8]

In an interview published in *al-Mujahid*, Ibn Baz clearly pronounced liberating Afghanistan from Soviet domination to be a legitimate *jihad*, performed against an infidel state that invaded Muslim territory, and that all Muslims were under the obligation to support it. He declared it *fard ʿayn* (an obligation incumbent on all Muslims) in Afghanistan and *fard kifaya* (an obligation that must be performed by a sufficient number of other Muslims) elsewhere.[9]

In addition to *jihad* in Afghanistan, Ibn Baz clarified the concept of *al-wala' wa 'l-bara'*, association with Muslims and dissociation from infidels. In his view this involves loyalty and obedience to pious Muslims and dissociation from infidels, by showing enmity towards them. Hatred and enmity do not involve injustice towards infidels or attacking them if they are not fighters.

> Hatred and enmity mean to hate them in your heart, never to take them as friends. Muslims should not hurt them. If they greet you, you should return the greeting. You should also preach to them and guide them to the Good. Jews and Christians are people of the book. They should be given *aman* [peace], unless they do injustice, then they should be punished. One can also give them charity.[10]

Official *ʿulama* provided the theological discourse in support of the *jihad* project, disseminating the information in print and visual media and in sermons. The state promised logistical support and financial resources. For the regime *jihad* in Afghanistan was a political strategy rather than a religious obligation. State support involved various activities ranging from subsidised air tickets to multi-million-dollar projects in support of combat operations and relief efforts. It was reported that between 1980 and 1990, Saudi Arabia gave nearly US$4 billion in official aid to Jihadis in Afghanistan. This figure does not include unofficial aid from Islamic charities, donations by princes, private funds and mosque collections. The regime initially relied on already existing Muslim Jihadis and

charitable networks and leadership, but later created its own network and personnel. At the beginning of the Afghan *jihad*,[11] Saudi Arabia enlisted Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, an Afghan long settled in Saudi Arabia, to set up a pro-Wahhabi Jihadi party, Ittehad-e-Islami (Islamic Unity Party) in Peshawar.[12] Saudi Arabia opened itself to Afghan and Arab Jihadi leaders to recruit, preach and raise funds in support of expelling the infidels from the land of Islam. In addition to wealth, globalisation, easy travel and communication technology created a religious effervescence that was difficult to control, even by those who had initially planned the process.

Osama bin Laden was key figure. A man of piety and wealth, standing outside the Saudi tribal system, in debt to the regime for his family's financial empire, and truly modern, he was an ideal choice.[13] Initially acting on his own initiative, he put his wealth in the service of the cause. The Saudi regime, which could not have chosen a strong tribal sheikh with thousands of followers who might invoke the rhetoric of tribal solidarity in response to calls for *jihad*, immediately noticed – and enlisted – him. The regime perhaps remembered the consequences of mobilising the tribal population for *jihad* and using tribal sheikhs to lead the struggle in the early decades of the twentieth century. Such personalities cannot be easily controlled, given the potential strength afforded them by their deep roots in society. The Ikhwan rebellion of 1927 was still alive in the historical imagination of Saudis. Although the Saudi regime had eliminated the leaders of the rebellion, it took a long time to reconcile with their tribal sections. It could therefore not tolerate a rising tribal star who could in the future challenge the rule of the Al-Saud, especially if such a personality had acquired a reputation for defending Islam and Muslims. The Saudi Afghan project was better served by someone in a state of liminality, a Saudi but not a Saudi, neither here nor there. These qualities made Osama bin Laden the ideal choice in the eyes of the Saudi leadership. It must be said, however, that the qualities that endeared Osama to the Saudi regime in the early 1980s were his greatest strength in a global Jihadi project. He captured the hearts and minds of Saudis belonging to different regions, tribes and backgrounds – in addition, of course, to other Muslims.

Osama bin Laden was able to rise above the localism of *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya* and their parochial discourse, and gain a pan-Islamic reputation. While not a single Wahhabi scholar gained worldwide eminence in the pre-oil era, Bin Laden succeeded. This eminence was not a result of high-level scholarship in religious knowledge or extraordinary military skills, but rather that, having no obvious roots in Saudi Arabia, Bin Laden was able to play the role of mediator between various groups. He had his Islamic credentials and wealth without being associated with one social group. These qualities made Bin Laden appealing not only to Saudis seeking martyrdom

in Afghanistan but also to other Arabs and Muslims who responded to the call for *jihad*.[14] Studies of Bin Laden exaggerated his foreignness and marginality in Saudi society, and downplayed his influence and charisma.[15] Events since 2001 have proved the inaccuracy of these evaluations.

Having been guided by Sheikh Ibn Baz's religious rulings and government logistical support, young Saudis left the country, seeking an honourable death for the cause. Even women, who were excluded from any public role in Saudi Arabia at the time, enlisted themselves or were enlisted by their male relatives in the struggle against infidels. It was reported that wives joined their husbands and engaged in preaching and charitable work, helping Jihadi female relatives and orphans. *Da'iyyat* such as Fatimah Nasif and Samira Jamjum travelled to Afghanistan.[16] While there is no precise documentation and statistics regarding the exact number of Saudis who participated in the Afghan war as fighters, a figure of 30,000 is often cited. However, the number of Saudis who participated in non-combat capacity – as preachers, recruiters, fundraisers, medical assistants, charity and relief workers – must have far exceed this figure. While a substantial number of men were full-time Jihadis, the majority must have been part timers. It was reported at the time that many Saudi men visited Afghanistan and Pakistan during the long summer holiday, a visit that may not have necessarily led to a long-term or full-time commitment. The economic slump of the mid-1980s and the rising unemployment among young men acted as a push factor. However, redirecting religious zeal to Afghanistan only delayed the confrontation between the Saudi regime and its increasingly politicised religious scholars and youth.

Afghanistan offered young, old, middle-aged and wealthy men and women an opportunity to break the monotony of life at home, where independent political activism is banned and local leadership is curtailed by an authoritarian regime that forbids initiative except that which can be controlled and used in pursuit of its own agenda. Having been subjected to decades of preaching obedience to rulers who know the 'public good', for the first time in their modern history Saudis were offered the opportunity to engage in political – and even military – activism. Although the regime boasts about supporting the Palestinian cause and regularly publishes statistical evidence, the Afghan *jihad* was a totally different experience. Although it took place under government supervision and control, it gathered its own momentum in Afghanistan, and began to free itself from this control. The Saudi regime succeeded in redirecting political and military activism abroad, while reviving its own credibility and legitimacy at home. However, the evolution of the Afghan project proved more complicated. The transnationalisation of the localised Saudi religious discourse led to unintended consequences.

Saudi youth who left for Afghanistan returned with a sense of their worth and empowerment. Their post-liberation narratives glorified their heroic role in defeating the forces of atheism. The encounter was described as the triumph of Islam over Communism, while in the West it was described as the victory of Western democracies and values over totalitarian regimes, under the idiom of the 'end of history'. Young Saudi men reinvented themselves as *ahfad al-sahaba*, the descendants (grandsons) of the early pious companions of the Prophet. In the twentieth century, the descendants of the Jihadi Ikhwan who had 'unified Arabia' under the banner of Ibn Saud and become 'consenting subjects' thanks to several decades of preaching emerged from the Afghan experience with a new identity. Sons perpetuated the old glory of their fathers and grandfathers – not in Saudi Arabia this time, but abroad. Doing the same thing in Palestine remained a project that Saudis dreamt of, but did not undertake. The young men's return to Saudi Arabia was to be seen only as *istirahat al-muharib*, a temporary period of rest after an arduous and most dangerous but rewarding combat experience. While the majority were content with this experience, others were restless. They searched for future similar encounters. Religious imagery was reinvoked and fused with modern rhetoric, drawing on stories glorifying martyrdom, camaraderie, Stinger missiles, near-death situations and miraculous survival. Those who visited Jihadi relatives in Afghanistan returned to Saudi Arabia with mythical images glorifying the 'Vanguards'. In such narratives, myth and reality combined to paint a magnificent heroic narrative. Young men proved themselves in the battlefield as *murabitun ʿala al-thughur* (fighters for faith who are tied to the fortresses), and gained recognition that eventually undermined the *qaʿidun*, those left behind, mainly fathers. Images of the *ghazu* (raid) were documented in poetry invoking continuity with a glorious Islamic past. In a society where parental authority – especially that of fathers – is paramount, young men returned with their own sense of worth achieved as a result of participation in a real life-threatening experience. They had their own poetry, composed and learned in distant lands. Their transformation emasculated their fathers, who had already been undermined by the religious discourse of acquiescence and the authoritarian state that nourished and perpetuated this discourse. For the first time since 1932, young Saudi men proved that they too could be heroes, scoring victories of international significance. A deep sense of patriotism and self–worth flourished, expressed in an Islamic idiom.

Official *ʿulama* who theorised *jihad* and urged Muslims to take part were from now on heirs of the Prophets (*warathat al-anbiya'*), flames that kept the message alive. They were reconfirmed in their status as wise

sages who deserve due respect and recognition in this world while God would reward them in afterlife. Having been patronised and controlled by the state, they proved that they were capable of mobilising people for a just cause. They temporarily regained a fraction of their lost glory as people whose first allegiance is to God rather than the state that employed them. Ibn Baz, who in 1979 had authorised the storming of the Holy Mosque in Mecca where Juhayman took refuge, briefly regained his prestige.

The regime also emerged triumphant. It glorified its contribution to Muslim causes. Most importantly, it was able to rebuff Iran's revolutionary rhetoric and accusations. The defeat of Iran and its revolutionary mullahs was a project that needed to be achieved, not only in the battlefield where the Iraqi and Iranian armies met, but also in the minds and hearts of Muslims. Official propaganda depicted Iran as the regime that fought Iraqi Muslims while the Saudi regime liberated Muslims from evil Communists. Iran's Shi'i faith assumed new political significance. The ancient Sunni Islamic discourse demonising the Shi'is as those who insult the early caliphs, the descendants of aggressive *al-furs* (Persians) and blasphemous and treacherous Majus, assumed new meaning in the context of confrontation between the Saudi regime and Iran.[17] While Saudis became the grandsons of the early companions of the Prophets, the Shi'is were the grandsons of al-Alqami – or, even worse, the offspring of *mut'a* (temporary marriage),[18] the by-product of adultery in Saudi popular imagination. Wahhabi religious discourse provided the religious language that was politicised in the context of rivalry between two states desperately fighting for supremacy in the Muslim world in general, and the Gulf region in particular. Saudi negative images of Iran and the Shi'i tradition resurfaced with the Iraqi crisis in 2003.

In Afghanistan, Wahhabi discourse encountered a plethora of religious interpretations, schools of Islamic jurisprudence and forms of worship, in addition to contemporary Islamist political interpretations. It came into contact with the dominant Deobandi tradition in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, which was perhaps closer to Wahhabiyya than any other Sunni tradition in Asia.[19] Both Wahhabi and Deobandi traditions had grown up in the context of the encounter between the Muslim world (the Arabian Peninsula and India) and Britain. This had shaped the two movements' outlook and interpretations.

In Saudi Arabia *haraki* Islam was still an underground movement, in the form of a revival of faith and more commitment to Islamic appearances. In the early 1980s, Saudi Islamists were preoccupied with resisting modernity and Westernisation. In Afghanistan, they encountered open Islamic political activism in the context of a war situation. For the first

time Saudis had the experience of Islamist political parties and military groups working openly.

By the time they arrived in Afghanistan, Saudis had already been exposed at home to current Islamist thought, as discussed in the last chapter. In addition to the survival of the local Ikhwani tribal tradition (represented by Juhayman's followers), Muslim Brotherhood literature (for example, Bannais, Qutbists), Salafi Jihadis, Hizb al-Tahrir and Pakistani Islamism – especially that related to Abu Ala al-Mawdudi – had circulated in Saudi Arabia since the 1970s.[20] Yet Saudis had never before experienced open political activism, rivalry and competition. In the early 1980s Saudi Islamists debated how to resist corrupting Western influences and guard the authentic tradition against liberal and secularist Saudis. All Islamist trends operated as underground movements at that time. In Afghanistan the debate was about how to fight Communist infidels and their local agents. Most importantly, the debate was also about how to establish the pious Islamic state. Saudis were armed with a religious discourse that allowed them to achieve the first objective, i.e. resisting infidels through the discourse of *jihad al-daf'i*, but the majority must have thought they already belonged to a pious state. Nevertheless, the first Afghan experience allowed Saudis to reflect on their own state, to see it from a new perspective, one that was changed by the fog of war and the euphoria of fighting and defeating the enemies of Islam. Questioning the credentials of their own pious state back home must have occurred to many Saudi Afghans as it occurred to Juhayman's followers. Did Saudis go to Afghanistan to gain military skills that would enable them to create the pious state upon their return?

Phase 2 (the 1990s): from excommunicating society to excommunicating rulers

The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989 closed the gates of *jihad* in this country for both Saudis and other Muslims, thus marking the end of the first phase.[21] Saudi warriors and their leaders returned home. From now on they were identified as the Saudi Afghans, a subgroup of the Arab Afghans. Upon arrival at home, they were treated as heroes who had defeated the Evil Empire. The welcome was, however, only a passing moment of joy and recognition. While the Jihadi heroic narratives continued to inflame the imaginations of those who had been classified as *qa'idun*, a bleak future awaited the returnees. Like other Arab states, Saudi Arabia had no exit strategy or reception programme to facilitate the reintegration of the Saudi Afghans in society. The rising preeminence of Osama bin Laden and his confirmation as the undisputed

sheikh of *jihad* and the Jihadi fervour that crystallised around young Saudi Jihadis were carefully watched by the regime.

The second phase was perhaps the most dangerous for the Saudi regime and its religious establishment. It was during this period that a transnationalised Saudi–Wahhabi religious discourse turned its attention to its early mentors, not only to dismantle their monopoly over religious interpretation but more importantly to challenge the regime that sponsored them. This sponsorship is described as leading to a corruption of the authentic Islamic tradition. In this second phase Osama bin Laden took the lead in denouncing both the Al-Saud and official *ʿulama*. While Bin Laden was not a religious scholar, he spoke the language of scholars and fused this language with political rhetoric, thus inflaming the imagination of both Saudi youth and other Muslims around the world. While official *ʿulama* remained parochial and without a pan-Islamic reputation, Bin Laden assumed such status.

In 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Osama bin Laden volunteered his services and those of his Jihadis to liberate Kuwait and fight the infidel – Saddam. Having demonstrated his military skills and acquired new expertise in the mountains and cities of Afghanistan, Bin Laden thought that he and his followers were better positioned to launch another *jihad* close to home; after all, Saddam had already been declared *kafir* by Sheikh Ibn Baz. The Saudi regime refused the offer. It was doubtful whether the Jihadi returnees were a match for Saddam's army, and the regime preferred an international coalition to liberate Kuwait and protect the kingdom. Armed with the Council of Senior Ulama's famous *fatwa* legitimising the participation of foreign troops, King Fahd told his subjects that an international coalition of armies would perform the task. Having 'defeated' the infidel Communists in Afghanistan, many Saudis found it difficult to seek assistance from Western governments to resolve a conflict between Muslims. Saudi *ʿulama* debated the official *fatwa* issued by the religious establishment. The previous prestige of the religious establishment, which had been gained as a result of supporting *jihad* in Afghanistan, quickly withered away. Senior *ʿulama* lost their credibility – for ever, this time.

After being put under what amounts to house arrest in Jiddah, Bin Laden secretly left the country with the help of family members. The Saudi Afghans dispersed inside Saudi Arabia and abroad, while waiting for other potential *jihad* destinations. Kuwait was liberated, but the foreign – mainly American – troops remained in Saudi Arabia, a fact that from now on became the axis around which the Islamist opposition to the Saudi regime revolved in all its shades and orientations. The question that was theoretical in Afghanistan – the nature of the pious Islamic state and

its relations with 'infidels' – began to be posed in the context of discussing the Saudi state itself. Osama bin Laden was again a key figure, just at the time he was stripped of his Saudi nationality (in 1994).

The young Saudi Afghans became fugitives, a pariah group searching for shelter or another *jihad* destination. While some followed Bin Laden to Sudan, the majority remained in Saudi Arabia or travelled to Chechnya, Bosnia and Kashmir. Their hero, Osama bin Laden, became *persona non grata* in Saudi Arabia. From now on Jihadis were defined as *al-fi'a al-dhalla* (the group that has gone astray). Violent attacks in Riyadh in 1995 killed many Americans. It was the first major anti-American action inside Saudi Arabia. In 1996 al-Khobar was bombed. While nobody claimed responsibility for either attack, it was assumed that Bin Laden and his Saudi Afghans may have been responsible. Violence confirmed the status of the Saudi Afghans as a threat to the regime. In public it tried to link the violence to Shi'i dissidents, but without success.

Osama bin Laden was expelled from Sudan, and returned to Afghanistan after the rise of the Taliban regime in 1996. Although Saudi Arabia maintained friendly relations with the Taliban and promised substantial aid, the regime initially did not put pressure on the Taliban to deport Bin Laden. According to Rashid, only when Prince Turki al-Faysal, in charge of intelligence services at the time, was personally insulted by Mullah Omar in Kandahar did the Saudis curtail diplomatic links with the Taliban. In other words, Saudi policy towards this impoverished polity was dictated by a personal insult.[22] Saudi Arabia withdrew its recognition of the Taliban only months before the USA launched its attack on the country in 2001.

Young Saudis followed Bin Laden to Afghanistan. Once again it became a haven for those who were pursued by the security forces at home. It is at this time that a religious discourse that is more focused on the Saudi regime began to emerge. It advocated excommunicating the regime as a whole, or individual figures within it, or both. Osama bin Laden's various speeches and media statements confirmed that he was working for the overthrow of the Saudi regime, which had brought 'infidels' to the Arabian Peninsula against the Prophetic tradition. As we shall see in the following chapters, this tradition became central in the struggle of Jihadis against the Saudi regime. By September 2001 Bin Laden had become the regime's chief enemy. It was facing one of the most violent episodes in modern Saudi history, with suicide bombing, confrontation and shoot-outs between members of the so-called *al-fi'a al-dhalla* (the Jihadis) and security forces.

Osama bin Laden's activism against the Saudi regime in the 1990s is now well documented.[23] I shall focus on a long speech delivered in

December 2004, in which he outlined his position vis-à-vis the regime and official *ʿulama*. The speech was delivered after several violent attacks shattered peace and security in Saudi cities. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility. It was assumed that it had direct links with Bin Laden. This speech addressed 'Muslims in *bilad al-haramayn* [the land of the two holy mosques] in particular and the Muslim world in general'.[24]

The speech addresses three categories of people: *hukam al-riyadh* (pejoratively the rulers of Riyadh); *ahl al-hall wa 'l-ʿaqd* (those who tie and loose); and Muslims – Bin Laden avoids the term Saudis, as such an artificial category does not feature in his discourse. In this political speech there is fusion of Quranic verses, Prophetic sayings, citations from famous past and present *ʿulama* and poetry. It demonises the Saudi rulers, reprimands official scholars for their acquiescence, exposes Saudi 'conspiracies' against Muslims and defends Jihadi violence in Saudi Arabia even though it killed Muslims as well as 'infidels'.

Bin Laden explains why he and the Jihadis practised *khuruj ʿala al-hakim* (rebellion against the ruler), a direct challenge to the Wahhabi tradition which forbids such rebellion. He explains:

> *Al-imara* [rulership] is a contract between *raʿi* [ruler] and *raʿiyya* [followers], which entails rights and obligations on both sides. It can be nullified under certain conditions. When a ruler commits treason against his religion and people, the *imara* is no longer valid. A century ago, the Al-Saud jumped on people's necks without their consent or consultation but with British support. Today these rulers practise oppression and theft of public money. People have woken up from their sleep. They are determined to take their rights. You, the Al-Saud, have only two options: first, either return people's rights to them in a peaceful way and leave the country to choose a Muslim ruler who rules according to the Book [Quran] and Sunna [tradition of the Prophet]; or second, refuse to return these rights and continue to pay your mercenaries to oppress people. Remember what happened to the shah of Iran and the Romanian president. We in al-Qa'ida do not compete with you for worldly privileges but we do not accept that you commit acts that are considered *nawaqidh al-iman* [acts that nullify faith], for example ruling not according to the word of God and subservience to infidels.

According to Bin Laden, the Saudi regime moved from committing *maʿasi* (minor sins) and *mubiqat* (grave sins) to violating some of the ten principles of faith when it practised subservience to infidels (*tawwali al-kuffar*), and assisted them against Muslims, in Afghanistan (2001 War on Terror) and Iraq (2003 American occupation). This subservience is a major theme in local Jihadi discourse, as will be shown in the following chapter. In Bin Laden's speech there is no scope for reforming the Al-Saud. According to him the Al-Saud 'are part of an international blasphemous alliance whose main objective is to enslave Muslims'. The theme of subservience to infidels recurs when Bin Laden attacks Crown Prince

Abdullah, who in 2003 called upon Saddam to step down in order to prevent a bloodbath in Iraq. In other words, 'the Crown Prince suggested that Saddam peacefully hands over Iraq to the Americans. This is the advice of the *ʿarabi amir* [the Bedouin prince]'. Bin Laden plays on the imagery of the '*ʿarabi*', defined in the Quran as the worst *kafir* ('al-ʿarab ashadu kufran'). He invokes strong Prophetic language when he calls Prince Abdullah '*al-ruwaybidha*', an insignificant person who talks about public affairs. Bin Laden's rhetoric draws on both the Quran and the Hadith to project an image of the Saudi leadership as immersed in *kufr* (blasphemy).

Bin Laden asserts that he is not after worldly matters and wealth. He explains that 'we left all this behind. We left our land not because we suffered poverty. We have been away for a long time but we long for the Hijaz.' At this juncture he cites a poem demonstrating his longing for this territory:

> The love of Hijaz is in the depth of my heart
> But its rulers are wolves
> I found home and friends in Afghanistan
> God is the one who provides a livelihood

His message to 'those who tie and loose' includes advice to migrate in order to liberate the self from

> illusory restraints and psychological pressure exerted by the regime. Only then you can perform your duties, lead the *umma* and organise its activities. If you delay this mission, you complicate matters further. Young Jihadis will take the initiative to interpret texts (*ijtihad*), in order to justify armed rebellion against rulers. This must be a joint effort and the *ʿulama* must help convince the ruler to step down in order to avoid further bloodshed.

Bin Laden here reminds the *ʿulama* of their role in the early 1960s as mediators between King Saud and his brother Faysal. According to his narrative, the *ʿulama* convinced King Saud to step down and avoid further conflict. Bin Laden urges the *ʿulama* to play a similar role, this time to convince the Al-Saud to leave the country to the people. One senses that in 2004 bin Laden was worried about the proliferation of *jihad* and its privatisation in the absence of grass-roots *ʿulama* to guide and direct Jihadis. The violence that erupted in Saudi Arabia in 2003–4 was in need of justifications and theological sanction, both the prerogative of the specialist *ʿulama*. Perhaps Bin Laden's call to the *ʿulama* to take the initiative and provide guidance stemmed from concern about inexperienced Jihadis who might go too far in 'privatising' the obligation of *jihad* without central command or supervision.

Regarding Jihadi violence, Bin Laden asks a series of rhetorical questions.

Who are those who hold the thought that the regime describes as having gone astray, the so-called contemporary Kharijites? Are they Khalid al-Mihdhar, Salim al-Mihdhar or Nawaf al-Hazmi, who left Mecca to attack America? Are they King Fahd, who attacked Mecca with tanks when a small group of Muslims took refuge in the holy sanctuary? The regime could have negotiated with them [Juhayman's group] but the enemy of God, King Fahd, preferred to attack the mosque. I remember the marks left by tanks on the Haram's floor and the black smoke coming out of minarets. Are the Al-Saud the ones who command virtue and prohibit vice or are they the ones who corrupt Muslims using the media? Are they the ones who defend the honour of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir or Chechnya? Or are they the ones allied with infidels and those who steal Muslims' wealth? Who has violated the sanctity of the Land of the Two Holy Mosques? Are they the Jihadi youth or the security forces who killed innocent people in the poor neighbourhood of Rasifah in Mecca so that the land can be confiscated by the Minister of Interior?

Bin Laden reminds his audience that those who rebelled against the Ottomans early in the twentieth century, a reference to the Saudi state, deserve to be called Kharijites. Calling the Wahhabi movement a Khariji movement echoes early Sunni positions among the *ʿulama* of Damascus and Baghdad, who abhorred the movement's rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. He addresses Saudi rulers: 'Your father Ibn Saud rebelled against the Ottomans and you yourself rebelled against your brother Saud. Your *ʿulama* never condemned your acts. Let's remind you of the massacre in Taif when your people practised *takfir al-ʿumum* [excommunicating whole communities]. Your father told his soldiers that Hijazis were *kafir*s therefore killing them was *jihad*.' Bin Laden rejects Saudi accusation that he and his followers practise wholesale excommunication. In fact he tells his audience that the Al-Saud and their early followers did exactly that in the Hijaz. This language rejects early Wahhabi discourse that justified the killing of Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of spreading monotheism, according to the official narrative.

This leads us to question descriptions of Osama bin Laden as a puritanical Wahhabi[25] or a 'product of traditional Saudi Wahhabism'.[26] He does not embrace the official Wahhabi tradition or agree with the state narrative produced by the *ʿulama* who described the population as being in a state of *kufr* before the rise of the third Saudi state. Had Bin Laden been a Wahhabi, he would not have challenged the most important pillar of the Saudi–Wahhabi foundation myth. He would not have disputed the right of the Al-Saud to rule over Arabia, a right that was granted to them by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself. While those who study Bin Laden's speeches and statements might describe him as a Wahhabi, we must see him through the eyes of one of his supporters.

A Saudi supporter argues that Bin Laden could not possibly be a Wahhabi. He lists four reasons in support of his opinion. First, 'Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida rebelled against the Al-Saud regime, an act that has never been performed by Wahhabis. While most Wahhabis would occasionally "criticise" the rightful Imam, hoping to reform him, they would prohibit advising him in public, let alone carrying arms against him.' Second, 'Bin Laden aims to restore the Islamic caliphate while the Al-Saud and Wahhabis were the first to have undermined the Ottoman Empire'. Third, 'al-Qa'ida and Bin Laden fight only those who undermine Islam while the Saudis and Wahhabis fought Muslims who do not accept their jurisprudence'. And fourth, 'unlike Wahhabis, Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida do not distinguish between the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence'. The author concludes that Bin Laden did not rebel against the Saudi regime in order to restore the early Wahhabiyya, which clearly claims that the Al-Saud must rule Arabia for ever in accordance with hereditary rule and that the mufti of Saudi Arabia should be a descendant of Al-Shaykh family. Al-Qa'ida is 'wider than the narrow local Wahhabi tradition, which excelled in dividing rather than uniting Muslims'. Bin Laden's supporter asks why today 'Muslims sanctify Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who brought the Al-Saud corrupt rulers to power and considered rebelling against them a form of blasphemy'.[27]

Bin Laden's attachment to the Hijaz is clear, especially when he reminds his audience of the atrocities committed there by Saudi–Wahhabi forces. It is perhaps more accurate to claim that he was a product of the context of the Hijaz rather than the narrow, localised Wahhabi religious tradition of Najd. While the Hijaz was systematically Wahhabised and Saudised in the twentieth century, the region retained some of its previous cosmopolitan and pan-Islamic outlook. Bin Laden himself and the migration of his father to this area attests to this history, with its deep-rooted transnational connections. In the past the Hijaz received migrants not only from Hadramawt, Bin Laden's ancestral land, but also from distant Muslim territories as far away as Indonesia. These migrants always brought with them their intellectual traditions, which were defined and redefined in the holy land as they intermingled with Muslim scholars who were resident in Mecca and Madina.[28] It is the cross-fertilisation of religious thought in the Hijaz that produced Bin Laden, who cannot be anchored in one locality or intellectual tradition. In his quest for the return of the pious Islamic caliphate, with the Hijaz as its central core, Bin Laden regards Ibn Saud's rebellion against the Ottomans under British orders a form of Kharijite behaviour. While many Muslim scholars doubt whether the Ottoman Empire, especially in its later years, represented the desired Islamic caliphate, Bin Laden's

political speech naturally overlooks the body of literature produced by Muslim scholars who subjected the Ottoman experience to *shari'a* rulings. Many concluded that it was not only an aberration of the concept of the caliphate, but was also a system of *kufr* and innovation.[29] Bin Laden deconstructs one of the fundamental religiously sanctioned myths of the Saudi state, namely that this is the state of monotheism, which brought the people of Arabia to true Islam. He claims that the Saudis contributed to the fall of the Ottoman Empire without replacing it with a legitimate alternative. While his dream is to establish a caliphate with the Hijaz as its core, contemporary official Wahhabi discourse has limited ambitions.

Bin Laden has used arms against both the West and the Saudi regime and has proved that he is capable of inflicting great damage to both. His influence in Saudi Arabia is often downplayed, for obvious political reasons. Some argue that his lack of a solid tribal genealogy in the country prevents him from developing real influence. But perhaps a new generation of Saudis find this so-called disadvantage his main asset. They may be truly tired of the rigid tribal hierarchies and grading system that dominate Saudi society, which a priori defines people's status, privilege and even financial prospects in a regime that continues to play on tribal divisions. Bin Laden surpassed tribal solidarity groups as he brought a Harbi, Otaybi, Zahrani and Ghamdi – not to mention Egyptians, Yemenis, Palestinians and Algerians – together in a joint adventure, not only in Afghanistan but also elsewhere in the world. It was Bin Laden who challenged the apartheid system that separated 'Saudis' and 'immigrants', the million or so Muslim workers that the Saudi regime struggled to keep under control and deprive of all rights. Western expatriates enjoyed privileges and rights that Muslim immigrants could only dream of. Bin Laden himself was a descendant of an exceptional immigrant who managed to 'assimilate' while thousands of other Muslim labourers were kept outside society, confined in segregated residential compounds, if they were professionals, or shanty towns that circled Saudi cities. It is surprising that, given his appeal, some analysts have argued that for the majority of Saudis Bin Laden was the 'other'. This may have been true for those 'inside' the Saudi system, but his rhetoric certainly strikes a chord with a growing marginalised population who lack equal access to resources. Bin Laden himself was inside this system, but he rebelled against its rigid hierarchies, nepotism and corruption. He and his wealth represent the shift in Saudi Arabia from a society dominated by inherited status to one that is gradually embracing achieved status. Being the 'other' seems to have guaranteed the survival of Bin Laden's reputation, if not influence, on young Saudis – not only in Saudi Arabia, but also elsewhere. In today's world it is impossible to measure this influence accurately let alone quantify it.

Despite hundreds of books and intelligence reports, understanding the Bin Laden phenomenon is one of the most difficult tasks contemporary scholars face. It is easy to say that he is a puritanical fanatical Wahhabi. It is also easy to describe him as a non-Saudi terrorist who fell under the spell of Egyptian Jihadis, an interpretation which suits the Saudi regime as it struggles to absolve its own religious establishment from any responsibility for world terrorism. It is not surprising that the Bin Laden phenomenon is entangled with political polemics rather than sober interpretations of a complex religious and political field, made even more so as a result of new communication technology, transnationalisation and easy travel and movement. Bin Laden is an evolving phenomenon and it will continue to be so in the foreseeable future.

London: contesting Wahhabi religio-political discourse

Contesting Saudi religio-political discourse did not take place only in Afghanistan. The religio-political literature of rebellion and resistance against 'despots' who corrupt Islam was produced and published in other places as well, with Muslims of diverse nationalities contributing to its formulation. In the mid-1990s, London was a refuge for dissident Islamists facing imprisonment and torture in their own countries. While a small minority were real Jihadis, trained in the art of using weapons, the majority were theoreticians and interpreters of *jihad*, who disseminated their ideas in a tolerant, 'connected' context, with easy access to old and new media. In the name of freedom of expression, British tolerance and multiculturalism, the British authorities turned a blind eye to their activities. This was a political strategy – to watch, control and provide 'British Spooks with a great photo opportunity', in the words of a realist scholar who is not fooled by spin or rhetoric.

London thus became one of the most important centres of debate over Saudi religio-political discourse.[30] Bin Laden's envoy Khalid al-Fawaz established the Advice and Reform Committee there in 1994.[31] The influence of this committee was limited, however, as al-Fawaz was later imprisoned in Britain. More influential was the counter-theology offering revolutionary interpretations of the original Wahhabi texts that flourished in the British capital. Saudi and non-Saudi *'ulama* and political activists based in London and elsewhere contributed to the production and dissemination of this counter-religio-political discourse. London became the space where the production and distribution of dissident literature took place. What such activists did in London was not to 'invent' radical discourse or 'learn' it, as claimed by Saudi propaganda. Rather, they turned the original Wahhabi discourse against those who initially spon-

sored and promoted it worldwide. Their aim was to prove that had Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab been alive, he would have excommunicated the current Saudi regime.

This counter-discourse invoked neither the standards of democracy nor universal human rights. Instead, it reinterpreted the criteria of the Saudi religious establishment to excommunicate it. Several publications showed how the regime fell short of complying with its own Wahhabi rhetoric.

In 1994 a book entitled *al-Kawashif al-jaliyya fi kufr al-dawla al-saoudiyya* (Clear Evidence of the Blasphemy of the Saudi Regime) by Abu al-Bara al-Najdi (allegedly an alias for Jordanian Palestinian Abu Muhammad al-Barqawi al-Maqdisi (b. 1959)), was reprinted in London by an anonymous publishing house called Dar al-Qasim, thus invoking the heartland of the Wahhabi tradition. Al-Maqdisi's case is a clear illustration of how Saudi–Wahhabi religio-political discourse was adopted by a non-Saudi Islamist, thanks to transnational religious networks, easy travel, fast communication and the proliferation of Saudi-sponsored centres of religious education. Rather than bringing an alien Islamic tradition to Saudi Arabia, as claimed by Saudi officials and Western writers, al-Maqdisi fell under the influence of the religious discourse that originated in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Maqdisi lived in Kuwait where he frequented Islamist circles until his deportation to Jordan after the Gulf War of 1990–1. In the mid-1980s he travelled to Peshawar where he developed a Salafi–Jihadi discourse. According to several accounts, he visited Madina in the early 1980s, immediately after the dispersal of Juhayman's followers. During these visits, he fell under the influence of Juhayman's underground supporters. According to al-Noqaydan, al-Maqdisi also visited Buraydah in Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s.[32] Al-Maqdisi returned to Jordan in the mid-1990s, and was imprisoned in 1995. In 2005 he was still serving a prison sentence in a Jordanian prison. He was released for a short period, but was later returned to prison after an interview with al-Jazeera television. Al-Maqdisi's book could have been written by any Salafi sheikh in the British capital or elsewhere, such as Abu Qatada, another Jordanian of a Palestinian origin who in 2005 was in Belmarsh prison; or Hizb al-Tahrir's Omar Bakri, who returned to Lebanon in 2005 after the 7 July London bombings; or Abu Hamza al-Masri, a veteran of the Afghan Jihad who in 2006 was serving a prison sentence in London. It is alleged that al-Maqdisi's book circulated in Afghanistan before its republication in London.

The fact that the author chose a pseudonym ending with al-Najdi reflected a desire to authenticate this revolutionary theology by anchoring it in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, the land of Wahhabiyya.

Al-Maqdisi endorsed Wahhabi interpretations and its symbolic attire. The book relies heavily on citations from the intellectual heritage of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Bin Laden ordered the writing of this book in an attempt to bring the struggle closer to Saudi Arabia. Only if the regime is declared *kafir*, a declaration that is dependent on religious evidence, can Saudis rebel with arms against the regime (*khuruj bi ʾl-sayf*). The content of the book was drawn from the religious rulings of the early and latter Wahhabi *ʿulama*, thus making it more accessible and acceptable to Wahhabis themselves. It spoke the words of their own *ʿulama*, but the words were this time turned against the regime itself. The main point was that by its own Wahhabi theology and standards, the Saudi regime is guilty of blasphemy. The author wanted his readers to reach the conclusion that had Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab been alive, he would have issued a *fatwa* convicting the Al-Saud regime of *kufr*.

Official *ʿulama* ignored the book when it first appeared in 1989, and continued to do so for almost a decade after its publication. Some thought that a response would give the book more publicity than it actually deserves. However, with the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia in 2003–5, it was reported that many Jihadis had read the book. A pro-official *ʿulama* website called al-Radd (response) published a piece denouncing the book and deconstructing its theological evidence.[33]

In the book, Abu al-Bara al-Najdi claims: 'I am a Sunni Arab Muslim not a Shiʿi *rafidhi* [rejectionist] or a Communist.' This is aimed at shattering the claims of the regime that criticism comes only from Shiʿi 'rejectionists' or atheists. In his words, 'the regime is blasphemous if judged by the standards of the early Wahhabi *ʿulama* themselves'.[34]

Abu al-Bara argues that one must distinguish the current Saudi regime from the early people who carried the flame of monotheism under the banner of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. One must also distinguish between the evil, subservient *ʿulama* of today and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, whose teachings they claim to follow.

The book starts with the epic of the Ikhwan fighters, the foot-soldiers of Ibn Saud. The author narrates a history that glorifies those fighters and demonises Ibn Saud, the 'symbol of conspiracy and subservience to Britain at the time'. He moves on to identify the characteristics of the blasphemous regime that evolved in the twentieth century. It does not apply Islamic law, maintains amicable and subservient relations with infidels, plunders public wealth, cooperates with Gulf and Arab *tawaghit* (despots) against their own Muslim population and joins international *kufr* organisations, for example the United Nations and other regional and international forums.

The author argues that the regime introduces new legislation (*nidham*) to replace *shari'a*. He reminds his readers of Muhammad ibn Ibrahim's epistle (*Tahkim and qawanin*), in which he condemned the introduction of new legislation that contradicts, or has no grounding in, *shari'a*. He claims that the suspension of *shari'a* punishment (*iqamat al-hudud*) is characteristic of the blasphemous regime, and reminds his readers of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, who wrote to the king demanding the sacking of a judge in Yanbo for smoking: 'It became clear to us that the *qadi* smokes in the court. He delays people's cases. The *maslaha* [public good] requires that he is forced to resign. We hope that your majesty complies.'[35]

The grave sins of the regime must be remedied. Abu al-Bara introduces a 'way out of discord' (*makhraj min al-fitna*). He asks, 'What is to be done?' The solution proposed is that put forward by the Wahhabi establishment several decades ago, namely *hijra* (migration) and *jihad*, citing two Quranic verses, one urging Muslims to migrate, the other instructing them to perform *jihad*. The latter suggestion is justified on the basis that Muslims were urged by the Prophet to kill if they witnessed *kufran bawahan*, clear and obvious blasphemy that can be documented with evidence. Abu al-Bara warns Muslims not to be deceived by those who declare that there is no God but Allah. A Muslim must dissociate himself not only from all action that is potentially blasphemous but also from subservience to others. At this junction, he introduces citations from *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya*, who urged people to excommunicate the blasphemous, fight them and rebel against them, starting with the words of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif, and Hamad ibn Atiq.

As the book appeared after the end of the first *jihad* experience, the author reflects on the Saudi role in this *jihad*. He depicts official Saudi involvement in the Afghan *jihad* as an attempt to control the parties involved and prevent the rise of the 'real Islamic state'.

> The regime spent millions for this purpose. It patronised Jihadis who were prevented from reading any literature that denounced the blasphemous Saudi regime. It even set up a residence compound for Saudi Jihadis, called *al-bayt al-saudi*, to prevent its own citizens from mixing with Muslims. They prevented the publication of manuals teaching Jihadis how to fight guerrilla warfare in cities because the regime feared that they would apply these methods in Saudi Arabia. When Saudi Jihadis returned home, their books were confiscated at the airport. They were put in prison. Saudis spend millions to appear as defenders of faith. In fact, they want to keep *jihad* away from the country. We pray to God to destroy the regime at its own hands.[36]

Abu al-Bara's book was only the beginning of a series of dissident publications that appeared in London, all challenging the Saudi religio-political

discourse that was propagated by the state. In 1995 Saudi Hizb al-Tahrir dissident Muhammad al-Masari published a book entitled *al-Adilla al-qatiyya ʿala adam shar'iyyat al-dawla al-saudiyya*, in which he denounced Wahhabiyya itself. Al-Masari confirms that Abu al-Bara's book contains the full evidence in support of its main thesis, i.e. the blasphemy of the Saudi regime. However, he argues that Abu al-Bara's book is not satisfactory because it contains inappropriate language in addition to extensive discussion of minor issues such as smoking. In al-Masari's words the author 'like other Salafis fails to distinguish between absolute issues where there is consensus and where the label *kufr* can be applied and other issues where there is difference of opinion and can be subjected to *ijtihad* [interpretation]'.[37] Al-Masari proposes subjecting the whole regime, rather than individuals within it, to *shariʿa* in an attempt to judge its Islamic credentials. There are criteria specified as absolute requirements for the legitimacy of Islamic political leadership: first, rule according to the revealed word of God, which excludes a ruler as a source for legislation; second, enable Islam to flourish and its rituals to be performed; third, associate with Muslims and dissociate from infidels – a position that defines international relations, to use modern terminology; and fourth, apply *shariʿa* rule rather than simply admitting its relevance. According to al-Masari the Saudi regime fails to comply with these four conditions.

The Saudi regime, according to al-Masari, suspends *shaʿair al-Islam* such as *jihad*. It does not forbid usury and vice. In fact, he claims that the regime actually promotes vice. Although there is a committee that is supposed to promote virtue and prohibit vice, its functions are distorted. He argues that the regime inherited this committee, which it kept not because it cares about the obligation but because it fears the consequences of abolishing the institution. The committee establishes the appearance of an Islamised space rather than its message. Therefore, the regime uses the committee to distort the image of Islam rather than to prevent vice and promote virtue. It fights the obligation incumbent upon Muslims to debate their political, military, economic and social affairs. It accepts only preachers who instruct their audience in matters related to personal worship. This observation confirms the establishment of an Islam that is obsessed with *ʿibadat* (rituals, personal worship), at the expense of bringing out other aspects of the Islamic tradition, a theme that is at the heart of Sahwi activism. He criticises both Al-Saud and Wahhabi *ʿulama*:

> The Al-Saud spread a distorted Islam. They allow their *ʿulama* to condemn the so-called innovators who perform *shirk* near tombs, worship dead saints, trees, stones and sand. They forbid the *mawlid* [celebration of the Prophet's birthday], which is an issue subject to difference in opinion rather than consensus among

scholars. These issues become the main focus of preaching. Yet the blasphemy of rulers who introduce secular laws, their glorification and their subservience to infidels are hardly condemned by such *ʿulama*.[38]

Like Abu al-Bara, al-Masari exposes the dark side of official Saudi engagement with the Afghan *jihad*. He argues that the regime suppressed those Arab Afghans who questioned the legitimacy of their despotic rulers. Their aim was to control the Jihadis and make them subservient to King Fahd rather than support them in their efforts to fight the Communists. He cites the example of the regime paying tribal groups in Afghanistan to block the travel of the Arab Afghans, especially Saudis, to reach training camps where debate about the Islamic credentials of King Fahd regularly took place. The Saudi regime, according to al-Masari, patronised the Afghan leaders in order to ensure that the outcome of the struggle did not challenge its own credibility. Al-Masari points out that the Saudi regime manipulated the Afghan Jihad and sent spies to report on Saudis, a theme that is so well articulated in Muhammad al-Hodhayf's novel, Nuqtat taftish, cited at the beginning of the chapter. Al-Hodfayf's character Jamil, who is now concerned with demonising Jihadis, was a spy acting on behalf of the Saudi project in Afghanistan. Al-Masari admits that Saudi Jihadis returned to Saudi Arabia with a new understanding of their own so-called pious state:

> Having acquired training in weapons and combat, having read hundred of books denouncing the despots, having mixed with the real preachers, Saudi Afghans returned with a different face. They acquired and internalised the thought that excommunicates rulers, their supporters, and aides. The excommunication tradition was not new. Only its application to the Saudi regime is new. The young Saudi Afghans returned having lost trust in the regime's *ʿulama*, 'regardless of the length of their beards and age'. The *ʿulama* retaliated by condemning those young men and accusing them of spreading *fikr shadh* [perverse thought]. The youth left thinking that they were tied with an oath of allegiance to the Al-Saud (*fi unuqihim bayʿa*), but when they returned they realised that this was an illusion.[39]

Having evaluated the current Saudi regime, al-Masari concludes by contesting the Wahhabi movement itself and its founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. He not only scrutinises the Wahhabi religio-political discourse but also the relationship between the Al-Saud and the Wahhabi *ʿulama*. This necessitates a return to the original pact between the reformer and Al-Saud. Al-Masari praises Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's concern over purifying faith from blasphemous practices but he criticises the reformer on four grounds:

> First, the reformer overlooked the fact that the *sultan* [ruler] is not allowed to collect money from his subjects except that which is specified in the Quran and tradition. Second, hereditary rule contradicts Islam. Third, the reformer's

commitment to limit his allegiance to Al-Saud anchors the call to monotheism in localism and prevents its universalisation. And fourth, granting the Al-Saud the right to political leadership and the *'ulama* the right to decide in religious matters are unacceptable measures that lead to secularisation and the creation of *kahanut* [a clergy], both are un-Islamic.

Al-Masari concludes that the Wahhabi reform movement degenerated into 'a local Najdi regional call that is also racist (*'unsoriyya*). It failed to rise above its localism and preach a universal message.'[40]

Transnationalisation in peaceful contexts

Saudi involvement in Afghanistan was only one context of the transnationalisation of its religious discourse. For the Saudi regime the transnationalisation of *da'wa* (call) became a political strategy rather than a mere religious obligation. Under the guise of religious duty towards other Muslims, the regime sought to establish its credentials among communities worldwide. It patronised Muslim regimes in various parts of the world, but its religious transnationalism was meant to reach the grass-roots level in order to control it and prevent it from contesting Saudi status and hegemony. While the Saudi government knew that it was difficult for impoverished Muslim states to contest Saudi hegemony, it feared the people in those states. Charity and education proved to be powerful mechanisms: the first bought dissenting voices, while the second aimed to control the minds and hearts of Muslims from Detroit to Jakarta.

Exporting the call involved the transnationalisation of Saudi religio-political discourse before it achieved a degree of sophistication suitable for an international Muslim audience, especially among Muslims in the West. The parochial local discourse was exported before it was able to produce all-encompassing and less exclusivist interpretations. The arrival of Muslim immigrants in the 1960s who worked in education and religious institutions inside Saudi Arabia had done little to broaden the scope of the Wahhabi message.

From the 1970s the official Saudi religious discourse travelled abroad to peaceful locations in Europe, America, Africa and Asia. Under the auspices of the Saudi regime, mosques, charitable organisations, religious schools, research centres and *da'wa* institutions were set up abroad. These grass-roots bodies differed from the formal and institutionalised activities that were represented by the Organisation of the Muslim Conference, the Muslim World League and other Islamic economic and financial organisations and bureaucracies that were sponsored by the Saudi government. The transnationalisation of Saudi religious discourse reached Muslims abroad as a result of educational programmes (in

mosques, research centres and schools) whose main function was to disseminate religious knowledge produced by *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*. The *fatwa* volumes of Ibn Baz and al-Uthaymin, the most eminent Saudi scholars of the last two decades, could be found in small, shabby Islamic bookshops in Washington, London, Paris, Madrid, Lagos, Jakarta and other cities. While Muslims visiting Mecca could pick up a free copy of *fatwa*s relating to pilgrimage, prayer, fasting and how to visit the Prophet's mosque in Madina without committing 'blasphemous acts' such as supplication or sacrifice to other than God, they can now receive such literature in their home countries, where Saudi-sponsored Islamic education centres distribute it freely. Members of the Council of Senior Ulama, together with minor scholars and recently appointed staff in religious universities, wrote these *fatwa*s, not only for local consumption, but also for other Muslims abroad, and even potential converts.

Saudi Arabia exported vast religious literature that fell into four categories: first, the *ʿibadat* literature, whose main objective is the codification of the practice of Islamic rituals according to Wahhabi interpretations; second, literature that denounces the practices of other Muslims (including those who perform rituals differently or believe in other interpretations); third, literature dealing with Muslim women; and fourth, literature defining relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Any Saudi-sponsored religious centre abroad had sample literature covering all these areas. What concerns us here is not the literature that deals with *ʿibadat* and how they should be 'correctly' performed (for example, prayer and fasting) but with the political implications of such literature.

First, Muslims who contemplate visiting Mecca and Madina for either the pilgrimage or *ʿumra* (minor pilgrimage) receive a leaflet instructing them on how to perform *al-ziyara* (the visit). A leaflet published by a religious centre in Madina found its way to one Saudi-sponsored religious centre in London. The leaflet explains the rules guiding the visit. It was written by a lecturer in religious studies in Saudi Arabia who worked under the editorship of Sheikh Abdullah ibn Jibrin, one of the most eminent *ʿulama*, whose name was associated with the crystallisation of the Sahwi trend. It includes a warning against some of the *mukhalafat* (errors) committed by Muslims upon their visit to the Madina mosque. There are seven permissible acts:

1-It is permissible to travel for the purpose of praying in the mosque.
2-It is permissible to travel to pray even if the visit has nothing to do with the pilgrimage.
3-When a Muslim arrives in the mosque, he must enter it with his right foot and say the name of God, in accordance with visits to mosques in general.
4-A Muslim must pray, kneeling twice for salutation.

5-After prayer a Muslim must go to the tombs of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Omar and greet them. He must not spend a long time there. He must leave immediately.
6-It is *mustahab* (desirable) to perform ablution at home and visit the Qubba mosque and pray.
7-It is desirable to visit the Baqi cemetery and the tombs of the martyrs of Uhud.

The document warns Muslims that building on tombs or constructing mosques on them is one of the greatest prohibited acts.[41] Muslims are warned about the following:

1-Travel with the objective of 'visiting' the Prophet's tomb is prohibited. A Muslim must travel with the objective of praying in the Prophet's mosque.
2-Tomb visits are for men only. Women must not visit them.
3-Touching (*tamasuh*) minarets or stones, and kissing them or circling around them is an abominable innovation.
4-Intercession is strictly prohibited. No one must ask the Prophet for favours.
5-Raising the voice with supplication near the tomb is prohibited.[42]

The appendix of the leaflet explains the two types of *shirk* (blasphemy). The 'great association' (*shirk akbar*), which removes the individual from Islam, consists of supplication to other than God, sacrifice to other than God, circling around tombs, and rule not according to the revealed word of God. 'Minor association' (*shirk asghar*), which is great but falls short of removing one from the realm of Islam, involves swearing by a name other than that of God, and saying 'God and so and so willing', which implies equality between the will of God and that of a person.

Needless to say, the permissible and prohibited during visits to the Prophet's mosque in Madina reflect boundaries that early Wahhabis erected around themselves. These revolve around the way a true Muslim must worship, and are clear markers of identity. The regulation and control of worship rituals such as visiting the mosque distinguish between the faithful, who are part of the community, and those other Muslims who are by definition outside the realm of true Islam. Those who do not follow the rules risk committing not only minor religious innovations but also acts that remove them from Islam altogether. Such people cannot be excused on the basis of 'ignorance'. Receiving this leaflet abroad and complying with its rules removes any such excuse.

Regulating and controlling ritual practice outside Saudi Arabia is a preemptive measure that guards against potential acts of blasphemy and defilement in sacred territory, which must remain free of manifestations of *shirk*. The theme of defilement of Arabia by religious practices that do not conform to the Wahhabi rules is but one possible menace that the transnationalisation of Wahhabi discourse was meant to prevent. Defilement can also take place as a result of 'infidels', defined as *najs*

(impure), being stationed on its territory, a theme that al-Qa'ida Jihadis excelled in developing and which became the slogan under which they fought and killed infidels in residential compounds. Again Jihadis took Wahhabi discourse to its logical political conclusions. They neither invented this discourse nor imported it from other Islamists movements.

Second, it is considered important, to safeguard against further defilement of the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, that creed literature is distributed abroad. Muslims intending to visit Saudi Arabia find collections of *ʿaqida* books in Saudi-sponsored religious centres abroad. *Fatwas in ʿaqida* is a small booklet by Sheikh Ibn Baz that sums up important Wahhabi opinions on creed. It starts with a statement about the blasphemy that is exhibited by other Muslims (these days), for example 'the blasphemy that takes place near tombs'. Sheikh Ibn Baz explains:

> *Shirk* and innovation take place in many countries near tombs. This includes asking help from the dead to heal the ill, or supplication to be victorious against enemies. All this is great *shirk* that removes Muslims from Islam . . . Prophets, angels, pious men, *jinn*, spirits and idols have no powers. To call upon them is *kufr* . . . To pray near tombs or build minarets above them is *shirk* innovation. According to the Prophet, God cursed Jews and Christians because they converted their prophets' tombs into places of worship. All Muslims and their governments must be warned against this great blasphemy.[43]

Sheikh Ibn Baz gives his opinion on hypocrisy (*nifaq*), as it has 'become so common among Muslims and is now used to fight Islam and Muslims'. The hypocrisy of a Muslim amounts to 'the enemy within', who publicly professes Islam but secretly works to erode the faith of Muslims and undermine their hegemony. The sheikh describes this malaise:

> *Munafiq* [hypocrites] are mentioned in the Quran. They represent a great danger to the *umma*. They fall within two categories. First, those who practise 'creed' hypocrisy (*nifaq ʿaqadi*). They are more *kafir*s than Jews, Christians and pagans. They are so dangerous because they are difficult to discover. Second, those who practise practical hypocrisy (*nifaq ʿamali*), which involves pretending to pray and believe in God but in secrecy they lie, commit treason, and do not perform communal prayer.[44]

Again the theme of hypocrisy as explained by Ibn Baz is picked up by Jihadis, as will be demonstrated later in the book. While Ibn Baz describes ordinary Muslim hypocrites as drawing on Quranic and Hadith evidence, Jihadis apply the concept to people in positions of authority and leadership, *al-hakim al-munafiq* (the hypocrite ruler): the Saudi king.

Third, Saudis export a vast literature on women. The Saudi regime depicts itself as the guardian of women's honour, a claim now contested by those who oppose the regime. Nevertheless, exporting Wahhabi guidance to Muslim women worldwide is an extension of the domestic

obligation. In both exported and domestic religious discourse, Muslim women are considered elevated creatures, who have rights and obligations. Most literature sets Muslim women in an honourable space above *jahili* and Western women. In both the age of ignorance and the contemporary West, women are described as oppressed and abused, and Muslim women are depicted as enjoying more rights and respect. Women, however, are seen as potential weak elements (*da'if*). Because of this alleged weakness, the enemies of Islam (the *kafir*s, hypocrites and Westerners) use Muslim women to corrupt the *umma*. This makes women dangerous and susceptible to corruption. In one volume sent to London and dedicated to educating Muslim women, Sheikh Salih al-Fawzan writes:

> The enemies of Islam and those who have illness in their hearts want Muslim women to become a cheap commodity to be purchased by those with satanic desires. They want women to be a displayed commodity to see her beauty. They want her to leave her house and family and work as a nurse in a hospital, an air hostess on a plane, a teacher in a mixed school, an actress in a play, a singer and a television presenter. The enemies of Islam use the media to lead Muslim women astray. Women have left their real jobs in the house. Husbands are now forced to bring foreign maids to bring up children. This caused discord and evil.[45]

Issues relevant to Muslim women's education involve *ahkam* (rules) concerning the body. The focus is on biological functions (menstruation, other types of bleeding and birth), dress and the veil, worship (prayer, fasting, pilgrimage), marriage and relations with men. No educational material on women's general rights in Islam is included. Al-Fawzan's contribution to Muslim women's education is concerned with the biological female life cycle (birth, marriage and death), purity and ablution, and covering the body in order not to cause chaos or lead men astray. The obsession with the female body rather than female rights is symptomatic of the general political atmosphere, which aims to perpetuate acquiescence. Women potentially undermine state piety and virtue, therefore they need to be controlled. Controlling women is thus an extension of the religio-political orientation of the Wahhabi tradition. The discourse that is directed towards women produces not only acquiescent females but also dependent women, whose biological functions cannot be handled without consulting a male religious scholar. Women's dependence on continuous *fatwa*s dealing with the minute details of their bodily functions and worship ensures control in this life and salvation in the afterlife.[46]

This obsession with the female body and exclusion of other relevant educational material has gained official Saudi religious scholars a pejorative title. Their opponents, both Islamist and liberals, secretly refer to them as *mashaykh al-haydh* ('the sheikhs of menstruation'). Today, their

female educational literature is a contested discourse both inside Saudi Arabia and abroad. As the regime and Wahhabi *'ulama* claim the privilege of defending women's honour, opposition forces and dissidents' voices equally use the issue of women to contest the *'ulama*'s authority.

The fourth type of literature educates Muslims in how to handle relations with infidels. Among Muslim minorities in the West, the obligation to protect the faith and educate Muslims, who are believed to face daily challenges to their identity, is regarded by Saudi religious scholars as an important duty of Muslim governments. In a pamphlet entitled *Muslim Minorities: Fatwa Regarding Muslims Living as Minorities*, Shaykh Abdulaziz Ibn Baz and Shaykh Muhammad al-Uthaymin invoke a Quranic sura in which Muslims have a duty to 'invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and exhortation and argue with them in a way that is better'.[47] With regard to Muslim minorities, the two scholars insist that Muslim governments should 'send to them whoever can assist them in achieving this and ask them to send people to Islamic countries to learn knowledge. There should be, therefore, an exchange of people between those Muslim minorities and the Muslim societies in order to activate them and help them in all their affairs'. The responsibility of such an exchange lies with political leaders and religious scholars: 'The rulers of Muslims everywhere as well as the scholars and the rich must expend whatever they can to assist the Muslim minorities. They must be good to them, help them to understand their religion and help them to acquire complete freedom to manifest the rites and practices of Islam.'[48]

In Saudi Arabia the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta is in control of religious interpretations. Before the millennium celebrations in December 2000, the committee offered 'an Islamic opinion regarding celebrating this occasion, exchanging cards with the "unbelievers", and having days as holiday during the period of this event'.[49] It gave nine reasons to 'make Muslims aware of the misguidance deliberately condoned by the People of the Book' and urged Muslims worldwide to shun the celebrations because

> 1-Jews' and Christians' theories about the millennium are against the Islamic true revelation, and are merely an illusion. 2-Celebrating the millennium makes Islam appear as similar to other false religions. 3-It is prohibited to imitate the non-believers. 4-Imitating the non-believers in the exterior behaviour leads to some kind of love and support to them in the interior. 5-Celebrating with the non-believers is a sin, a trespassing of the borders of Allah. 6-It is unlawful to advertise the event electronically and in print media. 7-There is no Islamic evidence that those dates (of the Millennium) have any precedence over other days. 8-Congratulating each other or the non-believers is unlawful. And finally 9-Muslims should commit themselves to the Muslim calendar.[50]

The banning of Muslim participation in the millennium celebrations draws heavily on the opinion of the committee and the *fatwa* of Sheikh Abdulrahman ibn Abdulaziz al-Sudays, the imam of al-Furqan mosque in Mecca, copies of which are distributed in London and elsewhere.[51] The committee that bans sending a greeting-card to an 'infidel' is the same one that in 1990s issued a *fatwa* legitimising calling upon 'infidel' states to assist in fighting another Muslim state. Members of the same committee also issued *fatwa*s banning women from wearing jeans, because this would count as pious Muslim women 'imitating infidels' (*tashabuh bi 'l-kuffar*). The contradictions of the official religious discourse contribute to its loss of credibility and contestation.

In 2004 al-Sudays delivered a sermon in London's East End mosque, where he talked about tolerance and accepting the 'other', now clichés that summarise the transformation forced on the Saudi regime and its *'ulama* after 11 September.[52] It was doubtful whether his early 2000 *fatwa* was forgotten; Western governments eager to maintain amicable relations with a regime in control of 25 per cent of world oil reserves kept a blind eye, but the intellectual and psychological effect of contradictory religious discourse on young Muslims in Europe and elsewhere is perhaps similar to that among young Saudi men and women. Contradictions do not make for balanced lives, and Saudi society experiences far more than any other society, thanks to Wahhabi discourse and excessive and sudden wealth.

Wahhabi religious interpretations relating to worship and creed can be popular abroad. They can be seen as rational and methodological, and as founded on certainty and clear-cut categories. They reflect an obsession with sacred texts, easily accessible in both print and electronic format. These texts can be interpreted without mediators; thus in theory the discourse offers the possibility of dismantling the traditional authority exercised by fathers, religious scholars and pious men. Wahhabi interpretations call for the rationalisation of worship, minimalist rituals, equality between Muslims, and the rejection of sorcery, superstition and innovations. In theory they preach a sober rather than an animated religion. They offer certainty in a world dominated by fluid categories and multiple interpretations. Certain Muslim university students worldwide may appreciate their clarity, purity, certainty and authenticity. They may also appreciate the absence of ambiguity and hesitation. The discourse allows them to imagine a glorious Muslim past which appeals to defeated Muslims and marginalised youth as well as to wealthy and educated men and women.

Saudi Wahhabi discourse creates the illusion of empowerment, an empowerment that is achieved by complying with rigid rules and *fatwa*s that regulate almost every aspect of one's life, body and relations with others. It is the new 'science' of young Muslims.

The transnationalisation of this discourse can also create moments of confrontation among the recipients.[53] As it aims to standardise belief and worship, it risks obliterating local traditions and interpretations, undermine local power relations, threaten age-old hierarchies and create new ones. Its spread has tended to Muslims split rather than unify them. Its uncompromising and dogmatic nature leaves no room for the middle ground.

The premature transnationalisation of Saudi Wahhabi religious discourse, initially to Afghanistan and later to other destinations, led in some instances to the promotion of the authority of the Saudi regime and its Islamic credentials. Paradoxically, it also led to contestation of this authority and even undermined its security.[54] It can be said that there are unintended consequences of religious transnational connections. Wahhabi religio-political discourse is anchored in a specific context, but as it has flowed beyond this it has developed its own momentum, escaping the control of those who initially engaged in its promotion. Such forays into the wider world can turn into embarrassment, leading to international crises, which threaten to destabilise foreign policy, inter-state relations and contemporary international relations. The events of 11 September are a clear example.

The transnationalising of Saudi religious discourse proves that locally produced traditions and individuals undergo a transformation as they travel to other destinations. Sometimes it is difficult to argue that these traditions themselves are anchored in a specific locality and discourse, as many of them are products of interpretation and diverse influences.[55] The Saudi Afghan experience was perhaps one of the most important experiences for the younger generation. Although the regime tried hard to contain the Afghan *jïhad* by patronising and subsidising it, together with other states and intelligence services, it failed miserably in controlling the outcome and consequences. A cross-fertilisation of religious discourse in Afghanistan, London and many other places contributed to bringing out elements of Wahhabiyya that the regime had endeavoured to suppress for several decades. Away from home and under the fog of war, Saudi Afghans took Wahhabi religio-political discourse to its logical conclusion. Similarly under the fog of London, which allowed greater freedom, the same discourse was interpreted and reinterpreted to condemn those *umara* and *ʿulama* who claim to be guided by such discourse.

4 Struggling in the way of God at home: the politics and poetics of *jihad*

> Remove the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula.
>
> Prophet Muhammad, Hadith

> How can *jihad* be an unlimited good in the lands of other Muslims but a corruption in the Arabian Peninsula?
>
> Sheikh Yusif al-Ayri (d. 2003), leader of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula

In the twenty-first century, Saudi society is struggling over religious interpretation, which seems to be at the heart of political activism. As the struggle unfolds, it is accompanied by strife among various groups and confrontation between those groups and the state. Traditional *'ulama*, Sahwi sheikhs, Jihadis and laymen debate religious interpretations; not all subscribe to non-violent dialogue. Since 1990 violence has become the dark side of the Saudi religio-political debate. Various contestants challenge each other in a desperate attempt to control interpretations of religious discourse. The debate intensified after 11 September.

With American military power closing the gates of *jihad* in Afghanistan following the demise of the Taliban regime in 2001, the struggle of Saudis for the way of God came home.[1] Many Saudi Jihadis who travelled for the second time to Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden had lived between 1996 and 2001, returned to Saudi Arabia. After the toppling of the Taliban, the dismantling of al-Qa'ida training camps and the arrest or flight of Saudi trainees, it seemed to many observers that the War on Terror, led by the USA and a number of supporting countries, was proving successful. Yet several countries in the region experienced waves of violence. Between 2001 and 2005, Saudi Arabia witnessed the worst violence in its modern history, conducted under the rhetoric of expelling infidels from the Arabian Peninsula and removing the despots, known in Jihadi discourse as *tawaghit* of the Land of the Two Holy Mosques.

On 12 May 2003 a major bombing took place in Riyadh; thirty-five people were killed and hundreds injured. On 8 November 2003 car bombs devastated al-Muhayya residential compound, killing over twenty

people and injuring many residents. On 21 April 2004 the building of the security forces in Riyadh was devastated by car bombs. On 2 May 2004 four attackers killed several Western workers in the industrial city of Yanbo. In the same month, another attack on offices and residences of oil company workers took place in al-Khobar in the Eastern Province. Before the end of 2004, on 6 December, the American consulate in Jiddah was attacked. A few days later, a car bomb exploded in the Ministry of Interior buildings in Riyadh.[2] In 2005 regular shoot-outs between Jihadis and security forces continued.

These bloody attacks were major events that marked a turn in the Jihadi project. They announced the arrival of the *jihad* campaign in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, as the Jihadis called it. In addition, not a week passed during this period without the government announcing major success in capturing arms and killing suspected terrorists in the major cities, the mountains around Mecca and the farms of Qasim. Many people, referred to as armed and violent suspects, were killed in shooting incidents between Jihadis and the security forces. In 2005, Dammam saw the worst shoot-out between security forces and Jihadis, who took refuge in one building. There was no doubt that the struggle in the way of God had returned home after several years in the diaspora.

The rhetoric of Jihadis, the legitimising narrative of violence, drew on the sacred Quran and the Prophetic tradition, citing Hadiths calling upon Muslims to remove associationists or polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula – a reference to Westerners, mainly Americans. It is ironic that the struggle continued even after the USA and the Saudi government announced that most American troops stationed in Saudi Arabia had been moved to neighbouring Gulf states, mainly Bahrain and Qatar, in 2003. However, some American military bases remain in Saudi Arabia. As it unfolded, the struggle proved to be more complex and nuanced than simply a strategy to purify the land of Islam from infidels. The symbolism was, however, potent. The rhetoric of the struggle grew in a specific political context and is inspired by its own politics and poetics.

Throughout the 1990s, while the famous Sahwa *'ulama* were behind bars, a strong indigenous Jihadi trend took shape, which does not represent an external religious tradition, both politically and ideologically, as often mistakenly claimed by the government, traditional *'ulama* and Saudi media. While several successful scholarly works have attempted to trace the indigenous historical and religious roots of contemporary Jihadi discourse,[3] other works dissociate Jihadis from the indigenous Saudi–Wahhabi interpretations.[4] In official Saudi discourse, Jihadis are often referred to as Kharijites, or those who have gone astray (*al-fi'a al-dhalla*).

The quest to identify the local origins, causes and intellectual roots of Jihadism could have been a legitimate exercise at a time when Saudi Arabia was more isolated from the outside world. However, the country has now been drawn into the political, economic, intellectual and religious exchanges of other places. Easy travel, the internet (since 1999), satellite television and the media in general connect Saudis to other places and people. While Saudi Arabia received ideas and religious interpretations from abroad after opening its borders to Islamic trends since the 1960s,[5] it proved to be equally capable of initiating its own transnational religious flows to distant locations, thanks to a vigorous campaign of proselytising and royal patronage.[6] Saudi religious discourse was internalised by a whole generation of students who flocked to Saudi Islamic universities in Madina and elsewhere.[7] It is probably inaccurate to describe religious discourse inside the country since the 1970s as purely Saudi. It is equally unconvincing to describe the Islamic discourse that one encounters in London, Washington, Jakarta, Kabul and Peshawar as purely Saudi–Wahhabi. At the same time, one cannot argue that Jihadism in Saudi Arabia is an alien intellectual trend imported from other Islamist movements and locations.

Whether they draw on local religious tradition or imported politicised religion from other places, all Saudi Jihadis make use of locally produced religious knowledge and interpretations. Furthermore, regardless of whether the inspiration for, or even the orders to engage in, violence come from outside – for example, al-Qa'ida or other global Jihadi movements – it is certain that there is a strong local dimension to the Jihadi trend. Religious theoreticians of *jihad* (for example, some *'ulama*), interpreters (Islamist intellectuals) and those who carry out violent acts such as suicide bombers and other young militants are all Saudis, with the exception of a handful of activists who belong to other Arab countries and whose names have appeared in Saudi wanted terrorist lists.[8] To attribute the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century to outside agents such as a global terror movement is to miss the fact that this violence has its own local religious codes, meanings, politics and poetics which resonate in some Saudi circles. The violence associated with the Jihadi trend affirms that it is part of a 'highly meaningful relationship with divinity'.[9] Violent actors are understood as culturally authentic and significant rather than examples of the absence of such significance.

The terrorist attacks of the 1990s, which increased in frequency and magnitude in 2003–4, are not senseless and aimless acts by a group of alienated youth, often described in official religious and political circles as *khawarij al-'asr*, contemporary Kharijites. Perpetrators of violence are guided by cultural codes that draw on sacred texts and interpretations by

religious scholars who claim to return to an authentic Islamic tradition, found not only in *al-kitab wa 'l-sunna* (the book and the deeds of the Prophet) but also in medieval and more recent commentaries on the texts by famous religious authorities among *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya*. Jihadi violence is not at the margin of religious interpretation, but is in fact at its centre, hence the difficulties in defeating the rhetoric of *jihad* in the long term. Jihadi violence, until now dormant in many cultural and religious interpretations, has recently erupted and claimed many lives.

A more fruitful approach to interpret the Jihadi trend and the violence associated with it must start with a number of assumptions. First, Jihadism is a cultural expression grounded in strong religious interpretation that is indigenous to Saudi Arabia. Second, even if Jihadism in Saudi Arabia is a function of global terror networks and transnational religious and political flows, it grows in a specific local context with its own cultural codes and experiences. Third, Jihadism is not an affirmation of alienation, anomie, criminality, economic deprivation and social marginalisation, but an affirmation of a pledge to superiority and the belief in one's ability to change the world by action. It is often understood as a sign of the breakdown of 'traditional' society, loss of identity as a result of increased urbanisation and modernisation, or self-destruction and annihilation. It may grow in a context characterised by negative conditions of poverty, marginalisation and alienation, but one should not confuse context with cause.

It seems that Jihadism, together with the violence associated with it, has been brought from the margins to occupy a central place in the religious map of Saudi Arabia. In Jihadi discourse, changing the world by action is not a reflection of defeat, but an expression of empowerment felt by young militants, ideologue *'ulama* and other Islamist intellectuals. Unless the perpetrator's view forms part of our own understanding, interpreting the Jihadi trend will escape us. It is also essential to consider the role played by the Saudi regime in creating a context that allows it to grow. In many respects, the violence of the Jihadis represents a mirror reflecting the violence of the state and its official *'ulama*.

Taking Sahwa to its logical conclusion: *qa'idun* vs. *mujahidun*

The Jihadi trend is often seen as the logical conclusion of the Sahwi movement that openly dominated the Saudi religio-political scene throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[10] While it was clear that the religio-political awakening included diverse movements and trends, it seems that there was a common source of inspiration and an agreement on basic principles. However, one of the most difficult tasks is to draw the

boundaries between various Islamist groups. While there is common ground, they seem to differ in their religious, political and strategic agendas.

The Jihadi trend was operating within a context of religious diversity. Jihadi literature does not see itself as a deviation from the sources that the Sahwis drew on in the early 1990s. However, the release of famous Sahwi *'ulama* from prison and their subsequent interpretation of *jihad*, which limited it to peaceful cultural, civilisational and religious struggle under the banner of *wali al-amr* (leader of the Muslim community) marked a serious departure in the eyes of Jihadis from the main principles of *da'wa* and the early Sahwi position. Jihadis began to see themselves as the real heirs of Sahwa, carrying its banner, while those left behind or who failed to join them, both physically and intellectually, are labelled *qa'idun* (lit. 'sitting' or 'stationary': those left behind). Jihadis describe themselves as *murabitun 'ala al-thugur* (tied to the battleground).

While Jihadi and Sahwi interpretations are both grounded in Salafi religious discourse, three main differences separate Jihadis from mainstream Salafi Sahwis. An uncompromising rejectionist position towards the Saudi regime, a belief in violent resistance against Western domination, and the choice of legitimate means and targets for *jihad* (for example, the security forces and Western expatriates living in Saudi Arabia can both be legitimate targets) mark Jihadis out as a separate group on the religio-political map of Saudi Arabia.

Sahwis have reservations about the Saudi regime (*dawla*), but in public they label it Islamic. They resist Western domination by what they call peaceful civilisational means, and consider it a serious crime to kill Muslims who work for the regime – for example, members of the security forces. It has also been noted that Sahwis, after the experience of prison and the events of 11 September, have adopted a position which considers society rather than the regime to be problematic and in need of reform. Although Sahwis developed and propagated the rhetoric of Jihad and resistance to Western domination, they did not consider Western expatriates and Saudi security forces to be legitimate targets, especially after 11 September. It seems that this position is grounded in political strategy and expediency, for which they have developed elaborate judicial rulings. It is also based on their belief in the fact that an Islamised society generates Islamised government – that is, correct *da'wa* leads to authentic Islamic *dawla* – without recourse to violence. For the majority of Sahwis, *jihad* abroad (for example, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya and Palestine) is legitimate, whereas inside Saudi Arabia it is not. For example, a statement in support of *jihad* in Iraq, condemning any Muslim who cooperates with infidels' on *ithm wa udwan* (sin and aggression), was signed by twenty-six Sahwi *'ulama*.[11]

In the 1990s, and as a result of the Gulf War, the main question for the Sahwi *ʿulama* was the legitimacy of calling upon the 'infidel West' to help in a war against the Iraqi Muslim army that invaded Kuwait. The famous *fatwa* of Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Baz which legitimised the invitation of foreign troops by Saudi Arabia split the religious community and generated the dissidence described in the previous chapters.[12] However, almost ten years later, the main question became the legitimacy of Muslims assisting the infidel West in its war against other Muslims, starting with the Taliban in 2001 and moving on to Iraq in 2003, all depicted in Western discourse as part of the War on Terror. In the twenty-first century, and immediately after 11 September 2001, the West, headed by the United States, demanded that Muslim governments assist it in its War on Terror. This opened new frontiers in the quest for reforming religion and politics in Saudi Arabia. Above all, it inspired a debate regarding the legitimacy of Muslim governments assisting the enemies of Islam by killing Jihadis.

Since 11 September and the invasion of Afghanistan by US forces, a group of religious scholars came to be known in official discourse and in the Saudi press – for example, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, *al-Watan* and *al-Jazirah* – as the trinity of excommunication (*thulathi al-takfir*), which consisted of sheikhs Ali al-Khodayr, Ahmad al-Khalidi and Nasir al-Fahad.[13] These sheikhs were part of a well-established intellectual genealogy that drew on the early writings of Wahhabi scholars such as Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Sulayman ibn Abdullah Al-Shaykh, Hamad ibn Atiq, Humud al-Tuwayjiri, Muhammad al-Qahtani, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al-Shaykh and Humud ibn Oqla al-Shuaybi. The so-called trinity of excommunication was the young version of an old group of well-established religious scholars. It had strong genealogical links with a previous generation of Wahhabi scholars, in addition to contemporary ones. As religious scholars, they hardly referred in their writings to twentieth-century Jihadi Islamist activists and intellectuals such as Sayid Qutb or Ayman al-Dhawahiri. The latter were simply not their reference points.

In an attempt to examine the intellectual practice and the current context of excommunication and *jihad*, the writings of one of the young Jihadi scholars who emerged in the post-11 September period will be considered. Sheikh Nasir al-Fahad, who was considered part of the trinity of excommunication, wrote several pamphlets and issued a number of *fatwa*s considered a window from which to observe his thought. One of his most important treatises, *al-Tibyan fi kufr man aʿana al-amrican*, deals with religious opinion on the status of Muslims who help Americans.[14] While in the 1990s Saudi religious scholars debated the legitimacy of asking Americans for assistance in expelling Saddam from Kuwait, in

2001 the debate was about Muslims (Saudis) assisting Americans in attacking other Muslims, for example in Afghanistan. Al-Fahad does not publicly name individuals within the Saudi regime – for example, princes – as infidels, nor does he openly consider the Saudi state as a state of *kufr*. However, his writings may imply that this is the case. The obvious evidence which is often cited is Saudi relations with the USA and the regime's alleged departure from the revealed word of God. His imprisonment and later confessions on Saudi television in December 2003 reflect the regime's worries over his rhetoric and its ability to mobilise the youth of the country. While there are other religious texts dealing with 'assisting infidels' written by more established religious scholars, for example Sheikh Humud ibn Oqla al-Shuaybi's book *al-Qawl al-mukhtar fi hukm al-istiʿana bil kuffar* (Chosen Words for the Rule Regarding Calling Upon Infidels for Assistance),[15] al-Fahad's book is easier to read and can be more accessible to non-religious specialists.

Although a graduate of one of the Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia, al-Fahad is neither an established religious scholar nor a well-known figure among the Sahwi *ʿulama*, although he may have gravitated towards them in the 1990s. He was born in the early 1970s. Unusually for a religious scholar, his interest in religious matters and interpretation did not distract him from writing his own genealogy, and he published a book about his own tribal ancestors, al-Asaida, a branch of the Utayba tribe who inhabited Zilfi, a frontier town between Najd and the Gulf.[16] Al-Fahad is aware of the fact that *ansab* (genealogies) are controversial from an Islamic perspective, which tried to mould groups into a unifying religious community, suffused with the ethos of equality, and is concerned to justify documenting his lineage as being part of the Islamic tradition. He claims to have followed the middle path between an obsession with ancestors and forgetting them. Al-Fahad rejects the idea that concern with tracing genealogy should be a prelude to enforcing a hierarchical relationship between groups, an unacceptable position condemned by Islam because God insists that men are distinguished by piety. On the other hand, forgetting genealogy can lead to undesirable consequences, for example the severing of kinship ties, especially with increasing migration and dispersal. After this prelude, al-Fahad traces his own tribal ancestry, confirming his Arab Adnani origin and membership of the Rawq branch of Utayba that inhabited Najd, a tribe that more than any other contributed to the establishment of the current Saudi state. Utaybis were early converts to the Saudi cause and provided the manpower that invaded Hijaz in 1925. Their performance in early *jihad* as Ikhwan fighters, and later rebellions against the state, are well documented.

Al-Fahad is the son of a religious scholar, Sheikh Hamad bin Hamin bin Hamad bin Fahad who according to his son moved from Zilfi to Riyadh in 1374H (1944) where he assisted one of the most prominent and influential religious scholars of the current Saudi state, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al-Shaykh.[17] Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim is today remembered in Salafi circles as one of the most faithful and uncompromising interpreters of the Wahhabi tradition before the official co-optation of the *ʿulama* by the state in the early 1970s. As mentioned earlier in this book, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al-Shaykh died in 1969. Al-Fahad's father occupied various jobs in religious educational institutions, justice, and jurisdiction. He retired in 1411H (1990).

In one of the most important and comprehensive pamphlets, *al-Tibyan fi kufr man aʿan al-amrican* (Revealing the Blasphemy of Those who Help Americans), published on his website in 1422H (2001–2),[18] al-Fahad summarised his view on the problem of association with Americans in their aggression against Muslims. The publication of the book followed the attacks of 11 September and American preparation for the invasion of Afghanistan. Muslim cooperation with Americans is regarded as *kufr* (blasphemy), as the title implies. The book does not mention the Saudi regime or use it as an example of regimes co-operating with Americans in their 'War on Terror'.

In the preface three Saudi religious scholars applauded al-Fahad's book and described it as a clear and accurate treatment of the subject matter. Sheikh Humud al-Oqla al-Shuaybi wrote the first endorsement of the book, confirming the intellectual genealogy of this young scholar. Al-Oqla described al-Fahad as a *mujtahid* belonging to the 'victorious party' and recommended his book to the public, as he found it to be 'one of the best books on the issue of the blasphemy and apostasy of those who assist Americans'. The book is endorsed by two other important Saudi sheikhs, Sulayman al-Ulwan and Ali al-Khodayr, both intellectual ancestors of the young scholar. Their praise enhances the credibility of the book at least in the eyes of other Jihadis, especially when coming from established Salafi authority figures, some of whom were members of the Council of Senior Ulama. This attests to early observations made in this book regarding the difficulty of drawing clear-cut boundaries between offfical and non-official, radical and moderate *ʿulama*.

Al-Fahad's book consists of three general sections: The Crusade against Islam (part I); Evidence of the Blasphemy of Those who Help Americans (part II); and A Reply to Some Misguided Opinions (part III). While al-Fahad makes a political statement about Americans and the Taliban regime in part I, he elaborates theological arguments in part II, which represents the most substantial part of the book. This section

includes a sub-section in which al-Fahad lists evidence from the religious scholars of *al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*, a reference to the Wahhabi movement and its main religious scholars since the time of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. In part III, al-Fahad refutes some misguided opinions relating to the topic of association with and dissociation from infidels, *al-walaʾ wa ʾl-baraʾ*.

The book exemplifies the various aspects of al-Fahad's theological and political orientations. In addition to being a religious scholar, he poses as a political analyst who comments on current affairs which he sees through the prism of the past, tradition and the words of God. His political commentaries on current affairs expand beyond matters relating to Muslims and their history. In fact, he feels confident enough to comment on and analyse American society – despite lacking any direct contact with it – both in America or in Saudi Arabia. Al-Fahad would definitely regard visiting America as a form of an 'abode among polytheists' (*bayn dhuhrani al-mushrikin*).

In a section of the first part of the book, entitled Synopsis on America, al-Fahad paints a dark picture of American society, where moral degeneration, crime, corruption and atheism reign. America is portrayed as a land where Satan has taken refuge ('ashash fiha al-shaytan'). He cites statistics on homosexuality, illegitimate births, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual perversion and other sins. He reminds the reader of *qawm Lut* (the people of Lut), an extinct community known in the Quran for ten deadly sins, the most famous of which is homosexuality. American society not only engages in these sins but endeavours to spread them worldwide as a result of military intervention and colonial wars, according to al-Fahad. In few pages, he depicts America as a godless country, ruled by a government of corruption and sins that does not hesitate to kill in various parts of the world, mainly in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and listing examples of American interventions in places like Somalia, Lebanon, Vietnam and others. Al-Fahad argues that America is dangerous not only for its military adventures but also for its moral bankruptcy and corruption which it endeavours to export to other places, including the Muslim world.

In contrast, in the section in the same part (part I) entitled Synopsis on Taliban, al-Fahad paints the antithesis of America. After a brief introduction in which the religious and social diversity of Afghan society is described, al-Fahad argues that the emirate of Taliban is an Islamic government because it applied the *shariʿa* in all aspects of life. The achievements of the Taliban are listed in terms of establishing a Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice, promoting an Islamic media policy, prohibiting the shaving of beards, segregating men and women, eradicating opium cultivation, demolishing pagan statues in

museums and elsewhere, emphasising the duty of *jihad* in the educational curriculum, and delaying the education of girls until the availability of qualified female teachers. Al-Fahad concludes that America's war on Afghanistan should be understood in terms of a crusade whose main purpose is to destroy one of the first experiments in establishing Islamic government in the Muslim world. Invoking several speeches by President Bush and other senior figures in the American administration, al-Fahad reflects an awareness of the political rhetoric of the 'enemy of Islam'. He uses this rhetoric to enhance the credibility of his own narrative and concludes that 'it is indeed a war on Islam'.

In part II, Evidence of the Blasphemy of Those who Help Americans, al-Fahad identifies two important dimensions in Islam: first, belief in one God alone (*al-tawhid*); and second, the prohibition of polytheism (*shirk*). Excommunication is a state which follows the violation of the principle of the oneness of God. Al-Fahad endeavours to prove that enmity towards infidels (*kafirun*) and dissociation from them (*bara'*) are central to belief in the oneness of God. Evidence is drawn from eight sources: the Holy Book (*al-kitab*); consensus (*al-ijma'*); tradition of the Prophet (*sunna*), sayings of the companions of the Prophet (*aqwal al-sahaba*); deduction by analogy (*qiyas*); history (*tarikh*); the words of the people of knowledge; and the words of the scholars of the Najdi *da'wa*. It is extremely interesting that al-Fahad devotes a whole section to the latter scholars and treats them as a separate category of people of knowledge. The *fatwa*s and sayings of twelve Wahhabi scholars are listed as evidence of the centrality of the duty of dissociation from infidels.

The author describes three general relations with infidels that draw on Islamic texts, history and tradition. He sketches a perception of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims that draws on ancient texts in order to guide contemporary and future relations that Muslims both individuals and states may have with infidels. First, *tawwali* is a kind of relation with infidels which removes the person from the realm of religion. It includes love of the infidel's religion, wishing them victory, and helping them against Muslims. This is a relationship of subordination and subservience to infidels. It is the most reprehensible, as it leads the Muslim himself to become an infidel.

A second relation, *muwalat*, is forbidden but does not lead to blasphemy. *Muwalat* involves, for example, respecting infidels in meetings, greeting them before Muslims, and showing them love and affection. According to al-Fahad, this relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims can be problematic, as it may develop into *tawwali*. It is perhaps accurate to describe this relationship as one of deference and accommodation shown by Muslims towards non-Muslims.

The third association, which is permissible, *muʿamalat jaʾiza*, involves treating infidels with justice, especially non-combatants who live in Muslim lands. According to al-Fahad, the poor amongst them 'should be clothed, their hungry should be fed, and their weak should be protected. Muslims should do this not out of fear and humility but out of compassion.' Here he confirms an important Muslim tradition, namely justice towards the weak and those who represent no danger to the Muslim community.

Al-Fahad argues that Muslims confuse the three types of relations. His main concern is with the dangerous state of *tawwali*, which he explains on the basis of the writings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who insisted that *tawwali* (helping infidels against Muslims) is *naqidh lil islam* (a factor that removes a Muslim from the religious community and Islam). Al-Fahad lists types of help that are forbidden, for example, help that requires the use of one's own body, weapon, tongue, heart, pen, money and opinion. This assistance is considered both blasphemy and apostasy.

After this general theological treatise, outlining permissible and prohibited relations with infidels, al-Fahad moves to contemporary politics, focusing on the American invasion of Afghanistan, described as a new crusade against Islam and Muslims. This is interpreted in light of evidence from the Quran. In a section on *shariʿa* evidence, al-Fahad lists eight suras in which God informs the believers of the intentions of unbelievers who have 'plans to undermine the faith of Muslims, subjugate them and fight them until they declare their subordination and servitude'. One sura informs the believers about the intentions of Jews and Christians: 'Never will the Jews and Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion' (sura al-Baqara, verse 120).

Another sura mentioned by al-Fahad prohibits intimate relations with infidels:

> Ye who believe
> Take not into your intimacy
> Those outside your ranks
> They will not fail
> To corrupt you. They
> only desire your ruin
> Rank hatred from their mouths
> What their hearts conceal
> Is far worse. (sura al–Umran, verse 118)

With the support of evidence from sacred texts, al-Fahad describes the 'reality' of the new crusade in an attempt to emphasise the relevance and applicability of the Quranic sura to contemporary political context. In addition to invasions under the banner of colonialism (*hamlat istimariyya*),

and later invasions under United Nations sanctions (*hamlat umamiyya*), he lists several examples of contemporary crusades against Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Lebanon, Somalia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Chechnya and Kashmir, where Muslims have been killed. He also includes missionary activities, which are a form of 'violence as these missionaries try to "Christianise" Muslims'.

Other evidence derives from history. Al-Fahad lists *fatwa*s of famous *ʿulama* forbidding Muslims to help non-Muslims against Muslims. In addition to examples from medieval times, especially the era of the Mongol invasion and the responses of Ibn Taymiyya, the colonial encounter between Muslims and non-Muslims, for example in Algeria and Egypt in the twentieth century, he provides ample examples of religious scholars who spoke out against Muslims providing assistance to non-Muslims. He gives a list of theological positions from the four major Islamic schools of jurisprudence (Hanbali, Shafiʿi, Maliki and Hanafi), recent *ʿulama* (for example Rashid Rida, Ahmad Shakir and Abdulaziz ibn Baz), and contemporary scholars (such as Safar al-Hawali). Al-Fahad implies that there is consensus among Muslim scholars throughout the ages that assistance to infidels leads to excommunication. This obviously stands in sharp contrast with Sheikh Yusif al-Qaradawi's controversial *fatwa* to American Muslims in which he declared their participation as soldiers in the American army during the invasion of Afghanistan permissible.[19]

Al-Fahad moves to the evidence of Wahhbi religious scholars, whose theological position is in his opinion the most clear and uncompromising regarding helping non-Muslims against Muslims. He describes the *ʿulama* of the Wahhabi call as 'the most outspoken *ʿulama* in this regard. They produced elaborate *fatwa* and books on the subject,' thus justifying his detailed consideration of their intellectual heritage. Al-Fahad brings the story closer to his homeland and his intellectual ancestors by citing scholars who are the guardians of the Wahhabi tradition and its most loyal interpreters. Starting with the writings of the founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, he offers a survey of the opinions of those who kept his tradition alive, mainly the *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*, the Najdi scholars whose work is set apart as evidence supporting the belief in the blasphemy of all those Muslims who assist non-Muslims against their fellow Muslims. The list includes the *fatwa*s of Wahhabi scholars over three centuries, starting with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and ending with Safar al-Hawali. Al-Fahad cites a famous *fatwa* by Sheikh Ibn Baz, who warned Muslims against helping infidels, at the time 'Socialists and Communists', a reflection of the context in which the Cold War defined the enemy as the Soviet Union. In fact, as early as 1944, Ibn Baz clashed

with Ibn Saud over the 'invasion' of infidels, who were at the time American contractors with the government working on agricultural and development projects.[20] Al-Fahad's celebration of the Wahhabi scholars and his line of analysis are a clear continuation of the tradition clearly represented in the work of sheikhs such as Sulayman ibn Abdullah Al-Shaykh and Hamad ibn Atiq, both of whom issued *fatwa*s excommunicating those who assist infidels in wars against Muslims. In the early nineteenth century the infidels were the Ottoman sultan and his troops. In fact, both scholars insisted that punishment for Muslims who assist infidels against other Muslims should be harsher (*akhtar ghaltha*) than that meted out to infidels.[21]

This interpretation of the duty of association and dissociation as outlined by one of the most controversial Jihadi *'ulama* led to his imprisonment, for two main reasons. First, the Saudi regime was not ready to tolerate such theological discourse at a time when it was under tremendous pressure from the United States to curb the spread of what was regarded as anti-American religious interpretations. Second, al-Fahad's interpretations, although coined in an abstract manner, indirectly implicate the Saudi regime, which was increasingly seen as a regime willing to offer *i'ana* (assistance) to Americans during their war on Afghanistan. American military bases in Saudi Arabia were being discussed as possible places from which to launch attacks on Afghanistan.

Al-Fahad's theoretical treatise was followed by a scathing attack on Sahwi *'ulama* and intellectuals who after 11 September declared the establishment of al-Himla al-Alamiyya li Muqawamat al-Idwan (International Campaign to Resist Aggression), with the Sahwi sheikhs leading the campaign, defined as peaceful resistance against American aggression on Muslims using *da'wa* methods. Al-Fahad was specifically concerned with *Bayan al-muthaqqafin* (The Declaration of Intellectuals), which called for dialogue with American intellectuals. In a pamphlet entitled *Taliat al tankil bi ma fi bay'an al-muthaqafin min al-abatil* (Early Disparaging Attack on the Wrongs of the Intellectuals' Manifesto), al-Fahad declared that the Saudi *'ulama* and intellectuals who signed the petition expressed 'defeat, humiliation, begging and demonstration of love towards the infidels'.[22] He mentions an early lecture by Salman al-Awdah entitled 'Why They Fear Islam', in which he stated the centrality of *jihad* against infidels. Al-Fahad rejects peaceful resistance and reiterates the importance of *jihad* against those who undermine Islam. His attack on Sahwa *'ulama* centres on the way they abandoned their early message and instruction to Muslims, well documented in pamphlets, cassettes and public lectures. In a tone reminiscent of a student respectfully reprimanding his teachers, al-Fahad asserts that media campaigns and

international treatises failed to achieve what was accomplished by the bombing of the Marines in Beirut (1983) and the Mogadishu violence; both used language that the infidels understand.

Al-Fahad asserts that there is no difference between the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the early 1980s and the 2001 war on the same country by the United States. He questions the argument that the first occupation required resistance through *jihad* while the latter did not. He argues that the only difference is that the 2001 situation is a battle against Americans, to which Muslim governments have become subservient. Citing Western journalists in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*, al-Fahad concludes that it is a crusade against Muslims and the Wahhabiyya. Any reluctance, therefore, in helping the Taliban to resist the American invasion becomes a specific religious duty (*fard ʿayn*) on the Afghans themselves and a complementary obligation (*fard kifaya*) on other capable Muslims. This leads him to question the argument that 'we [possibly a reference to Saudis] cannot join the *jihad* in Afghanistan because we have a treaty (*mithaq*) with the United States'. Resisting the War on Terror, which started in Afghanistan, is a defensive *jihad* (*jihad al-daf*ʿ), the best and most noble form of struggle in the way of God. In this specific context permission from the leader of the Muslim community is not even a necessary prerequisite. Afghanistan on the eve of the American invasion was a context that required the privatisation of *jihad*. The struggle in the way of God becomes the prerogative of individual Muslims as li Muqawamat take matters into their own hands.

We have seen how Jihadi interpretations of the relationship between Muslims and infidels, exemplified by al-Fahad's treatise on *istiʿana* (assistance), represents a blueprint for an understanding of international relations from a specific Islamic point of view. In this interpretation, there is no room for realpolitik, compromise or negotiation, at least in al-Fahad's approach. His theory offers three possible relationships, two of which are either blasphemous or can lead to blasphemy. Embedded in this theory is the obligation to make *jihad* rather than peace, the latter being a prerogative of Muslim compassionate behaviour towards non-enemy infidels. Using the pressing issue of the *shariʿa* position on those who assist infidels, he develops the conclusion that resistance is not sufficient, but that in fact attack is compulsory in Islam. The argument draws on an intellectual genealogy, starting with the Quran, Hadith and both early and later religious scholars. Al-Fahad demonstrates that the centrality of excommunicating those who assist infidels is stressed not only by Muslim scholars worldwide but by the scholars of the Wahhabi reform movement, to which he devotes a whole chapter. The justification for violence against those who assist infidels becomes self-evident and a logical conclusion to be

drawn from this treatise. Al-Fahad's book shows that in general violence is systematic and is always governed by rules and replete with meanings.[23]

Al-Fahad's views on assisting Americans and the blasphemy that constitutes such an act mirrors his opinion on a wide range of political, social, religious and sectarian issues. He dedicated several treatises to countering what he calls *shubuhat* (doubtful, misguided statements and opinions) of a whole range of scholars and communities. For example, his refutations of the claims of dead scholars (Ibrahim ibn Musa al-Shatibi al-Maliki) and contemporary ones (Sheikhs Yusif Qaradawi and Hasan al-Maliki), in addition to his Responsa to Shi'is, Sufis and Zaydis reflect his endorsement of a specific meaning of *jihad* as a total struggle against opponents, Muslims or otherwise.[24] Al-Fahad is a strong believer in the totality of Islam and its ability to provide a meaningful framework for life, and guidance on causes as noble as defending the land of Islam and faith and as small as the permissibility of using hair dye, false eyelashes, internet chat rooms and video cassettes. While it is easy to condemn al-Fahad as a radical preacher, whose words may inspire violence and terrorism and whose religious interpretations are uncompromising, it is difficult not to acknowledge that his views resonate with a substantial section of Saudi society. It is also difficult to situate his religious convictions within contemporary social scientific paradigms where the sacred is relegated to the realm of irrationality, obscurity and mystification. Al-Fahad's discourse is neither irrational nor obscure. He aims to demystify a whole range of 'misguided positions' that have replaced authentic tradition. His approach to religious interpretation reflects a desire to reform the reform movement after it has been 'corrupted'. His intellectual genealogy is neither contemporary nor foreign; yet he is totally immersed in modernity, and willing to engage in interpreting it and responding to its challenges. Although his intellectual roots have become dormant in modern times under the pressure of politics and prosperity, his discourse has erupted into both the local public sphere and the wider world, thanks to new communication technology and the internet. Saudi religious discourse was transnationalised at a time when it was not so ready for such exposure. This premature publicity is primarily responsible for accelerating the confrontation not only between Saudis but also with outsiders. Al-Fahad revisits well-known intellectual grounds, but links old arguments to contemporary concerns.

As al-Fahad's contribution to the religio-political debate through his website and electronic pamphlets came to an abrupt end with his arrest in Madina in May 2003, the struggle in the way of God at home took a nasty turn with the eruption of violence in 2003–4 and the announcement of the establishment of an al-Qa'ida branch in the Arabian Peninsula.

The struggle in the way of God in the Arabian Peninsula

While religious scholars such as al-Fahad and others wrote treatises on *jihad*, association with infidels and excommunication, the struggle in the way of God at home produced a media campaign, not only to introduce the practitioners of the duty and its ideologues, but also to win new recruits for the cause. Above all, the Jihadi media campaign was meant to defend *jihad* against a religious background which obliged Muslims to obey the ruler, even if he is unjust, in order to safeguard against chaos, death and discord among Muslims. The internet was the most popular medium, especially after Jihadi ideologues went underground, were sent to prison or died in regular confrontations between security forces and what the regime called 'suspected cells' or 'wanted al-Qa'ida activists'. Theoreticians of *jihad* expressed their views in a bimonthly magazine, *Sawt al-Jihad* (The Voice of *Jihad*), the mouthpiece of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula. Words, images and iconography were combined to depict an organised underground movement, with a regular media outlet.[25] Furthermore, the magazine became the arena in which biographies and obituaries of the 'heroes of *jihad*' were published. The magazine, its writers and readers constituted a community joined in faith and strengthened by theological arguments.[26] On the pages of the magazine, *jihad* is celebrated in images, iconography and poetry targeting the hearts of its readers. With *Sawt al-Jihad*, the struggle became an integrated cultural whole, combining religion, politics, literature and art. While the appearance of the magazine on the internet is heavily censored and curtailed, electronic links leading to the latest issue continue to appear on discussion boards. In such an atmosphere of censorship, it becomes the duty of *al-qa'idun* (the sitting ones), i.e. those who have not joined the *jihad* for some reason, to disseminate the links to the 'voice of *jihad*'.

One of the most important functions this magazine performed was to defend the arrival of *jihad* on home soil, especially after the eruption of violence. After the Riyadh bombings of May and November 2003, a detailed document, *The Flowing Spring in Supporting Jihad in Riyadh*, edited by Saleh bin Saad al-Hasan, an alias, was published on the *Sawt al-Jihad* website.[27] It included several contributions in defence of the Riyadh bombings and in support of the theological grounds according to which such attacks were carried out. The rationale behind such publication is explained as 'dismissing the ignorant and misguided opinions of people who are now judging *jihad*. Those people do not speak with knowledge but insult our Jihadis. Despite the Saudi campaign against our Jihadis, many of whom are in hiding or in prison, God allowed justice to appear at the hands of real men who dismiss the obscurantism of the misguided

people.' It is claimed that the book is the unfinished project of one important Jihadi sheikh, Yusif al-Ayri, who died in 2003. Other contributions are by Jihadis who use a mixture of aliases: tribal (Barghash ibn Tuwala); regional (Bashir al-Najdi; Abu Bashar al-Hijazi); with Islamic connotations (Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir (the Immigrant)); and invoking modern political meanings (al-Hizbi al-Mutasatir (the Hidden Party Member). These names could well be the *noms de guerre* of a single Jihadi. All contributors anchor their personae in names that resonate with a wide circle of readers by invoking tribal affiliation, Islamic heritage, regional flavour or political modernity. In addition to support from theological treatises anchored in Quran, Hadith and sayings of *'ulama*, *jihad* is an act that requires the mobilisation of passions, religious duty and tribal honour, all in the context of modernity. The propaganda of *Sawt al-Jihad* is not only meant to arouse a passionate desire to guard faith and nation, but also to celebrate and document the lives of those who die in pursuit of the ultimate death: martyrdom.

Sheikh Yusif al-Ayri (killed by Saudi security forces) is introduced as the founder of Markaz al-Dirasat wa al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya (the Centre for Islamic Study and Research) and the author of several Jihadi treatises. Sheikh al-Ayri, thought to have been the leader of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula until his death in the summer of 2003, immediately after the first major Riyadh bombing in May, provides the basis for refuting the official anti-Jihadi opinion of Saudi *'ulama* which dominated public debate. He explains the rationale for bringing *jihad* to the Arabian Peninsula, especially after official Saudi *'ulama* justified it abroad – for example, in Palestine, Afghanistan, Chechnya and other locations – while forbidding it at home. Al-Ayri asks why *jihad* abroad is an unlimited good but is considered a cause of corruption at home. He questions why such official Saudi *'ulama* consider *jihad* a source of discord and a crime in the Arabian Peninsula, where in his opinion the conditions requiring it (both *daf'* (defensive) and *talab* (offensive) are present. Al-Ayri dismisses the opinion of the *'ulama*, both official and the so-called Sahwis, as biased, and gives several reasons for doing so. First, opinions given under threat of state violence are invalid and biased. Second, most *fatwa*s against *jihad* were issued in accordance with commands from the Ministry of the Interior. Third, control of the media in Saudi Arabia prevents any unbiased consideration of *jihad*. Fourth, the Ministry of the Interior remains the only source allowed to report on the number of dead and their identity after each round of violence, in which the Ministry mistakenly claims that victims are Muslims. Fifth, the *'ulama* cannot solve the contradiction embedded in forbidding *jihad* in Saudi Arabia and commanding it elsewhere while the conditions necessitating it remain the same. Al-Ayri

describes the context in which religious opinion is sought and how this context undermines the legitimacy of such opinions. He is a Salafi-turned-modernist as he 'situates' and 'contextualises' religious opinions and *fatwa*s. He draws attention to the political pressure exerted on the *ʿulama* by the state in order to compromise religious judgement and produce opinions in support of state policy.

After this introduction, another author elaborates on the *shariʿa* evidence in support of the legitimacy of the violent events in Riyadh. This elaboration is presented as a response to a series of questions, drawn from current official religious and political rhetoric in condemnation of *jihad* at home. Sheikh Bashir al-Najdi refutes each question as if it was *shubuha* (a doubtful or misguided statement). The collection of erroneous statements revolves around the legitimacy of killing people with whom there is a contractual relationship requiring peace, for example civilians, women and children. He denounces other misguided statements presented to him as questions relating to the duty to announce the suspension of peaceful treaties before attacking; attacking without having been attacked first; precipitating chaos and internal discord; and undermining local peace and order. These are arguments that had dominated Saudi public debate in the media and in religious circles, all aiming to undermine the rationale of local *jihad*, and defeat Jihadis religiously, politically and morally. Sheikh al-Najdi deconstructs each *shubuha*, using proof from the Quran, sayings of the Prophet and those of religious scholars such as Ibn Taymmiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim.

On the idea that attacking American civilians in Saudi Arabia is illegitimate because they are under the protection of the Muslim ruler, Sheikh al-Najdi refuses to recognise that the Saudi king is a legitimate Muslim ruler and that Westerners in Saudi Arabia are peaceful, protected citizens. In his opinion, the regime's support for the West and its internal policies (he cites Western-style banking and moral corruption as examples) removes the ruler, often referred to as the imam, from the category of rightful Muslim rulers. 'I do not know where this imam is', says Sheikh al-Najdi. He claims that the current imam is senile (a reference to the ageing King Fahd) and unable to rule, but that the official *ʿulama* refuse to recognise his mental disability and act accordingly – that is, practise *khalʿ* (forcibly removing a ruler from office by withdrawing the oath of allegiance), an act that in the Sunni tradition is required in the case of an illegitimate or incapacitated imam. He argues that the Saudi regime cannot give *aman* (peace) to the people of the book (*ahl al-dhimma*) because it is not an Islamic government. In fact, he says that the regime pursues policies in support of the infidel's agenda rather than of its own Muslim people, citing Saudi cooperation with America in its war on Afghanistan

in 2001, sanctioning Iraq throughout the 1990s and providing support for the invasion in 2003.

Furthermore, America's aggression towards Muslims in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq means that both the government and its citizens are legitimate targets for retaliation. In Sheikh al-Najdi's words, Americans are *harbi* (an aggressive nation). His argument reiterates that of Nasir al-Fahad who outlined the type of permissible relations with infidels. He concludes that Americans in Saudi Arabia do not qualify for *mu'amalat ja'iza*, that legal Islamic treatment preserved for non-aggressive infidels living in the land of Islam. On the question of Western women and children falling victims, he asserts that killing innocent people is illegitimate, but if they cannot be separated from the enemy, then killing them cannot be considered prohibited. It is an unintended act of murder that accompanies the deaths of those intended as the targets of the attack.

The killing of Muslims in the violence that erupted in Saudi Arabia also needed a religious opinion – not to defend it but to justify a necessary evil, in Sheikh al-Najdi's words. Against a background of revulsion and absolute prohibition on Muslims murdering Muslims, Sheikh al-Najdi faces a difficult if not impossible task – how to convince other Muslims that under certain conditions there is no escape from this tragic act of unintended murder, in modern parlance 'collateral damage'. The question whether a Muslim can kill a fellow Muslim who declares that 'there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet' is one of the most problematic theological issues Jihadis faced after the outbreak of violence in general and the attack on the Saudi security forces in particular. This question is neither new nor resolved. Furthermore, the issue of *diya* (blood money) and *kaffara* (compensation for sinful acts) becomes problematic too. If Jihadis kill other Muslims unintentionally, are they under the obligation to pay these penalties? Sheikh al-Najdi endeavours to clarify the *shubuha* related to this complex matter. According to him, it should be dealt with under questions of *ta'wil* (interpretation of concealed meanings) and *ijtihad* (the application of reason to a religious ruling). After citing several situations involving early Muslims, *al-salaf* (the pious ancestors) whereby such unlawful killing of Muslims took place and the response of the Prophet to such acts, Sheikh al-Najdi concludes that Jihadis cannot be 'criminalised' because they did not intend to kill Muslims. Muslims killed unintentionally are considered martyrs in this specific situation. However, if they are accomplices in corruption, sin and immorality and have chosen to live with the infidels, they deserve to be fought and killed. They have become a shield for infidels and as such they themselves are wrongdoers. In a situation where good Muslims cannot be segregated from non-Muslims, Jihadis do not commit a sin by

killing fellow Muslims, according to Sheikh al-Najdi: 'There is a consensus among the *ʿulama* that if we cannot reach non-Muslims without falling into the sin of killing Muslims, then this is permissible (*jaʾiz*), as long as we fear for the lives of Muslims.'

As Jihadis brought the battle to Saudi Arabia, they unveiled a dormant schism between themselves and other contemporary *ʿulama* and Islamist intellectuals, whom they considered a group that would at least remain silent rather than condemn them. As the struggle in the way of God came home, Jihadis clashed with Sahwis, who not only sided with the government and official *ʿulama* but also endeavoured to delegitimise the project of Jihadis, by providing religious evidence proving their *dhalal* (obscurity), misguided interpretation of the duty of Jihad and other issues. While violence claimed lives in streets and residential compounds, another intellectual battle was raging on the internet between Jihadis and Sahwis.

Jihadis and Sahwis: 'the years of deceit'

While al-Fahad's treatise discussed above presented religious evidence in support of contemporary political positions, such as the question of assistance and the legitimacy of *jihad* in the Arabian Peninsula, another genre of writing has entered the public sphere, both in defence of *jihad* and in response to contemporary developments within the Islamist camp: the position of Sahwis vis-à-vis Jihadis after the events of 11 September. Jihadis debate the new 'un-Islamic' position taken by Sahwis against Jihadis and their condemnation of any violent resistance. According to Jihadis, Sahwis changed their position for political reasons. Instead of either remaining 'neutral' or celebrating and blessing the attacks, they chose to openly condemn Jihadis. Furthermore, Sahwis opted for 'peaceful' resistance to Western domination under the pretext of inequality in military power and in the absence of an Imam under whose flag *jihad* becomes legitimate. Jihadis endeavoured to overturn what they called a pragmatic and defeatist political position.

In an electronic pamphlet entitled, *Sanawat khadaʿa: dirasa li waqiʿ al-sahwa* (The Years of Deceit: A Study of the Reality of Sahwa Preachers), Yahya al-Ghamdi contributes to the debate between Jihadis and Sahwis to correct what he calls 'contradictions' in the approach and position of the latter at a time when a unified position among Muslims is more than urgent.[28] The book, written in a highly accessible non-religious tone, is a message to

> the preachers whom God did not honour with breathing the air of Qandahar, Kabul, Grozny, or Jericho. To those whom God did not choose to carry the

message on the heads of swords [Sahwis]. Today such preachers should at least support their Jihadi brothers with money, word, supplication, and all meagre means available to those under the rule of despots.

While the treatise addresses preachers, in fact it speaks to young Muslim men with no deep religious learning, many of whom are internet surfers looking for inspiration, assurance and allegiance. It criticises Sahwis by citing the Quran and the Prophetic tradition, together with classical Arabic poetry. It situates religious references within the context of international relations, and the words of George Bush, Safar al-Hawali, Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden. The text is a pastiche, transmitted using the latest electronic communication technology. At the heart of this creation is the conflict between *murabitun* (those with experience of the battleground) and *qa'idun*. The latter are called the armchair theoreticians (*munathirun*), who have lost contact with reality and are awaiting visits by important Western journalists to assure the West that Muslims are determined to prevent future attacks on New York and elsewhere – a reference to a controversial interview with Safar al-Hawali, conducted by Thomas Friedman. Al-Ghamdi laments the Sahwis' failure to achieve excellence even in their stated field, education and the call to Islam.

Al-Ghamdi exposes the rhetoric of such Sahwis and deconstructs the rationale behind their alleged change of opinion, citing early recorded lectures by important figures in the Sahwi camp. He laments the changing perspective of Sahwis, who initially promoted a discourse in support of Jihadis, but later adopted a theoretical interpretation justifying the reluctance of *qa'idun* (those who do not participate). This change followed their experience in prison during the 1990s, which resulted – in his opinion – in complete disorientation. Al-Ghamdi attacks the inner logic of Sahwis which concentrates on the illegitimacy of *jihad* in the current context of the Islamic world. Sahwis argue that *jihad* is pointless where there is such a great military discrepancy between Muslims and 'infidels', and preaching Islam to re-Islamise society is therefore more fruitful. Furthermore, *jihad* is permissible only under the flag of a ruler. These views are strongly refuted by al-Ghamdi, who promotes an understanding of *jihad* as a compulsory duty, necessitated by the 'attack on the land of Muslims', i.e. by the United States and its allies, mainly Israel. He questions the claim that Muslims need a ruler to declare *jihad*, and laments that neither King Fahd nor President Mubarak – or any other 'Muslim' ruler – qualifies for the office of Rightful Imam, whose flag is a necessary precondition for announcing *jihad*. In terms of war strategy, al-Ghamdi argues that historically wars are not declared and fought because those who declare them are assured of victory. But he adds, 'Have the Sahwis forgotten that God is the

source of victory?' The Sahwis, in his opinion, prejudge *jihad* as a failure before asking whether their so-called peaceful resistance has achieved any of its stated objectives. If ever they state that the confrontation with the West did not achieve anything apart from tarnishing the image of Islam and portraying Muslims as bloodthirsty terrorists, al-Ghamdi argues that no God-fearing religious scholar would suspend *jihad* in the present circumstances when all evidence supports the duty to resist Western domination. *Jihad* is an individual duty, prescribed to every Muslim (*fard ʿayn*), rather than a duty for a selected few (*fard kifaya*). He calls for the privatisation of *jihad* in the age of globalisation. Furthermore, *jihad* without an Imam embodies the articulation of individual duty in the face of the defeatism of the Muslim rulers. The argument is sealed with lines of poetry stating that the sword is mightier than the pen.

Al-Ghamdi refers to an important factor behind the 'defeatist' Sahwi position. He argues that God has burdened the *ʿulama* with a serious defect, namely *hasad* (envy). The Sahwis could not, in his opinion, compete with Jihadis, who captured the hearts and minds of Saudi youth, especially after the successful 'raids on New York, Bali, Riyadh and other locations'. The jealousy and envy in their hearts were expressed in their condemnation of Jihadis, who proved their ability to attack and cripple the enemy, at least precipitating fear and chaos, if not victory. Al-Ghamdi points at how jealousy motivated *ʿulama al-sultan* (the religious establishment) to attack the Sahwis, whose star was rising in the 1990s, but now the Sahwi *ʿulama* have themselves succumbed to the 'burning feeling of jealousy and envy'. Competition over religious interpretation is a reflection of competition over status, prestige and popularity. There is no doubt that Sahwis and Jihadis fight a fierce battle over these 'worldly' matters. Religious knowledge is symbolic capital, which guarantees a material reward under the auspices of the Saudi state, especially if such knowledge confirms the legitimacy of the state. The Sahwis thought that their popularity – which had been gained at a time when Saudis, especially the young, were desperate for validating a discourse that is obviously antagonistic to both the religious establishment and political authority, in addition of course to Western hegemony in the region – was irreversible. However, after 2001, they lost some of their previous prestige, especially when they appeared to accommodate the regime. Al-Ghamdi subjects the *ʿulama*, both established and Sahwis, to a sociological analysis, which takes into account political manoeuvring, group interest and relations with the centre of power. The *ʿulama* as a group are no longer only a class with a special status derived from interpreting the sacred text. In fact, al-Ghamdi reduces them to a worldly group subject to human instincts and interests, which are constantly

changing in response to a changing political context. The Jihadis regard the Sahwis as having joined the ranks of official *'ulama* in their submission to the political authorities.

The poetics of *jihad*: body and soul

If *Sawt al-Jihad* is concerned with religious interpretations in support of *jihad* and the preparation of the minds of Jihadis, another electronic publication *Muaskar al-Battar* (al-Battar Camp), a military magazine issued by al-Qa'ida, prepares the body for such an endeavour.[29] According to the editors of this magazine, 'young Muslims do not know how to bear arms, not to mention how to use them . . . your Jihadi brothers in the Arabian Peninsula have decided to publish this booklet to serve young men in their place of isolation. They will do the exercises and act according to the military knowledge included.' It is the condition of the privatisation of *jihad*, now a duty to be performed in isolation and on the basis of private individual initiative, in the absence of a leader to carry its flag, that has given rise to the publication of *Muaskar al-Battar*. The editors insist that 'during the times of the Mongol invasion, it did not help the residents of Baghdad that most of them were *'ulama* and educators'.

The Jihadis believe that the body is a vehicle, which needs to be nurtured in order to fulfil the duty. In one issue of the magazine, Sheikh Yusif al-Ayri recognises that modernity has its drawbacks, experienced at the level of the body. Obesity, the disease of the age, is a real obstacle undermining the performance of contemporary Jihadis, and as such it should be fought with a vigorous exercise routine and diet. Al-Ayri's diet is based on a balanced calorie count, resembling any diet found in books dealing with obesity and how to control it. The sheikh outlines the details of three daily meals – breakfast, lunch and dinner. The first meal of the day, *iftar* (breakfast), consists of a small amount of brown bread with butter, a glass of orange or grapefruit juice, a boiled egg and coffee or tea without sugar. The midday meal consists of soup, cheese or butter, a slice of bread, chicken or fish, salad and fruit. Finally, the evening meal is a light dinner of fish or chicken, tomato juice, half a loaf of bread, boiled potatoes, one piece of fruit and coffee or tea without sugar. Al-Ayri warns against excess consumption of red meat – beef or lamb – full-fat cheese and milk, white bread and excessive sugary fruits.

The Jihadi diet is extremely modern. It overlooks traditional cuisine and culinary tastes. In a society known for the regular consumption of rice and lamb, Sheikh al-Ayri proposes revolutionising eating habits in pursuit of *jihad*. In order to defeat obesity, the modern disease, Jihadis must subject their bodies to a strict – and modern – routine.

Diet must be accompanied by an exercise routine, bringing to mind the most advanced training often associated with gymnasiums and sports centres where the body sweats in pursuit of beauty, health and perfection. A weekly exercise routine is proposed. It involves warming-up exercises for five minutes, followed by jogging for thirty-nine minutes. The time is gradually increased to reach fifty minutes in the sixth week of the programme. While this ensures the maintenance of body weight for the average person, a different, more advanced, six-step exercise programme must be followed by those already overweight. This consists of walking for five kilometres, twenty abdomen exercises, twenty chest exercises, climbing stairs, swimming and cycling. Al-Ayri warns against excessive exercise for those who are not trained properly. Instead of doing all exercises in one day, he proposes a gradual introduction of each activity over a long period of time. His advice to Jihadis is perseverance in following the routine because 'God prefers persistent acts even if they are not numerous'. The will to fight obesity with diet and exercise is seen as sanctioned by God and required in order to prepare the body for *jihad*. A Jihadi must not only be anchored in faith and perseverance, he must also be fit for the acts required from him.

Al-Ayri says that orders and instructions can be dry and lacking in inspiration. For this reason, instructions relating to military and physical training must be interspersed with poetry, whose ultimate purpose is to 'enter the ears of Jihadis and find its way to their heart'. Only then will they respond to the call for *jihad*. In a short section entitled A Poetic Station, *Muaskar al-Battar* uses the power of rhyming words to inspire its readers. Here the magazine talks to the hearts in a way that invokes the poetics of *jihad*, as a break from long sections outlining military training, illustrated with pictures of deadly weapons.

In one poem, a Jihadi describes his journey as one with a clear destination and path.[30] This journey is illuminated by 'death, dancing at every junction'. The dancing death is sought with courage rather than cowardice, as a Jihadi never fears his destiny. Neither 'thorns' nor 'upheavals' deter him from continuing the journey as his weapon is always his determination and passion for *jihad*. The Jihadi is presented as a sword, whose shining edge exceeds the light of the sun, and those of Indian swords. He seeks heaven to satisfy his burning desire for shelter in shaded, lavish gardens. The loss of other Jihadis torments him but he expects to meet them in heaven. He has grown tired of this world with all its trappings. In response, he found the road and well of God, which guide the believer, who draws knowledge and guidance from both. He responded by 'flying to seek the way of God', despite people's call to deter him. People called upon him to stop but God called upon him to join the battle without fear

or hesitation. He concludes his poem by saying that he will proceed, even alone, and despite those defeatists who ask him to remain behind. In this poem, the poetic of Jihad anchors the activity in the realm of meaningful and significant behaviour that resonate culturally, religiously and politically with a wide range of people.

Jihadi discourse encompasses a wide range of meanings. It situates *jihad* in religious interpretations, thus anchoring the duty in *shari'a* sources, as well as in analysis of world politics and international affairs, technical military training, pragmatic instructions preparing the body and poetic illuminations to create a cultural whole that is meant to appeal to both mind and soul. In such presentations, violence is no longer an isolated act with a single purpose, whether 'expelling the infidels from the Arabian Peninsula' or simply fighting the despots who do not rule according to the revealed message of God. *Jihad* is theoretically and religiously justified, militarily explained and poetically disseminated, thus creating a culture that is difficult to defeat because it evokes multiple layers of reason and faith, political awareness and international relations, and emotions and values. It plays on local and global identities, and national and religious sentiments.

Celebrations of life and death: *jihad* as performance

In a world dominated by media representations, Jihadis seem to be well prepared for disseminating powerful messages, iconography and sounds, thus satisfying a world hungry for images of death, destruction and devastation. Through several media organisations, one of which is known as Muassasat al-Sahab lil Intaj al-Ilami (Sahab Media Production), the world can see dozens of films of Jihadis in training-camps, preparing for the struggle in the way of God. While the majority of this media production is found on the internet, through links to several sites, some important films and video clips are sent to established Arab media satellite stations such as the Qatar-based al-Jazeera channel. Films are also available for purchase from commercial companies, for example Tempest Publishing, a sister organisation of IntelCentre, a Washington-based company whose stated objective is 'to assist professionals to understand and fight terrorism'. This company sells films, CD-ROMs, documents and other material related to *jihad* and terrorism to researchers, journalists, and military and security agencies.[31] Most of the items on the sale catalogue seem to be produced by al-Qa'ida, including the Arabian Peninsula branch.

One controversial film called *Badr al-Riyadh* (The Full Moon of Riyadh, a reference to the 12 May 2003 Riyadh attack), named after the

battle of Badr between Muslims and Meccans, was broadcast several months after the Riyadh bombing. According to Jihadi sources, between three and four hundred thousand people downloaded the film from the internet in less than five days.[32] To understand *Badr al-Riyadh*, three important dimensions must be considered. First is the two martyrs. Second are other actors, some meant to inspire and encourage viewers – most importantly Osama bin Laden, Abu Hafs al-Masri, Humud ibn Oqla al-Shuaybi and al-Khattab, *jihad* leader in Chechnya – while others are projected as the 'malicious other', against whom the battle is waged. This category of people includes George Bush, Crown Prince Abdullah, and Minister of Interior Prince Nayef. Third, the film's message is embedded in words and acts.

This film was perhaps one of the most powerful media productions issued by Saudi Jihadis, for a number of reasons. It showed the suicide bombers of the attack of 12 May, Ali al-Harbi and Nasir al-Khaldi, in an unusual location, a private house with a sitting-room lined with comfortable cushions and colourful rugs, rather than a military camp with barbed wires and signposts. The cosy setting is a contrast to that often projected in other al-Qa'ida films with Jihadis filmed in training camps, caves and rugged mountains. Furthermore, the film portrayed the would-be martyrs in an important event that sealed their fate, *zaffat al-shahid* celebration of the martyr. The word *zaffa* is usually associated with weddings as in *zaffat al-ʿarus* (bride) or *ʿaris* (bridegroom), a common celebration which takes place within the context of Muslim and Arab weddings. The future martyrs, al-Harbi and al-Khaldi, are celebrated in a televised *zaffa* as if they are bridegrooms.[33] They are also shown in what looks like a garage where several Jihadis engage in preparing the vehicle, a jeep, for the attack. They are seen painting the jeep and changing its number plate to AZ H 314. A Jihadi explains that 314 is the number of the early Muslim fighters who participated in the battle of Badr with the Prophet.

Badr al-Riyadh documents an event best understood as a celebration of life and death interspersed with young men dancing and chanting while sporting a range of weapons around waists, shoulders and arms. The martyrs, with their bearded smiling faces completely uncovered and with their hair longer than is usual for young Saudi men, dressed in white long shirts, were filmed surrounded by a large number of hooded young men, dancing and reciting verses from the Quran and other sources. An unseen interviewer asks the would-be martyrs several questions. A sense of camaraderie and solidarity is enhanced by images of the central actors surrounded by supporters and well-wishers.

Although the film shows a celebration of the deaths of the would-be martyrs, they are seen while still alive, and partake in the jubilation. The

celebration of life and death and the theme of martyrdom portrayed in the film confirm Jihadism as a theatrical performance, in which actors and audience are expected to fuse in a powerful emotional bond. While it is common for societies all over the world to separate birth and death rituals, in *Badr al-Riyadh* the boundaries overlap and are even blurred. In a single rite of passage, a Jihadi passes from life to death, then he returns to life. Death is projected as a temporary liminal phase, neither here nor there, culminating in returning to life. The theme of life and death is best expressed in a song which accompanies the celebration. The song asks participants to 'celebrate the passage of the martyr to his second home in heaven', and 'to celebrate his passage to the afterlife fully clothed, according to the tradition of the Prophet'. Al-Harbi explains that martyrdom is a transaction: God buys the soul of his slave (a human being), who sells it willingly. In a sombre voice, with his head down and his eyes fixed on the floor rather than the camera, al-Harbi recognises that the martyr may be hesitant to leave his family, friends and loved ones, but one is under an obligation to perform the noble deed, which is prescribed after the five pillars of Islam. Al-Harbi explains that death is defined as leaving life (*mufaraqat al-hayat*), but the martyr has another life in heaven. Death is a transition from life in a treacherous world to life in a generous world, where the Prophet and his companions reside. He also invokes the inevitability of death, whether 'in bed' or 'in a car accident'. Given this inevitability, he asks a rhetorical question: 'Isn't it more noble to die for the sake of God?'

The martyrs appear in the context of an interview by a fellow Jihadi, who asks them questions relating to *shari'a* evidence in support of suicide attacks, the purpose of *jihad*, the target of their actions, and their views on the USA, the Saudi state, the *'ulama* and the security forces. The interviewer brings to their attention some of the accusations of the Saudi media and officials, which portray Jihadis as killing Muslims and generating chaos in the land of the two holy mosques. The two martyrs are expected to defend the planned suicide attack on Mustawtanat al-Muhayya (the al-Muhayya settlement), a reference to a residential compound mostly occupied by expatriates. Al-Harbi invokes the terminology of 'settlement' to allude to similarities between Jewish settlements in Palestine and foreign residential compounds, inhabited by Americans and Europeans, in Saudi Arabia. The objective of the attack revolves around liberating the Arabian Peninsula from infidels, the establishment of an Islamic state, and revenge for Jihadis who are tortured in Saudi prisons or killed by Saudi security forces, such as Turki al-Dandani and Yusif al-Ayri. The martyrs lament the current transformation of the Arabian Peninsula from a land where the message of *tawhid* (monotheism) spread to other parts of the world to one

from which infidel armies launch attacks, *himla salibiyya* (a crusade), on Afghanistan and Iraq.

While the general message of the *jihad* and its purpose reflect well-rehearsed arguments put forward by Bin Laden and other Jihadi ideologues, both al-Harbi and al-Khaldi fuse the grand Jihadi narrative with personal experience, life history and individual motivation. Asked why he does not go for *jihad* in areas where there is clear argument in favour of the practice, al-Harbi inserts his own personal narrative as one of the primary motivating factors behind his determination to annihilate himself. He explains that the Saudi state is a *kafir* state, practising *nifaq* (hypocrisy). While the state claims that it supports Muslim causes, it punishes those who serve their religion. He went to fight in Bosnia in the 1990s, and when he returned to Saudi Arabia he was imprisoned for one year and three months. He claims that he was tortured, left in a small cell, deprived of sleep and paraded naked in al-Ruways prison. He was shocked by both the torture of Jihadi prisoners, as a result of which some died, and the verbal abuse experienced in prison. He concludes the narrative of his personal journey to seek death by asking, 'Which Islam is this?'

The second suicide bomber narrates another personal journey. Al-Khaldi recounts several incidents whereby he and his comrades came face to face with Saudi security forces. One encounter took place in Istirahat al-Shifa where a social gathering of Jihadis was taking place. According to al-Khaldi, they were listening to lectures and engaging in recitations when armed security men attacked them. A friend died in the encounter as he was shot by security forces – for no obvious reason, according to the narrator.

In addition to the main suicide bombers, the film invokes the words of famous ideologues. Osama bin Laden's speeches, together with those of his aides, such as Abu Hafs al-Masri, and Saudi religious scholars, such as Sheikh Humud al-Oqla, provide powerful words inspiring not only the would be-martyrs but a wider circle of viewers as well. The message is to demonise and terrorise the enemy. In a clear declaration, the voice states, 'Yes I am a terrorist,' against a background of chanting:

> Crush the Pharaoh with the sorcerers
> Kill whoever is an infidel
> Make your land a graveyard
> For the defeated armies of blasphemy

If ever someone is in doubt of the meaning of terrorism, the chanting then explains:

> Prepare bows and arrows for blasphemy
> Prepare white swords

Take from our enemies red hearts and necks
Let blood flow on soil
Like a glorious river
Tell the world and repeat
This is the meaning of terrorism

The message of other characters in the film centres on the decriminalisation of the perpetrator and the humanisation of the martyr. The film blurs the boundary between victim and victimiser, and deconstructs well-rehearsed arguments against *jihad*. The various Jihadis in the film face the challenge of responding to Saudi claims that they are criminals, lacking a clear message, and in favour of killing other Muslims rather than infidels. A Jihadi responds by asking how someone who spent twenty years defending Muslims in Afghanistan against the Soviets can turn into a criminal targeting Muslims. He adds that 'killing Muslims' in Saudi Arabia would be easier than killing infidels, as the latter reside in well-secured homes and are difficult to reach.

The film also demonises the other, the enemy, a group of world leaders (such as George Bush), and Arab and Muslim local 'agents' of world powers (for example, Crown Prince Abdullah and Interior Minister Prince Nayef). Speeches by Saudi leaders are played as evidence of their treason, and association with and subservience to infidels. In one speech, the Crown Prince is reported as saying to George Bush that 'a small minority (*al–fi'a al-dhalla*) poisoned our solid friendship and tarnished the image of Islam, but we are determined to fight it with all our means.' Al-Khalidi sends a message to Abdullah asking him to repent and stop privileging secular intellectuals, and associating with infidels. If he does not listen, then he faces the sword.

This film, like many other media clips that flood the internet after every suicide bombing or attack, represents another dimension of contemporary *jihad*, which has so far escaped analysts and commentators. *Jihad* is not only about theological treatises such as that of Sheikh Nasir al-Fahad discussed earlier in this chapter. It is also not solely concerned with purifying the Arabian Peninsula and defeating its despots and pharaohs. *Jihad* is a performance, celebrating heroes in a land where there are none. Saudi youth are denied a symbol for defiance. Their local media is saturated with old preachers calling for total obedience to the ruler, citing Quranic verses and Hadiths discouraging individual opinion, initiative and interpretation. Such media productions require the viewer to submit, obey and follow a single interpretation and worldview. Saudi youth surf the internet, downloading *Badr al-Riyadh* and other al-Qa'ida productions in search of rebellion, assertion of the self and individuality, against a well-developed machinery whose main purpose is to censor not only the

internet but all alternative visions that may circulate in the public sphere. *Zaffat al-shahid* in *Badr al-Riyadh* is not only a celebration of life and death; it is also a ritual of rebellion and defiance, with a clear message reaching thousands of viewers. In the modern world, *jihad* is the performance par excellence. However, Jihadi films are today competing with another genre of video clips and popular culture productions that dominate Arab satellite music channels such as Prince al-Walid ibn Talal's controversial Rotana television channel. The latter proved to be extremely popular among young people not only in Saudi Arabia but in the Arab world as a whole.

Badr al-Riyadh glorifies a privatised *jihad* in a globalised world where the media create images of a monotonous world, repeat well-rehearsed arguments and promote one message, despite the fact that globalisation was expected to generate diversity and pluralism. At one level, globalisation did offer a glimpse of this hoped-for diversity, but at several others it suppressed local culture, authenticity and tradition. Jihadi discourse responds to the challenge of globalisation and its alleged discontents using the same weapon that is believed to threaten authentic tradition. The resurgence of Jihadi discourse and practice in Saudi Arabia should be understood as a local response to this globalisation. This is clearly demonstrated in Jihadi views on women, honour and shame, all believed to be under threat from the champions of the alleged globalised crusade of the unbelievers.

Gendered *jihad*: women, honour and shame

In Saudi society, women have always been viewed as symbols of the nation's piety, a barometer of its commitment to Islam and Arab tradition.[34] The state enforces this view as it polices public space under the guidance of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice, in search of immoral behaviour, potentially generated by the sheer presence of women in the public sphere. Segregated, veiled women in black cloaks have become a symbol of identity in cities indistinguishable from any major cosmopolitan space in Dallas or Houston. On the one hand, the state claims to 'protect' women; it does so for its own purposes, mainly to assert its legitimacy as an Islamic state. Society also imitates the state in its obsession with restricting women, but for different reasons, mainly to guard against rapid change and alien intruders. Early in the twentieth century, the majority of Saudis perceived the presence of foreign immigrants as a necessary evil, needed to modernise the country in the absence of local skills and expertise. However, since the 1980s, this presence has become problematic – not only economically, but also

culturally and politically. While economic dependence on foreign labour was grudgingly tolerated, reliance on American military assistance has generated heated debate.

Over a very short period of time, Saudi Arabia moved from a small-scale traditional society in the 1970s, in which face-to-face interaction was the norm, to a society inhabiting an urban space shared with a multinational population of Arab, Western and Asian immigrants, expatriates and workers, the majority of whom are male. Society responded to the challenge of hosting a substantial foreign population in several ways. It imposed strict segregation on its immigrant population, translated into lavish, and not-so–lavish, residential compounds and neighbourhoods where they were expected to live. It also imposed a strict code of behaviour, limiting interaction between Saudis and foreigners to the workplace, and revisited what is believed to be the last frontier in resisting penetration by the outside world: the female sphere. As a result, women paid a high price as they were seen as the last 'battlefield', to be defended, protected, sheltered, and even restricted, oppressed and excluded in pursuit of 'guarding' men's honour, and limiting the possibility of 'shame' being inflicted on men as a result of female behaviour or the violation of females by outsiders. Suddenly Saudi society became more restrictive in regulating the female sphere. While men tolerated contact with foreigners in the workplace, they did everything they could to restrict their own women's contact with outsiders, with the exception of course of Arab female teachers, instructors, doctors, nannies (in the case of wealthy women) and other indispensable outsiders, for example male drivers. Society allowed its women to be driven by foreigners, as their foreignness and low status guaranteed their inferiority to Saudi women, but restricted women from entering the public sphere, especially that which has become the sole domain of Saudi and other men. Women who previously worked in markets and fields, where they intermingled freely with men, had to be restrained as this public sphere turned into potentially hostile and alien space.

Instead of creating grounds for the amelioration of the status and rights of women, modernity led to greater restrictions on women. The state restricted female marriages to *ajnabi* (foreigners), a category that included foreign Arabs and Muslims. It also protected the strict sex segregation in the public sphere through its various law-enforcing agencies and modern technology. For example, modern communication technology has allowed strict segregation in universities, where female students see and communicate with male lecturers via videos. Children of women who married outsiders were denied nationality, thus excluding them from citizenship, the welfare state and its benefits. The state was an active agent in enforcing a restrictive code despite its apparent interest in the welfare and

education of women. In 2006 new legislation required shops selling lingerie to employ women only, in a move to appease the rising Islamist discontent and ameliorate unemployment rates among women. Outspoken members of the Saudi religious establishment objected to enforcing the law. To resist female employment, they missed an opportunity to 'Islamise' the selling of female lingerie, a position that brings to mind their objections to female driving.

While the state used women as a token of its piety in a desperate attempt to enhance its own Islamic credentials, Jihadis considered women a token of their rebellion, defiance and assertion of Islamic identity, pride and autonomy. *Jihad* was not only an Islamic duty to defend the land of Islam but was also a gendered obligation to protect women from the onslaught of alien cultures, corrupting media, state oppression and Western penetration. In Jihadi discourse, *jihad* is not only a defence of Islam and Muslims but is also a resistance to local and global agents who violate men's honour and bring them shame through a systematic violation of Muslim women. Both American troops in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi state are portrayed as contributing to this violation. Examples of American 'aggression' draw on images from Afghanistan, Israel and Iraq. Israeli and American soldiers searching Muslim women at checkpoints and inside their homes give ample opportunities to illustrate the violation. Saudi state violation of women is represented through a portrayal of the state as an agent of moral corruption and secularisation via its support and sponsorship of a media empire that corrupts the youth of the nation. Jihadis claim that Saudi princes do not respect the Islamic tradition, but endeavour to normalise moral laxity, degeneration and sin. The Jiddah Economic Forums in which women participated in 2004 and 2005 brought about themes relating to the corrupting influence of the state. The picture of Madeleine Albright sitting on an armchair in the front row during the conference, unveiled and with her legs exposed, came to represent not only the 'corruption and moral degeneration' of an 'American Jewish women' but also the Saudi state. The fact that Saudi women attend these conferences and are now allowed to participate in for example the Jiddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry as voters and candidates gives more substance to Jihadi claims.

In Jihadi discourse the politics of defiance is not only anchored in Islamic duty, it is deeply rooted in the discourse about women, honour and shame. A recurrent theme centres on the association between subservience to infidels and the violation of Muslim women. The local despot is not only an oppressor who does not rule according to the revealed message of God but vigorously contributes to the emasculation of Arab men by *'ahirat al-rum* ('Roman prostitutes'), a reference to the presence of

female American soldiers on Saudi soil for over a decade. The fact that Saudi Arabia was defended by American women in the Gulf War was viewed as the emasculation of its male population, especially the armed forces, a theme that is regularly reiterated in Jihadi discourse. Such images existed in Jihadi literature long before the torture of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison by American soldiers – both male and female – entered the public sphere in 2004. The local despot is often referred to as *dayuuth*, a strong abhorrent term describing the pimp, especially the one who trades his own *maharim* (the taboo female relatives such as mother, daughter, sister, etc.). The despot is transferred here from the realm of politics to that of morality, invoking images of sin and punishment resulting from the violation of divine law. Above all, the violation of women is attributed to the contribution of two agents: the infidels and the local despot.

Jihadi sheikh Issa al-Oshan (d. 2004), known as Muhammad Ahmad Salim, advised Saudi Jihadis against 'going to seek *jihad* in Iraq or elsewhere' and encouraged them to stay at home where they are needed.[35] He elaborates that this is not because the situation in Iraq is confused and unstable and that there is no banner to fight under, but because the priority should be the local context. Al-Oshan moves away from the duty to defend the global *umma* to the necessity of guarding against the violation of local women. He mentions a story that brought shame to a Saudi Jihadi who was fighting with the Taliban against the troops of the Northern Alliance during the American-led invasion of Afghanistan. Al-Oshan's friend told him that a Northern Alliance soldier asked him why a Saudi Arab was fighting in Afghanistan. The Saudi Jihadi answered that he wanted to defend the Muslim emirate of Taliban. The Afghan soldier replied, 'How could you come to Afghanistan while the Americans are with your sister in Saudi Arabia?' At this point in the conversation, the Jihadi felt shame. Al-Oshan argues that a Saudi cannot defend the honour of other Muslims while his own house is violated. This is a good reason to 'break the cross first in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, to set the land on fire so that no cross could feel secure'.

As gendered discourse, *jihad* draws on cultural values, with specific reference to male–female relations, the violation of women and the obligation to defend one's honour before seeking to do the same for other Muslims. In Saudi Arabia, *jihad* is a response to the emasculation of men, who are subjected to state repression in the context of prison and torture chambers. Al-Harbi, the suicide bomber in *Badr al-Riyadh*, painfully recounts the experience of his friend in al-Ruways prison. He says that during a long and painful interrogation session, his friend and his wife (described as a respectable tribal woman, a *hurra*, a free woman (not a slave)) were subjected to the most humiliating treatment. He claims that

his friend, after being paraded naked, was forced to have sexual intercourse with his wife in front of the interrogators. This not only violates the honour of the free woman as a result of an act committed by her husband, who has lost his ability to defend her honour, but also dishonours the man. Rather than being the defender of women's honour, the male prisoner, emasculated and humiliated by state agents, is turned into its violator. He collapsed, sobbing and crying, according to al-Harbi. While it is impossible to verify the authenticity of this story, it is nevertheless a powerful statement in Jihadi propaganda that plays on honour and the violation of honour. These images blur the boundaries between protector and violator of women. The helpless Muslim male is portrayed as being forced by the despot to violate his own honour.

The connection between *jihad*, on the one hand, and women, honour and shame, on the other, invokes the role of women in this duty. Are women expected to join the Jihadis? Sheikh Nasir al-Fahad provides a *fatwa* in this regard. He responds to two questions:

Q: What is the nature of female *jihad* and are women required to go out seeking *jihad*? Please answer with regard to defensive and offensive *jihad*.

SHEIKH AL-FAHAD: In general, women are not required to go for *jihad* but their exit with male Jihadis to cure the ill and the wounded and to fetch water for the thirsty is permissible. In Ibn Abbas's Hadith, the Prophet used to raid with women who look after the wounded and gain booty. Umm Atiyyah confirms that 'we used to go on raid with the Prophet to nurse the ill and there was booty for us'. Also it is permissible for women to fight directly in some situations. This is what Safiyyah bint Abd al-Mutalib did when she hit a Jew with a pole and killed him in battle. Women must get permission from their guardians before going and must be accompanied by *mahram* [a male chaperon].[36]

While there is no conclusive evidence in support of women directly participating in combat, there is ample evidence to suggest that women must be involved in other capacities, one of which is to support male relatives involved in *jihad*.[37] For this purpose, the al-Qa'ida branch in the Arabian Peninsula published *al-Khansa*, a sister electronic magazine to *Sawt al-Jihad*, named after a famous Muslim female poet who lost several sons in *jihad*. The magazine instructs women on how to reconcile *jihad* with family life. According to the editorial board, the magazine is published by an organisation called the Women's Media Bureau in the Arabian Peninsula. It owes its publication to the leader of *jihad* in the Arabian Peninsula, Abdulaziz al-Muqrin (d. 2004).[38] The magazine advises women on how to educate their children in the *jihad* culture, in addition to giving instructions in first aid and nursing the wounded, thus echoing the expectation regarding women's participation in *jihad* from an Islamic

point of view. The magazine does not, however, exclude women from active combat, as the instructions in carrying and handling arms indicate.[39]

The discourse of the struggle for the way of God which encourages confrontation, resistance and domination is not only anchored in religion and politics; it is a cultural whole which defines a way of life for the Muslim male, the privatised self in a globalised world. Above all, it tackles the last line of defence, the remaining guarded fortress: women in Saudi Arabia. As gendered discourse, *jihad* not only promises liberation from the domination of 'infidels', but also a defence of the most cherished female, whose violation dishonours and shames men. Violence is generated not simply by adherence to globalised ideologies and movements but through the regional and sub-regional disputes which have their origins in the complexities of local political history and cultural practices.[40] To understand the Jihadi trend in Saudi Arabia, one must situate it in the local context. Jihadis are a response to contradictions generated by a political leadership professing adherence to Islam, while the reality attests to something different. Jihadism is today defined as illegitimate violence, but in many respects this violence is a mirror of another type of violence – that of the state. Certain types of violence can be considered legitimate, not only by the Saudi state but also by the international community. In the aftermath of 11 September and under the banner of the 'War on Terror', Saudi state violence remains more or less outside the realm of condemnation. Violations of human rights are occasionally mentioned by international organisations, but remain unproblematic for countries that claim to uphold these rights at home and encourage them abroad. While *Badr al-Riyadh* included clear references to state violence (for example, torture and humiliation in prisons), in the following section, we consider more subtle practices of indirect violence by the state.

Repentance: violence to renounce violence

State repression, manifested in long prison sentences without trial, led to *taraju'at* (going back on previous intellectual and political positions), especially by outspoken Sahwis, who after years in prison in the 1990s were transformed into a loyal opposition. When faced with the rise of local Jihadi preachers, the state used these Sahwi *'ulama* to 'orchestrate' the repentance of the Jihadis. They volunteered to play the role of mediators between the state and Jihadis. The state used the Sahwi ex-prisoners to deliver 'peace' when they offered to provide assistance in guiding the Jihadis to the right path, after straying in thought and practice.

Three Saudi Jihadi *ʿulama*, Nasir al-Fahad, Ahmad al-Khalidi and Ali al-Khodayr, declared their *tawba* (repentance) in several television programmes broadcast in November and December 2003.

Nasir al-Fahad 'repented' in 2003 when Saudi television showed him being interviewed by a Sahwi preacher, Sheikh Aidh al-Qarni.[41] The programme was aimed at establishing that al-Fahad was not qualified to issue *fatwa*s, especially the one related to excommunication of 'those who assist Americans'; that Americans in Saudi Arabia are *muʿahadin*, infidels with whom Muslims have peace as a result of an oath (*ʿahd*); and that his repentance was the result of serious reflection in prison, without any pressure or coercion from the state. Al-Fahad clearly declared that his repentance was a result of lessons received in prison from people of knowledge. He admitted that he was not qualified to issue religious opinions and that it was nobler to admit error than to continue to hold mistaken views which encourage violence.

The repentance session started with al-Fahad announcing his erroneous judgment regarding the obligation to remove infidels from the Arabian Peninsula. He added that violence in Riyadh tarnished the image of Islam and Muslims, wasted resources and brought disaster. He renounced the right to give opinions on excommunication, stressing that *takfir* remains a prerogative of established *ʿulama*, mainly the Council of Senior Ulama. With respect to rebelling against the ruler, al-Fahad stated that this is not justified in a country such as Saudi Arabia. He concluded that infidels in the land of Muslims should be protected and their wealth guarded because they hold visas, issued by the Saudi authorities, and the visa is a contract which brings infidels under the protection of Muslims. He rejected any call for destroying Western interests in Saudi Arabia. He added that such destruction is permissible only if *wali al-amr* declares war on infidels. Al-Fahad warned Saudi youth against the temptation to 'go out' for *jihad* in Iraq. He described the fighting as *jihad fitna*, a combat that leads to chaos and discord among Muslims. He revoked the privatisation of *jihad* and insisted that it is permissible only under the banner of a Muslim ruler, the only person who can call for *jihad*. Al-Fahad moved from being a rebel scholar to one fully endorsing the official Wahhabi religio-political discourse.

Al-Fahad renounced his earlier *fatwa* regarding the permissibility of using women and children as human shields in combat (*al-tatarus bi ʾl-nisa*), a reference to the fact that women (infidel or otherwise) might be caught in violence. He argued that such a *fatwa* was current in early Islamic times but today the context is different.

In 2006, al-Fahad remains behind bars, which casts doubt over the sincerity of his apparently changed views. Perhaps the state finds it

difficult to trust his televised statements. It is also possible that the Saudi government is under pressure from the United States to keep him in prison. However, the fact that al-Fahad remains imprisoned may suggest that the state does not fully trust its own propaganda. In the absence of independent reporting or access to the prisoner, we cannot rule out the possibility that al-Fahad's repentance may have been forced or staged. Therefore, no conclusive evidence can be presented here. After all, to reconsider early opinions and denounce previous convictions can be a healthy sign, but there is always room for expressing what one does not believe in. Here we enter the realm of the inner self, where assertions are difficult to make.

Several months after the televised repentance session, a letter attributed to Nasir al-Fahad and signed by him appeared on several internet sites.[42] While it is equally difficult to establish the authenticity of this letter, it carried a strong message to his audience. He clearly stated that any opinions expressed on television while he was in captivity (*ʿasr*) cannot be a true reflection of his beliefs. Al-Fahd refers to coercion (*qahr*), which forced his repentance, and confirms that the state holds power over him. The state, in his opinion, is the strong agent (*qawi*), while he is weak (*daʿif*). He adds that the state has the upper hand, but that it cannot possibly win his heart and change his mind.

The theme of *tarajuʿat* and *tawba* is discussed in a pamphlet which aims to respond to the televised repentance sessions of the three Jihadi scholars. Sheikh Abdullah ibn Nasir al-Rashid argues that prisons are sites of coercion rather than compulsion.[43] It is unlikely that truth manifests itself in the despot's prison. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the status of statements made by Jihadi *ʿulama* in which they renounce previous opinions. In a manner reminiscent of a tradition that does not consider confessions under duress or torture legitimate evidence, al-Rashid invokes the context of prison and torture as limiting one's free will. Any renunciation of previous opinions in such a context is defined as *tarajuʿat qasriyya* (forced repentance).

The repentance sessions were well publicised in official media. Intellectuals, religious scholars and laymen debated the television programmes and presented them as success stories. The main champions were the state and the Sahwi *ʿulama* who helped deliver the repentance statements. So-called liberal writers presented these broadcasts as reflections of the wise spirit of dialogue adopted by the state. Others saw them as signs of the complete defeat of Jihadis. Liberal newspapers such as *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *al-Watan* rejoiced over the end of *thulathi al-takfir* (the trinity of excommunication).[44] Some Sahwi *ʿulama* warned against over using these sessions to score illegitimate gains, a reference

to the way liberals commented on the television episodes. Sheikh Aidh al-Qarni applauded the Jihadi sheikhs for their courage and ability to revisit previous opinions. He argued that admitting error is better than continue to err. He used the repentance to demonstrate 'the good *fitra* [nature] of the people, who are brought up on true Islam'.[45] However, the involvement of Sahwis in the repentance dramas did not go unnoticed. Liberal writers pointed attention to the possible gains that might accrue to them as a result of their mediation with Jihadis. Several writers used the occasion to indirectly accuse Sahwis of sharing a common intellectual platform with Jihadis. One prince even went as far as accusing Sahwis of being the intellectual godfathers of the Jihadis. Sahwis were incensed by such public accusations, and one asked for a public debate with the prince to 'clarify the issues and absolve Sahwis of any responsibility for Jihadi violence'. His calls for debate were ignored.[46]

The positioning of Sahwis as 'mediators' between the state and Jihadis incurred the wrath of underground Jihadi *'ulama*, who endeavoured to defeat the Sahwis on the internet. Sahwis acquired a new label, *gafwa* ('asleep') as opposed to *sahwa* ('awakened'), thus contributing further to the rift between the various Islamist trends and enforcing a political and religious fragmentation among ex-comrades.

It is very difficult to claim with certainty that the repentance sessions, together with the royal pardons granted to Jihadis who gave themselves up to the authorities, had a positive impact on the development of events in the year that followed. In 2004 Saudi Arabia remained hostage to the Jihadis, whose attacks became more daring. The American consulate and Ministry of Interior bombings in December 2004 proved that they were still capable of hitting at the heart of the American presence in Saudi Arabia and humiliating the regime through targeting one of the most important state institutions. Repentance, especially the Saudi televised version, was confined to winning the media battle while the state tried to win the military campaign on the ground. If instruction and re-education in Saudi prisons resulted in the repentance described above, it is clear that the same prisons must have had a lot to do with producing the fiercest Jihadis. Several people who provided military and intellectual support for *jihad* had spent time in prison, for example the above-mentioned al-Harbi, Abdulaziz al-Muqrin and Yusif al-Ayri; the last two were leaders of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula. Before his recent imprisonment, al-Fahad himself had previously been a cellmate of two other famous Jihadi sheikhs, his intellectual mentors, Sheikhs al-Khodayr and al-Oqla in al-Hayer prison in Riyadh.

Jihad: self-annihilation, purposeful behaviour or agent of modernity?

Today Jihadism is an underground movement that manifests itself in violent attacks. Its discourse is debated in rest-houses, mosques, private gatherings in the poor and crowded neighbourhoods of Riyadh and Jiddah, the elite intellectual salons, five-star international hotels, research centres and remote farms. This debate is clearly articulated in internet discussion forums and on Jihadi websites. Religious discourse comfortably intermingles with reflections on Muslim–infidel relations, contemporary politics and cultural notions about femininity, masculinity and violation of honour. The debate is supported by media productions, poetry, chanting and iconography, not to mention instruction in how to use weapons, to survive in the desert without water and food, and to seek cover within society, thus generating a cultural package that reaches much further than suicide bombers aim to. Contemporary *jihad* is a culture that flourishes in a specific historical and political context in addition to being a religious duty. It has become a privatised obligation in the age of globalisation, thanks to mass communication.

Violent acts are expressions of cultural codes imbued with great meaning for both perpetrators and victims. Rather than being at the margins of culture, violence has perhaps moved to its centre.[47] Scholars who analyse the relationship between violence and religion tend to emphasise that a cultural approach encompasses a wide range of variables that make *jihad* or any other form of religiously motivated violence authentic, inspiring and powerful.[48]

Such reflections on violence rightly situate it in the realm of culture. However, while it might have several social, economic, political and religious causes, this violence does not represent a yearning for old times, despite its rhetoric. *Jihad* is not pursued for a return to the *status quo ante*, to the glorious past and the tradition of pious ancestors. It is a culture that promises a transformation of the present to achieve a better future, and is pursued by individuals who believe in their ability to change the world. Outsiders conceive of *jihad* as self-annihilation in a world where the balance of power is clearly in favour of the West. However, from the Jihadi point of view it is purposeful behaviour. In fact, Jihadis believe that it is the only religiously sanctioned response to this imbalance.

In the context of Jihadi violence, the debates on politics and religion moved much faster than ever before. Since the early 1990s, debating religion, politics, relations with the West, the status of women, the religious establishment, the new Islamism, the ruling family, the national debt and many other urgent issues are constantly being considered by an

increasingly literate population which has at its disposal multiple sources of information. The 11 September attacks increased the speed and intensity of the debate even further. Under the pressure of violence, the Saudi government was forced to respond and act rapidly. It changed the religious curriculum, sacked religious scholars, restricted charitable work, established a National Dialogue Forum and introduced limited municipal elections in February 2005. The regime presented itself as the champion of reform. While it dismisses any suggestion that its timid and hesitant reform takes place under American pressure, it will never admit that Jihadi violence may have been a wake-up call.

Jihadism is a culture of transition that may lead to a kind of modernity different from that celebrated in official discourse and often measured in ample statistics about the number of hospitals, airports, paved roads and highways. Saudi modernity brought the alien trappings of material goods, consumerism and literacy. It also consolidated a centralised authoritarian state that destroyed local political actors, with the exception of those who were willing to be co-opted. Modernity brought about increased urbanisation, dislocation and the erosion of old tribal and kinship loyalties, but failed to replace the latter with alternative modes of organisation such as independent cooperatives, associations, political parties and circles for support and representation. While Saudi modernity silenced the traditional religious diversity within Islam, it allocated massive resources for the propagation of one interpretation of religious discourse, although in the face of unprecedented proliferation of religious knowledge, it became impossible for the state to extend its control. With the centralisation of religious institutions came the decentralisation – and even fragmentation – of religious discourse. The old religious monopoly of the Salafi–Wahhabi consenting tradition began to be gradually eroded by various groups, of which Jihadis are but one.

Although modernity empowered many Saudis, it disempowered a massive population that is increasing at an unprecedented rate. Modernity generated discontent among those who could not be included in its parameters. In recent times and under the fluctuation of wealth, Saudi modernity failed to include as many people as possible. In fact, this very modernity contributed to the systematic exclusion of a wide circle of people who were able to learn its alphabet and communicate using its own language, but were for some reason excluded. It resulted in a class of dispossessed and excluded people who lacked either the right skills in a competitive market, belonged to marginalised groups and regions or failed to be part of patronage networks. However, Saudi modernity also had beneficiaries, and created an awareness and an ability to imagine an alternative existence. Modern communication technology and rapid

travel speeded up this awareness and widened the gap between reality and aspirations.

The drawing of Saudi Arabia into Western modernity generated a local response with its own momentum. The country initially absorbed selected aspects of Western modernity and violently rejected others. Jihadism and Western modernity share a common belief in the ability of man to change the world. Both are sure that they hold the key to advancement and progress. However, Western modernity held reason to be the key to such advancement, whereas Jihadism invoked faith.

Jihadis may well have accelerated change but it remains to be seen whether they can survive in a time of stability.[49] The debate between those who support *jihad* and those who denounce it continues, and will probably do so for the foreseeable future. The debate is not simply about removing infidels from the land of Islam or toppling despotic regimes. It is about sincerely believing Muslim men and women and their agonising journey through a changing world. The following chapter captures a glimpse of this ongoing debate, through the life, words and thoughts of one man.

5 Debating Salafis: Lewis Atiyat Allah and the *jihad* obligation

LEWIS ATIYAT ALLAH: They will write books about me.
ABU YASIR: Why? What is your achievement?
LEWIS ATIYAT ALLAH: Nothing apart from proving that you have achieved nothing.
ABU YASIR: What have you got to say now?
LEWIS ATIYAT ALLAH: Whatever says any Lewis Atiyat Allah to another. More practical and logical proofs justifying the *jihad* option and the bankruptcy of your strategies. Lewis Atiyat Allah, *Min buraydah ila manhatin*, p. 23

Lewis Atiyat Allah is a Saudi intellectual and Islamist activist, who has taken refuge in the bulletin and discussion forums of the internet because his message is today subject to censorship. He is also an al-Qa'ida supporter who has been forced to go underground. Lewis came to prominence under this pseudonym after 11 September, an event that precipitated a substantial schism within the Saudi Salafi scene. Since then, Lewis's articles, commentaries on current events and evaluations of the Saudi regime have appeared in several well-known Saudi internet websites and discussion boards.[1] Lewis also had his own website, which was closed down by the hosting company for security reasons.[2] It is more than likely that the virtual Lewis is currently known by his real name in the real world; he may well be a public figure. However, for fear of persecution and arrest in the country where he lives, he chose an unusual pseudonym: a Christian first name, followed by a Muslim surname.

We can only speculate on why this character chose a rather unusual nom de plume. The name Lewis brings to mind several French kings, whose names appear in Lewis's articles, together with references to Christian clergy and the church. In one article, he refers to King Fahd as '*al-malik* Lewis', evoking images of dictatorship, divine kingship and alliance with a church.[3] However, the second part of his name, Atiyat Allah, anchors him in an Islamic tradition, perhaps a counter-kingship that is bestowed on the believers by Allah.

Lewis himself explains his nom de plume in a very simple manner,

which reflects a rather unusual phase in his early days, when he had a sense of humour, but is now incompatible with his current Islamist preoccupation. Some time ago he travelled to the United States. He recounts the conversation he had with the immigration officer upon arrival:

IMMIGRATION OFFICER: What is your name, sir?
LEWIS: I think. Um. Well, I'm Lewis.
IMMIGRATION OFFICER: But it is not the name on your passport!
LEWIS: You can say that I'm gonna change it!
This is how I became Lewis.

Lewis's long articles are usually eagerly awaited both by many committed Islamists looking for inspiration and intelligence officers and experts on terrorism who surf the internet websites and discussion boards for *jihad* literature and al-Qa'ida supporters in an attempt to understand the phenomenon or arrest the enemy.[4]

Lewis is perhaps one of the most popular of the Jihadi Islamist internet writers.[5] One of his literary contributions on the internet received 18,576 hits. Saudi Islamists read his articles with enthusiasm. His accessible and eloquent contributions generate heated debates and counter-arguments between those who praise him and those who condemn him. Lewis also enters into dialogue with people in Saudi Arabia whose identities are known and who can afford to write under their real names as they have rejected or suspended the obligation of *jihad*. He also converses with others – usually Western specialists on terrorism, as he claims – who want to understand the duty of *jihad*, which Lewis strongly supports, enthusiastically justifies and clandestinely defends. The virtual Lewis articulates a vision in defence of *jihad* but perhaps the real Lewis suspends the duty as he cannot afford at the moment, an exposure which would no doubt lead to arrest, a fate similar to that of the Jihadi *'ulama* discussed in the last chapter.

It is difficult to know where Lewis is. Yet wherever he is, it seems that expressing open support for al-Qa'ida is taboo and has serious consequences. Under these circumstances Lewis chooses to conduct a covert *jihad*, '*bil lisan wa laysa bil sinan*' (with the tongue, not with weapons). At heart, Lewis remains a committed Jihadi, although in an open environment he would not be a foot-soldier. He is more likely to be a theoretician/strategist/interpreter of the *jihad* rather than a practitioner. He is probably a middle-aged man, in his forties. Given his writing skills, education, knowledge and style, the real Lewis is likely to be part of the political wing or the propaganda department of the Jihadi Islamist movement, providing intellectual input in support of the overall strategies.[6] However, neither Lewis nor al-Qa'ida is conventional. Lewis belongs to a trend

rather than a hierarchical organisation, with an identified division of labour and clearly assigned roles. He may or may not have direct or indirect channels of communication with al-Qa'ida. However, he writes in such a way as to support and glorify *jihad*.

Both the virtual and the real Lewis can be considered *munathir wa mudafi' an al-jihad* (a theoretician and defender of *jihad*). Unlike traditional religious scholars, he writes in a modern and accessible way, reflecting knowledge of politics, international relations and an ability to analyse the world – from his point of view, of course. However, he also has a solid religious education, which enables him to intersperse his discourse with Quranic verses, Hadiths and references to early religious scholars, history and tradition.

Lewis is a committed Jihadi Salafi. He is also a hybrid in the sense that he successfully combines his religious identity and commitment to Islam with a rather deep immersion in Western discourse and languages. He is not only fluent in English, he is also an articulate reproducer of Western concepts and methodology.[7] He has mastered the art of dialogue according to Western standards, although he may not want to acknowledge his reproduction of this discourse. He also uses the method of interpretation, analysis and conventions that are common in Western discourse. In addition to his commitment to defending faith worldwide, Lewis can be regarded as a Najdi Salafi, thus locating his global religious message in the confines of central Arabia and the Wahhabi call. He may object to being labelled a Wahhabi Salafi. According to his testimony, he is the real Salafi, the one who has not been 'domesticated' by Al-Saud, pejoratively referred to in his articles as al-Sulul, a mock name which has become commonly used by the Islamist opposition in Saudi Arabia to refer to the ruling family, thanks to Lewis.[8] He may have been influenced by modern Islamist intellectuals, famous names associated with twentieth-century Islamism such as Sayid Qutb, Abu Ala al-Mawdudi and theoreticians of the Egyptian Jihadist movement, but he remains faithful to the early Wahhabi tradition, especially that associated with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's grandson, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Latif (d. 1969).[9] Lewis is definitely a product of the Wahhabi reform movement and its teachings, whose Jihadi branch is now referred to in Western literature as neo-Salafis.[10] He is not, however, concerned with labels and trends. He remains in his own eyes a Muslim who follows the right path. He is local but also global, not only in his personal biography and sources of religious education but also in his cosmopolitan outlook and travel.

Lewis is a real conversationalist. He engages his opponents in intense debate, answers their queries, responds to their provocation and defends

his point of view. A substantial part of his discourse is primarily directed towards his fellow Salafis, mainly those who, in his opinion, not only betrayed the Salafi movement by *ta'til faridhat al-jihad* (suspending the obligation of *jihad*), but also condemned his brand of Salafism. Since 11 September, Lewis's opponents seem to be drawn from the so-called Sururi Sahwis, discussed earlier. Others are pro-government *'ulama* and intellectuals, who openly declare their rejection of his strategy, at least in the current international context. This condemnation revolves around describing him and his likes as *khawarij al-'asr* (contemporary Kharijites), *bughat* (usurpers) and *al-fia al-dhalla* (the party that has gone astray), threatening the community by rebelling against the rightful Muslim ruler, and encouraging discord among Muslims; all carry serious religious punishments (*hudud*). It is important, however, to point out that such accusations by laymen using the internet are not necessarily grounded in serious knowledge and scholarship in Islamic studies. The majority of those who use such strong terminology in internet discussion boards are probably not aware of the historical contexts in which such labels emerged.

Lewis the person

One of the most difficult tasks in drawing the contours of Lewis's background and personality is access to the person and his narrative, which, if traced correctly, would open a window through which we can gain a glimpse of the complexity, tension and resolutions which this character has faced throughout his life. Lewis's current affiliation with the Jihadi trend is a product of an evolution and a development, all reconstructed in this chapter from information Lewis released about himself on the internet. While it is not possible to cross-check this information, I have all reason to believe that it represents an authentic and accurate description of a life that is perhaps representative of a whole generation of Saudi men born in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While Lewis is unique in his ability to articulate his thoughts and in the strength of his convictions, his biography reflects the drastic changes that have swept Saudi Arabia. In reconstructing Lewis's life history, I have no reason to consider his autobiography a fabrication. What he says about himself remains an autobiography, a selective and fully controlled narrative. My reconstruction is, however, partially mediated by my translation of the text from Arabic and my organisation of the material.

The first conversion: from Sahwi Islamism to liberalism

I was Satan's soldier then Satan became my soldier.

Lewis Atiyat Allah

Before introducing Lewis's various debates with his opponents, it is important to draw the contours of his personal journey to political activism, which is marked by his conversion from Islamism to liberalism. Like many young Saudis brought up in a world nothing like that of their parents' generation, it seems that Lewis went through a very difficult time in his youth, beautifully alluded to in the above statement. His traditional Salafi upbringing and later his commitment to the Sahwi Islamist trend gave way to liberalism.

According to Lewis, his life can be seen as a series of conversions. He had a traditional religious upbringing. His father was a Salafi and he grew up in a Salafi environment. He learnt the Quran from his father, who later sent him to Madina, where he studied in the Hadith College. He learnt three thousand Hadiths from the *Ahkam* collection. As a young man he became part of the so-called Sururi Sahwi movement in Saudi Arabia, which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. He was a follower of Sheikh Safar al-Hawali.

Lewis says that after this brief experience of Islamism 'things happened to him', but without specifying the nature and impact of these 'things'. As a result, he admits that he lost his Islamic identity. Three years passed after he graduated from university without being able to define the meaning of 'belonging to the *umma*'. It seems that this was his first personal and intellectual crisis in life.

He abandoned his Islamic awakening and became a liberal. At this stage he began reading philosophical texts, for example the Encyclopaedia of Abdulrahman Badawi, the story of Hayy ibn Yaqthan, Descartes, Spinoza and Kant, in addition to the history and causes of the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He was impressed and began to condemn Islamic thought, as deep down his reference point was 'Shakespeare and Voltaire'. In his own heart Lewis considered himself as belonging to the 'victorious party', *al-umma al-muntasira* (the West). He confesses that he forgot all his Islamic education with the exception of Ibn Khaldun and his *Introduction* and Ibn Tufayl and his story 'Hayy ibn Yaqthan'. At this stage Lewis went to America.

Lewis returned to Saudi Arabia fully immersed in liberalism. He describes himself as having become 'modernist in literature and secular in thought'. He began to defend democracy, human rights and the rights of women, as defined by the West.

Lewis believes that in a previous time Satan occasionally tempted him. He immersed himself in sins to the extent that he became one of Satan's disciples, subjected to his own whims. Lewis refers here to morality and corruption as an escape from 'loss of Arab identity and faith in religion'.[11]

Following this loss, Lewis lived *ayam al-dhalal* (the days of obscurity). On one occasion, he endeavoured to use all his skills and charm to mislead a young American woman, a representative of 'the civilised world', using internet chat rooms. After several virtual encounters, the woman fell in love with him and the flowers he used to send her. She told him that she used to show the flowers to her friends and tell them that they were from her 'Arab boyfriend' who owned an oil well. She later asked him to marry her, but he declined. She then told him that she frequented an Islamic centre and had converted to Islam, hoping that he would change his mind and marry her. He declined the offer again, and began to question how he contributed in his own sinful ways to creating bad impressions about Islam and Muslims. At this juncture, Lewis wished for death.

Lewis's 'illicit' encounters with women seem to have been a foundation for his return to Islamism. In addition to being an argumentative and stubborn young man, immersed in *dhalal* (debauchery), who went as far as to preach that smoking is not *haram* (forbidden), Lewis seems to have mastered the art of flirtation to a high level. He tells us how he became an expert in using the language of eyes to lure women to smile, and perhaps more. According to him, the language of eyes is irresistible, and regardless of a woman's education and upbringing, she will eventually succumb to a glance by a charming man like himself. This did not necessarily lead to an illicit relationship, but exchanging glances would lead to mutual appreciation and smiles because 'the eye is the door to the soul', according to Lewis. He was self-confident in his abilities to 'charm and defeat an army of female resistance', wherever he found it. He practised his skills in bookshops, supermarkets and abroad.

Lewis was an experienced traveller who put his charm to the test in airports. Travelling and being with strangers were moments of excitement. He flirted with air hostesses, using a rather unusual entry into their hearts – he would discuss the ozone layer with them. When in foreign lands – Britain, for example – he sensed a 'spiritual vacuum among women', which he obligingly tried to fill on regular occasions. He would describe to an English woman how her face reflected fatigue, pain and suffering. She would respond immediately, and engage him in conversation. According to Lewis this approach is far more sophisticated and effective than starting a conversation about the weather, as English people would normally do. Lewis resists the conclusion that English women are loose or easy targets, as he stresses that many would ignore his advances.

This period in Lewis's life is described as a by-product of complete 'intellectual corruption', of which casual relations with women were one aspect. He recounts his encounters with women and his 'liberal' attitude

to demonstrate the level of degeneration that he had reached before his rediscovery of the meaninglessness of life without faith. During this episode, he felt no guilt because he suspended religion as a moral force capable of halting his immersion in sin. He even went as far as denying the legitimacy of a religion, which forbids acts of immorality. At that point he introduces the term 'crisis' (*azma*) to describe his situation. He argues that it is most natural for love and closeness to develop between men and women, and admits that even talking to a woman is pleasurable. Why then does Islam restrict the interaction between men and women? He proposed a solution: moulding and modifying religion to accommodate human desires. This was his way to avoid guilt as he searched in the religious tradition for examples that would justify mixing between the sexes and more relaxed public interaction with the opposite sex. The stories of the early Muslim women (*al-sahabiyyat*) and their relations with men became his reference point in a desperate attempt to justify what he calls the contradiction between *al-shar'* (jurisprudence) and the language of the body, mainly his desires.

Lewis claims that at this stage he forgot the Quran – with the exception of some verses, which he constantly remembered in solitude. These verses summarised his newly acquired liberal convictions. Lewis felt like the *khubth* (filth) ejected by the city, described in Hadith as 'al-madina tanfi khubthuha kama tanfi al-nar khubth al hadid'. Lewis was this *khubth*. He continued to socialise with known Saudi liberals and engage with their thought. Lewis admits that he began to admire someone whom he had loathed previously when he was an Islamist Sahwi: Ghazi al-Qusaybi – Saudi liberal writer, ex-ambassador to Britain, and in 2004 Minister of Labour.

Lewis had his second crisis when he admits that he discovered 'the emptiness of their life, namely the liberals' and developed a revulsion against their gatherings. He felt that Saudi liberals are like parrots, blindly imitating the West. He believed that they were incapable of instigating any serious change. For the second time, Lewis experienced a kind of turbulence as he lost his second acquired identity as a secular liberal. He became a tormented soul, having abandoned the certainties of his first Islamic identity and his second acquired Western outlook.

The second conversion: back to Sahwa

Lewis's account of his early flirtation with liberalism and adventures with women reflects a tormented self immersed in behaviour and thoughts implicitly considered immoral. He searched for a return to salvation, a way out of his degeneration.

One day he performed his ablution and sat holding the Quran. He summarises his return to the right path:

> I did not cry as happens in the story of Prophets who repent, but I felt that I was the one addressed by the Quran. This was the turning point in my life. I continued to search in the Quran for rational proofs. I found them in sura al-anam. Finally I became like *ahl al-araf*, betwixt and between. I heard about al-Wasatiyya. I came asking about what they offer and why they are called thus. Perhaps they have ideas I can adopt. I am an ordinary person. I ask questions because I reject all artificial thoughts.

Although Lewis admits that he felt happy in his liberal days, today he feels pain and bitterness. He opted for salvation, as he felt tranquillity when he was in a public space where he lowered his gaze (*ghadh al-basar*). He also admits that suppressing his desire to look at women is not easy, but that the peace that follows is eternal, and the pleasure that succeeds hardship is everlasting. At this stage Lewis was a reformed character, a 'born-again' Muslim. He returned to Islamism but remained independent, entering into heated discussion with Sururi Sahwis, his early mentors and companions, and participating in discussion boards of the Wasatiyya internet club, coordinated by Muhsin al-Awajy. However, he was not to be satisfied by the 'methodology' of the Wasatiyya. His heart was somewhere else.

At this stage – that is, in the post-11 September period – to be a born-again Muslim was simply not enough. Lewis's personal journey to salvation became a serious mission to save his country, other Muslims and the world. From this time on, he had a mission in life. Lewis revisited the Sahwa camp, only to be disappointed by its position after 11 September.

Lewis found his salvation in a return to 'an Islam manifested in mosques, libraries, schools, universities and summer camps'.[12] The Islamic awakening (the Sahwa movement) included diverse Islamist groups and orientations, the most important of which was the so-called Sururi version, discussed earlier in this book. Lewis's involvement in the movement brought him to the conclusion that 'Saudi society and state oscillate between being totally non-Muslim in some aspects and less than Muslim in others'.[13]

Lewis admits that throughout the 1990s, he was a follower of *'ulama al-sahwa*, including, among others, Sheikhs Salman al-Awdah, Safar al-Hawali and Nasir al-Omar. His later adoption of the *jihad* obligation is not a conversion or a departure from what those scholars preached, but it takes the *sahwa* to its logical conclusion, which the above-mentioned scholars have failed to do according to Lewis, given their reaction to the events of 11 September.

The final confirmation: Lewis the Jihadi

So far we have followed Lewis through his various stages: Lewis as a Salafi; Lewis as a liberal; Lewis as an independent Islamist with connections and in communication with the Jihadis throughout the late 1990s. The final phase, discussed here, is Lewis as a confirmed Jihadi.

His position changed in the second half of the 1990s – more accurately in 1998, when he admits to having had *itisal* (communication) with Jihadis. Lewis committed himself to the Jihadi trend after 11 September 2001, when he had to make a final resolution (*yahsum al-khiyar*). The main reason for this final conversion was his disappointment with the Sahwi sheikhs, who signed a pamphlet after 11 September entitled *How we can Coexist*, which was a response to a pamphlet produced by a group of American intellectuals entitled *What we are Fighting For*.

Having been shocked by the Sahwi sheikhs' response to 11 September, Lewis wrote an article, 'Iflas al-islamiyyin' (The Bankruptcy of Islamists), which confirmed him in his position as a defender of *jihad*. This article symbolised his final break with Sahwi Islamism and conversion to the *jihad* option. Lewis argues that his abandonment of the Sahwi camp was a result of the position of their famous sheikhs outlined in the pamphlet, which, according to him, shocked all Salafis in Saudi Arabia. With 'The Bankruptcy of Islamists', Lewis came to prominence as a daring writer. He challenged the religious scholars who had dominated debate throughout the 1990s – al-Hawali, al-Awdah and al-Omar. Because of their anti-Americanism during the Gulf War of 1990, their critical stance towards the government and their imprisonment until the late 1990s, these sheikhs had become powerful symbols, capitalising on more than a decade of resistance and personal suffering. In this article, Lewis shattered the myth about these sheikhs, whose position and rhetoric changed dramatically after they came out of prison, and more so after 11 September.

According to Lewis, his eminence following the article on the bankruptcy of Islamists was accidental. He uses the image of a play in which people were bored with the monotony of the performance. In the audience there was one who was murmuring a song, possibly to overcome his boredom. When people sitting around him heard his murmurs, they asked him to go on stage and sing. He hesitated, but sang beautifully. People started to applaud, and at that moment in the show Lewis the Jihadi writer was born. The poetic of Lewis's self-assessment of his pre-eminence is a window from which to look at this personality. He combines two contradictory characteristics, humility and strength.

The events of 11 September 2001, which precipitated a major schism within the Salafi awakening movement, had proved to be crucial for Lewis. The Salafis were divided between those who openly supported Bin Laden (the most famous were Sheikhs al-Oqla, Nasir al-Fahad and Ali al-Khodayr) and those who distanced themselves from him without condemning him openly, for example Sheikhs Salman al-Awdah and Safar al-Hawali. There were also official religious scholars who accused Bin Laden of causing *fitna* (dissent), like the one of the early Kharijites. The Sahwa sheikhs regarded the attack on New York as a cataclysmic event unblessed by God. Despite Lewis's training and intellectual proximity to al-Hawali and al-Awdah, he decided to side with those who endorsed Bin Laden and sanctioned the *jihad* option. Lewis laments the schism within his movement, and cites the Arab poet who said:

> Ualimuhu al-rimayat kuli yawmin
> Falama ishtada sa'iduhu ramani
>
> [Every day I teach him to shoot
> When his hand became steady he shot me.]

Lewis took the preaching and teachings of *ʿulama al-sahwa* to their logical conclusions when he decided to embrace the *jihad* not simply as an option but as a duty, whose fulfilment is currently the responsibility and programme of Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida. He declared the events in New York a major success and a turning-point in the struggle against American hegemony. His journey from *sahwa* Islamism to the *jihad* trend should not be interpreted as a departure from the teachings of the 1990s Sahwi sheikhs. He admits that his choice does not represent a serious departure from his intellectual Sahwi roots. The two Islamist camps – the *sahwa* and the *jihad* – differ only in practice. While they agree on the centrality of *jihad* as *faridha* (duty), they differ on the conditions of its application. They also agree that the United States is the enemy of Islam and Muslims and that it occupies the land of Muslims, especially *bilad al-haramayn* – the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, but disagree about when *jihad* should be declared, who has the right to declare it, how it should be declared and whether the conditions for declaring it are met. Moreover, there seems to be no consensus on when *jihad* ceases to be *fard kifaya* (an obligation for a sufficient number of people) and becomes *fard ʿayn* (an obligation incumbent on every individual).

Lewis's endorsement of *jihad* over whether 11 September served the Salafi cause and Muslims in general marked a departure from the philosophy of his ex-comrades. He also disagreed with their position regarding the Saudi regime. The Sahwi sheikhs and the Jihadis agree that the

regime does not fully apply the *shariʿa* or abide by it in all aspects of social, economic and political matters. However, the Sahwis implicitly agree not to attack the regime or harm it at present, whereas the Jihadis do not accept the strategy of a truce with the Saudi government.

Lewis does not give up hope that his early mentors, especially his intellectual masters, *ʿulama al-sahwa*, will come to accept his point of view. For this reason he has entered into an electronic dialogue with Abu Yasir, one of the Sahwis, in an attempt to present his point of view and convince his ex-comrade – now intellectual opponent – that suspending *jihad* is not only un-Islamic but is also a futile policy.

Lewis Atiyat Allah and Abu Yasir: from Buraydah to Manhattan

An important and lengthy internet dialogue between Lewis and someone by the name of Abu Yasir appeared in the form of a small booklet in Arabic bookshops in London. Lewis's booklet, *From Buraydah to Manhattan*, was published in 2003 by Dar al-Riyadh, an imaginary publishing house. Previously this debate appeared on several websites.

In this booklet, an interesting debate takes place between Lewis Atiyat Allah and a fellow Salafi by the name of Abu Yasir, who belongs to the other Salafi camp, presumably another Muslim intellectual who has become 'moderate', perhaps after several years behind bars in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s. Abu Yasir challenges our characterisation of Salafis as he enters into a dialogue with Lewis. He represents the other brand of Islamism, the one associated with *ʿulama al-sahwa* of the 1990s and now abandoned by Lewis. Lewis and Abu Yasir share a profound commitment to Islam, not only as a way of life but also as a solution to all problems.

Before 11 September, Lewis and Abu Yasir undoubtedly belonged to the same Islamist movement (*tayar al-haraki*), and probably knew each other very well. However, after the events, the two followed different paths. Lewis became covertly associated with the Jihadi Salafis and Abu Yasir remained part of a Salafiyya with moderate Muslim Brotherhood leanings. Abu Yasir is a *haraki*, an Islamist activist. According to Lewis, the difference between himself and his interlocutor is not in *mafahim* (understanding), but in *tatbiqat* (application). The main debate revolves around the events of 11 September and the duty of *jihad*, which led to schism within the Saudi Salafi Sahwi camp. They both see themselves as true Muslims who are opposed to the official quietist Salafi trend, represented by the Saudi religious establishment.

Abu Yasir's point of view

Abu Yasir poses a series of questions which were asked by many Saudi Salafis following the 11 September attack. These fall within two main themes. First, should *jihad qitali* (military struggle) be a priority over *jihad hadari* (civilisational struggle) to deal with the concerns of the Muslim community at this particular moment in time? Second, should the battle be taken to the USA when there is a lot of scope for educating Muslims by implementing grass-root programmes to raise social and religious awareness? The latter question deals with whether the strategy of military struggle against the 'most powerful nation on earth' is a sound tactic when contemporary Muslims have no power comparable to that of the United States. Abu Yasir's questions reflect his rejection of Bin Laden's strategy. He argues that the decision to hit America was detrimental to the Islamic *da'wa* (call). The attack was, according to Abu Yasir, carried out by 'gangsters' under the command of one person – Bin Laden – himself, without resorting to the opinion of mainstream *'ulama*. Abu Yasir questions the religious legitimacy of killing innocent people in New York who may not even support their government's policy towards the Muslim and Arab world. He believes that given the state of backwardness prevalent in Muslim countries, which have fallen under unjust rulers, attacking America did not represent a strategy but an act of anger and revenge, whose consequences were harmful. The attack led to the destruction of a young Muslim state, the Taliban government in Afghanistan, and also to aggression towards Muslims all over the world.

Abu Yasir is hesitant when it comes to endorsing the *umami* (global) approach of al-Qa'ida, which leads to overlooking *watan* (homeland) in favour of a global Muslim community. However, he does believe in the supremacy of the Muslim *umma*. He bases his understanding on practical grounds as he argues that one needs a home base in which to start an education programme, raising awareness and above all Islamising society. He does not see the benefit of wasting limited resources on battles in Kashmir, Bosnia, Chechnya and other places where al-Qa'ida is thought to operate. The Islamisation of the homeland includes preaching *da'wa*, which includes among other things the obligation of *jihad*. However, given the present circumstances of Muslims mentioned above, in practice military *jihad* has to be 'suspended' or 'frozen' in favour of cultural and educational struggle. The objective should be to create the virtuous Muslim society, which would inevitably lead to the establishment of the authentic Muslim state. Only then can Muslims think about military confrontation with a powerful enemy. In the present circumstances, none of

the conditions for military struggle are met; therefore, attacking the United States was premature, foolish and detrimental.

Lewis's point of view

Lewis responds to Abu Yasir's questions and accusations in a style reflecting his familiarity with both Islamic and Western discourses. He moves easily from Ibn Taymiyya to Fukuyama, although he admits that practising Jihadis do not bother reading the latter. Lewis privileges military struggle and mocks the educational programme of Abu Yasir. For him *da'wa* is not a lesson delivered in a mosque. Even if it is the right way to raise awareness, this method has failed to end the subservience inflicted on Muslims by the superpower. According to him *da'wa* is besieged by both the United States and its local allies, the rulers of Saudi Arabia, who collaborate to suppress any activity which undermines American hegemony.

Lewis rejects the notion of *watan* (homeland) as un-Islamic. According to him, all Muslim countries and states are recent creations resulting from foreign intervention rather than an Islamic obligation or effort. This development is now taken for granted and accepted, but it should be rejected and confronted. Lewis rejects the idea of Islam based in one country. He also questions the notion of a homeland when it is occupied by American female soldiers, the ultimate humiliation.

He also rejects the importance of creating the 'institutions of civil society' through awareness, a programme adopted by Abu Yasir's movement. According to Lewis, civil society does not lead to any substantial change. He describes it as an escape from responsibility. He challenges Abu Yasir to give him examples of major historical changes that have resulted from the emergence of civil society in the Arab or Muslim world. Obviously Lewis, the supporter of *jihad*, thinks that military interventions in the form of uprisings and revolutions led to the emergence of civil society rather than the other way round.

The real educational programme, in his view, is that which emphasises the duty of *jihad*. He criticises Abu Yasir for preaching *jihad* but suspending its practice, thus arousing young people's emotions without offering an opportunity to 'practise what is preached'. The result, according to Lewis, is frustration. He mentions the position of Sheikh Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah: both allegedly advised Saudi youth against going to Afghanistan to perform *jihad* against the Soviet Union, while at the same time glorifying resistance to oppression and foreign domination.

On the decision to attack the United States, Lewis argues that Bin Laden took advice from 'majlis shura al-Qa'ida', the al-Qa'ida Shura Council. According to him, this resulted in America losing its *hayba*

(authority), a success which is not well understood by the likes of Abu Yasir. According to Lewis Abu Yasir belongs to an organisation whose hierarchical infrastructure prevents him from appreciating this kind of achievement. Lewis describes the Sahwi movement as bureaucratic, rigid and hierarchical, freezing abilities as it recruits its followers on the basis of loyalty and obedience. In contrast, al-Qa'ida does not isolate itself from society – rather, it 'melts in society', using it for support and cover. Lewis concludes that the Sahwi movement can easily be eliminated by governments because it has a transparent organisational infrastructure, whereas al-Qa'ida is a real transnational movement, difficult to defeat simply because it is a loose association.

In addition, al-Qa'ida, according to Lewis, rejects hierarchical models of organisation. It acts whereas other Islamists react, resorting to the effective surprise factor. It uses the enemies' material, their weapons and ammunition, to hit a 'clear' target. Moreover, it avoids entering into polemics with other Islamist groups. Finally, it consists of a group of *fida'iyyin*, similar to those described by Ibn Taymiyya in his letter to the king of Cyprus as the ones who 'kill kings in their beds'.

On the legitimacy of targeting civilians in the USA, Lewis does not distinguish between Americans and their government. He argues that in a democracy, the government represents the will of the people. Therefore, he concludes that American civilians brought their government to power. By hitting Americans, Lewis expects America to become 'confused', lose perspective and change its policy. He demands that the USA stops supporting Israel, withdraws its troops from Saudi Arabia and abandon the Arab *taghut*s (despots) such as the Saudi leaders to the will of their own people.

Lewis comments on the limited knowledge of official Saudi *'ulama* who mistakenly thought that they were targeted by American media when criticism of the Wahhabi movement followed the 11 September attacks. He concludes that the world does not care about such official *'ulama*. According to Lewis, only those who defy America become famous. He gives the example of Jihadi religious scholars such as Nasir al-Fahad and Humud al-Oqla whose *fatwa*s in support of *jihad* against the USA are now famous and reported in the international media. Lewis praises those *'ulama* for using modern communication technology (the internet) to communicate their messages, but he also sends a plea. He asks them to communicate their ideas to *al-shabab* (the young) in simple and accessible language. He laments that Saudi official religious scholars think that they live in the Meccan age, referring to the time when the Prophet Muhammad could not launch *jihad* from Mecca when he was under the rule of the blasphemous. In the Meccan age, there was no *jihad*.

From Buraydah to Manhattan is but one forum in which these two Saudi Salafis engage in a fierce debate about politics and religion. They both agree on a vision – that is, changing their country through action. Abu Yasir feels it necessary to adopt a peaceful preaching campaign to 'Islamise' society, which would eventually lead to Islamising government. According to many Islamists, an open battle with the Saudi government may have detrimental consequences. The fear of direct American intervention in Saudi Arabia to protect the oil fields necessitates a truce. Lewis, on the other hand, considers the Saudi government 'the enemy within', and totally under the thumb of the United States.

Lewis and Abu Yasir are products of the Islamist movement of the 1980s and 1990s. They draw on the same religious sources. However, the events of 11 September seem to have started a fierce battle among Saudi Salafis. This battle is fought both openly and clandestinely, in internet discussion and bulletin boards. The Sahwi camp, which has suspended the *jihad*, now has access to official media channels after almost a decade of censorship and imprisonment. Today outspoken figures in this movement are given space in official, Saudi-controlled print and satellite media. The government uses them, in addition to official *'ulama*, to discredit the Jihadis, who have gone underground.

Lewis and violence in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Salafi debate became extremely heated in 2003, which saw two major suicide bombings in Riyadh in May and November, targeting major residential compounds occupied by Westerners and other residents. These attacks, followed by one on a government security building in April 2004 and the killing of five Western workers in Yanbo and more than twenty people in Khobar in June, generated heated discussion on the internet, in which Lewis participated. The main focus of the debate was on whether such acts of violence constitute true and legitimate *jihad*.

Almost all Sahwi Islamists inside Saudi Arabia publicly condemned the violence and described it as an 'act of terror', carried out by what is often described as *al-firqa al-dhalla* (those who have gone astray) and as Kharijites; both terms invoke strong religious connotations leading to rejection and condemnation of the attackers. Among those who condemned the attacks was a small group of Sahwi activists (including Sheikhs Safar al-Hawali, Sulayman al-Duwaish and Muhsin al-Awajy), who offered to mediate between the government and activists known to have previously supported *jihad*, hoping that their young followers who had gone underground would give themselves up. They called upon the youth 'who have gone astray' to repent and come forward to face justice.

The government, however, openly rejected the proposal and continued to pursue a policy based on military confrontation with the Jihadis and their cells. It is difficult to confirm that any talks with the Jihadis did actually take place. Throughout 2003–4, the Saudi government publicly reiterated its position, and refused to negotiate with the Jihadis. However, in reality, it encouraged and welcomed the Sahwi mediation initiative. In the words of one Sahwi, the state cannot admit that it uses Sahwis to mediate with Jihadis, as this would destroy its credibility.[14]

The government used the violence of 2003–4 to project an image of the Jihadis as a group that targets society and innocent people, highlighting the fact that Muslims and Arabs were killed, especially in the November attack. When suicide bombers struck the Riyadh security building on 21 April 2004, only Saudis died. In the media battle between the government and the Jihadis, the government was able to discredit the Jihadis and expose 'their lie that they only target Westerners'. However, in April 2004, when violence struck in the Red Sea city of Yanbo and claimed the lives of five Western workers, Jihadis reasserted their early strategy of targeting Western interests and workers in Saudi Arabia. The government, under pressure because of the violence, apparently tried to appease the Jihadis by offering an amnesty period of one month (June–July 2004). A handful of suspects on the wanted list gave themselves up to Saudi embassies in Tehran and Damascus, while one or two local suspects responded to the king's offer. A key Jihadi figure, Sheikh Faris al-Shuwayl al-Zahrani, was captured on the Saudi–Yemeni border in July 2004 after refusing to give himself up to what he called the '*taghut* government'.

The obvious space for challenging both government discourse on Jihadis and that of the official and Sahwi *'ulama* was internet discussion boards. As expected, Lewis was ready to improvise, and was an active participant in this debate. In an electronic interview with *Sawt al-Jihad*, he explains and defends the Jihadi strategy in Saudi Arabia.[15] The interviewer asks Lewis whether he thinks that targeting foreigners' residential compounds might decrease the appeal of the Jihadis and turn society against them. Lewis responds that the 2003 bombings in Riyadh may dent their popularity for a short time, but that the attacks should 'be placed in the larger context of resisting Western and American domination'. He argues that Jihadis may have to resort to such strategies although it is psychologically costly and may lead to momentary decline in their popularity. According to Lewis, in the long term, Jihadis need to consider two aspects related to these attacks: first, how to prevent 'hypocrites' from achieving a media victory following violence; and second, how to stop those hiding behind a 'misguided' religious discourse from condemning Jihadis.

The interviewer asks Lewis to explain why Jihadis have not so far targeted members of the Saudi royal family – which, according to the interviewer, may avoid the problem of other innocent people being killed in future blasts. Although Lewis admits that he does not have a clear answer, he thinks that such a strategy would inevitably speed up the collapse of the Saudi regime. He argues that this is no doubt a military decision that is constantly discussed in Jihadi circles. However, he offers his explanation why such acts have not yet taken place. Jihadis, according to Lewis, may not yet be ready for the total collapse of the Saudi regime, which is a close ally of the United States. The continuity of the regime prevents the USA from attacking the country. The regime in its present configuration acts like a shield, protecting Jihadis from direct exposure to the United States which, according to Jihadis, would no doubt intervene in Saudi Arabia to protect the oil fields. Lewis thinks that limited violent attacks in Saudi Arabia would increase the pressure on the ruling family, without leading to the complete disintegration of the regime.

The violence that erupted in Saudi Arabia throughout 2003 and 2004 seems to have escalated with the occupation of Iraq and the increase in Iraqi resistance to it. While all Saudi Salafis endorsed the Iraqi resistance as legitimate defence against occupation, violence against Westerners and Western interests inside Saudi Arabia was a different and more complicated matter. As expected, official media, together with establishment *ʿulama* and Sahwis, openly condemned acts of violence inside Saudi Arabia. Lewis, however, offered a different interpretation, as indicated in his commentaries on the violent events of 2003–4.

Lewis and his enemies: the *jihad* obligation explained

In addition to the internal battle that is raging electronically among Saudi Salafis, Lewis engages in a different kind of encounter, which is primarily directed towards the West. In an article entitled 'Yes Blair: It Is a Historic War', Lewis summarises his views on the war in Iraq:

> Yes, you [Prime Minister Tony Blair] are right. It is a historic war and not a peripheral battle as your unwise American allies think. Look at the new weapons used by the *mujahidin* in Iraq. The weapon of kidnapping your men and women in Iraq. What happens in Falluja is a serious matter. It shows that Muslims are taking the initiative for the first time in modern history. Unlike what happened in Afghanistan in the 1980s, when *jihad* was manipulated for international political reasons, the situation in Falluja is a product of Jihadis taking the initiative and carrying out their own plan.[16]

Lewis compares two *jihad* experiences. The first took place in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s and resulted in the liberation of Afghanistan, the

humiliation of the Soviet Union and eventually its collapse. Unlike other Jihadis, Lewis is aware of the international context in which this *jihad* took place; for example, he refers to the 'manipulation of the United States and other Muslim governments' of this *jihad*. His interpretation of the Afghan *jihad* invokes notions of balance of power and the Cold War conflict. He alludes to the fact that Jihadis were 'used' in this conflict to carry out the strategies of a superpower. The second case is that of Falluja. For Lewis, the Iraqi resistance in Falluja is an example of an independent 'Muslim initiative', determining without 'outside patronage' the place and time of the battle with the Unites States.

Despite destruction and death in Falluja throughout April 2004, Lewis considers the *jihad* option to be a success. He sees the Iraqi resistance as a coordinated activity which has spread *thaqafat al-jihad* (a culture of *jihad*), 'implanting the psychology and prestige of resistance and the pride of killing the blasphemous'. Lewis refers to the unexpected resistance of Iraqis in what was commonly referred to as the 'Glorious Sunni Triangle'. His interpretation of this development in Iraq centres on the fact that the resistance was a product of popular consciousness without any effort from Bin Laden's al-Qa'ida. In his opinion, by invading Iraq, the United States facilitated the spread of the *jihad* culture without any effort by al-Qa'ida.

Lewis returns to Tony Blair's description of the war in Iraq as a 'historic battle that nobody in the West can afford to go wrong or fail'. According to Blair, failure in Iraq means the return of fanatics and terrorists. Lewis agrees that failure in Iraq has a high price for the West. It involves the 'loss of all Western domination in the Muslim world achieved over the last five centuries'.

In addition to this address to Tony Blair, Lewis claims to have corresponded with Reuven Paz, senior fellow at the Centre for Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) in Hertzylia, Israel.[17] It seems that on one occasion, Paz accused Lewis of having fallen into *junun al-'adhama* (grandiose madness), especially after 11 September. Lewis refutes this accusation and explains that Muslims 'had an ancient grand history, which was subdued by Western domination. The 11 September attack reasserted their supremacy.' Lewis argues that the strategy of al-Qa'ida is incomprehensible to Westerners or to Paz himself, whose political thought is derived from a combination of Judaeo-Christian roots and secular capitalist principles. In contrast, al-Qa'ida's programme is above all 'mashru Islami dini' (an Islamic project devoid of secular and capitalist underpinnings), according to Lewis. This 'Islamic project' aims to undermine the existing international world order.[18]

The invasion of Iraq presents itself as the background to Lewis's commentary on the international world order. He argues that although he

hated Saddam and his regime, he felt a kind of sadness over how his regime collapsed as a result of American intervention. He would have preferred al-Qa'ida men to have brought down Saddam. However, he recovered from this sadness as soon as the Iraqi resistance started inflicting heavy losses on American troops. According to Lewis, even before America expressed joy over the removal of Saddam, the resistance proved that US plans for the region would be thwarted.

Lewis introduces four prisms through which he interprets the occupation of Iraq, seen as yet another step towards thwarting American hegemony in the Arab world while increasing the credibility of the *jihad* option. First, Saddam's fall in this manner and speed facilitated the complete destruction of the secular Baʿthist ideology, thus removing one of the obstacles to the materialisation of the Islamist agenda. Second, the occupation privileged the culture of *jihad* as the option most suitable for dealing with the crisis of the Muslim world. Third, the occupation led to a trap in which the USA is the loser. The USA, according to Lewis, will lose whether it stays in Iraq or leaves. Fourth, the attack on New York was the key event that hastened the confrontation between the international world order, represented by the United States, and the Muslim world.

Lewis comes home to *bilad al-haramayn*

We have established that Lewis is an *umami* Islamist whose vision encompasses an Islamic world order which opposes and defies the current international world order, under US hegemony. His *jihad* is very much dependent on the notion of an Islamic *umma*, encompassing different races, nationalities and cultural groups. The unity of this *umma* is derived from faith rather than race. However, Lewis turns his attention to his homeland, the most sacred territory and the core of the Muslim world, the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, *bilad al-haramayn*. His homeland is central in the establishment of the Islamic world order, but unfortunately, according to Lewis, it has become, under the current Saudi leadership, a vehicle for Western hegemony. Lewis seems to blur the boundaries between the so-called national and transnational Islamists, a dichotomy that has become fashionable in several academic studies of the Islamist movement after 11 September. The first are often seen as moderate Islamists whereas the latter are considered representatives of the radical trend, held responsible for globalising *jihad* out of desperation and defeat.[19]

When Lewis 'returns' to *bilad al-haramayn*, he is transformed into a nationalist who invokes notions of sacred territory, historical responsibility and the glorious past. For Lewis *bilad al-haramayn* is not only Mecca and Madina, which are theoretically closed to non-Muslims, but the

whole Arabian Peninsula. As such, the land of Islam needs to be freed from acts of defilement, manifested in the actual physical presence of non-Muslims. This foreign presence encompasses not only US soldiers and military bases, but also non-Muslim workers, especially Western expatriates. According to Lewis, foreigners, obviously regarded as profane, violate the purity of this geographical entity. Here the boundaries of *bilad al-haramayn* are seen as having become porous, allowing in the process a greater defilement and molestation to take place not only on the periphery but also in the core of this sacred territory.

For Lewis *bilad al-haramayn*'s sacredness stems from the presence of the holy shrines in Mecca and Madina as well as the fact that the last Prophet, Muhammad, appeared in this land with a sacred mission, the message of Islam. Another element in this sacredness stems from the role played by the people of this land in spreading *da'wa* (the call), starting with the early companions of the prophet, the caliphs and later generations of *bilad al-haramayn*. In addressing the people of this land, Lewis uses the term *ahfad al sahaba*, the grandsons of the early companions of the Prophet.

He calls upon the 'grandsons of the companions of the Prophet to expel the infidels from *jazirat al-'arab*', the Arabian Peninsula following the prophetic tradition. *Jazirat al-'arab* is another central term for Lewis. It invokes 'Arab' possession of a territory, which the descriptive nomenclature *al-jazira al-'arabiyya* fails to capture. Furthermore, *jazirat al-'arab* conveys a different meaning from that implied by *bilad al-haramyn*. The first invokes the centrality of the Arab dimension of the *jihad* option and the historical responsibility of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula to take the lead in the struggle. When Lewis invokes *jazirat al-'arab*, there is no doubt that he is an Arab nationalist, thus exposing the tension between the universal Muslim community, the *umma*, and the particular, his own homeland. He resolves this tension by ascribing a central role to his own native land, fusing the local – his homeland – in the global project, the envisaged Islamic world order.

According to Lewis, the hegemony of the international world order is dependent on the survival of the Saudi regime in its present form, pejoratively referred to as *al-nidham al-Sululi*. This regime, he says, needs to be dismantled. Three conditions will contribute to its downfall.[20] First, the Islamic reform movement was the only voice that exposed the reality of the regime, its corruption and support of Western domination in the region. As such, this movement plays an important role in dismantling the web of lies upon which the regime bases its legitimacy. Second, internal disputes within the royal family will eventually lead to the regime's downfall. Third, regular violence like that in Riyadh in 2003 and 2004, demonstrates that

Bin Laden is preparing the ground for the collapse of the Saudi regime or a series of assassinations of key figures among the royal family.

The above factors would, according to Lewis, dismantle a regime that has 'served the West for the last seventy years', paving the way for their projects and supporting their interests. Once this essential obstacle is removed, the Islamic world order would be established. However, Lewis warns that a period of chaos may ensue in the short term. Chaos often accompanies drastic changes such as the one expected to shake the nation ('tahuz al-umma') after decades of submission, hypocrisy and evil. He also does not rule out the inevitability of *fitna* (dissent), which normally accompanies serious political and social changes. Lewis has an apocalyptic vision of the liminal period, which he describes as being chaotic and lawless. He forecasts a situation in which 'people will die of thirst, hunger and at the hands of thugs and criminals'. This is the high price that must be paid for the establishment of the Islamic world order, starting with the central core, *bilad al-haramayn*/*jazirat al-ʿarab*.

The ultimate defilement of *bilad al-haramayn*: 'when a hypocrite becomes ruler'

When the hypocrites come to thee, they say, 'We bear witness that thou art indeed the messenger of Allah.' Yea, Allah Knoweth that thou art indeed His Messenger, And Allah beareth witness that the Hypocrites are indeed liars.

They have made their oaths a screen [for their misdeeds]: thus they obstruct [men] from the Path of Allah: Truly evil are their deeds.

Quran, Sura 63, al-Munafiqun, verses 1 and 2

At the time of the Prophet, the boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims in Madinan society were well defined. The community consisted of two categories, those who declared their Islam and were part of the Muslim *umma*, and those who remained outside it by virtue of professing other faiths. The first category consisted of those who were true believers. They declared their faith, performed Islam's rituals and demonstrated their allegiance to the Prophet and the community. But the category 'Muslims' included an ambiguous and dangerous subgroup, the hypocrites, *al-munafiqun*, who declared their faith and performed the rituals but had no allegiance to the Prophet and the community. In fact, they secretly plotted to destroy Islam and defeat Muslims. According to the Muslim tradition, *al-munafiqun* are the enemy within. They have distinct characteristics, which may or may not be easily detectable by the rest of the community of Muslims. In general the hypocrites are people who openly declare their Islam, believe in its five pillars, and are incorporated in the

boundaries of the Muslim community. The earliest ones approached the Prophet, announcing their belief and acceptance of his mission. However, they used their 'insider' status, their closeness to the Prophet and their open display of piety to conceal their true selves and harm Muslims. As an enemy within, they are a 'fifth column', and serve the interests of the enemies of Islam.

The Prophet through divine revelation warned his community of the danger such groups pose for Muslims and Islam, hence Sura al-Munafiqun was revealed to draw attention to the destructive role of the hypocrites, who will always be a feature of Muslim society but who need to be exposed and expelled. During the Prophet's time, the secret of the hypocrites was exposed but God warned of their presence in the future and the responsibility of all Muslims to draw attention to their destructive influence.

One famous hypocrite in the pre-Islamic tradition was Abu Righal, who guided the army of the Abyssinian king Abraha towards the holy shrine in Mecca, the Kaaba, with the objective of destroying it. In the Islamic tradition, the Abyssinians were the rulers of Yemen and in the year of the Prophet's birth, about 570CE, we find them at the gates of Mecca threatening its precious Kaaba with destruction.[21] In the early Meccan Sura al-Fil (the elephant), the Abyssinian Christians under the viceroy Abraha Ashram led a big expedition against pagan Meccans, riding on elephants. The Meccans offered no defence, but a shower of stones, thrown by flocks of birds, destroyed Abraha's army.

In *Hina yusbih al-munafiq hakim* (When the Hypocrite becomes the Ruler), Lewis returns to the theme of hypocrites in the Islamic tradition as he recounts the famous story of another hypocrite, Abdullah ibn Sulul. Lewis argues that the most dangerous threat to early Muslims was not the known enemy – for example, Abu Jahl, whose *kufr* (blasphemy) was known and obvious. In fact, the real danger came from Abdullah ibn Sulul's 'hidden cancer that destroys the community from within'. Ibn Sulul, a Jew from Madina, declared his allegiance to the Prophet and composed poetry in his honour, but in the battle of Uhud (625), he withdrew one-third of the Muslim army, estimated at 300 men, which resulted in perplexity, confusion and the eventual defeat of the Muslims in this important military encounter with the pagan Meccans.[22] In this battle, the Meccans under the command of Abu Sufyan avenged their previous defeat in the battle of Badr. The Prophet was wounded, but Islam was not defeated, according to Lewis.[23]

Lewis asks, 'What would have happened to Muslim society had Abdullah ibn Sulul, the hypocrite, become ruler?' The Muslim tradition asserts that the presence of hypocrites within the Muslim community is not an unusual phenomenon. Nevertheless, when a *munafiq* becomes

ruler of the Muslim community, the consequences are detrimental. Lewis asks his audience to imagine a hypocrite ruling over not only Muslim lands but the holiest of all – *bilad al-haramayn*. In this exercise of imagination, he outlines the intrigues of a recent 'Abdullah ibn Sulul', a reference to Ibn Saud, the founder of the kingdom, and later his sons. He lists some of the hypocritical acts of past and present. While publicly declaring faith and belonging to the Muslim community, the contemporary hypocrite uses Muslims to establish his dynastic realm. Behind their backs, he enters into alliances with the British government (a reference to early Saudi relations with colonial Britain in the Gulf). He then respects British interests and restrains Muslims from performing *jihad*. After consolidating his realm, Ibn Sulul/Ibn Saud turns his attention to his supporters, and in one battle he eliminates them after establishing his rule. Furthermore, while continuing to profess faith, Ibn Sulul/Ibn Saud introduces a Western style-banking system, charging the forbidden interest. He also conspires against all Islamist movements and causes. Lewis mentions Saudi endorsement of a number of governments – for example, Algeria, Sudan, Yemen, Egypt and Chechnya – in support of suppressing the prospect of Islamists coming to power. However, Ibn Sulul/Ibn Saud does not dare to publicly declare his *kufr*, in spite of all his wealth and capabilities. According to Lewis, the hypocrite remains weak.

In this exposure of hypocrisy, Lewis weaves together past and present. His argument is anchored in Islamic discourse and tradition. The text is full of references to the Prophet's biography and the golden age of the companions of the Prophet. Although the past is the anchor, it seems that the present is the starting-point for invoking a distant and ancient tradition. The word Salafi is well anchored in the past as it explicitly conjures up a return to the past and an orientation towards earlier tradition. However, it is clear from Lewis's exposition that the present is of great concern. The return to the past is only one way of rectifying present calamities, disorder and deviation from the right path.

The sultan's *'ulama*: 'cursed by God and cursed by cursers'

The hypocrite does not act alone in Lewis's literary productions. He turns his attention to *'ulama al-sultan*, the team of official religious scholars headed by the Saudi grand mufti who invokes sacred texts to sanction the words and deeds of the hypocrite ruler.[24] The *'ulama* use their 'sacred religious knowledge' in approving the ruler's treacherous acts. For Lewis, the real *'ulama* should play a role in exposing hypocrisy rather than lending it an air of legitimacy. In his condemnation of such *'ulama*, there

is no room for pragmatism, expediency or realism. He does not accept any argument which may justify or explain the historical support of the official *ʿulama* for the hypocrite ruler but rather demonstrates how they suspend certain religious interpretations and judgements. One neglected responsibility is the duty to 'expel the *mushrik*, polytheist from the Arabian Peninsula', in the Prophetic tradition. Lewis invokes a comparison with the Shiʿi *ʿulama*, who, according to his understanding, strongly believe in the infallible imams, the descendants of the Prophet to whom they attach great deference and obedience. He argues that *ʿulama al-sultan* are worse than the Shiʿi *ʿulama* because they believe in the infallible hypocrite ruler. In his reference to the Shiʿi tradition, Lewis is 'ashamed of how far the Sunni *ʿulama* have gone in praising the rulers, invoking the concept *of tazkiyyat al-hakim* [praising the ruler]'. In his opinion, the *ʿulama* have distorted the reformist call of Sheikh Muhammad ibn abd al-Wahhab in the service of a ruler who happens to be a hypocrite. They have in fact 'domesticated' and 'hijacked' the reform movement to suit the political whims of the ruler, in the name of Ibn Abd al-Wahab.

Furthermore, Lewis condemns the *ʿulama* for their various *fatwa*s justifying the prosecution of Jihadis who 'kill the infidels in the Arabian Peninsula' and questions the interpretation that such infidels represent *ahl al-dhimma*, whose blood should not be spilled by Muslims. He clarifies his point of view by adding that US military presence in Arabia is an occupation and as such *jihad* is the only means to respond to such violation of the sanctity of *bilad al-haramayn*. The central question for Lewis is how the *ʿulama* can issue *fatwa*s justifying the killing of *ahl al-islam* and forbidding the killing of *ahl al-sulban* (people of the cross).

Lewis issues a call to the youth of the nation to abandon those *ʿulama* who practise *kitman* (concealing what is right as expressed in sacred texts) while revealing complete deference towards the hypocrite ruler. He urges them to point their fingers and say, 'Those are cursed by God and cursed by cursers', thus invoking a famous Quranic Sura that condemns those who practise *kitman*.

After saturating his text with religious references and Quranic verses, Lewis ventures into European history and warns against the 'historical alliance between European kings and the pope', which in his opinion had detrimental consequences for faith. He cites the French Revolution, which he interprets as a 'revolt against religion in all its manifestations, leading to rejecting religion all together and the consolidation of secular society in the West'. This interpretation of the French Revolution does overlook some substantial causal factors; however, it remains a valid reading of this historical event whose outcome is utterly condemned by Lewis. He is confident that 'the religion of God is protected, but the right path needs men to

render it visible'. At the end Lewis thanks God that neither papal authority (a reference to official Saudi *'ulama*) nor despotic kings are capable of concealing the right path of Allah. Lewis's confidence is derived from his faith in God, and in the courage of Bin Laden and Jihadis.

Lewis addresses the Saudi grand mufti, Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Shaykh, a grandson of the reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and shames him by reminding him of his descent from the 'great reformer'. According to Lewis, had the latter been alive, he would have decreed a flogging for the mufti as a punishment for supporting Al-Saud's policies. Lewis declares the Mufti *fasiq* (debauched), a ruling which he thinks Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would have used to describe his grandson. He reminds the mufti of the words of Ibn abd al-Wahhab, who described the *taghut* as the ones who have gone back on religion (*murtadd*) because they permit what God forbids and forbid what God permits. Lewis reminds his audience that Islam will not flourish until Muslims announce dissociation from those people and their blasphemy.

The role of the *'ulama* in sanctioning American hegemony in Saudi Arabia is yet another proof of the co-optation of religious scholars, according to Lewis. Here he returns to the Gulf War of 1990–1 when American soldiers, including women, 'defiled the land of the Two Holy Mosques'. The *'ulama* 'sanctioned this intrusion, thus replacing a *kafir*, the blasphemous Saddam Hussein, with another *kafir*, the Americans'.

Given Saudi Arabia's sanctity and wealth, Lewis laments how Islam degenerated at the hands of the rulers. In particular he resents how *'ahl al-sunna* [Sunni Muslims] have been reduced to insignificance in the world as a result of the *'ulama*'s role'. He argues that today Saudi *'ulama* are worse than those of the Shi'is and the Kharijites because they allow the killing of Jihadis and forbid the killing of Jews and Christians. According to Lewis, the Kharijites 'left the Muslim community claiming to go back to judgement by the holy book whereas the *'ulama* today order people to obey those who do not rule according to the book'. He questions whether the 'occupying American army' in Saudi Arabia can ever be granted the status of *ahl al-dhimma* (people of the book). Finally, he encourages the Muslim youth to protect those religious scholars who refuse to be drawn into the circle of apologetic *'ulama*, giving the example of Shaykh Humud al-Oqla and his followers.

Preparing for chaos: an Imam elected by an alternative council

In interpreting Bin Laden's plan for Saudi Arabia, Lewis anticipates a period of chaos, following the gradual or sudden collapse of the house of

Saud. In order to protect the community from a state of disintegration, he urges the faithful *'ulama*, who are concerned about the future of Islam and faith, to come together and form a clandestine council consisting of the real *'ulama* and reformers (*du'at al-islah*) in a secure location. This council is expected to occupy the vacuum resulting from the expected regime collapse.[25]

Lewis, the interpreter of Bin Laden's vision, expects the United States to occupy Saudi Arabia the moment it feels that its oil interests are threatened as a result of the collapse of the house of Saud. The USA will lose its local supporters, upon whom it has been relying for the perpetuation of its hegemony. At this juncture, Lewis argues that it will have no choice but to go for a direct occupation of the Arabian Peninsula. He also introduces another possibility that would prompt the USA to deploy its troops in Saudi Arabia: a second 'spectacular attack along the lines of 11 September'. Lewis expects the USA to respond by punishing the radicals inside Saudi Arabia. The next attack, according to Lewis, will be 'creative' and unexpected in the manner in which it will be carried out. As the USA prepares for the direct occupation of Saudi Arabia, Jihadis will have had plenty of time to organise themselves, having benefited from the US occupation of Iraq, which gave them the opportunity to operate in that territory. In those circumstances, the Jihadis will be in charge of the military situation and resistance while a new council of *'ulama* elects the rightful Imam, the leader of the Muslim community.

Lewis: between admiration and detraction

There is no doubt that Lewis Atiyat Allah has established himself as one of the internet's most popular Salafi writers, whose style, arguments and interpretations are meant to address a wider audience. He presents himself as a Muslim intellectual, conversant with Islam and its tradition but also aware of politics and international relations. At one level, Lewis is a Salafi who draws on the classical sources ranging from those of Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. At another level, he addresses history, Western intellectual heritage, international relations and the role of Islam in the modern world.

Lewis should not be understood as 'a detached observer' or a 'strategic analyst'. His discourse is a product of activism and a commitment to change the conditions of the Muslim *umma*. He remains an engaged Islamist intellectual. His Western enemies no doubt describe him as an apologist for terrorism and as someone who encourages, supports and endorses armed struggle in a global war without frontiers, specific targets or objectives and which he and his like have no chance of winning. Such

opponents would also describe him as a megalomaniac, an unrealistic dreamer who would like to plunge the world into his nightmare scenarios. He would also be considered a destroyer of world peace and order, driven by subliminal hatred towards an enemy that is far superior, more rational and advanced. In Western classifications of the post-11 September world, Lewis incites violence and encourages terrorism.

Some Arab and Muslim opponents see him as a misguided person who 'poisons' the minds of young men in pursuit of an unrealistic project at a critical moment. Like his Western opponents, these people see him as an irrational misfit whose words undermine their security, prosperity and coexistence with the Western other. Some Muslims may share his emotional response to the state of degradation and humiliation, and come to lament the golden age of Muslim civilisation. In fact, this shared emotional response is the key to Lewis's fame, which means that even his enemies feel the urge to respond to his writings. For many opponents, he remains an outcast, whose enthusiasm for the cause of Muslims is not fully appreciated. In fact, his words inflame the minds and hearts of young Muslims, a situation regarded by his opponents as counterproductive, and even destructive.

Given the accessibility of Lewis's discourse, it is not surprising that his participation in internet discussion boards is eagerly awaited by a wide audience, some of whom do not hesitate to reply immediately, either in praise or condemnation. It is worth mentioning that not all those who read Lewis's articles and respond to them accept his line of thought. In addition to lengthy formal responses, represented in the dialogue with Abu Yasir mentioned earlier in this chapter, his electronic contributions generate a heated debate between those who support him and eagerly await his articles, and those who strongly condemn them. Monitoring these responses indicates that not all his respondents are particularly well informed in the two fields that Lewis masters, the Islamic and Western traditions.

Supporters praise Lewis and invoke Quranic verses glorifying and celebrating his 'sacrifices', 'commitment' and 'courage'. Others praise him for his accessible language, the clarity of his thoughts and his convincing arguments. They also call upon God to protect him from the many enemies his boldness is bound to generate. For them, Lewis is a teacher and preacher.

Those who reject Lewis describe him in very disparaging terms. Some call him '*'ajuz* London', the old man of London, implying that he is one of the Saudi opposition figures who have taken refuge in London since the early 1990s. Others pejoratively call him 'the desktop Jihadi', a reference to his alleged lack of vitality and his incapacity to influence the course of events inside Saudi Arabia, or even beyond this one country. Some of

Lewis's attackers were his early 'comrades', other Sahwi Islamists who according to him 'failed to take their awakening to its logical conclusion as they suspended the *jihad* duty'. These people accuse Lewis of betraying the essence of the call, encouraging dissent and celebrating future lawlessness, leading the youth of the nation astray. Some trivial accusations name him as a foreign intelligence or Zionist agent, whose articles are meant to 'divide Muslims' and tarnish the image of Islam in the world.

More sophisticate deconstructions of Lewis's articles invoke the futility of the duty of *jihad* in the present circumstances, a line of argument similar to that invoked by Abu Yasir earlier in this chapter. One critic anchors his objections in strategic grounds, arguing that the loss of Afghanistan as a base was the consequence of an undisciplined struggle, targeting a powerful enemy without being able to defend one's own territory from inevitable retaliation. Such responses demonstrate that Lewis is wrong only in some strategic thinking, while his overall interpretation of the duty of *jihad* is correct.

In one electronic contribution, Lewis cites an exchange he had with Reuven Paz, senior fellow at the Centre for Global Research in International Affairs, entitled 'This is How al-Qa'ida Spoke: A Letter to Reuven Paz'. Lewis argues that Paz and the Sururi Sahwis share a common understanding of al-Qa'ida. They both condemn it as lacking a political programme. On one occasion Lewis cites Paz as having said:

> I wonder whether al-Qa'ida agrees with your analysis. I had in mind the image of Osama as he sits in one of his caves reading your correspondence with this Israeli Jewish scholar [Paz] . . . My brother in humanity, Lewis, I do respect your line of analysis and your will to continue the struggle but in your writings you confuse reality with imagination. [26]

A survey of the responses to Lewis shows that both his admirers and his detractors feel compelled to address his message, which cannot be published openly in Saudi Arabia since the mid-1990s, or globally since 11 September. He has therefore taken refuge in the internet, and his ideas will most probably travel long distances in cyberspace, thanks to electronic waves.

Lewis in his own eyes

Lewis reflects on his own contribution to the cause of *jihad*. In his opinion, his main achievement is the invention of a mocking nickname for the Saudi royal family. The name al-Sulul (a reference to the hypocrite Abdullah ibn Sulul) is a powerful symbol in Muslims' religious and historical imagination. Like all such symbols, which condense meaning,

the name al-Sulul powerfully evokes the 'hypocrisy' of the ruling family. Today the name is used by both Jihadis and a wide range of Islamist opponents of the Saudi regime.[27] It appears in Jihadi media clips and is repeated in international satellite television news channels when they cite Jihadi sources. According to Lewis, the name's importance will become even more revealing after the anticipated collapse of the Saudi regime, and will be associated with the royal family in a manner reminiscent of how the nicknames al-Kathab (the liar) and Abu Jahl (the father of ignorance) became an integral part of the identity of Musaylima and Amr ibn Hisham[28] respectively.

Second, Lewis admits to practising a kind of intellectual terrorism against Sahwi sheikhs by exposing their standpoint in his articles, especially in the period between 11 September and the beginning of violence in Saudi Arabia in 2003. According to Lewis, his articles influenced many young people who began to doubt the authenticity of the Sahwi sheikhs and their commitment to Muslim causes. However, he admits that after the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia in 2003, the Jihadis were under military and intellectual siege from the Sururi Sahwi Islamists. The government encouraged the latter to adopt an anti-Jihadi position, and even publicly defend the regime. The Sahwis had access to Saudi, Arab and international media as long as they were prepared to publicly condemn violence and attack the Jihadis.

Third, Lewis considers his articles a success in so far as they create a perception of the Jihadis that counters the negative images propagated by their enemies. According to him, he plays a role similar to that of Abdullah Azzam in the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviet Union. Lewis thinks that the modern language he uses to promote *jihad* is suitable for the current struggle against Americans.

Fourth, Lewis argues that his contributions give the *jihad* an intellectual and philosophical meaning which resonates not only in Saudi Arabia but worldwide. His rhetoric differs from that of the *'ulama* of *jihad*, whose style is judicial and may not be easily accessible to those with limited Islamic education. According to Lewis, his articles depict *jihad* as a social and civilisational duty, whereas most Jihadi literature talks of it as simply *harb 'ala al-kuffar*, a battle against the infidels with the objective of expelling them from the Arabian Peninsula. In his own self-assessment, Lewis moves Jihadi discourse to a different level of sophistication.

Evaluating Lewis: popularity against anonymity

Moving away from Lewis's subjective evaluation of his own achievement to an analytical assessment of his impact involves identifying three factors

behind his popularity: one related to Lewis as a writer; a second concerning conditions in Saudi Arabia in the post-11 September period; and a third dealing with the relationship between the USA and the Arab world, including Saudi Arabia. All three dimensions give a virtual and unknown writer like Lewis unusual fame, and followers among Saudi internet users as well as all Arabic speakers who surf the internet in search of answers to urgent questions that dominate their imagination at a critical historical and political moment. Lewis moved from being an unknown personality to a major player in a virtual forum where his articles force readers to respond, regardless of whether they agree with the message. His past and his various personal crises – for example, his conversion to liberalism and later return to Islamism – do not make him a straightforward popular Islamist writer, automatically predisposed to play the role he envisaged for himself as he entered middle age. His early personal tensions and contradictions may not have allowed him a direct entry into the world of Jihadis. One can argue that his personal narrative may not attest to a long association with this trend. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that his early Islamist upbringing and his later liberalism were essential preconditions for such a dramatic entry into the underground world of the Jihadis. One can also question whether this is the final destination for Lewis, or whether he will continue to evolve.

Lewis has become an internet Jihadi icon, despite the fact that he does not belong to the more established community of *ʿulama*, Sahwis or other formal groups. In fact, one can argue that he became so popular because he was not a member of the *ʿulama*, whose stance after 11 September changed dramatically to the surprise and shock of some of their followers. While official Saudi media boast about ex-Jihadis – *ʿulama*, activists and laymen[29] – who declare their *tawba* (repentance) on television screens and move away from Jihadi and *takfiri* positions towards a 'moderate' Islam, Lewis attests to an evolution in the opposite direction, towards the Jihadi camp. Lewis's repentance – that is, the confirmation of his allegiance to the Jihadis – does not, however, find its way to public media channels. His story and articles remain alive in an electronic medium.

Lewis's pre-eminence relates to four personal attributes, clearly demonstrated in his writings. He displays courage, self-confidence, hope and an understanding of the West. He is extremely courageous in his criticism of Sahwis who in the 1990s assumed nearly sacred status among the youth of Saudi Arabia, including Lewis himself. He dismantles the myth surrounding these personalities, using their own weapons and drawing on Salafi thought and proofs. His criticism remains strong and within the limits of religious argumentation. In several articles, he defies the 'culture of secrecy and silence' predominant in Saudi Arabia as a result of a

combination of political, religious and social factors. Political oppression – combined with powerful tribal and familial control mechanisms and religious interpretations which require total obedience to men in positions of authority and condemns 'individual' opinions believed to be threatening unity and encouraging dissent – are powerful taboos, which many prefer to remain intact. Lewis dismantles the culture of secrecy and silence cherished in Saudi Arabia, albeit under a pseudonym. Lewis's second asset is his self-confidence and belief in the strength of the Muslim community. He does not believe in self-flagellation. His articles reject defeatism and celebrate future victory. Such a style appeals to men who are tormented by what they perceive as *inhizamiyyat al-umma*, the umma's defeatist attitude. He also inspires hope and predicts future victories as inevitable for those who follow the right path. Finally, his early liberal ideas and his familiarity with Western literature put him in a privileged position regarding 'understanding the West'. He impresses his audience when he cites Lenin, Huntington and Fukuyama. Lewis appoints himself as *qadi*, judging the West and its achievement, rather than *muqalid* (follower), an imitator of Western ways.

In addition to his own attributes, Lewis's success is very much related to external factors pertaining to Saudi Arabia and Salafi schisms after 11 September. He is not a detached observer, but is immersed in his local surroundings. He has lived through several years of intense debate between various Islamists belonging to competing camps. Some, such as the Jihadis and the Sururis, are well known, but others remain clandestine and less exposed to media attention. Lewis's full understanding of these debates is reflected in his articles, most of which are responses to current affairs. His words explode at the right time and place. This connects him organically to the lives and debates of others around him. The most important debates for Saudi Islamists in the twenty-first century seem to be centred on the duty of *jihad*, the 'Islamic' credentials of the Saudi regime and how to deal with the USA. Lewis addresses these three concerns in his articles, boosting his popularity.

Lewis's popularity must also be related to the actual and perceived confrontation between the USA and the Arab and Muslim world, beginning with the question of Palestine and ending with the occupation of Iraq in 2003. In this atmosphere, internet users seem to be constantly searching for anyone who defies the USA, even if this defiance is anonymous. However, print and satellite media as well as internet discussion boards are saturated with anti-Americanism; Lewis must offer something that other writers lack. He speaks from a position of strength against a background of obvious and undisputed humiliation, weakness and defeat by American hegemony. American military strength is not only self-evident,

it is on display in many settings from Afghanistan to Iraq. However, Lewis is able to expose the 'weaknesses and bankruptcy' of the superpower in ways which are not so obvious to most readers, drawing on his personal encounters with American society. The image of a naïve American woman lured by Lewis is a powerful one. He intersperses his text with humorous anecdotes and stories of situations he himself encountered while travelling abroad to deconstruct the myth about a hegemonic America whose liberalism and capitalism are nowadays projected as the last phase in the history of humanity. He empowers and emboldens others, despite his virtual and anonymous status as an internet writer.

Searching for meaning: Lewis's message

Lewis's articles contain several global and local messages. His global message has two dimensions. First, *jihad* (both defensive and offensive, military and otherwise) is a central duty which cannot be suspended depending on the historical context in which Muslims find themselves. Second, its purpose is not simply to 'liberate' Muslims from foreign domination or 'expel infidels from the Arabian Peninsula' (both themes dominate popular Jihadi discourse) but to establish Islam as a hegemonic religion, power and civilisation (*mashru haymana hadariyya*).

At the local level, Lewis has several points to make. First, he exposes the Saudi religious establishment, which claims to be faithful to the Salafi call of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. He sends a clear message that their Salafiyya is corrupted as a result of co-optation by political authority. Second, he exposes the Sahwi Salafi discourse and shows how it has compromised itself by adopting a quietist position after 11 September. He rejects 'hierarchical Islamist organisations' which require total obedience from followers and suppress independent thinking. In such movements, obsession with loyalty, security and the safety of members tend to lead to compromise with those in positions of authority. Lewis is in favour of a *tayar* (current or trend), which is diffuse and difficult to suppress. He calls for a social movement rather than a party like the Islamist organisations. In this respect he is a populist rather than an elitist political activist. He gives the example of al-Qa'ida, which is in his opinion still strong 'horizontally' even after receiving a 'vertical' blow. It managed to inflict damage worldwide even after losing its base in Afghanistan.

Subjecting Lewis's writing to a careful reading exposes and deconstructs well-established dogma about Jihadis, often using a frame of reference which invokes notions of criminality, irrationality, ignorance, fanaticism, hatred and bigotry. Demonising the 'enemy' is a well-known strategy in the process of eliminating him. However, demonisation does

not result in 'understanding', which should not be interpreted as 'justifying' or 'accepting' the internal logic that underlies the 'enemy's' behaviour. Equally Lewis and other Jihadis cannot be understood if we continue to think in terms of medieval Islamic theology – for example, referring to such groups as Kharijites or *ghulat* (religious extremists). Such theology is constantly used by the Saudi religious establishment and leadership to denounce the current threat as a religious sin similar to that of the early rejectionists who disobeyed the caliph Ali bin Abi Talib. While comparisons are misleading from both a theological and historical point of view, this discourse enhances state propaganda, which aims to discredit Jihadis by labelling them Kharijites who promote dissent by disobeying the ruler. While there are no grounds for comparing the Saudi rulers with the Muslim caliph Ali, it seems that comparing the Jihadis with the Kharijites who rebelled against him is equally implausible religiously, politically and historically.

In official Saudi discourse, activists like Lewis are often accused of wanting to repeat the Taliban experience in Saudi Arabia. However, he operates in a world far removed from that of the Taliban and the caves of the Tora Bora mountains. Lewis is just one example of a generation of urban, well-educated Muslim men, whose experience of this world is marred by a deep feeling of humiliation as a result of a perceived injustice inflicted on the Muslim world by superpowers and a well-grounded commitment to action which it is hoped will reverse this injustice and regain pride. Lewis is a modern man, and does not aspire to create an archaic, Taliban-style Muslim state in Saudi Arabia. While embracing Western science and technology, he is no doubt socially conservative, and rejects Western values and morality. Part of his project is to restore Muslim values and authenticity, while mastering the latest scientific discoveries, including the internet. Like hundreds of Islamists before him, including famous ones such as Sayiyd Qutb, Lewis has a troubled relationship with the West in which admiration, rejection and envy freely intermingle. Furthermore, by virtue of his education, possible professional training and social outlook, he does not belong to the wretched of this earth. Lewis is a real bourgeois, a pious and engaged middle-class man.

Throughout his life journey – at least the one that is available to the public through his internet confessions – it seems that Lewis acquired all sorts of meanings, but also lost others. He laments the loss of myths and roots in a world where only the 'rootless' is celebrated, the loss of local identity where only those with multiple identities are successful, and the loss of precious faith where reason is dominant. His personal biography situates him in a global world. His message and the means of its transmission are also global. But Lewis craves for his local roots. He also longs for

the reinstatement of faith in this supposedly rational world. He cannot accept a world devoid of faith, God and his sovereignty. For Lewis man is a rational being and should act according to rational principles, but these actions must be guided and inspired by faith. They should emanate from the love and submission to God, and a commitment to spread his word, justice and law. He does not, however, call for an esoteric personal experience, a subjective salvation through a reinstatement of a degree of enchantment in a disenchanted world. Lewis is by no means a mystic or a Sufi in search of spells, magic and potions. Nor does he search for a psychological awakening, a retreat into or merger with the divine order. He is neither a Muslim puritan nor a mystic but is fully immersed in this world and its materialism, although he feels guided by divine power, and empowered by faith in a world where such empowerment is dismissed as emotional, irrational, misguided and even destructive.

In addition to searching for glorious roots, Lewis is committed to a constant search for a grand meta-narrative, a historical myth in which he is the central character and his faith is the motivating force. He cannot and will not accept a dismal state of exclusion from world history and humiliation by its forces. Rather than clinging to past myths about a glorious Islamic history, Lewis demands actions in this world which not only bring him back from the periphery but place him at the centre of the grand narrative about times and places. Simply put, Lewis aspires to change the world by action. His Islamism is very much a modern phenomenon, based on a strong belief in the ability to change the world. While Lewis is modern, he also reacts to the modernity that has become hegemonic not only in the Western world but also elsewhere, including his own homeland. Changing the world by action is what Lewis shares with Western Enlightenment thought.

In Western academic scholarship, real Islamist activists were studied, analysed and commented on throughout the second half of the twentieth century as part of the study of 'radical Islam', 'fundamentalism', 'Islamism' and, more recently, 'terrorism'. This became even more urgent after the collapse of Communism, when it seemed to several Western scholars that Islamism is the only remaining challenge to Western hegemony, liberal democracy and value system. Both in the West and in the Muslim world, there were those who liked to present current problems in terms of a polar opposition between the civilised West and the irrational, fanatical Muslim other.[30] This presented the West with an enemy, the 'irrational other' against whom it can define itself and draw its boundaries, while at the same time its image as a repository of reason and rationality began to be deconstructed by Western post-modern critiques. As Western rationality and modernity began to be questioned – and even

condemned – by post-modern critics, the defenders of Western modernity misguidedly considered Islam to be the ultimate threat, whereas in fact the onslaught on the rationality of the Enlightenment had actually started in the twentieth century in the West itself. The West's responses to the crumbling of its own narrative about its rationality encouraged a condemnation of the other, who is now believed to be the antithesis of Western Enlightenment. The bipolar discourse of the West gave the Muslim world the opportunity to define its failure and humiliation as a product of Western aggression. Muslims themselves, through their own discourse, preferred to see themselves as that other, whom the West has condemned. Dismissing these explanations proved to be difficult, especially when the reality of the interaction between the West and the Muslim world appeared to justify an even greater belief in the credibility of the explanation – that is, the divide between 'us' and the 'other'.

Social science paradigms developed and nurtured in the age of reason searched for explanations that would situate Lewis and his like in the realm of rationality. If Lewis was a megalomaniac, a psychopath or a serial killer, then only medical science could deal with his personal problems, while criminal justice carries the burden of punishing him and locking him away behind bars or in rehabilitation centres, depending on where he is caught. However, Lewis is a social phenomenon and a political liability for the West – and, some would argue, the Muslim world and beyond. Lewis is today defined as a world menace.

Lewis is text and context. Lewis is also religion and politics. As such, understanding the phenomenon became a priority across the globe. While the humanities took care of text and language,[31] social scientists searched for the context that in all their paradigms (functionalist, Marxist, structural functionalist, modernist and post-modernist) would eventually explain the phenomenon by delineating the causes producing it.[32] In these paradigms, Lewis and his predecessors cannot remain irrational outcasts. They have to be understood as rational actors, although their actions are seen as irrational. In several scholarly works, Islamists such as Lewis are described as irrational rational actors. Part of this obsession with understanding Islamists is an obvious desire to control them and prevent others from emerging. Control can take several guises, ranging from direct military options to more subtle ways of changing the contexts that are believed to produce people like Lewis. This logic suffers from an obvious confusion between context and cause.

Identifying the context is important. Yet the methodology and assumptions used to draw the contours of the context do not seem to provide the full story behind Lewis. In fact, they tend to distort the reality of Lewis as much as the translation of *jihad* as 'holy war' distorts and obliterates the

various meanings behind such a concept. Here anthropological knowledge cannot and should not confirm media and some scholarly and academic discourse which may describe Lewis as a criminal, ignorant, marginalised, alienated, peripheral Jihadi who cannot adjust to the onslaught of modernity or accept the hegemony of the West in almost all fields. Arguments about economic, social and political failures often list poverty, alienation, marginalisation, unemployment, a search for Islamic authenticity and pride; these either fail to identify the main causes or paint a distorted picture consisting of a web of causal factors. It is often believed that Jihadis emerge either from the neglected proletariat in the suburbs of big Western cities and the Muslim world or the excluded pious middle class, the dislocated and marginalised petite bourgeoisie of ancient and traditional Muslim cities, thereby holding economic deprivation and alienation responsible for producing the phenomenon. Some of the attempts at identifying the context and characteristics of Islamists are true reflections of milieu in which they grow. Yet causal relationships remain elusive.

Lewis, the Saudi Salafi, interprets the world using a dimension which includes an element often missing in social scientific Western paradigms, namely faith. With the exception of a few examples, these paradigms do not allow us to consider religion as an autonomous field and definitely have no room for religion to be considered as an end in itself. Furthermore, Western paradigms insist that religion and politics are two separate domains. In other cultural contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, the two are inseparable, at least in the minds of the majority of Saudis. If ever faith is acknowledged in Western paradigms, it is always reduced to a causal factor that may inspire a particular behaviour, orientation and dispossession while economic and material conditions are always held to be the ultimate causes. But faith is never considered an autonomous end in itself. Lewis cannot be understood without reinstating faith as an end in its own right rather than as a cause. Also, Lewis cannot be understood if we continue to consider religion and politics as two distinct fields of enquiry. At this juncture, it is important to reinstate that 'religious convictions – as are all convictions worth the name – are far too complex to be either reduced to an option in the market place of ideas or minimised as a refuge that provides emotional peace and comfort'.[33] Lewis may have sought solace in religion against a background of dislocation and confusion, but he saw in it a force that would enable him to understand the world and change it at the same time. He found in religion faith and will. As a Muslim intellectual, Lewis does not reject modernity. He reformulates it.

6 Searching for the unmediated word of God

> Remove the Wahhabis from the Arabian Peninsula
>
> al-Katib 5, anonymous Saudi internet author

Lewis Atiyat Allah is but one activist who aspires towards reformulating modernity according to his own principles. Other Saudis are equally concerned with the same questions that torment Lewis, but their preoccupation may differ in its focus and strategy. Yet they all have one common denominator: the search for the unmediated word of God. This search is at the heart of the Saudi debate in the twenty-first century.

Previous chapters demonstrated that official *ʿulama*, Sahwis and Jihadis are engaged in fierce intellectual battles over religious interpretation. None of these battles is likely to go as far as openly challenging the religious discourse of the ancestor, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, or the heritage of *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*. However, contesting this heritage – or at least the way it is practised, applied and interpreted by official scholars – is an ongoing intellectual preoccupation.

Traditional Saudi *ʿulama* regard themselves as the intellectual heirs of the reformer's heritage and as the only true Muslims. Both dissident Sahwis and Jihadis consider many contemporary official *ʿulama* to be latecomers who corrupted the initial original message of the reformer under the patronage of the Saudi regime. They both aspire to free religious interpretation from their monopoly. This position was particularly clear among those described previously as Salafi–Ikhwani and Jihadis. Yet not many activists openly scrutinise the interpretations of the ancestor. If they have minor reservations about the eighteenth-century message, they remain silent in the public sphere. It is assumed that the official public sphere is not yet ready for an open critical evaluation of the roots of Wahhabism. In public the majority considered the first Saudi–Wahhabi polity (1744–1818) as the exemplary monotheist state. Some extend this positive evaluation to cover the second state too (1824–91).[1] A small minority amongst them may have theological reservations on Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab granting the oath of allegiance not only

to one Saudi ruler but also to his descendants after him, according to the alleged pact between the reformer and the ruler of Deriyyah.[2]

Against silence in the public sphere, many Saudis are concerned with Wahhabi violence, both symbolic and real, against their own Muslim society, commonly referred to as *ahl al-qibla* (the people who face Mecca for prayer), a term that includes all Muslims regardless of sect or school of jurisprudence. In alternative public spheres such as opposition publications abroad and anonymous internet discussion forums, Saudis openly denounce the demonisation of their ancestors and religious traditions. Two groups are vocal in expressing strong rejection of the Wahhabi historical and theological narrative: the Shiʿi s of the Eastern Province and some of the Hijazis of the Western region.[3]

Hijazis resist Saudi–Wahhabi hegemony through revival of Hijazi identity and heritage. In this context, the restoration of a building dating back to the Ottoman period becomes an act of defiance that the regime watches very carefully. Similarly, the highlighting of the destruction of archaeological sites such as the burial places of the Prophet and his companions becomes a political act challenging contemporary religio-political domination.[4] The revival of Sufi *dhikr* (devotional recitation) circles is also an act of defiance, which the government did not spare time to suppress.[5] Since 11 September the government has turned a blind eye to such things. It can always rely on a number of official scholars who denounce Hijazis for 'worshipping graves', thus discrediting their religious tradition by associating it with *shirk* (associationist practices).

In the case of the Shiʿis, refuting Wahhabi religious discourse that denounces them as *rafidha* (rejectionists) and polytheists is the beginning of a process of regaining recognition on the religio-political map of Saudi Arabia.[6] This is disguised as a quest to be included as 'partners in the nation', the title of a Shiʿi petition submitted to the king in 2003.[7] Both Shiʿis and Hijazis search not only for recognition and partnership but for greater local autonomy as well. In a previous publication I highlighted various timid attempts by the two groups to challenge Saudi narratives.[8] It remains to be seen whether such cultural and religious activism will be translated into serious political demands calling for 'separation' from the Saudi–Wahhabi polity. So far both groups have emphasised their allegiance to the regime by playing on the theme of *wataniyya* (citizenship), a new slogan that was raised after 11 September, and the increase in Jihadi violence. The government was extremely responsive. It allocated a few places for Shiʿis and Sufi scholars in the National Dialogue Forum. When a known Sufi Hijazi scholar died in 2004, Crown Prince Abdullah visited the family and offered his condolences.

What concerns me in this chapter is how contesting the Saudi–Wahhabi heritage is today taking place from within the rank and file of people who are part of the intellectual tradition that I identified as Wahhabi–Salafi. This chapter documents how Saudi Salafis search for unmediated knowledge about religion, history and politics.

The pillars of Saudi authoritarianism

History, theology and politics are the pillars of authoritarian rule in Saudi Arabia, and enforced a tradition whereby political acquiescence is worship. While authoritarianism of course relies on the exercise of a certain degree of direct physical coercion and oil revenues, it is much more dependent on sacred narratives about the past and present. Such narratives create consent without the need to continuously exert direct repression or regularly distribute handouts. In the twenty-first century, this consent is gradually giving way to contestation.

Today Saudis have direct access to religious knowledge and alternative sources of interpretation. More people read, rather than recite, the Quran. As such they are less dependent on traditional transmission of religious knowledge, although the official religious narrative is reiterated in every public platform, including audio-visual and print media, universities and mosques. Equally, more people are aware of the multiple histories of Saudi Arabia that are available in bookshops in London, Paris, Washington, Beirut, Cairo, Istanbul and Bahrain. Many Saudis denounce the monopoly of official Wahhabi *ʿulama* over religious interpretation and their demonisation of other Muslims who do not share their interpretations. With increased exposure to other discourses and mass education, mainstream Saudi intellectuals and scholars are involved in a revisionist trend whose main objective is to deconstruct this monopoly and search for the unmediated word of God, the true and authentic Salafiyya that is not corrupted by *ʿulama* close to power. Mass education has made official *ʿulama* one category among several others. Searching for the unmediated word of God means dismantling religious monopolies and intellectual cartels. For many Saudi Salafis, the project represents a return to the 'true' and 'real' Salafiyya, a Salafiyya that is outside the iron fist of previous and contemporary religious scholars. It is a return to the book, the tradition of the Prophet and a narrowly defined circle of very early pious ancestors (immediate contemporaries of the Prophet, usually referred to as *al-muhajirun* (the Muslims who migrated from Mecca with the Prophet) and *al-ansar* (Madinan supporters of the early Muslim immigrants). This definition of *al-salaf* immediately excludes latter-day *ʿulama* and interpreters of the tradition. Many Saudis argue that this was the

original project of the reform movement, the Wahhabiyya itself. Today, the quest for the unmediated word of God is also a search for unmediated historical, theological and political interpretations.

Saudis are beginning to deconstruct the three pillars of authoritarianism. A glimpse of this deconstruction is found in the writings and positions of many Saudi intellectuals, *'ulama* and others who are not yet part of an organised group or movement. Their uncoordinated efforts at articulating a critical view of history, theology and politics appeared in many unofficial forums, publications and debating circles. Those who are openly involved in presenting the clearest and most articulate revision of the pillars of authoritarianism are subjected to state repression, including suspension from their professions and imprisonment. Others prefer to remain anonymous, writing in internet discussion boards and forums.[9]

Liberating history from Wahhabi domination

In Saudi Arabia the past is a theological rather than a historical narrative. Its contours are mediated by an early generation of Wahhabi *'ulama* who were both religious scholars and chroniclers. While emerging Arab nation-states replaced their theological history with modern ideological historical narratives, Saudi Arabia continued to propagate religious narratives about the past.[10] As mentioned in the first chapter, the theological narrative about the past emphasises the blasphemy of the population of Arabia prior to the reform movement, in an attempt to justify the wars waged by the Saudi Wahhabi forces since the eighteenth century. War is justified only if Muslims fought were blasphemous. Only then does their slaughter fall within the parameter of legitimate *jihad* in Wahhabi interpretations because it is presented as a struggle against the *mushrikun* (associationists).

The Saudi–Wahhabi historical narrative is today contested. A Saudi Islamist who prefers to remain anonymous is engaged in rewriting Saudi history. During the context of several long conversations, he argued that Wahhabis were the contemporary Kharijites of the Muslim world. My informant was highly articulate and knowledgeable about both the past and the present. In addition to his professional training, he is well versed in religious matters. He endorsed calls for re-establishing a glorious Muslim caliphate. According to him, it was the Wahhabis who contributed to the downfall of this caliphate in modern times – in accordance with imperial British policy. He drew my attention to an internet pamphlet–book entitled *Who are the Kharijites?* In this book, the author, Abdullah al-Qahtani (a pseudonym), dedicates a chapter to the refutation of Wahhabi claims about the blasphemous and associationist nature of

other Sunni Muslims, not only in Saudi Arabia but also in the Muslim world.[11] A compilation of theological and historical sources, the book has become a reference document for those Saudi Islamists who object to Wahhabi domination of the Salafi religious map. After all, not all Islamists in Saudi Arabia are Wahhabis.[12]

Ironically, the author relies on Wahhabi chronicles that documented the expansion of the movement since the eighteenth century.[13] However, while these chronicles glorify this expansion and consider it a *jihad* against the blasphemous and associationists of Arabia, al-Qahtani deconstructs this thesis. He hopes to demonstrate that Wahhabis were not only historical enemies of Muslims but also agents of foreign domination, mainly the British. According to al-Qahtani, Wahhabis served British interests twice. In the eighteenth century they undermined the unity of Muslims and threatened the Ottoman Empire. In the twentieth century, they ousted the Sharif of the Hijaz after the latter objected to British plans. Al-Qahtani claims that the Wahhabis were a British creation intended to undermine the Ottoman Empire, divide Muslims and weaken their unity.

Both al-Qahtani and my informant cite a book that circulated on the internet. The book is entitled *Confessions of a British Spy*, and is also known as *Memoirs of Mr Hempher, The British Spy of the Middle East*.[14] It is claimed that it was written by a man called Hempher, a British agent who allegedly met Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in Basra and convinced him to work towards dismantling the Ottoman Empire. After meeting Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Hempher wrote, 'I was happy because I was sure that this ignorant and morally depraved man was going to establish a new sect, which in turn would demolish Islam from within, and that I was the composer of the heretical tenets of this new sect.'[15] After 2001, Hempher's book became very popular among Saudi dissidents who denounced Wahhabiyya and Saudi hegemony; references to it flooded Saudi internet discussion boards. The book is also endorsed by several dissident Sunni websites. The book, however, is a recent creation that cannot possibly reflect accurate history. It is a constructed narrative that has been revived by Wahhabiyya's opponents.

In al-Qahtani's narrative, Wahhabis are portrayed as friends of infidels and enemies of Muslims. Such depictions resonate with present concerns. Al-Qahtani invokes the past in order to explain current Saudi alliance with the West, mainly the USA. His story about Hempher substantiates his accusations.

According to al-Qahtani, Wahhabi fanaticism towards other Muslims served only the interests of the enemies of Islam. The past is invoked here to explain the present. An alleged relationship between Wahhabis and a

British spy in the eighteenth century is used as a historical precedent that set the scene for later conspiracies against Muslims in fulfilment of imperial intrigues. Several conclusions are often drawn from such references. One may argue that if Wahhabis were responsible for 11 September, then their actions contributed to demonising Muslims and Islam. The War on Terror, interpreted as a war on Muslims, would not have been launched had Wahhabis not provoked it. Other conclusions are equally possible. Wahhabis could not have been involved in the events of 11 September because throughout their history, starting with the overtures of Mr Hempher, they were friends of the infidels. Those who endorse this view argue that Osama Bin Laden could not possibly be described as a Wahhabi.

Today the past as inscribed in the Wahhabi tradition and taught in Saudi history textbooks is subjected to reinterpretation by a wide circle of Saudis. These interpreters may or may not include well-known historians, but no doubt some of them are searching for an unmediated narrative that suits their own ideological and political orientations. Revising the past means revisiting the legitimacy of the so-called 'state of monotheism'. While Hijazis, with the exception of a small minority, and the majority of Shi'is were historically opponents of Wahhabiyya and Saudi domination, today the circle is wider than that. It includes those who were brought up on its teachings but for various reasons began to challenge its historical–theological narratives. However, those who challenge these narratives face repression. It seems that Wahhabis have succeeded in enforcing the myth that without the Saudi royal family Islam is undermined, and that without the Al-Saud, Arabia would have continued to be the land of pagans and associationists. To be a good Muslim one needs to believe in Al-Saud. Revisiting the past is an attempt to prove that the Saudi–Wahhabi alliance was responsible for chaos and discord rather than unity among Muslims.

While Wahhabi expansion in Arabia is always described in Saudi narratives as conquest in pursuit of spreading monotheism among a nearly pagan society, al-Qahtani paints a horrific picture of Saudi–Wahhabi atrocities against other Muslims, both inside and outside Arabia, committed in the name of God and *jihad*. His examples start with the eighteenth century and continue to the present day. He mentions the people of Taif, a mountainous summer resort that fell into the hands of the Saudi–Wahhabi forces during the early conquest of the Hijaz in the nineteenth century and later in the twentieth century. He claims that Taif was attacked 'to liberate it from blasphemy, according to Wahhabi legends. They killed men and women, looted the city and its libraries and mosques. They killed Abdullah al-Zawawi, the Shafi mufti, Sheikh Abdullah Abu al-Khayr,

Qadi of Mecca, and Sheikh Jafar al-Shaybi.' In the twentieth century, Wahhabis fought Sharif Husayn who 'refused British orders to give Palestine to the Jews. The Wahhabis, under the leadership of Khalid ibn Loay, Faysal al-Duwaysh and Sultan ibn Bjad, attacked and sacked the Hijaz to frighten the sedentary and nomadic population.'[16]

The author reminds his readers that Wahhabis looted the holiest of all cities, Mecca. He writes, 'They never showed leniency. They left Meccans hungry. Meccans sold the jewels of their women to buy food. They starved; some ate donkeys and dead animals. The price of dog meat went up. How could they fight in Mecca when the Prophet himself prohibited violence in the sanctuary?'[17] Al-Qahtani not only highlights the plight of Hijazis, he defends the Najdi population of Arabia, which was subjected to similar atrocities and injustices. He shows that Wahhabis demonised other Sunnis and rejected their interpretations in order to justify their expansionist wars in Arabia. According to the author, Wahhabis killed Muslims in mosques after Friday prayers. He cites evidence of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself who described the ruler of Uyaynah, Othman ibn Muamar, as 'a blasphemous associationist. Muslims vowed to kill him after Friday prayer. He was killed in Rajab 1163AH.'[18] Al-Qahtani argues that an apostate should not be treacherously assassinated. Instead, he should be asked to repent. He concludes that Wahhabis terrorised the population in pursuit of booty rather than monotheism.

Al-Qahtani moves from history to geography when he challenges the Wahhabi 'map of blasphemy'. In Wahhabi narratives, after the conquest of Najd towards the end of the eighteenth century, the land beyond it became the land of blasphemy where religious innovations reigned. As mentioned in the first chapter, Wahhabis called upon Muslims to abandon these blasphemous regions and migrate to the land of Islam – the area under Saudi–Wahhabi domination. Invoking the Prophetic tradition which considered Najd as the land where sins will appear, al-Qahtani's historical narrative becomes theological as he quotes the Prophet to prove that the Wahhabi homeland was described as the land of earthquakes and discord, 'hunak al-zalazil wa al-fitan wa biha yatluʾ qarn al-shaytan'. According to al-Qahtani, some Wahhabi scholars argued that in this Hadith the Prophet referred to Najd al-Iraq, the elevated land of Iraq, rather than Najd of Arabia. Using several quotations, al-Qahtani asserts that the Prophet meant the geographical area where false Prophets and apostates appeared immediately after the death of Prophet Muhammad: Najd of Arabia. In modern times, it was the homeland of the Wahhabis. Najd, like Wahhabi history, is today a contested region. Wahhabis consider it the homeland of the monotheists, *aimat al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*; their opponents see it as the land of past and present apostates. The latter recall the tradition of the

false prophets, for example Musaylima al-Kadhab, to establish historical continuity.[19] The theological history propagated in Wahhabi religio-political discourse generates equally implausible counter-narratives. In the eyes of opponents of Wahhabiyya, Najd becomes the land of blasphemy par excellence. What evidence is better than the words of the Prophet? The official sanctification and mystification of Wahhabiyya leads to unreasonable demonisation of its homeland and people.

Internet discussion forums are today the battleground between supporters of Wahhabi interpretations of the past and their opponents. Al-Katib 5 contributes to the debate about history and Wahhabiyya. Like al-Qahtani, he does not reveal his real identity. He praises the intellectual abilities of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, but does not shy away from criticising some of his views. He denies that the reformer renewed faith, because 'faith does not get old'. He contextualises the reform movement by discussing the social and economic conditions that prevailed in Arabia at the time. He argues that Arabia was backward, illiterate and poor. Consequently, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab followed strict and radical interpretations of the Hanbali *fiqh* to remain on the safe side in this specific social context. He should, however, have indicated to his followers that his approach was suitable for that time only and should not be taken as a standard path to be followed after him. Al-Katib 5 laments the evolution of the relationship between the Saudi royal family, whom Ibn Abd al-Wahhab 'installed as the political authority' and the *'ulama*, the guardians of the *shari'a*. The latter have become a 'media front' (*jabha ilamiyya*), to enforce the legitimacy of the regime. The *'ulama* have been reduced to the role of poets who follow and praise the leadership. Al-Katib 5 offers his reflections on the contemporary state:

> When Abdulaziz al-Saud, the legendary leader, returned to Riyadh to establish a 'Kingdom without Borders' he was assisted by the Ikhwan, who were courageous and loyal men, but they were also simple. They had no thinkers and *'ulama* amongst them. We hear secular writers describing the Ikhwan as thugs and robbers to justify their suppression after the unification of Arabia. Thugs are usually united by a thug. Does this mean that King Ibn Saud was one of those thugs? The Ikhwan were faithful to the principles of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab but they confused the general principles with the minor principles.[20]

In another article, al-Katib 5 starts with a provocative title, 'Remove Wahhabis from the Arabian Peninsula', thus invoking the Prophetic Hadith calling upon Muslims to remove infidels from Arabia, referred to earlier in this book. He explains:

> Wahhabiyya became dormant until after the nationalist and revolutionary trends of Nasir swept the Arab world. Wahhabiyya re-emerged with the intention of

widening its influence. It aimed to Islamise society but in fact its real objective was to increase its influence in the political field. The Saudi regime sanctioned Wahhabiyya hoping that it will serve its own interests . . . Wahhabis are used to repress those who do not agree with them. They discredit people by labelling them *kafir*s or secularists. They claim to represent Saudi society but they do not. Wahhabi *fatwa*s never condemn the state; they never object openly to usury and corruption. They never call for freedom, justice, and equality. Wahhabiyya sanctified individuals and families like Sheikhs Ibn Baz and Ibn Uthaymin. Ibn Baz allows Muslims to seek assistance from infidels to fight a Muslim state while Ibn Uthaymin forbids women to wear jeans because that is regarded as imitating the corrupt infidel West. How could Wahhabis continue to propagate contradictions? When Wahhabis clash with the regime, they quickly abandon their principles in favour of acquiescence.[21]

Al-Katib 5 exposes how the marriage between Wahhabiyya and politics was detrimental because it led to the first losing its credibility. He invokes the Afghan *jihad* as an example of how Wahhabiyya mobilised Saudi youth to serve American interests. They

advised the youth to travel to Afghanistan where they were promised to meet the sheikhs of *jihad*, Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, who were both righteous men. The Saudi government was mistaken when it antagonised Bin Laden. Wahhabis changed their mind after the eruption of violence in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden, Azzam and Qutb are now all considered terrorists. The sheikhs of Wahhabiyya present themselves as patient preachers. In fact they preach only to increase their wealth. Wahhabis repent and ask for forgiveness when faced with the sword of Al-Saud. This is what happened to the Wahhabi Jihadi Sheikhs when they appeared on television.[22]

Al-Katib 5 refers to the crisis of Wahhabiyya during the invasion of Iraq in April 2003. He reminds his readers that the Saudi government was not in a position to support or criticise the invasion. Wahhabis preferred to preach that

the Americans were in Iraq to remove Saddam the blasphemous. Later they preached that there was no flag under which *jihad* can be launched against American occupiers. They considered the Iraqi government brought about by American occupation as *wali al-amr*, who must be obeyed. They considered resisting foreign occupation in Iraq as *khuruj ʿala wali al-amr* [rebellion against the ruler].[23]

The crisis of Wahhabiyya is but an aspect of a general crisis experienced by the contemporary state, according to al-Katib 5. His evaluation of the 1932 Saudi state highlights the 'reasons for its imminent downfall'. He lists several factors: the estrangement of the royal leadership from its social base, its subservience to the USA, its inability to improve social and economic conditions, its corruption and its injustice. He criticises the nepotism that is practised in ministries run by princes. He argues that

'princes threaten the unity of the country because they rule in the provinces as if these provinces are their personal property. Each local governor operates according to his own whims.' He cites the governor of Asir, Prince Khalid al-Faysal, who he says has turned the region into a secular emirate where dancing and singing dominate the cultural scene. 'At any turbulent moment in the future, the governor will be able to declare Asir an independent state. The Saudi royal family is digging its own grave. It shuts the door between itself and the people.'[24] Al-Katib 5's assessment of the future of the country under Saudi rule is dark, yet he claims that his allegiance, love and respect for the royal family drives him to issue this bleak evaluation of the situation.

Responses to al-Katib 5's articles vary. Some readers accuse him of causing discord and encouraging chaos. Others call him a secular agitator. More reasonable responses try to explain that he confuses Wahhabi teachings with practice, and should not blame the mistakes of contemporary Wahhabis on the original sources. His articles remain very popular, both among those who agree and those who disagree with his reasoning.

Many Saudis search for alternative reflections on the past in order to understand an uncertain present and future. This search is also a quest for unmediated knowledge. While Saudis deconstruct the Wahhabi theological narrative about history and geography, it remains to be seen whether they offer a plausible alternative narrative. Clear and convincing alternative narratives often emerge in contexts where there is genuine freedom of expression. Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century is still far from this. Resorting to the anonymous internet discussion boards is only the beginning of the journey towards creating the right context. We will now turn our attention to those who deconstruct Wahhabi theology itself.

Liberating theology from Wahhabi domination

A second feature of the Saudi revisionist trend is a preoccupation with theological arguments. Some religious scholars aim to free the religious field from the control of one single interpretation and challenge early Wahhabi theological positions, especially those related to the alleged blasphemy of other Muslims, which Wahhabi scholars took to extremes. This stance is represented by the work of a young sheikh, Hasan al-Maliki. While al-Maliki's ideas question eighteenth-century theological positions, they are also relevant to the contemporary context. His work is not simply about how Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab misjudged the Islam of his contemporaries when he branded them as polytheists and innovators; nor is it about how later disciples have corrupted his original message. Al-Maliki's work is concerned with contemporary Saudi Arabia,

a place where those who claim a profound adherence to the unmediated word of God are blind followers of a previous generation of *'ulama* that has assumed sanctity. Their knowledge is mediated by the words of past and present *'ulama*. Al-Maliki endeavours to 'expose the radicals among the Hanbalis amongst us, a project which should not be portrayed as an attack on Saudi Arabia, as often mistakenly interpreted by radicals'.[25]

In a book entitled *A Preacher Not a Prophet*, published outside Saudi Arabia, Sheikh al-Maliki courageously violates a well-established and revered taboo – the sanctity of the founder of the Wahhabi movement. Al-Maliki questions this sanctity by invoking both Hanbali sources and the legacy of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself. Al-Maliki's book is a revisionist reading of one of the most important books written by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Kashf al-shubuhat* (The Unveiling of Doubt). Al-Maliki has two objectives. First, he traces how latter-day Wahhabis departed from the main themes that were represented in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message. Second, and more importantly, he challenges the theological judgements and exposes the errors of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself.

The author reminds his readers of the reformer's strong rejection of great deference granted to interpreters of religion and his emphasis on the importance of going back to the text as the primary source. Al-Maliki considers the Wahhabi movement a revolution against the mystification of *al-awliya* (pious men). He asks, how could contemporary Saudi *'ulama* grant the reformer a status that equates him with prophets when he himself rejected such sanctity being granted to preachers and interpreters of religion? His understanding of Wahhabiyya centres on how it emerged as a movement that denounced excessive deference to interpreters of religion, yet contemporary Wahhabis showed nothing but excessive adoration of the early Wahhabi scholars. Contemporary Wahhabi *'ulama*, according to al-Maliki, practise *ghulu* (radicalism) in defending their theological ancestor. He argues that had the reformer been alive, he would have denounced this radicalism. He proposes several steps to free the religious field from a radicalism that is centred on sanctifying the founder of the movement. First, an awareness that religious interpretation is a product of human effort helps to desanctify early scholars and allows students of religion to reconsider their postulations without feeling that religion itself is threatened. Put differently, questioning early interpretations and dogma does not mean questioning religion itself. Second, an assertion that 'among human beings we only follow the Prophet Muhammad' is enough to dispel the sanctity of later interpreters.[26]

As he endeavours to challenge contemporary radicalism, al-Maliki defines the 'real' Salafiyya. In his opinion, 'we must not consider the

reformer an infallible prophet. We must subject his writings to *shariʿa* rule and evidence. We must not make him above *shariʿa*. We must follow his words that comply with *shariʿa* and reject that which does not. We must go back to *shariʿa* evidence rather than men's words.'[27] Al-Maliki explains that in Saudi Arabia today there are two brands of Salafiyya, a corrupted tradition based on lies and injustices and another tradition close to the book and Sunna, propagated by people who subject the words of men to those two sources.[28] He articulates a profound quest for the unmediated word of God. He is concerned that today in Saudi Arabia, radicals preach against radicalism ('ghulat yanhawn an al-ghulu'). He asks how contemporary scholars can denounce Jihadis, who resort to the texts of early Wahhabi scholars that they themselves sanctify. He identifies the inherent problems in Wahhabi theology, which depends heavily on genealogies of knowledge. He proposes to revisit and, possibly, question the chain of transmission. This questioning, in his opinion, should not lead to questioning faith or creed. Al-Maliki proposes dissociating the sanctity of religion from the words of men. While religion is a revealed sacred tradition, knowledge about it is not. This position echoes similar arguments in the Muslim world that highlight the distinction.[29]

Al-Maliki's revisionist project is primarily concerned with the problem of *takfir* (excommunication). As Wahhabis insisted that monotheism should be exhibited in the heart, demonstrated in words and enacted in behaviour, they widened the grounds upon which a Muslim can be excommunicated. Al-Maliki questions whether Muslims can be judged blasphemous if their actions violate the principle of monotheism because they are simply ignorant. He refutes the evidence that justified claims that Muslims who may have incorporated in their rituals certain practices, such as supplication to pious men or visiting tombs, are blasphemous or polytheists, a theological position that distinguished Wahhabi interpretations from other Sunni schools. He strongly rejects Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's claim that such blasphemous Muslims are more dangerous than the *kafir*s of Quraysh in the age of ignorance. He argues that Wahhabis painted a rosy picture of Qurayshi *kafir*s, who in fact denied the afterlife, practised infanticide, allowed usury and deliberately destroyed human life, and questions whether such people can really be considered better than Muslims who utter the declaration of faith, *al-shahada*. Al-Maliki claims that the reformer was so generous towards the *kafir*s in order to justify his denunciation of Muslims who did not share his interpretations. He concludes that Wahhabis share with the early Kharijites their excommunication of Muslims who engage in *maʿasi* (minor sins), while at the same time denouncing these Kharijites. Sheikh al-Maliki proposes starting a process whereby contemporary *ʿulama* do not shy away from identifying

and correcting Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's errors. Self-criticism is the first step towards dealing with religious radicalism.[30]

Al-Maliki criticises the early Wahhabi position which accused whole regions of blasphemy if only a small minority exhibited it. He attributes this to the fact that from early days Wahhabiyya was a political project aimed at dominating other territories in Arabia. According to al-Maliki, the whole population of Hijaz and Asir, for example, should not be judged blasphemous when only individuals may exhibit certain blasphemous behaviour.

Al-Maliki's views were, not surprisingly, denounced by official *'ulama*. He was dismissed from his job in the Ministry of Education and incurred the wrath of other Wahhabi–Salafis in Saudi Arabia. Sahwi sheikhs and Jihadi ideologues wrote epistles refuting his ideas. Some accused him of being a covert Zaydi innovator who erodes the tenets of faith from within.[31] Although he declares in his books that he is a Hanbali Salafi, he incurred harsh criticism.

Al-Maliki does not openly and directly question the religio-political heritage of the Wahhabiyya. Like Judge Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim, mentioned earlier in this book, he is concerned only with the theological aspects of Wahhabiyya. This probably explains why state reaction to his revisionist theology is relatively lenient, compared, for example, with the imprisonment of Abdullah al-Hamid, whose work directly challenges several political innovations in the official Wahhabi tradition. To find critiques of the religio-political Wahhabi tradition, one must turn to a different literature and context, a task the following section aims to accomplish.

Liberating politics from Wahhabi interpretations

Liberating politics from the control of the Wahhabi religio-political discourse is a dangerous endeavour in Saudi Arabia because the exercise challenges one of the most important and fundamental pillars of Saudi authoritarianism. Contemporary politics that demands an absolute submission to rulers became theological. Professor Abdullah al-Hamid articulated a political vision grounded in alternative religious interpretations that was deemed threatening. Al-Hamid is counted as an Islamist who among others was part of a loose group that was consulted in the process of producing the Memorandum of Advice and later establishing the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Arabia in 1993. He was suspended from his job and was imprisoned in the 1990s. In 2003–4 he was involved in articulating drafts of various petitions calling for the gradual evolution of the Saudi regime towards a constitutional monarchy. He is best described as a member of a loosely defined Islamist intellectual

trend that highlights the centrality of Islam as a reference framework for future social and political change. The trend is grounded in the emphasis on *maqasid al-shariʿa* (the objectives of *shariʿa*), which prioritises people's religious and worldly interest. Al-Hamid calls for a critical evaluation of Islamic *turath* (heritage) and developing the spirit of openness, pluralism and recognition of the intellectual, political and sectarian specificity of the other.[32] This approach is described as the rationalist and enlightened trend dominant among a small minority of Islamist intellectuals, mainly university professors, journalists and writers. In Western accounts, al-Hamid is described as part of an emerging trend, referred to as Islamo-liberal. Like other Saudis labelled as such, al-Hamid, however, would consider himself a Salafi.

Al-Hamid draws attention to a serious derailment of religious discourse.[33] This led to the disappearance of religious interpretations that celebrate justice and freedom. Islam, according to al-Hamid has two dimensions; one regulates *ʿibadat* (worship), and the other regulates worldly matters. The first is concerned with the individual and his relation with God, whereas the second is ultimately concerned with relationships between individuals in Muslim society. The first ensures personal salvation, while the second governs the regulation of human life and association. According to al-Hamid, prayer is the most important *ʿibada* that ensures personal salvation. Justice is the pillar of the second salvation, i.e. the regulation of interpersonal relations. The practice of justice is as important as performing daily prayers. At this junction, al-Hamid resorts to the Quran as he cites verses describing the obliteration of previous communities, not because they were *kafir*s, but because they paid lip service to social justice. In an attempt to retain Salafi credibility, he reminds his readers of Ibn Taymiyya's assertion that 'God makes a just *kafir* state victorious over the unjust Muslim state'. In his interpretation of religious heritage, al-Hamid argues that monotheism is linked to practising social justice. If present-day Muslims are backward, it is not because they have ceased to perform the ritualistic aspect of their religion. Backwardness is not a function of abandoning prayer. It results from neglecting the obligation to enforce social justice. This justice is linked to the practice of *shura* (real consultation by election rather than by appointment). Previous scholars whose work constitutes what is referred to as the Islamic tradition did not pay enough attention to this important reality, according to al-Hamid.

Al-Hamid attributes the neglect of consultation and social justice to several factors. First, the predominance of Umayyad–Abbasid jurisprudence that grew in the shadow of despotic rulers. Second, the role played by religious scholars who trivialised the contractual civil obligations and

highlighted the centrality of ablution, supplication and Quranic recitation. Such scholars buried tolerance, freedom and equality. He concludes that slogans such as 'Islam is the solution' are doomed to fail if the Umayyad–Abbasid heritage and jurisprudence are presented as the true heritage of Islam. An Islamic renewal/reformation needs to be preceded by deconstructing Umayyad–Abbasid visions of creed, jurisprudence, civil and political obligations. 'The Islamic heritage needs to return to the holy book and the Prophetic tradition as practised by the Prophet himself and his four caliphs in order to reach an understanding of good political practice.'[34]

Al-Hamid deconstructs the meaning of *wali al-amr*, the one who determines and controls destiny. He laments how this meaning is now loaded with notions of absolute rule and despotism. Because of the heavy intervention of previous religious scholars, Muslims have succeeded in 'Islamising oppression and backwardness' under the guise of returning to the pious ancestors and guarding authenticity. Some previous *'ulama* resisted this process of Islamising repression, but later they lost their ability to resist. According to al-Hamid, Muslims inherited a tradition that considers oppression an unavoidable and necessary evil, and regards unjust leadership a natural political aspect of government. They cherished security while neglecting justice. They eventually produced the theological discourse that justified the police state, a contemporary version of old despotism. When Muslim *'ulama* issued a *fatwa* making it permissible to torture an accused person, they abandoned the civil aspect of Islam and propagated political innovation disguised under an Islamic rhetoric. Al-Hamid resorts to the words of Ibn Taymiyya's student Ibn al-Qayyim, who says: 'Satan misleads Muslims. He may show them ninety-nine doors that open paths to a secondary good but he will divert their attention from one major good. *'Ulama* were diverted from calling for just, consultative rule. Satan knows that *al-hukm al-jabri* [coercive rule] leads to oppression, poverty and sins. Satan led the *umma* astray.'[35]

Al-Hamid argues that *al-sha'b* (the people) must participate in political decisions because this is a *shari'a* principle (*asl*). He does not consider an appointed group who 'tie and loose' the real *sha'b*. The people must elect their representatives. Al-Hamid resorts to the Quran. He mentions that in the Quran God does not address the sultan even once. The Quran addresses the *umma*. Therefore, it is incumbent on the *umma* to act in pursuit of public good. Political participation must be protected by a constitution and enacted in election. The conclusion al-Hamid draws is a serious departure from the dominant official Wahhabi religio-political discourse. His understanding of the meaning of *wali al-amr* – consultation, justice, political participation and elections – threatens religiously

sanctioned authoritarian rule. Al-Hamid calls for the people rather than a small circle of appointed representatives to participate in the political process. Although he does not refer directly to contemporary politics or mention the role of Wahhabi *'ulama*, his revisionist arguments cannot be read except as an attempt to liberate contemporary politics from the control of past theology as well as contemporary manifestations of previous theological positions. The challenging nature of al-Hamid's revisionist thought led to his imprisonment.

In his reconsideration of *jihad*, al-Hamid elaborates on the role of the spoken and written 'word' (*al-kalima*) in pursuing the project of political participation, consultation and election. According to him these are the objectives of *jihad madani* (a civil jihad). The just word is not simply that spoken by an *'alim* who turns up in the ruler's council to utter advice, and leaves after having cleared his conscience. The word is

> that spoken from a minaret, a sermon of a preacher, a treatise of an intellectual, a play performed in theatre, and a poem that mobilises people. The word is not simply a short summary. It can be a long analytical treatise, a petition that analyses and reaches conclusions . . . Civil reform is an aspect of *jihad* in which all must participate. The *umma* must be involved in *jihad madani*. The ammunition of peaceful civil *jihad* is the pen, the tongue and social associations rather than bullets.[36]

In order to protect those who utter words of justice, they must form organisations, the seeds of an emerging civil society. Failure to do so will lead to individual activists being arrested and suppressed. Al-Hamid must have anticipated his fate, as he visited Saudi prisons several times. To guarantee their safety, reformers must reach out to a constituency. This constituency must be educated and involved in the project of *jihad madani*. This position is contrasted with the exclusionist approach of official Wahhabi *'ulama*, whose views on the masses are often tarnished by accusations of debauchery and blasphemy. Al-Hamid rejects their view, which states that the masses are 'gregarious savages who are dangerous when they are united and beneficial when they are disunited. A reformer must have a crowd (*rahat*) to protect him and support him, otherwise his words are lost and his efforts are obliterated by the forces of repression.'[37]

Al-Hamid dismantles yet another pillar of the dominant religio-political discourse, that which states that disavowing the abominable in the heart or by the tongue (secretly) is enough. He argues that this strategy does not reform a state. He uses the example of Muawiya (the first Umayyad caliph) described as *hakim ja'ir* (a despotic ruler), and Kemal Atatürk, described as *hakim kafir* (a blasphemous ruler). In both cases, change could not be achieved through the word of a small, educated minority (*nukhba*). Reforming the state is incumbent on the participation

of the masses through education and guidance. He reprimands those *ʿulama* whose preoccupation was with jurisprudence that does not 'reform a state, does not awake the *umma*, using the pretext that Muslims must be patient when confronted with the power of the despot . . . even if he steals money and hits backs',[38] a reference to official religious discourse that draws on weak Hadiths and cites Quranic verses out of context in order to enforce and legitimise authoritarian rule, acquiescence and unconditional surrender to the will of rulers. Private advice fails to achieve its objective, according to al-Hamid. It 'is the beginning rather than the end. A despot does not usually listen. Those *ʿulama* who continue to defend secret advice to rulers must consider it a personal choice that is not grounded in *shariʿa* evidence.'[39] If they are content with private advice, this must be their personal choice rather than a religious obligation that binds all Muslims.

Al-Hamid rules out the argument that reforming the state is dependent on the accession of a just ruler, especially when oppression becomes a regime that is entangled with a wide circle of beneficiaries. He gives the example of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the Umayyad caliph celebrated in the historical imagination of Sunni Muslims as a just ruler, who could not prevent the decline of the Islamic polity although he personally had excellent qualities. To ensure reform, society must be empowered through the formation of independent civil institutions and an awareness of civil rights. He calls for the emergence of the religious thinker who renews religion to replace the traditional religious scholars. Only the first can spread awareness. As far as relations with political power, the only way is to give and take. Politics is negotiation, but society must be strong to negotiate with authoritarian rule.[40]

In this blunt critique of previous theology that justified oppression, al-Hamid does not openly mention the Wahhabi tradition, but it is impossible to read his intellectual productions without making the connection between his revisions and the dominant religio-political discourse. He is not involved in intellectual academic luxury. He aims to reform the dominant Wahhabi discourse from within. He called for reform and paid a high price for revisiting old grounds that are well established in official narratives. However, he insists on clarifying that the *ʿulama* are interpreters of religion rather than religion itself. Calls for reform should not be limited to those under their patronage. The *ʿulama* have monopoly over *fatwa*s, yet it is the responsibility of society as a whole to engage in reform. Al-Hamid calls for the breaking of the monopoly of the *ʿulama* when he writes: 'It is not appropriate to limit calls for reform to those very religious members of society. A Muslim who exhibits *maʿasi* [sins] must not hold himself from calling for reform. Equally those *mutadayin* [religiously

observant people] should not think that they are the only ones who can call for reform.'[41]

Al-Hamid blurs the boundaries between categories of people that are now well established in Saudi Arabia as he propagates the right of all in society to be engaged in the political process. Although al-Hamid is an intellectual, he is a populist one. His main concern is to dismantle the rift that has appeared in Saudi society between various categories of people, namely the so-called *mutadayin* (religious) and *'ilmani* (secular). He challenges the perception that only the former are guardians of public good and initiators of reform. Although al-Hamid is counted among the intellectuals, he does not shy away from demanding a serious engagement of the people in all their traditions, backgrounds and education to participate in reforming state and society. His efforts towards redefining heritage and freeing Islam from past and present monopolies led him to argue that contemporary associationist practices (*shirk jadid*) involve glorifying rulers and worshipping them.

Al-Hamid moved from an intellectual revisionist project to political activism in a document, 'Islam is our Constitution: A Peaceful Call for Constitutionalism and Civil Society'.[42] In this document al-Hamid identifies the origins behind the failure of reform projects. The problem lies in repression and monopolising the political decision-making process. He deconstructs the myth that glorifies the rule of *al-mustabid al-'adil* (the just oppressor), as he argues that the myth is based on a contradiction. An oppressor cannot possibly be just. The myth enforced coercive rule and blocked the emergence of consultative justice, whereby society participates fully in the decision-making process. To regard reform as an elitist project that excludes the *umma* is a position that will inevitably lead to thwarting political reform. Reforming society and state are parallel processes; one cannot be accomplished without the other.

Al-Hamid offers a reinterpretation of the role of the state, which is limited to administering people's will rather than subduing it. He challenges the view that 'wali al-amr adra bil maslaha' (the ruler knows public interest best). The state is administration while the government is the executive arm that translates people's will into action and articulates the objectives of *shari'a*. To achieve these objectives, reformers must spread the culture of civil society, through education, which in turn will lead to establishing the institutional and constitutional basis for reform. Reform is delayed in a country like Saudi Arabia because the vocabulary of constitutionalism and civil society were suppressed. Saudis should not consider the call for establishing the institutions of civil society as a call for party politics (*hizbiyya*), but for empowering society in all its sections. Al-Hamid invokes here the notion of citizenship (*wataniyya*). He argues

that the national state must move society from sectarianism to an all-encompassing citizenship. The state must be capable of absorbing diversity and pluralism. According to him, this is the real meaning of the Islamic state that incorporates diversity and difference. In order to achieve serious reform, one must deconstruct the inherited Islamic political jurisprudence that grew under previous repressive and authoritarian rule. Obstacles to reform stem from the absence of jurists who are capable of articulating political reform that highlights the benefits of constitutionalism in an accessible language that draws on the holy book and the Prophet's tradition.

Al-Hamid highlights certain conditions in Saudi society that delay and may inhibit the emergence of a constitutional reformist trend. The polarisation of society between those who call for Islamising society and the advocates of modernity delays reform as neither emphasises the importance of constitutionalism. Furthermore, he laments the absence of social values that promote accepting difference, pluralism, tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflict.

Al-Hamid diagnoses the problem in Saudi society as 'the violence of the minority and the apathy of the majority'. Society has not produced the discourse of 'peaceful change'. Rather, it encouraged polarisation and radicalism. Al-Hamid recognises that by invoking the rhetoric of modernisation, the centralised state and the well-funded *ʿulama* were able to destroy traditional organisation and local activism within the traditional structures of the mosque, the tribe, the guild and other forms of traditional association. The state deployed substantial resources for this objective while the *ʿulama* provided religious legitimacy. The state failed to replace these associations with unions, political parties and modern, all-encompassing organisations. Al-Hamid acknowledges in passing that the state was powerful as it purchased the means of coercion to directly oppress and spy on its citizens.

According to al-Hamid, Saudi Arabia is at a crossroads, with two competing forces – those who practise violence and those who call for constitutional reform. He praises elements in the royal family for 'listening to reformers, for example King Abdullah and Prince Talal'. The latter failed in the 1960s when he called for constitutional monarchy because his project was elitist. Today, according to al-Hamid, the call has a wider social base. Society is ripe for this historical change. Al-Hamid overlooks the circles of power that rule Saudi Arabia, the competing and conflicting visions that dominate and sometimes paralyse the Saudi royal family.

Like many Saudi intellectuals, al-Hamid blames society, although he occasionally alludes to the role of the oppressive state in fostering the culture of polarisation, intolerance and violence. He does not give enough

attention to the way the state itself, together with its available resources, were extremely efficient and active in not only eradicating calls for reform but also perpetuating the religious discourse that makes apathy, indifference and total submission to rulers a religious duty. Counting on substantial resources, the state used and deployed violence against others, especially those who did not accept its project. For the use of violence to be legitimate it needed the theorising of specialists. The *ʿulama* were active agents in theorising and legitimising state violence. They were the *noblesse d'état* at a time when neither intellectuals nor bureaucrats or technocrats emerged.

According to al-Hamid, there are several groups who are more likely to obstruct constitutional reform, the separation of powers and the establishment of civil society. He alludes to *al-quwa al-mutadharira* (those who are hurt by reform). He lists high-ranking officials in the judiciary. Judges are more likely than any other groups to obstruct and resist change, especially if it seems to threaten their privileges and monopolies. It is ironic that the judges he identified as obstacles to reform are the same ones who sentenced him to six years in prison in 2005. It was a Wahhabi state judge, operating under the patronage of the Ministry of Interior, who condemned al-Hamid and other reformers to several years in prison. The list of accusations was endless.

Rounds of petitions

Political activism and violence progressed hand in hand in Saudi Arabia after 11 September. Intellectuals, *ʿulama* and professionals engaged in dialogue aimed at strengthening calls for reform . . . A substantial number of intellectuals and political activists believed that real political reform could solve the problem of internal security, and regarded it as the only shield against terrorism and violence. They thought, correctly, that the violence had created an atmosphere in which the government was willing to listen to their demands and to the various calls for reform that had started after 11 September. Under the pressure of serious violence, the regime needed allies who would help it defeat the terrorist menace.

The regime enlisted key political activists, intellectuals and *ʿulama* (both official and Sahwis) in its war on terror. Even minority intellectuals such as Shiʿis and Ismailis were given a platform to celebrate the common national interest that overrides sectarian and regional identities. Activists of all persuasions thought that as the government needed their aid in battling terrorism, they must extract from it not only willingness to listen to their demands but also an undertaking to implement concrete measures

to ease off tension. However, they miscalculated the readiness of the government to act in accordance with their reform agenda: listening to demands was not the same as acting to promote the reformist agenda. The war on terror was in fact used as a pretext to imprison peaceful reformers, who were described as taking advantage of the violence in order to cause chaos and discord.

The intensity of political activism that gathered momentum in 2003 was dubbed the 'Riyadh Spring'; yet it precipitated a round of arrests and restrictions on political activism. Political activists of all persuasions were imprisoned for simple reasons, such as giving media interviews to Arab satellite television, signing a petition or defending political prisoners. Released prisoners signed documents forbidding them from communicating with the media. Some were banned from travelling abroad, while others had their passports confiscated. The euphoria of the 2003 Riyadh Spring gave way to disappointment and demoralisation in 2004. The common theme of all calls for reform was a serious quest for unmediated history, theology and politics. Reformers strove to free themselves from narratives of exclusion, subservience and obedience. They emphasised *wataniyya*, an all-inclusive citizenship wide enough to incorporate groups that had been marginalised or demonised. They all called for a system in which ordinary people, through elected representatives, have a major role in the political decision-making process – a revolutionary demand in the context of Saudi Arabia, where only loyal appointees enact royal will and power.

In order to articulate this reformist agenda, more than twelve petitions were submitted between 2000 and 2004 to the main senior figures in the royal family. The petitions are grouped into three categories: category I included four petitions in support of Arab causes, Palestine and Iraq being the most dominant themes; category II included six petitions calling for constitutionalism and civil society; category III included three petitions calling for respect for human rights, and recognition of Muslim minorities (Shi'i and Ismaili) and women's rights.[43] These three categories reflected concern over Saudi Arabia's position in the Arab world and a perceived lack of real solidarity with mainstream Arab causes, the deteriorating internal political scene and the status of the 'other' – religious minorities and women – in Saudi society. The petitions reflected society's frustration in the three major areas against a background of apparent government failure to respond to the three challenges. They stemmed from a general atmosphere in which revisionist trends began to be consolidated.

Saudi reformers challenged history, theology and politics as they submitted their petitions. First, they asserted their historical connection with

Arab and Islamic identity. Second, they challenged theological narratives that both excluded and demonised the Muslim other. And third, they undermined the dominant religio-political discourse that marginalised society and excluded it from the political sphere.

A series of regional and international conflicts in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq had led to an increase in political activism. However, one major factor facilitated this process: local Jihadi violence. As mentioned earlier in this book, the violent struggle in the way of God proved to be an agent of change. The Saudi domestic scene witnessed more political activism under the pressure of this violence than under any other factor.

In order to express solidarity with Arab causes, Saudi petitioners generated their own statements, bypassing government bureaucracy and will. For decades the Saudi government had, through its representatives and bureaucrats, articulated a vision that was described as shared by the whole society. However, twenty-first-century Saudi activists mobilised themselves to generate their own initiatives. They expressed solidarity with the Palestinian second intifada, condemned 'Sharon's violation of Jerusalem', and objected to 'Bush's War on Iraq'.[44]

The second category of petitions addressed political reform. Together with others, al-Hamid articulated the vision of constitutionalism and civil society. In his various writings he identifies five urgent principles:

1. giving priority to political reform over economic, social, educational and judicial reform;
2. grounding constitutionalism in Islamic jurisprudence;
3. promoting national unity and rejecting calls for division and partitions along regional or sectarian lines;
4. supporting the Al-Saud leadership, which guarantees *shari'a* and unity of the country;
5. addressing state and society.

In order to start the process, more than five petitions were sent to the leadership between 2003 and 2004. In January 2003, 103 intellectuals, liberals and moderate Islamists signed the National Reform Document, submitted to Crown Prince Abdullah. The list of signatories included a mixture of Islamists and liberals. Whether this was the beginning of the emergence of a united coalition of Islamists and liberals or an alliance of convenience between ideologically incompatible partners is difficult to judge.

The signatories of the reform document refrained from engaging in serious discussion of the merits of having the Al-Saud family at the top of the political system. They called, however, for radical political, economic, judicial, educational and social reforms, aimed at redrawing the social contract in such a way as to allow a wider section of society to share power

and participate in the decision-making process. Their demands fall within five main areas:

1. Political reforms: the building of constitutional institutions within the parameters of what is permissible in Islam, the Quran and Sunna. This involves the formation of an elected *majlis al-shura* (consultative council) and local regional councils, an independent judiciary, citizens' rights, freedom of expression and assembly and the right to establish civil institutions, (clubs, committees and unions). The petition does not mention the formation of political parties (*ahzab siyasiyya*).
2. Economic reforms: implementing fairness and equal distribution of wealth between the different regions, controlling public spending, strengthening accountability of institutions, dealing effectively with the national debt, creating job opportunities and diversifying the economy.
3. Royalty–society relations: encouraging greater interaction between the government and society, spreading the culture of human rights, reforming public services and creating a greater role for women.
4. Reform initiatives: introducing a general amnesty for political prisoners, restoring civil rights to reformers, freedoms for intellectuals and academics.
5. Invitation to national dialogue: creating a convention or a forum for national dialogue and debate, which includes a representative sample of Saudi society.[45]

This document demonstrated that certain groups (mainly intellectuals, professionals and moderate Islamists) are willing to work with the royal family as long as it is prepared to implement reforms. Moreover, their current willingness to accommodate the Al-Saud within a constitutional monarchy is attributed to their belief that since 1932 the Al-Saud have destroyed traditional local leadership in the Hijaz, Najd, Asir and Hasa, the previously autonomous regions which are today incorporated in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The reformers did not envisage any other group occupying the highest position of authority in the country. They saw two options: 'reform the Al-Saud and the dysfunctional state they have created or wait for a long period of violence followed by a radical Islamist takeover'; the consequences of either for the existence of Saudi Arabia as state and society cannot be accurately predicted. The signatories of the petition opted for the first option, namely reform the Al-Saud and work with them. It is very misleading, however, to present the reformers as a product of an autonomous and independent initiative. Their discourse is not new: it echoes earlier 1960 proposals that emerged under the patronage of Prince Talal ibn Abdulaziz. It cannot be ruled out that

the constitutional reformists themselves had the patronage of key figures among a number of Saudi princes, in addition to Talal and perhaps his son al-Walid. The reformers' activism, imprisonment and release in August 2005 attests to a kind of royal connection. In fact it is almost impossible to keep the momentum of the constitutional trend without royal patronage.

The signatories of the January petition had internalised the Al-Saud's discourse on its central mediating role in Saudi society, without which they believe that the disintegration of the country is more likely to take place. While this remains the discourse that is presented in publications, some signatories argue that their decision to support a constitutional monarchy is a political strategy. Some believe that the Al-Saud are not ready to share power and will never be ready to give it up, but that if the government does not accept the demands of the January petition, particularly the establishment of an elected council, many Saudis will eventually be convinced that the moment has arrived to get rid of the Al-Saud altogether.[46]

The 2003 petitions demonstrated that a liberal group has struck an alliance with moderate Islamists inside the country. Crown Prince Abdullah invited a small group amongst them, around forty-three signatories, to attend a private session to discuss their demands. He announced the establishment of a government-sponsored dialogue forum, the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, under royal patronage. The centre was meant to encourage various sections of Saudi society to discuss relevant contemporary issues under royal supervision.

In September 2003, another petition was released. In Defence of the Nation was submitted to the crown prince on the Saudi national day (24 September 2003).[47] The petition came after serious terrorist attacks and confrontation between Jihadis and the government. It confronts the government with the problem of violence, and links the solution to serious political reforms. It emphasises that 'military solutions' are not enough to combat terrorism, and called for a serious revision of *al-khitab al-dini* (religious discourse) in order to encourage pluralism and tolerance. It also called for a timetable (*jadwal zamani*), within which reform is to be implemented.

It was followed by a new petition at the end of 2003. This reflected the reformers' impatience with government's silence regarding previous petitions. In Call to Leadership and People,[48] reformers insisted on the urgency of constitutional reform. They also reiterated that they are partners in the nation, a plea to be included in political decisions. They criticised the suspension of real political consultation and the marginalisation of society, and emphasised that reform without institutions is unlikely to

produce satisfactory results. They called upon the government to initiate change 'immediately'. This involves elections to a *majlis al-shura* (parliament) and a commitment to move towards constitutional monarchy. The signatories expressed disappointment at government responses to previous petitions. 'We reached a dead end with political leadership. Royal figures do not have the intention to implement social, economic and political reform. We say this with great sorrow. But we promise people to continue our efforts in order to prevent the ship from sinking. Then the losers are the nation and the citizens.'[49]

The Call to People involved a warning that delaying political consultation is harmful not only to society but also to religion. It seems that reformers were calling upon the *'ulama* not to obstruct change, reminding them of the duty to take part in *sha'n al-'am* (public affairs). They assured them that a constitution guarantees the application of *shari'a*, justice and equality. Institutions play a role in ensuring people's participation in promoting virtue and prohibiting vice, including favouritism, corruption and injustice.

The crown prince received the reformers and listened to their demands. Other senior princes – for example, the minister of the interior, Prince Nayef and the minister of defence, Prince Sultan – condemned the calls for reform and described them as misguided and opportunistic. They both expressed doubts regarding elections to a parliament. Prince Sultan stated that 'we can announce elections and forge them. If elections take place, they will bring illiterate and ignorant people to positions of leadership.'[50] In a speech, Prince Nayef reminded Saudis of the role of the sword in the unification of Arabia. He summoned around twenty signatories and reprimanded them. They assured the prince that the constitutional monarchy they envisage is not like the one that exists in Britain, but is similar to the political system in Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco.[51]

By March 2004 several petition signatories, political activists and lawyers had been put in prison. The government fought both Jihadis and reformers simultaneously. While repression continued through out 2004, together with another round of Jihadi violence, the government continued to invoke the rhetoric of reform. The sessions of the National Dialogue Forum, together with the promise to carry out limited municipal elections, were considered the beginning of a new era. While the dialogue sessions were meant to allow a wide section of intellectuals and activists to debate the future of the country, in reality they became yet another weapon in the war against terror. It seemed that the whole purpose of the dialogue was to gather supporters for the regime against Jihadi violence, rather than serious political reform. The regime enlisted intellectuals, activists, *'ulama* and others to have dialogues that lead to

policy recommendations, but the regime is under no obligation to implement these recommendations. Up to 2005 the National Dialogue Centre organised five rounds of sessions discussing education, women, the youth and accepting the other. Against official celebration of the beginning of dialogue in Saudi Arabia that accompanied the sessions, it was reported in the official press in September 2005 that the coming 'Others and Us' session seemed to have had a less than encouraging start: 'Not even Jiddah's hot weather helped warm up the preparatory discussions . . . the participants in both the men's and women's halls of the Meridian hotel in Jiddah were almost sleepy as they read from their previously prepared papers. Some of them were seen paying more attention to the gum they were chewing or the pens they were playing with.'[52] Did the participants come to the conclusion that such sessions were futile and less likely to lead to serious change? Or was this an official reporting that disparages the participants and their apathy, perhaps to send a message of some sort?

With King Fahd on the verge of dying for more than a decade, Saudi politics and activism reached a standstill in 2005. The media campaigns surrounding local municipal elections, together with various public-relations exercises glorifying government success in killing various al-Qa'ida leaders in the Arabian Peninsula, diverted attention from the failings of the regime. Several activists were released from prison on condition they stopped all activities deemed illegal. Al-Hamid, together with Matruk al-Falih and Ali al-Damini, were sentenced to six to nine years in prison. The euphoria of the Riyadh Spring, together with the wave of petitions, stopped completely.

The regime immediately started its propaganda counter-offensive. Armed with substantial wealth, thanks to the dramatic increase in oil prices in 2004–5, it flexed its muscles after each violent encounter with Jihadi violence while its courts dealt with peaceful reformers. The rift with the USA was beginning to be mended. In 2005 Crown Prince Abdullah visited President Bush in Crawford, thus marking a return to a harmonious relationship. A televised trip to a local American supermarket capturing the crown prince munching potato chips and casually conversing with young American girls was meant to convey a new image. More serious discussions took place behind the scenes. It was announced that the US administration supports Saudi Arabia's entry into the World Trade Organisation by the end of 2005. It was assumed that Saudi Arabia was committed to trade with all partners, including Israel, a price the regime was willing to pay in order to be rehabilitated in Washington after a period of estrangement. While the American administration mildly criticised the imprisonment of Saudi reformers, the continuing bad human and women's rights record and the lack of religious freedom,

it congratulated the Saudi regime for initiating a historical reform with the half-elected municipal councils. With the Iraq situation moving from bad to worse, it seemed that the tension between the USA and Saudi Arabia following the 11 September was swept under the carpet for the time being. The reform envisaged and demanded by the constitutional reform group was put on hold. The reformers' search for unmediated politics collided with the factionalism that has taken hold of Saudi royal politics in the last decade.[53]

Revisiting history, theology and politics is part of scattered intellectual attempts, crystallising among individuals and groups of people in isolation from each other. While they are all daring in their questioning of religious and political taboos, their efforts still allow room for negotiation with the regime. Al-Hamid and his colleagues hold on to the royal family and demand that it leads the reforms. They hope that Prince Abdullah, now king, and his faction within the royal family, will adopt the proposed reform. In all their petitions they consider the Al-Saud a symbolic unifying force. Reformers insist that a constitutional monarchy does not necessarily mean a British model whereby the king reigns but does not rule, although the imprisonment of some of them suggests that this is what the royal family understood from their petitions. Constitutional reformers simply consider the 'house' in need of repairs, a view that is also expressed by some members of the royal family such as Prince Talal ibn Abd al-Aziz and Saud al-Faysal. In effect, al-Hamid's proposed constitution affirms the right of Al-Saud to rule indefinitely – in fact, it provides for constitutional entrenchment of already-existing privileges and political arrangements, hardly a situation that can be anchored in an Islamic interpretation. It seems that after the present regime had exhausted its traditional theological base that had been developed by the official *'ulama* over generations, al-Hamid and his colleagues are in the process of injecting the system with a new life, perhaps a prelude to the establishment of the fourth Saudi state. The constitutional reforms not only confirm but also legitimise the Al-Saud's monopoly over political decisions.

Breaking chains: the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia

Between 2003 and 2004, with the imprisonment of several political activists inside Saudi Arabia, some Saudi intellectuals lost hope that the anticipated political reform was possible. They remained silent, while in public they praised the limited steps taken to lessen tension, for example promises of half-elected municipal councils, and participating in national dialogues. Other Saudis listened to another, older, voice, which had been

calling for serious political change since 1994. While the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA) was old – it had emerged in 1996 as a splinter group from the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Arabia – in 2003 it acquired a satellite radio station and started broadcasting not only its own programmes, but also anti-government statements. It gave Saudis inside the country an opportunity both to listen to alternative views and to contribute their own stories. MIRA called for the complete overthrow of the 'house of Saud' and its replacement with a different political system in which there is no place for hereditary rule or Al-Saud privileges. It publicised its political reform programme, which involved a serious departure from the status quo. I have discussed the movement and its political programme elsewhere. [54] In this section, only developments since 2001 will be dealt with.

The harsh measures against reformers inside Saudi Arabia seemed to increase the attentiveness of Saudis to this London-based voice. From its London headquarters, MIRA director Saad al-Faqih demands the overthrow of the Al-Saud through peaceful means such as demonstrations and civil disobedience. Al-Faqih mobilises Saudis to act in order to dismantle the political system and install an elected 'Islamic government'. He shares several characteristics with al-Hamid: both activists, together with other Islamists, were behind the Memorandum of Advice and the formation of the CDLR which led to the flight of al-Faqih to London in 1993–4. The climax of their activism in the early 1990s culminated in the famous Memorandum of Advice. Al-Faqih regards himself as part of the Sahwi Islamist trend that gathered momentum during the Gulf War of 1990–1 and led to this famous document. However, while al-Hamid remained loyal to the royal family, at least in public, al-Faqih gave up hope that it will ever respond to demands for political reform or become capable of reforming itself. While in an interview in March 1999, al-Faqih clearly stated that 'we are not ready to pull the tree with its roots yet', this did not mean that he anticipated that the ruling family was responsive to calls for reform. In October 2003, he declared that the time had come to work towards a 'surgical' operation 'through envisaging a reform programme where there is no room for Al-Saud'.[55] To put pressure on the regime and demonstrate its intolerance of peaceful political activism, al-Faqih called for demonstrations in Riyadh on 14 and 23 October 2003. The stated objectives of the demonstrations were to highlight the plight of political prisoners in Saudi Arabia to coincide with holding an international conference on human rights in Riyadh. It was estimated that around eight hundred people took part. As expected, security forces arrested some activists and demonstrators and dispersed the crowd. Another call for demonstrations in major Saudi cities was issued

in December 2004. The Saudi regime surrounded the main areas where the demonstrations were planned, and prevented people from reaching them. The security forces were mobilised in large numbers to blockade areas in Jiddah and Riyadh. The demonstration failed to materialise on the designated day, although a very small number of activists managed to assemble.

Throughout 2003 and 2004 al-Faqih commented on the various petitions that were handed to the senior princes, the last of which was the aforementioned Call to Leadership and People. Al Faqih considers this petition a courageous attempt by the signatories to express their frustration with the leadership. It shows that they reached a dead end. The fact that it addressed the people as well as the leadership shows their realisation that reform cannot be achieved through addressing rulers only, and that the only hope for real reform is in raising people's awareness.[56]

When al-Faqih arrived in London in 1994 he gave the impression that he and his colleague al-Masari were acting within the Sahwi trend that was associated with the Memorandum of Advice. Immediately after settling in London, he publicised the plight of imprisoned Sahwi sheikhs such as Salman al-Awdah and Safar al-Hawali. However, after their release from prison in the late 1990s, these sheikhs moved from confrontation with the regime to co-optation, a strategy that created a rift between them and the exiled Sahwis, mainly al-Faqih and al-Masari. In a manner reminiscent of their calls to Jihadis, the released Sahwis initially called upon al-Faqih to 'repent' and return to Saudi Arabia. After 11 September and the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia, their conciliatory tone changed. Some famous Sahwi sheikhs – for example, Safar al-Hawali and Muhsin al-Awajy – openly denounced al-Faqih for calling for demonstrations. Sheikh Safar al-Hawali issued a public statement giving what he claimed to be religious justification for non-participation in peaceful demonstrations.

The more the rhetoric of the Sahwis inside Saudi Arabia moved towards glorifying the Saudi royal family and its centrality in the envisaged political reform process, the more that of al-Faqih moved in the opposite direction. Famous co-opted Sahwis continued to denounce him publicly. While he refrained from openly criticising and naming individual Sahwis for their accommodation and cooperation with the regime, his Sahwi ex-comrades, now adversaries, excelled in demonising him. Together with the official so-called liberal Saudi press, they launched personal attacks on al-Faqih and his followers in order to discredit them. The regime continued its efforts to silence al-Faqih's radio channel (initially known as Radio Islah, later Debate Channel and in 2006 PTV). In 2004 and for the first time, the Saudi press began to 'mention' al-Faqih by

name after a long period of silence when he was only referred to as 'the so-called opposition abroad'. After calling for the October 2003 and December 2004 demonstrations on his radio channel, his photograph, together with that of ex-comrade Muhammad al-Masari, featured regularly in the local press. Official Saudi demonisation of al-Faqih took a more direct approach.[57]

Al-Faqih identifies the Saudi crisis as stemming from an absence of political participation, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, an independent judiciary and separation of powers. In his political programme, there is no room for hereditary rule or sanctity to be granted to the Al-Saud. Al-Faqih does not believe that the royal family is an agent of unity, a symbol around which various sections of society can share meaning. He believes that the *umma* must elect its leader. As a Salafi, his quest for the unmediated word of God goes as far as to call for abolishing the office of grand mufti and calling for pluralism in issuing religious opinions – in other words, recognition of the four *madhahib*. The objective is to challenge dominant theological interpretations relating to absolute submission to political authority. He considers the official *ʿulama* who perpetuate such religious interpretations as equal accomplices in enforcing authoritarian rule. His Salafiyya is one that does not recognise the authority of contemporary official *ʿulama*. It only acknowledges the authority of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition.

While al-Hamid and his colleagues do not openly question the 'Islamic' credentials of the Saudi regime, al-Faqih states clearly that it is a blasphemous regime (*nidham kufr*), that does not rule according to the revealed word of God. Al-Faqih's excommunication of the Saudi regime falls short of naming individual princes as *kafir*s, thus avoiding the problematic issue of *takfir al-muʿayan*, the specific excommunication of individuals, which is, in his opinion, dependent on the ruling of religious experts such as judges.[58]

Since 2001 and the US War or Terror, al-Faqih and other Saudi Islamists were accused of links to Osama bin Laden by the US government. The USA claims he bought a satellite telephone for Bin Laden in 1998, prior to the US embassy bombings in Kenya. He was also accused of providing logistical support for Libyan agents on a mission to assassinate Crown Prince Abdullah in 2004. A third accusation revolved around an alleged meeting he and al-Masari had in the mid-1990s with one or two of the Jihadis who carried out the Yanbo bombing. In December 2004 the US government, together with Saudi Arabia, succeeded in putting his name on Security Council list of suspected terrorists, which led to the British government freezing his assets. The USA demanded his extradition from Britain. On various occasions, British

government and Foreign Office spokesmen argued that they have no evidence against al-Faqih, and so far have resisted calls for his deportation.

After the 7 July London bombings, the Saudi regime capitalised on the climate of fear in Britain and intensified its pressure on the British government to deport al-Faqih. In November 2005 the *Guardian* reported that the Saudi government was engaged in negotiating a contract to purchase Typhoon planes from Britain on condition that the latter expel al-Faqih and al-Masari. The Saudi government denied the *Guardian*'s allegations. At the time of writing al-Faqih was still broadcasting a daily evening radio programme on PTV Radio, a satellite channel, from his headquarters in north London. While his future in Britain is yet to be decided, the programme continues. His MIRA website and discussion board were suspended in July 2005, immediately after the London bombing. By September 2005 the website had returned, but without the discussion forum, which in the past had been occasionally used by anonymous participants to glorify *jihad* in various parts of the world. Al-Faqih always claimed that he had no control over material posted on MIRA's discussion board and endeavoured to remove the postings immediately after they appeared.

Is al-Faqih a covert Jihadi? Or is he a Sahwi Islamist who calls for the peaceful overthrow of a 'blasphemous' regime? Is he a believer in 'theoretical *jihad*' (*jihad nadhari*)? Or is he simply a covert propagator of *jihad 'amali* (practical *jihad*)?

According to official Saudi media, al-Faqih is an 'al-Qa'ida agent in trousers'.[59] A Saudi journalist goes as far as claiming that al-Faqih is 'a good target for Zionists and all those enemies of Saudi Arabia who recruit him and his likes to harm this land'. He asserts that according to Saudi documents, al-Faqih is linked to Zionist organisations that continue to campaign against Saudi Arabia – without, of course, presenting his readers with the evidence.[60] This opinion echoes Crown Prince Abdullah's statement after violence erupted in the industrial city of Yanbo in 2003, as a result of which several Westerners died. The crown prince described the violence as a Zionist conspiracy. It is ironic that in official Saudi discourse someone can be both an al-Qa'ida agent and part of a Zionist conspiracy against the heartland of Islam. Another Saudi author claims that al-Faqih positions himself as the al-Qa'ida spokesman in London,[61] a reference to the fact that al-Faqih is occasionally sought by Western media to give comments on current al-Qa'ida violence and Osama bin Laden.

Obviously al-Faqih does not publicly call for violent acts in pursuit of the overthrow of the Saudi regime, nor does he openly praise or

glorify Jihadi violence against government buildings, Western residential compounds and innocent civilians. Callers who praise Jihadis or express support for Jihadi violence on PTV Radio station are immediately cut off. He occasionally criticises Jihadis for their 'literal' interpretation of religious texts, choice of targets and lack of a coherent political programme. On several occasions, he told his audience that Jihadis 'excel' in opposing foreign Western domination. They have a well-developed anti-Western rhetoric, but lack a complete political programme. At this juncture, he presents MIRA's programme as an alternative comprehensive blueprint for the transformation of Saudi politics and society. He positions it as the only possible alternative after the regime rejected calls for constitutional monarchy and imprisoned the main advocates. He calls for the deployment of peaceful means in the realisation of this goal.

In his commentaries on al-Qa'ida and Jihadi violence, al-Faqih positions himself as someone who adopts an analytical view. On several occasions, Western media (including the BBC, CNN, PBS and others) sought his comments on suicide bombers and violence, not only in Saudi Arabia but elsewhere. His analysis blames the Saudi regime and its policies for the eruption of violence. He also considers US Middle East policy to be part of the causes of terrorism. He unequivocally rejects the connection, made by the USA, Western scholars and Saudi liberals, between the Saudi religious curriculum, which draws on Wahhabi interpretations, and terrorism. He takes the view that the policies of the Saudi government, especially its unconditional alliance with the West, is at the heart of Jihadi violence. Furthermore, the USA, together with other Western countries, fuel this violence as a result of their foreign policy. He points to the role played by the Bush administration in giving Jihadis reasons to 'hate America', not only in Palestine but also in Afghanistan and Iraq. Following the 7 July London bombings, he wrote in the *Guardian* that restricting the freedom of Muslims in the UK and introducing new anti-terrorism legislations such as the British government package under discussion in September 2005 represent a victory for Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden longs for the creation of a rift between European governments and their resident Muslim minorities in order to give credibility to his anti-Western discourse, according to al-Faqih.[62] He argues that Bin Laden forced Western governments to abandon justice and freedom for the sake of security, elements which historically allowed the West to enjoy supremacy and domination.

What concerns us here is how al-Faqih's project reflects yet another attempt at searching for the unmediated word of God. His description of the type of 'religion' that evolved in Saudi Arabia is revealing.

He broadcast his 'caricature' evaluation of official Wahhabiyya in August 2005:

> They [official religious scholars] share with Shi'is the way they revere their religious scholars. They consider them infallible. They share with Sufis their infatuation with the *tariqa* sheikh. They share with the Kharijites their willingness to describe their opponents as *kafir*s. They share with the Murjia their suspension of the duty to command virtue and prohibit vice when it comes to rulers. They refuse to criticise the rulers' bad deeds. They no longer refer to the Quran and Sunna. They always refer to what Ibn Baz and Ibn al-Uthaymin say. The words of the *'ulama* cannot be used as evidence. When confronted with a problem, we should not say 'qal ibn Baz' [ibn Baz said], we must return to the Book and the tradition of the Prophet.[63]

In his reflections on Salafiyya, al-Faqih argues that there are several meanings and usages. For the purpose of an article he wrote on Salafiyya and democracy, he argues that there are several groups claiming to be Salafis. First there are those who use it to imply that so and so is a radical or extremist. Second, there are those who use it to indicate that a group rejects *madhhabiyya fiqhiyya* (schools of jurisprudence). Third, there are those who use it to refer to political Islamist movements like the ones in Kuwait and Jordan. For al-Faqih, 'Salafiyya describes those who claim to respect *shari'a* evidence and promise to follow the methodology of the pious ancestors. Some groups and intellectuals use Salafiyya as a slogan but when it comes to practice, we discover they are not authentic Salafis. One must consider the evidence.'[64] Like other Salafis, al-Faqih is engaged in the debate about who is a Salafi.

Al-Faqih argues that under Saudi authority, the *'ulama* lost their autonomy. They became a rubber stamp to royal decisions. His daily radio show, together with the internet discussion board, are arenas for contesting the authority of the official *'ulama*, and even ridiculing their *fatwa*s. The most scathing attack is always initiated by anonymous contributors who call official *'ulama* '*'umala*' (traitors). Al-Faqih's position vis-à-vis the *'ulama* is similar to that of a whole range of Saudi activists, intellectuals and non-official *'ulama* (both Sahwis and Jihadis). In contrast with the liberal position that aspires towards less *'ulama* intervention (official or otherwise) in the public sphere, and more liberal religious interpretations in the social sphere (for example, issues related to women), al-Faqih calls for greater role being granted to those familiar with *shari'a* evidence. For their opinion to count, they must have a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis political authority. Al-Faqih does not reject the *'ulama* altogether. He calls for a greater involvement by what he calls independent *'ulama*. According to al-Faqih, the *'ulama* should be outside the state apparatus altogether. They should derive their authority from their social base, and

should organise themselves as they consider appropriate, without state interference.

While al-Faqih respects the early Wahhabi discourse of the eighteenth century and a selected chain of *ʿulama*, he considers later *ʿulama* as people who corrupted the tradition. In his opinion, the first Saudi state exemplified the power of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in creating the Muslim polity rather than the power of the Al-Saud, an understanding that in his opinion current Saudi propaganda and educational programmes reversed.[65] He argues that the first and second Saudi states were more faithful to their religious discourse than the third state. However, the contribution of early *ʿulama* in the past two states is often not given enough credit in Saudi official narratives. These glorify the role of the Al-Saud in creating unity and prosperity, an approach that tends to belittle the contribution of the Wahhabi movement. If ever there is a recognition, it is usually expressed in terms of 'partnership'. Al-Faqih emphasises that 'there were several swords in Arabia in the past; none of these swords succeeded. Only the one that had the blessing of religion succeeded.'[66] His reflections on history lead him to argue that the primary force behind the establishment of the early Saudi state was the reformer: without him there would not have been an impulse for unification. Al-Faqih may have reservations on Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab granting the Al-Saud an oath of allegiance that was extended to their descendants, but he does not tackle this issue publicly. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is a political strategy or a reflection of a deep conviction. He may feel that as a political movement, MIRA should not be entangled in a theological debate that would diminish its popularity among a constituency that is perhaps not yet ready for such intellectual overtures. Yet al-Faqih strongly argues against the legitimacy of hereditary leadership, which Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was known to have granted and legitimised for the Al-Saudi family. Al-Faqih avoids discussing religious matters that are divisive, or favouring one *fiqh* opinion over another. When a woman caller to Debate, later PTV, Radio criticised those *ʿulama* who consider *zawaj al-misyar* (secret visiting marriage)[67] permissible, he immediately pointed her attention to the fact that this matter is subject to religious debate and is not central to MIRA's programme. He adopts a similar view regarding women driving, covering their faces, and occupying position of authority. While he accepts that driving and covering the face are subject to different religious opinions, he unequivocally rejects women being put in a position of *wilaya ʿama*, (leadership), for example as president or minister. He claims that there is *ʿulama* consensus over excluding women from *wilya ʿama*. Other religious scholars have a different opinion on the question. In general, his position on gender issues is derived, according to him, from

the book and the Prophet's tradition. Both men and women are interpreters of this heritage, according to al-Faqih.

When it comes to the contemporary state established by Abdulaziz ibn Saud in 1932, al-Faqih seems to be liberated from all constraints. He considers the third state to be the evil empire par excellence. However, he acknowledges that King Abdulaziz had personal leadership qualities such as intelligence, perseverance and charisma. For a whole week in 2004, he bombarded Debate Radio listeners with an understanding of the past that challenges the official narratives enforcing Saudi legitimacy. He invited his listeners to contribute their own reflections and oral narratives that 'put the record straight'. His audience excelled in offering an alternative historical memory that has been suppressed for so long. People from various regions and towns, belonging to tribal and non-tribal groups, descendants of the 1920s suppressed Ikhwan rebellion, representatives of sedentary families in Hijaz, Najd and the Eastern Province all joined in a chorus condemning the 'historical forgery' that the regime maintained. Old and young men and women retold the past. They broke the silence over 'massacres', 'torture', 'treachery' and 'hypocrisy'. While al-Faqih offered his own version of the past, he gave others the opportunity to imagine and articulate a different, so far untold, history. In a manner reminiscent of anonymous internet discussion boards, Saudis added their dissident voices to the written word that is yet to be claimed by identifiable men and women. While Saudis searched for the word of God that is not mediated by co-opted *ʿulama*, they longed for a past that is equally free from the domination of the regime and its historians. If official media channels are platforms for creating consenting subjects, Debate Radio exemplified the 'opposite direction'. It is the voice of dissent and contestation. The majority of participants still hold on to their creative *noms de plume*, often carefully chosen to reflect whole range of positions: the 'Jihadi Den' is a rebellious woman; the 'Bare footed' is an impoverished man; the 'Lion' is a defiant man; the 'Stranger at home' is a man exiled in his own country; the 'ex-Saudi' is someone who liberated himself from 'Saudi' identity. Callers are creative in choosing symbolic names to convey a whole range of meanings including defiance, alienation, rejection, piety and determination. They, continue to be followed by security forces, however. Several raids on groups of young men who had assembled for dinner after having called Debate Radio in 2004 resulted in arrests, the details of which were broadcast on air during the security force raids.[68]

In addition to communicating MIRA's political programme, Debate Radio offers a platform for attacking the royal family, the official *ʿulama*, co-opted Sahwis and liberals. It allows the dissemination of MIRA's

all-encompassing reform and commentaries on current affairs. As MIRA's political programme is discussed elsewhere,[69] it is important to focus here on more recent trends that emerged with its acquisition of a media communication channel in 2003.

Al-Faqih's daily radio programme offers a wide range of topics and commentaries on past and present affairs. Sometimes he proposes alternative interpretations of economic, political and social issues. On one occasion, tribalism and tribal identity were discussed in ways that mobilised people by drawing on their tribal honour. In al-Faqih's opinion, Islam is not against tribalism as such; it is against racism. He told his audience that the Prophet called upon the tribes of Arabia to compete in defending faith rather than in fostering superiority and racism. Al-Faqih called upon the various tribes of Arabia to fulfil the Prophetic tradition and demonstrate their commitment to reform by sending in their names as individuals in support of MIRA. This was called a communal electronic demonstration, and preceded his call for real demonstrations in 2004. As al-Faqih mobilised people by appealing to their tribal identity, he emphasised equality in Islam. However, by addressing Saudis as individuals belonging to tribes rather than as Saudi citizens, he incurred the wrath of several groups. The government, together with liberals and Sahwis, accused him of playing on old tribal rivalries and ancient feuds. His ex-comrade Muhsin al-Awajy wrote a scathing attack in which he accused al-Faqih of 'sinking the ship rather than reforming it'.[70] Given the ferocity of al-Awajy's attack, it seems that al-Faqih touched a very raw nerve among government officials, who may have authorised al-Awajy's attack. Al-Faqih's response emphasised that Islam did not destroy tribal identities, but mobilised them for the public good. Invoking tribal honour on the basis of an Islamic interpretation for the purpose of political mobilisation is in sharp contrast with official Saudi narratives that demonise tribal allegiance and call upon people to offer their loyalty to the king. Tribes are only allowed to boast about their allegiance to the Al-Saud through the mobilisation of their own members. This is usually done in the context of Nabati poetry, recited in heritage festivals and addressed to the king and other princes. Al-Faqih's mobilisation is, however, very much dependent on whether tribes can be politically motivated after decades of urbanisation, migration to cities and systematic government attempts to undermine tribal economy and leadership. There is no doubt that tribalism as an identity is still prominent in Saudi Arabia, evidence of which is the enthusiasm expressed by many callers to Debate Radio, who highlighted their tribal identity and put it at the service of MIRA's programme. It is very difficult, however, to predict whether the rhetoric of tribalism and honour will eventually lead to real mobilisation. So far this

does not seem to be the case. In twenty-first-century Saudi Arabia, tribes and even families are divided and polarised.

One of the novelties of MIRA's radio channel stems from its ability to question dominant understandings of gender relations. While this challenge should not be understood as leading to Western-style feminist awareness, it is definitely an attempt to offer alternative interpretations of gender, but from within the Islamic tradition. Al-Faqih does not call for 'gender equality' as understood in the West. However, he promotes what might be considered as gender complementarity, whereby men and women play complementary roles as specified and defined by *shari'a*. Al-Faqih announces that the problem in Saudi Arabia stems from confusing *shari'a* with social tradition. The official *'ulama* use restrictions on women in an attempt to increase their legitimacy, but in fact they are not capable of separating social practice from the Islamic tradition. Only a free medium for debate and discussion will overcome this problem. He gives the example of women driving, a case where the confusion between social tradition and *shari'a* evidence is clearly demonstrated. While he calls for the creation of more jobs for women and more state benefits for disadvantaged divorcées, widows and spinsters, his proposals fall short of calling for women to occupy positions of leadership, except in areas related to women. Reforming gender relations invokes a paternalistic and protective approach. Women are seen as *al-'unsor al-da'if* (the weak element), who need protection from men and the unjust state. According to al-Faqih, neither men nor women decide on women's rights. The final judgement is the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet.

In a move meant to refute the criticism of his opponents, especially those Saudi liberals who accuse him of aspiring towards a Taliban-style government, al-Faqih allowed and encouraged the participation of *islahiyyat* (female reformers) in Debate Radio. *Islahiyyat* proved to be different from the increasing number of *da'iyyat* (preachers), who by and large endorse the Sahwi discourse and its political position vis-à-vis the regime.[71] *Islahiyyat*, like other MIRA supporters, reject the regime and hold it responsible for the 'misery' of women in Saudi Arabia. Sahwi *da'iyyat* usually blame society and its misguided Islam for the current exclusion of women. Their preaching is primarily concerned with Islamic dress and worship. So far they have not demonstrated an engagement with current political affairs or articulated a vision of reform. Sahwi *da'iyyat* often assert that the problem lies in the tribal patriarchal system rather than political oppression or Islam. Suhaylah Hammad Zayn al-Abdin is such a *da'iyya*, who is very close to the government agenda. MIRA's *islahiyyat*, however, are beginning to articulate an alternative vision that establishes the connection between the status of women and

political oppression. Most MIRA *islahiyyat* are not specifically concerned with issues relevant to women but offer a wide range of opinion on politics, society, the economy and foreign relations.

Women are given a platform to present their views, analyse the current situation and, more importantly, mobilise men by appealing to their Islamic, tribal and masculine honour, described as being regularly violated by the state and its agents. In October 2003 al-Faqih went as far as calling upon women to participate in the Riyadh demonstration, provided that they were veiled and protected by groups of men. He was accused by co-opted Sahwis of hiding behind a female shield (*tatarus bi 'l-nisa*), an act of cowardice. He encouraged women, together with men, to attend regular Friday prayers in specific mosques designated by the movement in an attempt to create a critical mass in such mosques without incurring state repression. This was regarded as a first step towards creating a defiant group of *islahiyyin* and *islahiyyat* without being identified by state security agents. Al-Faqih publicised the plight of Umm Saud, whose son burnt to death in al-Hayer prison, and Ghayda al-Sharif, who was allegedly subjected to humiliation by the Saudi intelligence services following the arrest of her husband. The celebration of the lives and courage of these two women and several others contributes to the creation of images of female heroines who were so 'daring in speaking truth to power'. Their experiences are regularly remembered in prose and poetry.

In general, *islahiyyat* have proved to be articulate and thoughtful. They not only discuss issues relevant to women, but also men. On various occasion, I participated in the debate and generated a wide range of responses from both men and women. The majority are young schoolteachers, students in higher education or housewives who have a good level of literacy and general awareness. They prepare presentations in advance; some speak in classical Arabic, others use colloquial language and powerful poetry. The mood is always defiant and confrontational. They draw on the Islamic tradition to challenge the domination of the royal family and its *'ulama*. More importantly, they search for religious interpretations that are not mediated by royal authority or state *'ulama*. They discuss the plight of women who are abandoned by their husbands and the state, such as widows, divorcées, spinsters and all those marginalised in Saudi society. They argue that jobs for people are not a matter of luxury; but a means of survival. They emphasise that the state must create jobs for women that respect sex segregation and Islamic tradition. One woman called for the state to employ women in the judiciary as assistants and counsellors in order to create a comfortable space for other women in an otherwise all-male forum. The *islahiyyat* want to break the chain of subservience, they want women to be treated as people with full rights and

responsibilities, derived according to their vision of Islam. While they reject Western-style feminist discourse, they search for an 'authentic' Islamic alternative.

They denounce the state for forcing female teachers to travel long distances to remote schools, or even schools in other cities. They claim that this is a strategy to break up the family. The regime forces people to be so preoccupied with the details of living that they forget the real problem – oppression and corruption, according to one *islahiyya*. While *islahiyyat* call for respect and equality, they draw on *shariʿa* evidence and the tradition of the Prophet to promote a vision whereby women play an important role in society. They emphasise the connection between the marginalisation of women and political oppression. When a member of the Consultative Council, Muhammad al-Zulfa, called upon the council to debate women driving in 2005, an opinion poll on the MIRA website indicated that most participants (approximately 60 per cent) would support allowing women to drive only if the Al-Saud cease to rule the country, itself an interesting result. In this opinion poll, women's driving is conditional not on *shariʿa* evidence or social tradition, but on the overthrow of the Saudi regime. This demonstrates that gender issues in Saudi Arabia are truly a political rather than a *shariʿa* or social concern. As the Saudi regime is seen as 'morally corrupt', opposition groups emphasise piety and moral superiority. Women are central to this vision.

The participation of women in MIRA forums (internet and radio) reflects the state of frustration experienced by Saudi women in general. MIRA's *islahiyyat* denounce state-initiated reforms, for example employing women in Saudia Airlines, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other envisaged sectors. They reject state-sponsored reforms in the area of gender relations: often such initiatives are interpreted as a conspiracy to normalise moral corruption and degeneration. They interpret state initiatives as attempts to 'corrupt' women and destroy the piety of society. They are very critical of entertainment satellite channels owned by Saudi princes – for example, al-Walid ibn Talal's Rotana music channel. *Islahiyyat* stretch the debate on gender, yet it is important to emphasise that they do not offer a radical programme outside the Islamic tradition. As in other Muslim countries – for example, Egypt and Iran – Saudi *islahiyyat* reflect personal attempts to articulate an Islamic feminism that draws on early Muslim tradition, especially the Prophet's biography and that of early female companions of the Prophet (*sahabiyyat*), to reformulate solutions for modern and contemporary problems. They denounce traditional *ʿulama* for concentrating on interpretations that deal with women's issues such as menstruation and ablution while excluding the general plight of women in Saudi society. They call such *ʿulama mashaykh*

al-haydh, 'the sheikhs of menstruation', a reference to their numerous *fatwa*s in this area. In this Islamic feminism, there is no role for state-sponsored social reforms. Most *islahiyyat* consider the state an agent of corruption rather than reform, and as a violator of women's honour rather than its protector. Examples of raids on private homes, the arrests of sons and brothers and even women themselves, provide ample evidence of this violation. According to many *islahiyyat*, the Saudi leadership exploits women after impoverishing them and depriving them of their rights. They say that it has failed to provide either economic or physical security for women, either on the streets or inside the confines of the household. They call for women's employment, as they see it as a strategy for survival for many women. Some *islahiyyat* reject the concept of *wali al-amr*, for example fathers, brothers or sons who act as guardians of women. They want to be treated as legal persons who represent themselves rather than as minors who need to be represented by others, a position that not only challenges parental authority but also political extensions of this personal and familial relationship.

It is important to compare their position with that of other categories of women in Saudi society. Some Saudi women regard the royal family as their main protector against the forces of backwardness, by which they often mean the official religious establishment that so far has denounced calls for social change. They have hopes that enlightened members of the royal family, together with moderate Muslim scholars, will crush religious opposition and initiate reforms in the area of gender. As mentioned earlier in this book, the religious establishment controls the social sphere as it is the only area left under its jurisdiction, so their hold over this last precious area of control may not evaporate very easily. Selected professional women, academics and writers were involved in presenting a petition to the royal family calling for greater freedom and recognition, in addition to signing other general reform petitions.[72] In September 2005 King Abdullah received a group of Saudi businesswomen, academics and writers to discuss matters related to the status of women in general. The discussion remained enshrined in secrecy, perhaps for fear of antagonising traditional elements in Saudi society. The controversy caused by the participation of a famous businesswoman whose veil was not tight enough – it occasionally slipped – in the Jiddah Economic Forum in 2004 was perhaps a factor in keeping the king's discussion with women behind closed doors.

MIRA's *islahiyyat* follow the news of such encounters and offer their own interpretations of the situation. In general, they regard the female signatories of petitions and those who met with the king as unrepresentative of Saudi women and as co-opted groups that the state uses to polish its

image abroad. In the words of one distinguished *islahiyya*, 'the issue for me is not whether I will be allowed to drive but whether I will be able to afford a car'.[73] Women who belong to the business elite and who inherited the management of family financial companies, together with female professionals and writers, may not constitute a representative sample of Saudi women, the majority of whom remain marginalised and underprivileged.

Like other groups in Saudi society, MIRA constantly searches for uncensored spaces. If its communication arm, PTV Radio, continues without government interference, it may develop into a substantial voice. This will depend on whether al-Faqih continues to receive funds for his various activities, and on whether the British government resists Saudi or American pressure to deport him.[74] Developments inside Saudi Arabia may also influence the future of MIRA. Increased Jihadi violence, together with failure of King Abdullah to act upon at least some of the political reform agenda demanded in the various aforementioned petitions, may create a window of opportunity for MIRA.

It remains to be seen whether MIRA will be able to recruit supporters from influential groups across Saudi Arabia, such as professionals, intellectuals and foot-soldiers drawn from the various regions. Its headquarters in London is manned by a Ghamdi, a descendant of the Hijazi al-Ashraf (Abdulaziz al-Shanbari), an Otaybi, in addition to al-Faqih who claims decent from Banu Tamim. In December 2005 al-Shanbari declared that he had defected from MIRA and returned to Saudi Arabia. In March 2006 he appeared on al-Arabiyya Saudi satellite channel, denouncing MIRA and its director, while glorifying King Abdullah. One cannot rule out the possibility that the regime exerted pressure on al-Shanbari to denounce al-Faqih and accuse him of working for the intelligence services of Libya, Iran, Britain and another unnamed Gulf state, possibly Qatar. Such accusations must be understood in the context of Saudi efforts to discredit al-Faqih, one of the remaining unco-opted dissidents abroad. Al-Shanbari claimed that al-Faqih was Iraqi until the age of seventeen, a reference to the fact that al-Faqih grew up in al-Zobayr, a Sunni town in southern Iraq that has been host to several waves of Najdi migrants for the last three hundred years.

No doubt other MIRA supporters remain behind the scenes. Lists of people who have offered their allegiance indicate that a cross-section of Saudi society responded to al-Faqih's electronic support demonstration in 2004. It is difficult to asses the magnitude of MIRA in the present context of repression. Identification with MIRA, contact with or participation in its daily radio programme remain crimes punishable by arrest.

So far liberals see MIRA as a dissident political movement that draws on strict Wahhabi interpretations. They accuse it of aspiring towards

establishing a Taliban-style regime in Saudi Arabia. Al-Faqih's views on gender issues and the fact that women participated not only in Debate Radio but also in the October 2003 demonstrations did little to dispel these accusations. Al-Faqih boasts that his Salafi orientation did not prevent him from using the latest communication technology to spread his message, proof of his endorsement of modernity. While using modern technology is not the same as being modern, it attests to the fact that this Salafi opposition is a product of modernity rather than a movement against it. Modernity for MIRA is defined according to its own terms, itself a proof of the possibility of multiple modernities.

When confronted with liberal accusations, al-Faqih argues that there are three categories of liberals in Saudi Arabia. First, there are those who theorise liberalism and believe in political liberties as defined in the Western tradition. He claims that he respects those people because they are consistent and tend to be critical of the royal family. These diehard liberals are almost extinct in Saudi society, according to al-Faqih. The second group is very hypocritical and subservient to the royal family despite their liberal tendencies. They only promote the social aspect of liberalism, as they call for the adoption of Western lifestyles but defend Saudi authoritarianism, justify dictatorship, absence of accountability and secrecy in politics. Those so-called liberals tend to be dominant in Saudi-owned media and government bureaucracies. He says he has no respect for such people. The third group consists of those who support MIRA but have 'overstretched' liberal social programmes. Such people are mistakenly classified as liberals because of bias in Saudi society against those who do not exhibit clear signs of religiosity. According to al-Faqih, they are in fact *islahiyyin*, who need a gentle approach in order to include them in MIRA's project.

Traditional *'ulama* and outspoken Sahwis attacked MIRA on various occasions. Some Jihadis openly praise MIRA and its director. Others have reservations regarding MIRA's self-proclaimed peaceful strategy to overthrow the regime. Some Debate Radio callers are occasionally impatient with peaceful demonstrations or communal prayers as a political strategy. On several occasions al-Faqih cut their participation in the programme for praising violence. Most MIRA supporters seem to be frustrated with the fact that they cannot get to meet each other for fear of the intelligence services and oppression by the regime.

Will MIRA attract Jihadis who may have given up violence after the serious bloody confrontations with the regime? Such a question cannot be answered at the moment. However, it seems that by 2005, MIRA's message resonated among the unemployed and the marginalised in peripheral regions and low-income neighbourhoods. It is clear that

MIRA attracts several marginalised Hijazis, Asiris and members of the northern tribes. It may have the support of wealthy and influential members but they are not visible for obvious reasons. It remains to be seen whether MIRA through its daily broadcast can transform those atomised, disenfranchised, and marginalised young men and women into organised clandestine political activists who will in the future pose a threat to the regime. Regular demonstrations and civil disobedience may embarrass the government at a time when it may not be able, in the age of increasing exposure and globalised communication, to use force indiscriminately against peaceful, unarmed demonstrators. Any bloody confrontation with peaceful demonstrators would have serious repercussions, both internally and externally. While the government does not feel it needs to justify violence against armed Jihadis, it is unlikely that it will be able to excuse the use of violence against peaceful civilians.

Publications, political activism, internet discussion boards and live radio provide Saudis with unmediated spaces where they articulate a constant preoccupation with freeing themselves from the domination of state-approved interpretations of history, theology and politics. So far their debates have not crystallised around strong independent institutions and organisations, as these are banned, yet the anonymity and informality of the spaces various voices occupy provide alternative visions that are threatening to the regime. Such voices challenge the main pillars of authoritarianism, mainly the consenting narratives that draw on sacred religious tradition, thereby granting holiness sanctioned by texts and their interpreters to this authoritarianism. While direct repression is regularly practised, the regime censors books, jams radio stations and controls the internet.[75] The imprisonment of the constitutional reformers and regular reports on the abuse of human rights remain an embarrassment. Yet there is no doubt that the process of undermining authoritarian rule has already begun. It is difficult to bring it to a halt. The search for the unmediated word of God may eventually lead to the dismantling of authoritarian rule.

Conclusion

Literature on Saudi Arabia often starts by making the obvious observation that the regime derives its legitimacy from Wahhabiyya. Yet not many studies go further than this, for example to analyse the internal dynamics and dialectics of this legitimacy. In this book I have explored the ways in which Wahhabiyya became a hegemonic discourse under the patronage of the state. Rather than being a tradition opposed to modernity, Wahhabiyya flourished and its advocates became prosperous as a result of the immersion of Saudi Arabia in modernity. Wahhabiyya became a dominant discourse because of state patronage, oil and modernity. However, the same factors that consolidated it have led to its contestation. This has resulted in the emergence of multiple Wahhabi discourses, all constructed against the background of state control.

The creation of the modern state in 1932 consolidated a religious tradition that grew in the shadow of the sultan. After the state eliminated undesirable elements and interpretations in the 1920s, Wahhabiyya became the dominant religious discourse, whose consolidation was dependent on financial and moral support from the political elite. Wahhabi scholars developed into a class of *noblesse d'état* with its own interests and role in the political realm. This elite originated in the small oases and settlements of southern Najd and Qasim that produced religious interpreters. Until the 1970s *aimat al-da'wa al-najdiyya* represented a close circle of people of knowledge. Against the universal claims of Wahhabiyya, mainly its assertion that it represented the authentic Sunni tradition, it remained anchored in one geographical region and propagated by people with clear regional genealogical connections.

Three important concepts, deeply grounded in the religious tradition, were deployed in supporting the project of state expansion. Relying on the tradition of the founding father, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the Wahhabi *'ulama* promoted migration, excommunication and *jihad* to consolidate the political realm. All three concepts were conducive to political centralisation and domination. Interpretations of migration marked a physical boundary between the realm of blasphemy and the

land of piety. It became compulsory for the Arabian population to abandon its own 'region of blasphemy' in favour of that of piety. The political realm was consolidated as a result of fear of death in the land of debauchery and associationist practices. To seek salvation one had to migrate to territories under the political authority of the Al-Saud and the religious authority of the Wahhabi *'ulama*. Similarly, excommunication of other Muslims who lived in blasphemous places became another mechanism that consolidated the realm. Early twentieth-century Wahhabi *'ulama* reinvoked the tradition of their eighteenth-century founder, who sent letters to faraway communities outlining their degeneration and religious bankruptcy. Those who did not voluntarily move to the land of piety had to be fought in their own territories to bring them back to Islam. Re-Islamising society and individual salvation were dependent on submission to the rightful Imam – the founder of Saudi Arabia, Abdulaziz ibn Saud. Those who hesitated over the exodus to piety were subjected to *jihad*, a duty anchored in sacred texts. After the activation of the three concepts, the state was proclaimed in 1932. Wahhabi discourse was successful in mystifying the world for the sake of power.

With the advent of oil in the second half of the twentieth century, the regime shared the booty with its most loyal religious scholars, now serving as judges, jurists, teachers and preachers to an increasing number of Saudis. For a brief period, the Riyadh-based religious study circles of famous Wahhabi *'ulama* became the Mecca for new recruits and converts. They initially came from Qasim, Hasa and northern Najd, and later from Hijaz, Asir, the northern and eastern provinces. In a third phase, students seeking religious knowledge came from not only the Muslim world but also from among Muslim minorities in the West.[1] Most of the novices returned to their countries to preach a new faith, acquired in the heartland of Islam, under the patronage of the so-called monotheist state.

It was not long before the oil revenues were able to fund the foundation of modern religious study centres. From the 1960s schools and universities were set up across the country. Initially the staff arrived from other countries in the Arab world, especially those that produced an excess of religious educators who could not be absorbed locally or were expelled from these countries by revolutionary Arab secular regimes. Saudi Arabia adopted an open-door policy as it expanded its religious educational bureaucracy. The new recruits were seen as a shield against the revolutionary rhetoric of these Arab regimes. All were controlled and supervised by the local Wahhabi circle. Such religious educators acted on Saudi society but also reacted to the system of control already in place. They influenced and were influenced by local Saudi Wahhabi interpretations. All benefited from the oil boom of the 1970s.

Oil revenues allowed the regime to expand and purchase the latest innovations of Western modernity. Technology and easy travel facilitated the consolidation of Wahhabi discourse and widened the circle of recruits. As more Saudis entered schools and universities, many chose religious careers. The rest were inexorably exposed to religious interpretations in a systematic way. Schools, universities, radio, television, public lectures, private study circles and the media played a crucial role. After a near-monopoly over religious interpretations by the Najdi circle, recruitment and dissemination was expanded. The regime succeeded in enforcing the appearances of religiosity while politics was moving away from the control of religion and the religious.

The proliferation of Wahhabiyya produced consenting subjects, who, as I argued in the first chapter, internalised specific interpretations of sacred religious texts calling upon true believers to submit to the will of rulers, respect their wisdom and revere their policies. These interpretations rendered public calls for reform, political participation and even open discussion of public affairs akin to blasphemy. While not invented by Wahhabi *'ulama* – they had a history rooted in certain interpretations within Sunni Islam – they were reinvented, reconstructed and widely propagated.

The regime did not need to use excessive force, although it occasionally found that it had to resort to harsh measures. Under its patronage, Wahhabi *'ulama* propagated interpretations that equated obeying rulers with obeying God. If a Saudi criticised the leadership, he committed a sin, violated God's orders and challenged divine wisdom. Obedience must be extended to a group of *wulat al-amr*, an ambiguous large circle, understood to include princes and religious scholars. Official Wahhabiyya required complete submission to the wisdom of the *umara* and *'ulama*, as represented in Ibn Baz's interpretations of Quranic verses.

The discourse of consent was internalised by several generations of Saudis. With modernity, state schools, universities, mosques, the media and all communication technology propagated the discourse of acquiescence. This is not to say that Saudis consented because they were simply bribed by the 'rentier state', with its redistributive system that exchanges welfare for loyalty and submission. Although the regime did its best to buy loyalty, reward or promise to reward obedience and patronise social groups, there were more subtle forms of domination and submission. The manufacture of consenting subjects needed more than oil to lubricate an everlasting acquiescence. Wahhabi religio-political discourse preceded oil. It not only sanctified authoritarian rule, it provided shared meanings that tied people to a particular political configuration. Wahhabiyya succeeded in Islamising Saudi authoritarianism rather than society.

Saudi authoritarianism developed in the twentieth century because it was able to capitalise on a master narrative, the sum total of religio-political interpretations that assumed sanctity. When such discourse was not there or was less developed, Wahhabi *'ulama* invented it for the sake of power. For more than seventy years, those who propagated this discourse were an elite class, above ordinary human evaluation and assessment. This authoritarianism was governed by highly structured sequences, narratives and rituals enacted at certain places and times. The religious discourse linked the present to the past, and present to future. As in colonial contexts, political order was to be achieved not through the intermittent use of coercion but through continuous instructions, inspection and control.[2] Saudi–Wahhabi religious discourse created consenting political subjects. It established links between divinely received wisdom and religious and political authority.

A product of state control and modernity, Saudi religio-political discourse proliferated, fragmented and challenged state authority. Unexpectedly, control under authoritarian rule produced the seeds of mutation. Wahhabiyya developed interpretations that challenged the discourse of control. As official Wahhabiyya enchanted society, rendering it more religious, and dis-enchanted politics, loud and critical voices emerged among those who had been brought up on its teachings. The Sahwis, mainly a product of Wahhabi education and modernity as experienced in universities, challenged official Wahhabi religio-political discourse as they called upon people to re-enchant politics. Sahwis contested the acquiescent discourse, a move that led inevitably to confrontation with the regime in the 1990s. While most Sahwi rhetoric was a response to what Sahwis defined as Western domination, they made linkages, subtle and not so subtle, between their local regime and Western domination. After brief periods of imprisonment, followed by a changing world situation after 11 September and a wave of violence inside the country, Sahwis were put on the defensive. They became the 'accused'. In order to defend their position, they tried two simultaneous strategies. They moderated and even stopped their criticism of the government, while a small minority endeavoured to mediate and negotiate with those defined as having 'gone astray', the Jihadis. Sahwis remain restless in Saudi Arabia despite regime's efforts to incorporate them and enlist them in its effort to combat terrorism. In the post-11 September period, Sahwis defended the regime and condemned Jihadis for their ignorance. They called upon Jihadis to give themselves up so that they could be rehabilitated and re-educated in the 'right' religious interpretations. Sahwis today refrain from challenging the government but they continue to attack the West, a safe position as long as they do not call openly for a

perpetual *jihad* against infidels. They restrain their followers by arguing that only in occupied territories, for example Palestine, Iraq and Chechnya, is *jihad* permissible. Sahwi religious effervescence is now concentrated on the social sphere. Socially, Sahwis claim to defend the authentic Islamic tradition while some figures, such as Salman al-Awdah, have developed a moderate transnational religious discourse appropriate for Arab satellite television viewers. Rather like the ageing religious establishment, Sahwis see themselves as defenders of the *umma* against corrupting Western domination and cultural imperialism. Today they are a 'church in waiting'.

Wahhabi discourse was prematurely transnationalised. The process started vigorously in the 1970s and 1980s. Wahhabi interpretations travelled to Afghanistan with the Jihadis. There it went through a process of reinterpretation as it was exposed for the first time to open combat, debate and competition. With the gates of *jihad* closed in Saudi Arabia since 1932, young Saudis travelled to Afghanistan in pursuit of an honourable martyrdom.

In Afghanistan, free spaces emerged where Saudis experimented with religious interpretation. Under the fog of war, a hybrid discourse emphasising rebellion against despotic rulers matured with Osama bin Laden's patronage and the influence of other Islamist Jihadi traditions. This discourse was not invented in Afghanistan. It arrived in Afghanistan with the Saudi Afghans. Trying to identify whether Osama bin Laden is a Wahhabi seems to me a futile exercise. What is clear is that his message went further than official Wahhabi interpretations had ever been able to go. While his message is rejected by many, it is endorsed and defended by a few Saudis. His revolutionary rhetoric was developed and supported by *shari'a* evidence and the interpretations of the early Wahhabi scholars themselves. The contestation of Saudi religious discourse coexisted with official efforts to export the traditional, acquiescent interpretations. In London official Saudi religious discourse arrived to educate in matters related to worship and creed, but this education spawned interpretations that had political consequences. Both the challenging political interpretations and the consenting literature on worship proved to be popular, empowering discourses. This empowerment derives from complying with rigid rules that regulate the body and relations with the other. Saudi discourse had moved from localism to transnationalism before developing a sufficient level of sophistication suitable for an international Muslim audience. This premature transnationalisation enabled its advocates to develop its full revolutionary potential.

After 2001 debates on religious interpretations continued at home with the outbreak of violence in major Saudi cities. Jihadis developed

rebellious interpretations and anchored these in the Wahhabi tradition. They confronted both official *'ulama* and Sahwis. They considered their early mentors as people who betrayed the project and failed to carry it to its logical conclusions. Jihadis did not import a new religious tradition. They simply revisited Wahhabi interpretations. They invoked symbols and meanings that resonate with society. In the style of an early generation of Wahhabi *'ulama*, young Jihadi scholars assumed the role of authentic guardians of the original message of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The founder's words and those of his disciples were crucial.

Jihadi activists used the internet to spread the message. This was the beginning of the privatisation of *jihad* in the age of globalisation. After each terrorist attack, Jihadis released statements and films celebrating the life and death of martyrs. In the twenty-first century, *jihad* became a performance with its own politics and poetics that draw on old meanings but is delivered and disseminated using the latest communication technology. Jihadi violence is not simply about challenging the regime and expelling infidels from the Arabian Peninsula. It is concerned with battles over religious interpretation, cultural values, national identity and the position of women. It emerges as a result of a modern orientation in which men feel they can change the world by action. Jihadis combine a longing for a return to the authentic tradition with ultra-modern concerns. Jihadi rhetoric is very traditional, yet the messages reflect issues that are a product of modernity. Jihadis are concerned with the question of loss of identity, hardly an issue in traditional societies. Their messages tended to be global, yet they are fully immersed in the politics of the locality. Such messages flourish in contexts in which aspirations are suppressed, projects are diverted and comrades betrayed. They also blossom in contexts where the gap between proclaimed official political discourse and reality is extremely wide.

Saudi Jihadi discourse emerged in an authoritarian context. Low levels of education, rising aspirations, economic deprivation, social marginalisation and suppressed dreams are the context rather than the cause. While *jihad* is commonly interpreted as a struggle for the sake of God, it is in fact a struggle over religious interpretation and identity at a time when there are several competing discourses and multiple identities. Jihadis do not seek to annihilate themselves because they are suffering alienation, sexual frustration or anomie. It seems that they do so because they strongly believe in their power and strength – both expressed in religious idiom. They are aware of the fact that after their martyrdom, some would hail them as heroes in the land of no heroes.

Through the life of one Saudi Salafi, Lewis Atiyat Allah, I traced the competing lives and identities that this personality experienced and

expressed. Lewis experimented with Sahwa, abandoned it in favour of liberalism, then returned to Sahwa, only to be disappointed. He claims to have found his salvation in Jihadism. It remains to be seen whether this is Lewis's final destination. I have my doubts.

This book highlighted the consequences of state efforts to domesticate religion and its interpreters. The Al-Saud controlled religious interpretations that were carefully produced by a group of *'ulama*. The latter took control of the social sphere while leaving politics to the Al-Saud and their advisers. The Al-Saud had no qualms with uncompromising religious interpretations applied in the social sphere. The more the public arena appeared to be 'properly Islamised', the more they are seen as pious Muslim rulers – or at least this is what they hoped. The *'ulama* played the game according to the rules. They excelled in enforcing the outward appearances of Islam while the regime conducted its policy on the basis of pragmatism and survival, like any other government.

If ever the *'ulama* interfered in the well-guarded realm of politics, it was only to repeat interpretations that consolidated power and eliminated any potential dissident voices. They interpreted peaceful dissidence as violation of Quranic verses that call upon the believers to obey God, the Prophet and *wali al-amr*. The state itself created the conditions that allowed mutations of the Wahhabi tradition. The more the state enforced the *'ulama*'s interpretations, the more this discourse proliferated. Those who excommunicate the regime itself draw on early Wahhabi sources of interpretation: when the state closed the gates of *ijtihad* (interpretation), society (or more accurately sections of it) opened the gates of *jihad*. The Saudi regime created the conditions for religiously motivated violence. Today it is struggling to convince the world that it is a victim of this violence. At the same time, it is desperately trying to convince the West that it is the only shield against this violence spreading more widely and claiming many lives, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The Saudi regime resorts to its old game. In Western contexts it demonises its own constituency for the sake of projecting itself as the sole agent of modernity, prosperity and tolerance. It relies on a circle of Western-educated princes and advisers to project an image of modernity that appeals to a West still dependent on Saudi oil. Many observers of Saudi Arabia forget the role played by these very princes and their loyal *'ulama* in creating the conditions for radicalism and violence. What is meant here is not 'sponsoring terrorism' but creating the conditions that make it the only imagined solution. Had Saudis been allowed to articulate and express alternative religious interpretations, not many would have resorted to violence. Alternatively, had the Saudi leadership acted according to its professed symbols and rhetoric, not many Saudis would have described their regime as a *kafir* regime.

This study has captured several ongoing realities about Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century. Despite being subject to authoritarian rule, Saudis today are engaged in a fierce debate about religion and politics, previously considered taboo topics. This debate takes place in both traditional and less traditional spaces, the latter the result of advances in communication technology. This debate is extremely modern as it reflects concerns over identity and place in the world. In a very short period, Saudis moved from a localised identity that revolved around kin, tribe, sect and region to globalisation, before consolidating a national identity. They celebrated narrow identities while at the same time they endorsed global religious belonging. They exported their narrow religious discourse before they themselves were able to cope with the pressures exerted by modernity.

The debate and those involved in it do not easily fit ready-made categories such as traditional, moderate or radical. I hope this book reflects the way those engaged in the debate can easily move from one category to another. The more authoritarian rule exerts pressure to contain debate, the more interpretations proliferate and escape the straitjacket imposed from above. As the debate disappears from the public sphere, it is bound to become more radical and dangerous. It lives in the shadow of a huge religious bureaucracy with its own privileges and power. When the official establishment became completely co-opted, Sahwis emerged to challenge its interpretations. With the co-optation of Sahwis, Jihadi interpretations emerged to challenge both. The process will continue as long as authoritarian rule continues to discipline and punish those who offer alternative interpretations. Because of the previous hegemonic status of Wahhabiyya, all will try to anchor their discourse within this so-called authentic tradition. A small minority will try to destroy Wahhabiyya altogether. This conclusion challenges the ongoing attempts by various groups to renew religious discourse under the rubric of *tajdid al-khitab al-dini* (renewing religious discourse). For this renewal to take place the right context must be dominant.

As Jihadi violence claimed many lives and triggered a wave of government repression, it must be acknowledged that it speeded up religio-political debate in Saudi Arabia more than any other event in the recent history of the country. While the official religious establishment reiterates its discourse of acquiescence, educated Saudis, intellectuals, *'ulama* and laymen challenge this discourse. People who search for the original message of Salafiyya, namely the quest for the unmediated word of God, are currently engaged in redefining the religious field. It seems that not many Saudis want to reassert the consenting discourse of the official *'ulama*, although they themselves continue to claim that they hold the keys

to salvation. Many Saudis struggle to dismantle the three pillars of authoritarian rule, the historical, theological and political narratives propagated by the ruling elite and their *noblesse d'état*. Saudis are beginning to imagine and articulate alternative religious interpretations that promise to free them from a cumulative religio-political discourse that grew in the shadow of power. Perhaps this quest will eventually lead to dismantling authoritarian rule itself. Only then Saudis will be fully integrated in the world – not as idiosyncratic fanatical puritans, suppressed bohemian subjects or romanticised tribal desert warriors, but as free citizens able to articulate, choose and live narratives of their own making.

Notes

INTRODUCTION: DEBATING RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

1 For recent balanced scholarly history of the Wahhabiyya, see David Commins, *The Wahhabis Mission and Saudi Arabia*, London: I. B. Tauris 2005. Other sources include Esther Peskes, *Muhammad b. Abdalwahhab (1703–92) im Widerstreit. Untersuchungen zuz Rekonstruktion der Fruhgeschichte der Wahhabiya*, Beirut: Steiner, 1993; Guido Steinberg, 'Religion und Staat in Saudi-Arabien. Eine Sozialgeschichte der wahhabitischen Gelehrten 1912–1953', Ph.D. thesis, Berlin: Free University, 2000; Guido Steinberg, 'The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to the Present', in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, London: Hurst & Co., 2005, pp. 11–34; Michael Cook, 'The Expansion of the First Saudi State: The Case of Washm', in C. Bosworth, C. Issawi, R. Savory and U. Udovitch (eds.), *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 661–99.

2 For a history of the first and second Saudi states see Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, pp. 14–26.

3 Bashir Nafi discusses the rise and decline of the Salafiyya that was associated with the nineteenth-century reformist modernist trend in the Arab world, mainly the project of Abduh, al-Afghani, al-Alusi and Rida. See Basheer Nafi, *The Rise and Decline of the Arab-Islamic Reform Movement*, London: Institute for Contemporary Islamic Thought, 2000, p. 45.

4 On revivalism in Islam, see Bruce Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam beyond Violence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998. See also Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1978–1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

5 The defeat of Egypt in 1967 was a crucial moment for the shift in power to the advantage of Saudi Arabia. See Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 128–34; Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Mazaq al-islah fi al-saudiyya fi al qarn al-wahid wa al-ishrin*, London: Saqi Books, 2005, pp. 9–24.

6 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's brother Sulayman wrote one of the first critiques of Wahhabiyya in which he reprimanded his brother for excessive excommunication of other Muslims. See Sulayman ibn Abd

al-Wahhab, *al-Sawaiq al-ilahiyya fi al-radd ala al-wahhabiyya*, Beirut: Dhu al-Faqar, 1997.

7 In the eighteenth cenury the *qadi* of Mecca, Ahmad bin Zayni Dahlan, denounced his contemporary, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in a short responsa. See Ahmad Dahlan. *al-Durar al-saniyya fi al-radd ala al-wahhabiyya*, Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqafiyya, n.d.

8 Sunni *ʿulama* who were close to Ottoman officials in Damascus and Baghdad denounced Wahhabiyya in several volumes that appeared in the eighteenth century. For an understanding of Salafi–Wahhabi religious debate in Baghdad, see Hala Fattah, ' "Wahhabi" Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri and the Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745–1930', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14/2 (2003): 127–48. For an understanding of the confrontation between Iraqi *ʿulama* and Wahhabiyya, see Rasul Muhammad Rasul, *al-Wahabiyyun wa al-iraq, aqidat al-shuyukh wa suyuf al-muharibin*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2005. The Azharite scholar Muhammad al-Ghazali denounced Wahhabis as ʿahl al-hadith who use less authentic hadiths to formulate religious rulings'. The Ahl al-Hadith is a group seeking literalist interpretation of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition. This school of thought was strong in a section of the Muslim community in India, where it emerged. It is often reported that Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab frequented the circle of one of their scholars, someone by the name of al-Sindi, who was in Mecca at the time. Ahl al-Hadith had followers in Saudi Arabia and sometimes the boundaries between them and Wahhabis are blurred. Ahl al-Hadith rejects all schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*) because they involve human opinion and interpretation, while Wahhabis revere Hanbali *fiqh*. Muhammad al-Ghazali promotes a different approach, associated with *ahl al-fiqh* (people of jurisprudence). See Muhammad al-Ghazali, *al-Sunna al-nabawiyya bayn ahl al fiqh wa ahl al-hadith*, 13th edn., Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2005.

9 Even in present-day Turkey, considerable intellectual effort, especially in Sufi circles, is devoted to refuting Wahhabi claims and positions on important matters of religious doctrine and practice. An Arabic version of a Turkish website publicises anti-Wahhabi publications for Arabic speakers. See http://www.hizmetbooks.org/hakikat/arabic/arabic.htm.

10 Shiʿi, Zaydi and Ismaili Muslims continue to defend their tradition against Wahhabi positions that in the past denounced them as innovators. See Hasan al-Saqqaf, *al-Salafiyya al-wahhabiyya*, Beirut: Dar al-Mizan, 2005; Muhammad Mughniyyah, *Hathihi hiya al-wahhabiyya*, Beirut: Dar al-Jawad, 1982; Ayatollah Hadi Kashif al-Ghita, *al-Ajwiba al-najafiyya fi al-radd ala al-fatawi al-wahhabiyya*, Beirut: al-Ghadir, 2004.

11 St John Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, London: Constable & Co., 1928; George Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia: Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703/4–1792) and the Beginnings of the Unitarian Empire in Arabia*, London: Arabian Publishing, 2005. In 2005 Rentz's 1948 thesis was published by a London-based publisher acting on behalf of a Saudi research centre in an attempt to dispel Western accusations against Wahhabiyya. For a critical review of Rentz's thesis, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, review of Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement*, in *Middle Eastern Studies* 12/10 (2006): 173–7.

12 Representatives of this genre of literature include Vincenzo Oliveti, *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences*, Birmingham: Amadeusbooks, 2001; Craig Ungar, *House of Bush House of Saud: The Secret Relationship between the World's Two Most Powerful Dynasties*, New York: Scribner, 2004; Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004; Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold our Souls for Saudi Crude*, New York: Crown, 2003; and Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam: Saudi Fundamentalism and its Role in Terrorism*, New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

13 See Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, New York: Islamic Publications International, 2002; Asad Abukhalil, *The Battle For Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism and Global Power*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004; Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001.

14 Three Saudi sources in exile take the lead in demonstrating the excessive interpretations of the Wahhabi tradition. The electronic publications of the Washington-based Saudi Institute run by Saudi Shi'i Ali al-Ahmad, the magazine *Shuun Saudiyyah*, published by the London-based National Coalition for Democracy in Saudi Arabia, and the *al-Hijaz* magazine, published by the National Hijazi Society, all take a clearly anti-Wahhabi position.

15 Salafi Publications, a small publisher based in Canada, defend Wahhabiyya. See Haneef James Oliver, *The Wahhabi Myth: Dispelling Prevalent Fallacies and the Fictitious Link with Bin Laden*, Victoria: Trafford, 2002. See also salafipublications.com, especially electronic books that denounce the Muslim Brotherhood, which is accused of corrupting the Salafi creed and encouraging violence. For a defence of Wahhabiyya in Arabic, see the Saudi website http://saaid.net/monawein/m/24.htm (accessed 16 June 2004).

16 Iris Glosemeyer describes these efforts as a charm-offensive campaign, in which the regime mobilised its technocrats, businessmen, *'ulama* and academics to polish the image of the country after 11 September 2001. See Iris Glosemeyer, 'Saudi Arabia: Dynamism Uncovered', in Volker Perthes (ed.), *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004, pp. 141–69, at p. 157. After 11 September, the regime mobilised women to defend the realm outside Saudi Arabia as reflected in the number of Saudi princesses, academics and businesswomen who have been allowed to travel with official Saudi delegations to the USA and Europe. The daughter of King Faysal, Princess Loulouwa al-Faysal, made several appearances in Western capitals, together with Saudi academics and businesswomen. The daughter of King Abdullah, Princess Adillah, issued statements to the media, an unusual move in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the daughter of Prince Talal ibn Abd al-Aziz was reported to have made public statements claiming that her father has the right to be considered among heirs to the throne. All female voices are meant to improve the image of the regime abroad.

17 See Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004. DeLong-Bas goes as far as to argue that Wahhabiyya is a moderate religious interpretation.

18 Gilles Kepel argues that terrorism is a product of the thought of the Muslim Brotherhood exiles in Saudi Arabia. While he draws attention to the fact that

Egyptian and Syrian exiles in the 1960s were under strict orders not to 'interfere' in local Saudi affairs, he seems to suggest that they did. He goes further when he attributes current terrorism to their influence on the Saudi population. His evidence is drawn from the fact that Muhammad Qutb, the brother of famous Egyptian Islamist Sayid Qutb, supervised Safar al-Hawali's doctoral thesis and the fact that the Syrian sheikh Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin might have taught Sheikh Salman al-Awdah in one of the religious institutes in Buraydah in the 1960s. Both examples provide weak evidence of the radicalisation of Saudis as a result of two Muslim Brotherhood activists. The opposite argument can easily be put forward, namely that the local Wahhabi tradition, especially its emphasis on *takfir* and *jihad*, had great influence on the thought of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood exiles in Saudi Arabia. See Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004, pp. 152–96. These issues will be discussed in chapter 2.

19 This confusion is common in media reporting on Saudi Arabia.

20 Steinberg addresses schisms within Wahhabiyya in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argues that there were at least two schools within Wahhabiyya, a radical one (based in Riyadh and Buraydah) and a moderate one, based in Unayzah in Qasim. Steinberg clearly illustrates that religious interpretations are grounded in socio-economic conditions. See Steinberg, 'The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State'. In contemporary Saudi Arabia, it is more accurate to talk about several strands within Wahhabiyya that are not necessarily linked to a geographical region.

21 Paul Dresch makes this observation. See Paul Dresch, 'Societies, Identities and Global Issues', in Paul Dresch and James Piscatori (eds.), *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, pp. 1–33.

22 Bruce Lawrence rightly argues that it is unconvincing to claim that Bin Laden and his movement is an Arab version of the Red Brigades or the ultra-left groups that practised terrorism in Europe in the 1970s, or even nineteenth-century anarchists. See Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, London: Verso, 2005, pp. xx. See also Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*, London: Hurst & Co., 2006. Devji rejects the comparison between Bin Laden and early revolutionary movements. He argues that Bin Laden represents a vision that is mystical, ethical and perhaps heretical, from the point of view of mainstream Islam.

23 Dale Eickelman, 'Inside the Islamic Reformation', *Wilson Quarterly* 22 (1998): 80–98, at p. 82. See also Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996; and Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

24 The *taraju'at* (lit. going back, repentance) of Mansur al-Noqaydan and Mishari al-Thaydi are now well known in the West. Both renounced radicalism and made a career out of publicising their 'reformation'.

25 For internet censorship in Saudi Arabia see Human Rights Watch, *The Internet in the Mideast and North Africa*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999.

26 A representative report is that of Cheryl Benard. See Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, Santa Monica: Rand, 2003. See also Angel Rabasa et al., *The Muslim World after 9/11*, Santa Monica: Rand, 2004.

27 A study of the elite in Saudi Arabia demonstrates that this kind of research is extremely difficult as a result of the Wahhabis' anti-research culture, especially if the subject of research is the religious elite itself. Muhammad al-Sonaytan attributes his less than sufficient data on religious scholars to Wahhabi reservations on research. See Muhammad al-Sunaytan, *al-Nukhab al-saudiyya dirasa fi al-tahawulat wa al-ikhfaqat*, Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-Arabiyya, 2004. While it is incredibly easy to publish biographies that praise the *ʿulama*, it is impossible to see them other than as pious guardians of the Islamic tradition. To say that they are a class set apart and with its own privileges and power amounts to insulting them. Similarly, as expected, biographies of kings and princes tend to promote mythical narratives.

1 CONSENTING SUBJECTS: OFFICIAL WAHHABI RELIGIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE

1 In the twenty-first century Salafis are diverse in their political views on the legitimacy of existing governments, democracy, elections, human rights and those of women and minorities as well as many other important issues. Most importantly, they differ on the strategy that must be adopted vis-à-vis political authority. At one extreme there is a trend that accepts total obedience to rulers and prefers not to initiate any political views. In Saudi Arabia, followers of this trend are pejoratively referred to as Jamis, after a Madina-based sheikh, Aman al-Jami. At the other extreme, Salafi Jihadis call for armed resistance against unjust and *kafir* rulers. Among those who adopt violence as a strategy, there are also subgroups. One such group is known as Ikhwan Burayda. This book will cover some but not all of the dominant and well-known Salafi trends within Saudi Arabia.

2 Saudi–Wahhabi Salafis denounced the Ottoman Empire as a *kafir* regime in the time of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Their objections were centred on the proliferation of Sufi *turuq* (sing. *tariqa*) under the auspices of the Ottoman sultan, a blasphemy that must be rejected by good Muslims. However, it is simplistic to reduce the Ottoman–Wahhabi conflict to its religious dimension. Fattah argues that understanding the Wahhabi revivalist movement especially in the later period of the nineteenth century was closely related to the incorporation of the Gulf region in European imperial design and the shift in trade routes between Europe and Asia. See Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf 1745–1900*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

3 Several Saudi scholars take it for granted that the Arabian population was blasphemous and chaotic prior to Wahhabi revivalism. See Abdullah al-Uthaymin, *al-Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab*, Riyadh: Dar al-Ulum, 1992; Uwaidah al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social, Political, and Religious Conditions during the Three Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, Reading: Ithaca, 2002; Abdulaziz al-Fahad, 'The Imama vs.

the Iqal: Hadari–Bedouin Conflict and the Formation of the Saudi State', in Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis (eds.), *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, New York: Palgrave, 2004, pp. 11–24.

4 Wahhabis identify Hijazis who visit tombs or build domes on graves as *quburi*s, meaning grave-worshippers. This is also a pejorative way to refer to the people of Hijaz in general.

5 An example of Wahhabi historiography that was intimately tied with the movement is the work of Hussein ibn Ghannam, referred to as the Sheikh and Imam, in which one finds a classic example of Wahhabi demonisation of Arabian society together with a detailed description of the atrocities that were inflicted on this society by Wahhabi raids. Ibn Ghannam's book is one of the main historical sources on Wahhabiyya. See Hussein ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*, Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994.

6 On contemporary historiography, see Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 188–217.

7 On folk Islam that prevailed among the population of Arabia, especially women, see Eleanor Doumato, *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

8 For a historical and theological interpretation of this Islamic obligation, see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

9 A vivid description of both the atrocities and gains of the Wahhabis can be found in the chronicles of the movement's historians. See Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*.

10 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Masail al-jahiliyya*, Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1408H, p. 43.

11 For a rationalist critique of 'blocking the means', see Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*.

12 The composition of *majlis al-shura* reflects a mixture of religious scholars and technocrats. For an analysis of the first *majlis*, see Hrair Dekmejian, 'The Rise of Political Islam in Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Journal* 48/4 (1994): 627–43. For the Saudi elite in general, see al-Sunaytan, *al-Nukhab al-saudiyya*.

13 For twentieth century episodes of this dissidence see Madawi Al-Rasheed *A History of Saudi Arabia* 2002.

14 Several Wahhabi publications are used in this chapter. One important source is sheikh Abdulrahman al-Qasim (ed.), *al-Durar al-saniyya fi al-ajwiba al-najdiyya*, 16 vols., Riyadh: n.p., 2004, hereafter *al-Durar al-saniyya*, and Muhammad al-Shuwayir *Abdulaziz ibn Baz majmu fatawi wa maqalat mutanawiah*, vols. V and VI, Jeddah: al-Sabahah, n.d. [1413H], hereafter *Majmu fatawi*, in addition to several publications by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

15 Guido Steinberg describes the ecology of this region where the staunchest supporters of the movement originated. See Guido Steinberg, 'Ecology, Knowledge, and Trade in Central Arabia (Najd) during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Al-Rasheed and Vitalis (eds.), *Counter-Narratives*, pp. 77–102, at pp. 78–88.

16 The Banu Tamim is an ancient sedentary Arabian tribe. Its members lived in the various oases and towns from Hail in the north to Hawtat Bani Tamim in the south. Many years of sedentarisation deprived it of its tribal organisation and structure. Moreover, members of Banu Tamim are found in Gulf states, Iraq, Egypt and the Levant as a result of a long history of trade and migration. Several generations of this tribe settled in Zubayr in southern Iraq, where they formed a Sunni colony.
17 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 49–58.
18 One of the main chronicles of Najdi scholars is Abdullah al-Bassam, *Ulama najd khilal thamaniyat qurun*, vols. I–VIII, Riyadh: Dar al-Asimah, 1419AH. See also Abdullah al-Bassam *Ulama najd khilal sitat qurun* Mecca: Dar al-Nahda, 1398AH.
19 al-Bassam, *Ulama najd khilal thamaniyat qurun*.
20 Pierre Bourdieu argues that schools produce the modern technocrat. They are the most efficient weapon of the state, creating the machinery that operates within ourselves. In contemporary Western society, of which France is an example, the school produces 'state nobility'. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996. In places like Saudi Arabia, we can argue that the Wahhabi *'ulama* and their educational and preaching efforts over the last century are truly a form of *noblesse d'état*, a religious 'nobility' in control of peoples' minds through their monopoly over educational institutions.
21 Alexander Bligh, 'The Saudi Religious Elite (Ulama) as Participants in the Political System of the Kingdom', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17/1 (1985): 37–50.
22 Abdulaziz al-Tuwayjiri, *Li surata al-layl hatf al-sabah*, Beirut: Dar Riyadh al-Rayyis, 1998, p. 474.
23 I borrow this terminology from the anthropologist Abdullah Hammoudi, who applied it in the context of Morocco. See Abdullah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997.
24 Sheikh Ibn Ibrahim's biography is constructed from *al-Durar al-saniyya*.
25 *al-Durar al–saniyya*, vol. XVI, p. 474.
26 al-Bassam, *Ulama najd khilal thamaniyat qurun*, vol. I, p. 244.
27 Ibid., pp. 245–6.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., p. 249.
30 Ibid.
31 *al-Durar al-saniyya*, vol. XVI, pp. 206–313. Sahwi sheikh Safar al-Hawali wrote an interpretation of Ibn Ibrahim's epistle, in which he highlighted the main themes that dominated the sheikh's thinking. See Safar al-Hawali, *Sharh risalat tahkim al-qawanin*, n.p.: Dar al-Kaima, 1999.
32 *al-Durar al-saniyyah*, vol. XVI, p. 206.
33 Nasir al-Fahad, www.alsalafyoon.com, accessed 26 November 2003.
34 Bligh, 'Saudi Religious Elite', p. 39.
35 See http://www.binbaz.org.sa/Doisplay.asp?f=eng0007.
36 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 163–87.

37 Wahhabi state *ʿulama* are not unique in playing this role. For a comparative study, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
38 See http://said.net/Warathah/1/hatif.htm and http;//said.net/Warathah/index/htm, accessed 10 March 2005.
39 Migration as an act of piety and survival is an integral tradition in Islam. For the early tradition of the Prophet and migration from Mecca to Madina, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
40 This obligation is clearly demonstrated in the early history of Wahhabiyya. See Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*.
41 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 2002.
42 Steinberg, 'The Wahhabi Ulama'.
43 *Majmu fatawi*, vol. V, p. 390.
44 Ibid., p. 79.
45 Ibid., p. 342.
46 On the Gulf War of 1990–1, see Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 163–87.
47 Sheikh Muhsin al-Obaykan, 'Maʿna ukhruj al-mushrikin min jazirat al-arab', *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 25 October 2004.
48 On Muslim–infidel relations, see Yohannan Friedman, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
49 Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
50 On the Kharijites see ibid., pp. 54–64. Current official Saudi discourse refers to al-Qaʾida agents as the contemporary Kharijites. See Omar Kamil, *al-Mutatarifun khawarij al-asr*, Beirut: Bisan, 2002.
51 *al-Durar al-saniyyah*, vol. I, p. 73.
52 Ibid., pp. 100–4.
53 Ibid., vol. VIII, pp. 89–90.
54 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 66–7.
55 Ibid., pp. 372–439.
56 Ibid., p. 565.
57 For a biography of Abdullah al-Qasimi, see Yurgen Wasella, *al-Qasimi bayn al-usuliyya wa al-inshiqaq*, trans. Muhammad Kibaybo, Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, 2001.
58 See http://www.metransparent.com/texts/bayan hayat.htm, accessed 3 May 2005.
59 *Majmu fatawi*, vol. VI, pp. 121–2.
60 Michael Crawford, 'Civil War, Foreign Intervention, and the Quest for Political Legitimacy: A Nineteenth Century Saudi Qadi Dilemma', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14 (1982): 227–48, at p. 235.
61 On the Ikhwan, see John Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and their Role in the Creation of the Saudi kingdom, 1910–1930*, Leiden: Brill, 1978 and Joseph Kostiner, 'On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State', *Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1985): 298–323.

62 Rifat Ahmad, *Rasail Juhayman al-Otaybi*, Cairo: Madbouli, 2004.
63 Abu al-Bara al-Najdi, *al-Kawashif al-jaliyya fi kufr al-dawla al-saudiyya*, London: Dar al-Qasim, 1994.
64 Saad al-Faqih, *al-Nitham al-saudi fi mizan al-islam*, London: al-Haraka al-Islamiyya lil islah, 1996; Muhammad al-Masari, *al-Adilla al-qatiyya ala adam shariyat al-dawla al-saudiyya*, London: Dar al-Shariyya, 1995.
65 DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*.
66 For a good interpretation of the tradition of *jihad* in Islam in general, see Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History*, The Hague: Mouton, 1979; Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996. On modern Egyptian interpretations of *jihad*, see Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, New York: Macmillan, 1986.
67 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p. 42.
68 Peter Sluglett and Marion Sluglett, 'The Precarious Monarchy: Britain, Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud and the Establishment of the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies, 1925–1932', in Tim Niblock (ed.), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, London: Croom Helm, 1982, pp. 36–56.
69 Guido Steinberg draws attention to the fact that there is almost a historical amnesia regarding the Wahhabi *'ulama* who sided with the Ikhwan rebels. See Steinberg, 'The Wahhabi Ulama'.
70 Ibid.
71 al-Fahad, 'The Imama vs. the Iqal'.
72 See chapter 4 in this volume.
73 Lisa Meyer, 'More Evidence of Saudi Doubletalk: Judge Caught on Tape Encouraging Saudis to Fight in Iraq', 26 April 2005, NBC investigation unit. See http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7645118/print/1/displaymode/1098/, accessed 28 April 2005. For al-Lohaydan's view on *jihad*, see Saleh al-Lohaydan, *al-Jihad fi al-islam*, Riyadh: Dar al-Liwa, 1980.
74 See http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@158.LNZuqLRwb5j.3@.1dd77103.
75 See www.saudiinstitute.org.
76 John Esposito and John Voll (eds.), *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 10.
77 *al-Durar al-saniyyah*, vol. XVI, p. 348.
78 This position reiterates Islamic political theory that was promoted by medieval scholars such as Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) in *al-Siyasa al-shariyya fi islah al-rai wa al-raiyya*, Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1988; Ali al-Mawardi (991–1031) in *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya wa al-wilayat al-diniyya*, Beirut: al-Arqam, n.d. For a review of Islamic political thought of the medieval period, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*; Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*; and Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.
79 Crown Prince Abdullah became king in August 2005. This was the first time that worldwide coverage of the *bay'a* was possible, thanks to Saudi-owned satellite media and international coverage. Previous *bay'a*s – for example, that of King Fahad in 1982 – were hardly televised outside Saudi Arabia.
80 *al-Durar al-saniyyah*, vol. I, p. 33 and vol. XVI, p. 153.
81 On modernist revivalism, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.

82 Joseph 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 (1986): 53–71.
83 Guido Steinberg describes the low level of religious education among religious scholars in the nineteenth century. See Steinberg, 'Ecology, Knowledge, and Trade', pp. 85–94 and Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 49–58. However, the situation prevailed until the mid-twentieth century, and even today not many Saudi religious scholars have worldwide recognition for their religious knowledge. Despite the decline of al-Azhar in recent decades, it has continued to produce scholars whose reputation travelled across the Muslim world.
84 Abdullah al-Uthaymin, *al-Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab*, p. 152. For another biography of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab see *al-Durar al-saniyyah*, vols. I and XVI and Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*. In English, George Rentz relies on the latter source. See Rentz, *Islamic Reform Movement*.
85 Contrast this lack of theorising Muslim leadership with Sunni reformism in Yemen. See Bernard Haykal, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. On Shi'i preoccupation with the issue of *imama*, see Fuad Ibrahim, *al-Faqih wa al-dawla*, Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, 1998.
86 Uwaidah al-Juhany draws attention to the concerns of the Najdi population at the time of the movement. These concerns did not go beyond regulating social relations and terminating the endemic feuds between various factions in the oases of central Arabia. See al-Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement*.
87 Ahmad al-Katib, *al-Fikr al-siyasi al-wahhabi qira'a tahliliyya* London: Dar al-Shura lil dirasat wa al-ilam, 2003.
88 Kuwaiti Islamist Hakim al-Mutayri criticises Wahhabi positions on politics. See Hakim al-Mutayri, *al-Huriyya wa al-tawafan*, Beirut: al-Muasasa al-Arabiyya lil Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2004.
89 Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Masail al jahiliyyah*, pp. 12–13.
90 Muhammad Qutb, *Jahiliyat al-qarn al-ishrin*, 14th ed., Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1995.
91 Quran, Sura al-nisa, verse 59.
92 Abdulaziz ibn Baz, lecture, 1/4/1417H, see http://www.ibnbaz.com.
93 *al-Durar al-saniyyah*, vol. I, p. 348.
94 al-Mutayri, *al-Huriyya wa al-tawafan*.
95 *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16 May 2005: a Saudi judge sentenced three constitutional reformers to a period ranging from six to nine years in prison. For further details see chapter 6.
96 Abdulaziz ibn Baz, http://binbaz.org.sa/Display.Asp?f=bz01274.htm.
97 al-Mutayri, *al-Huriyya wa al-tawafan*.
98 Abdulaziz Ibn Baz, interview in *al-Dawah* magazine, http://www.ibnbaz.com, 19/12/1415H.
99 This is a reference to the faxes of Saudi Islamist opposition in the mid-1990s.
100 See http://otiby.net/makalat/articles.php?id=104, accessed 12 May 2005.
101 Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*.
102 See Steinberg, 'Ecology, Knowledge, and Trade' on the miserable state of health and scholarship in central Arabia in the nineteenth century.

103 Wahhabi scholars today deny that their intellectual ancestors objected to female education. They insist that they objected to the delivery of education rather than its principle.
104 According to a survey of past and present scholars' views on elections, famous Saudi sheikhs are listed as having reservations, for example Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al-Shaykh, Humud ibn Oqla al-Shuaybi, Ali al-Khodayr and Abdulaziz al-Omar. See http;//www.almaqreze.com/Munawaat/Namesofscholars.htm
105 Bligh, 'Saudi Religious Elite', p. 40.

2 RE-ENCHANTING POLITICS: SAHWIS FROM CONTESTATION TO CO-OPTATION

1 For detailed discussion of the sociological and political impact of the first oil boom, see Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, chapter 5.
2 *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 18 July 2005.
3 For an account of the rise of religious and other universities in Saudi Arabia, see Andre Elias Mazawi, 'The Academic Profession in a Rentier State: the Professoriate in Saudi Arabia', *Minerva* 4 (2005):221–244.
4 Hamad al-Salloum, *Education in Saudi Arabia*, Washington: Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1995, p. 70.
5 The Saudi Arabian Information Resource, http://www.saudinf.com/main/j42.htm.
6 Al-Salloum, *Education in Saudi Arabia*, p. 71.
7 The Saudi Arabian Information Resource, http://www.saudinf.com/main/j44.htm.
8 James Piscatori, 'The Evolution of a Wahhabi University', unpublished conference paper, Oxford, September 2003.
9 Sheikh Salman al-Awdah's doctoral dissertation dealt with ablution.
10 Piscatori, 'Evolution'.
11 Omar al-Azi, ʿal-Ikhwan al-saudiyun: al-tayar allathi lam yaqul kalimatuhu bad', http://www.ala7rar.net/navigator.php?printTopic&tid=1277, accessed 8 June 2005.
12 Farish Noor, *New Voices of Islam*, Leiden: ISIM, 2002, p. 20.
13 Turki al-Hamad, *Rih al-janna*, London: Saqi Books, 2005
14 Qutbists (followers of Sayyid Qutb) refers to a variant of Egyptian Hasan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood movement, often described as more radical. Qutb's brother, Muhammad was a university lecturer in Saudi Arabia.
15 Musa al-Abdulaziz, interview on Idhaat, al-Arabiyya television channel, 29 June 2005.
16 Rabi al-Madkhali, cited in Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin, ʿal-Salafiyya bayn al-wulat wa al-ghulat', unpublished manuscript, n.d.
17 Awadh al-Qarni, interview, *Elaph*, 14 May 1426AH. See http:// www.elaph.com.
18 See several articles assessing the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood on Ikhwani website http://www.ala7rar.net.
19 Musa al-Abdulaziz, interview on Idhaat, al-Arabiyya television channel, 29 June 2005.

20 A typical text is Safar al-Hawali's letter to Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Baz, in *Kashf al-ghamma an ulama al-umma*, London: Dar al-Hikma, 1991.
21 For a history of the Sahwis in the 1990s, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Arabia's Islamist Opposition', *Current History* 95/597 (1996): 16–22; Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. See also Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1999; Dekmejian, 'The Rise of Political Islam'; Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition*, Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000.
22 Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin, in *al-Sunna* 40 (1417H), p. 92.
23 Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds*, pp. 170–96.
24 This theme is developed by Penina Werbner, who distinguishes between transnationals and true cosmopolitans. Transnationals are identified by their ability to move, whereas cosmopolitans master the cultures in which they find themselves. See Penina Werbner, 'Global Pathways: Working Class Cosmopolitans and the Creation of Transnational Ethnic Worlds', *Social Anthropology* 7/1 (1999): 17–35.
25 Interview, London November 2004.
26 Ibid.
27 Zayn al-Abdin, *al-Sunna* 40 (1417H), p. 82.
28 Ibid.
29 Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin, in *al-Sunna* 47 (1418H), p. 93.
30 Jihadi Salafis denounce Sheikh Muhammad Surur and his '*haraki*' Islam because he refuses to accept the inevitability of *jihad* against governments. See 'Minbar al-tawhid wa al-jihad', http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=57, accessed 5 November 2005.
31 Interview, al-Mustaqilla television channel, 30 January 2005.
32 Prince Khalid al-Faysal on Idhaat, al-Arabiyya television channel, 15 July 2004.
33 Prince Khalid al-Faysal, *al-Watan*, 7 July 2004.
34 *Al-Riyadh*, 31 January 2005.
35 Sheikh Musa al-Abdulaziz, on Idhaat, al-Arabiyya television channel, 29 June 2005.
36 Rabi al-Madkhali, in Zayn al-Abdin, *al-Sunna* (1416H), p. 95.
37 On the Egyptian *tarajuat*, see Muntasir al-Zayat, *al-Jamaat al-islamiyya ruyah min al-dakhil*, Cairo: Dar al-Mahrusa, 2005.
38 Several articles appeared in the Western press after 11 September. Some journalists glorified the 'courageous men who moved from Jihadi violence to liberalism', loyal to their government and less threatening to the West.
39 Mansur al-Noqaydan, 'al-Fikr al-jihadi al-takfiri', *al-Riyadh*, 11 May 2003. Al-Noqaydan is right in claiming that Jihadis draw on local religious texts rather than alien ideas. His story is published in the *New York Times*. See Mansur al-Noqaydan, 'Telling the Truth, Facing the Whip', *New York Times*, 28 November 2003. His story is also publicised by American journalists and on satellite television: for example, Idhaat, al-Arabiyya, 15 September 2004 and 17 September 2005.
40 Khalid al-Ghannami, 'Sururis and Jihadis: The Raging Wolf and the Buried Snake', *al-Watan*, 30 January 2005. See also http://www.daralnadwa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=144602, accessed 31 January 2005.
41 Ali al-Amim, http://www.daralnadwa.com.

42 Saud al-Qahtani, http;//www.daralnadwa.com.
43 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif Al-Shaykh, 'Bin Laden wa daʿwat Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab', *al-Hayat*, 21 March 2002.
44 The obsession with classifying Islamists has ceased to be a purely academic exercise. It is entangled with strategies and policies of governments in the West. Nothing exemplifies this like Cheryl Benard's Rand Report in which she classifies Islamists according to well-known criteria, for example their views on relations with the West, women, minority groups, elections, democracy and other social and political issues. While such classifications may be useful for the American administration, they fail to account for the fluidity and hybridity of Islamist movements in an age of increased communication and shifting boundaries. See Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam*.
45 The Riyadh Counter-Terrorism Conference (5 February 2005) concentrated on the intellectual and religious roots of terrorism, finance networks and money laundering, as well as the security dimension. One important aspect of terrorism was deliberately excluded: the role of local authoritarian regimes and their coercive force in creating favourable ground in which terrorism and Jihadi discourse become meaningful, and capable of resonating with many groups. Furthermore, the conference failed to address contradictions between state political discourse and reality, for example the contradiction between Saudi religious legitimising narrative as defender of Islam against infidels and its close alliance with the West, which is increasingly seen by Saudi Islamists as a threat to Islam. A similar conference was sponsored in London in January 2006 and hosted by the Royal United Services.
46 On the Sahwa in the 1990s, see Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Arabia's Islamist Opposition'.
47 See http://www.islamtoday.net/print.cfm?artid=5817.
48 See Abd al-Wahhab al-Turayry, 'Dawa', http://www.islamtoday.net/articles/show-articles-contenjt.cfm?catid.
49 Safar al-Hawali, interview, Bila hudud, al-Jazeera, 5 November 2003.
50 See http://islamtoday.net/english/printme.cfm?cat-id=29&sub-cat-id=471.
51 In a BBC radio programme, the Saudi ambassador to London, Prince Turki al-Faysal denied that there is such a thing as Wahhabiyya: BBC World Service, Analysis, 13 April 2005.
52 For Abdulaziz al-Qasim's research paper presented to Saudi National Dialogue Forum, see http://metransparent .com/texts/qassem manahej.htm). For a brief mention of al-Qasim, see Stephane Lacroix, 'Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New Islamo-liberal Reformist Trend', *Middle East Journal* 58/3 (2004): 345–65.
53 Reuters, 'Al-Qaida's Aim in the Kingdom Unlikely to be Achieved', Reuters, 6 June 2004.
54 See www.alhawali.com, accessed 5 May 2004.
55 See http;//www.islamtoday.net/qprint.cfm?artid=48582.
56 See www.almoslim.net, accessed 10 March 2005.
57 Ibid.
58 On the exclusion and deprivation of the northern provinces, see Matruk al-Falih, *Sikaka al-jawf fi nihayat al-qarn al-ishrin*, Beirut: Bisan, 2000. Al-Falih warns that if regional disparity in development and modernisation are not

addressed, the situation in Saudi Arabia will become volatile in the future. See Matruk al-Falih, *Mustaqbal al-saudiyya al-islah aw al-taqsim*, London: Qadaya al-Khalij, 2002.

59 Muhammad al-Awadhi, 'Safar al-Hawali: An Example of Early Understanding', http://www.ala&rar.net/navigator.php?printTopic&tid-244, accessed 5 July 2005.

60 For an assessment of the Saudi position regarding the US invasion of Iraq, see Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Arabia's Islamist Opposition'.

61 For a Sahwi view on the war, see 'Bayan hawla al-tahdidat al-amrikiyyah lil mintaqah', at http//www.islamtoday.net/Iraq2/byan.htm.

62 Nasir al-Omar, 'Waylun lil arab min sharin qad iqtarab', at http://www.islamtoday.net/articles/show_articles_content.cfm?i.

63 See 'Bayan hawla al-tahdidat al-amrikiyyah lil mintaqah', at http//www.islamtoday.net/Iraq2/byan.htm.

64 See http://www.almoslim.net/bayanat/falogah-jehad/sings-list-main1, accessed 18 November 2004.

65 Salman al-Awdah, interview, Idhaat, al-Arabiyya television channel, 13 July 2005.

66 Al-Awajy wrote articles posted on his website attacking Saad al-Faqih, Muhammad al-Masari, Mansur al-Noqaydan, Mishari al-Thaydi, Juhayr al-Musaid, Abdulaziz al-Khamis, Ghazi al-Qusaybi and many others, including this author. In one article he called upon Prince Khalid al-Faysal, governor of Asir, to engage in a dialogue with him. When I referred to al-Awajy as an Islamo-liberal, thus citing a label propagated by a French doctoral student, he was furious. He regarded the label as an insult. He immediately posted an article in which he called me *umm al-mu'minin*, 'the Mother of the Faithful', an amusing and ironical title. In March 2005 he launched an attack on Minister Ghazi al-Qusaybi in which he accused him of destroying the Islamic credentials of the Saudi state and of manipulating King Abdullah. Al-Awajy was imprisoned for ten days. His website, al-wasatiyya, was suspended. All his articles were found on http://www.wasatyah.com. For the label 'Islamo-liberal', see Stephane Lacroix, 'Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New Islamo-liberal Reformists', *Middle East Journal* 58/3 (2004): 345–64 and Stephane Lacroix, 'Islamo Liberal Politics in Saudi Arabia', in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, London: Hurst & Co., 2005, pp. 35–56.

67 In 2004 Sheikh ibn Zu'yar and his son were imprisoned after statements given to al-Jazeera television channel. The first commented on one of Osama bin Laden's statements while the second criticised the government's decision to imprison his father who had already served eight years in prison in the 1990s. A Saudi lawyer, Abdulrahman al-Lahim, was also put in jail after comments on al-Jazeera. He criticised the government's decision to imprison Matruk al-Falih, Abdullah al-Hamid and Ali al-Damini. The three prisoners became known as constitutional monarchy reformers. See chapter 6 for further details.

68 Muhsin al-Awajy, 'Saad al-Faqih wa muhawalat kharq al-safinah', at http://www.yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php?t=117529, accessed 17 November 2004.

69 Muhsin al-Awajy, 'Thawabit al-islah', *al-Madina*, 26 March 2004.

70 The most damming criticism of al-Awajy was written by Jihadi sheikh Yusif al-Ayri.
71 Saud al-Qahtani, 'Hadith ma' al-Awajy', discussion with al-Awajy, 25 March 2004, at http://writers.alriyadh.com.sa/kpage.php?ka-262.
72 During the fasting month in 2005, Sheikh Salman al-Awdah appeared daily on MBC television station in a programme called Hajar al-Zawiya, Cornerstone, to discuss religious issues and current affairs. The programme may contribute towards creating a pan-Arab reputation for the sheikh. It is also a desperate Saudi attempt to portray a different face of Islam to a wide Arab audience.

3 STRUGGLING IN THE WAY OF GOD ABROAD: FROM LOCALISM TO TRANSNATIONALISM

1 On a previous conflict between one Al-Saud ruler who in 1870 sought assistance from the Ottomans, defined as apostates by Wahhabi *'ulama*, see Abulaziz al-Fahad, 'From Exclusivism to Accommodation: Doctrinal and Legal Evolution of Wahhabism', *New York Law Review* 79 (2004): 485–519.
2 On the twentieth-century Ikhwan conflict with the Al-Saud see Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors* and Kostiner, 'The Ikhwan of Najd'.
3 The main text that is often cited as representative of Egyptian Islamist theorisation of *jihad* is that of Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, *al-Faridha al-gaiba* (The Absent Duty). See Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 149–69 and Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*.
4 Anwar Abdullah, *Khasais wa sifat al-mujtama al-wahhabi*, Paris: La Librairie de l'Orient, 2005.
5 On the Shi'is during this period see Fuad Ibrahim, 'The Shiite Opposition in the Eastern Province from Revolution to Accommodation (Case Study: The Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia)', Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2004.
6 The latest version of the epistles of Juhayman appeared in Cairo. See Ahmad, *Rasail Juhayman*. On the siege of the Mecca mosque and its consequences, see Fahd al-Qahtani, *Zilzal Juhayman fi Mecca*, London: Munathamat al-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi al-Jazira al-Arabiyya, 1987. See also Joseph Kechichian 'Islamic Revivalism and Change in Saudi Arabia: Juhayman al-Utaybi's letters to the Saudi people', *The Muslim World* 70 (1990): 1–16.
7 On the Afghan *jihad* and the internationalisation of the conflict see John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, London: Pluto Press, 2000 and Tom Carew, *Jihad: the Secret War in Afghanistan*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2000. On Osama bin Laden and the Muslim Diaspora, see Enseng Ho, 'Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat', *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* (2004): 210–46.
8 *Majmu fatawi*, vol. V, p. 149.
9 Ibid., p. 151.
10 Ibid., pp. 246–7.
11 For a vivid journalistic account of Saudi involvement in the Afghan project, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*, London: Pan Books, 2000, pp. 196–206.

12 Ibid., p. 85.
13 It is very difficult to identify an authentic biography of Bin Laden. An incredible number of books on him and on al-Qa'ida have appeared worldwide and in several languages, most containing elements of both myth and reality. In September 2005, on-line book shop Amazon listed 320 such books. Abd al-Bari Atwan offers a reasonable account of the man and his project, based on interviews with Bin Laden in 1996. See Abd al-Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al-Qaida*, London: Saqi, 2005.
14 Immediately after 11 September polling organisations reported that more than 90 per cent of Saudis viewed Osama bin Laden favourably. In 2005 he was viewed favourably by a large number of Muslims in Pakistan (65 per cent), Jordan (55 per cent) and Morocco (45 per cent). Anthony Cordesman cited these figures in his testimony before the US Senate Judiciary Committee 'Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe?' on 8 November 2005.
15 The transnational dimension of Bin Laden's project is discussed in Fawaz Gerges *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Gerges argues that Bin Laden's followers suffered from internal struggle that developed around national and ethnic belonging. However, while these internal struggles are well documented in his book, it is also noticeable that an Islamic global identity was forged among his followers who came from all parts of the Muslim world.
16 *al-Majallah*, 9–15 October 2005.
17 On anti- Shi'i *fatwa*s see Ibrahim, 'The Shiite Opposition'.
18 *Mut'a* marriage, a temporary marriage between a man and a woman, is considered lawful in Shi'i Islam but not so in the Sunni tradition.
19 On Deobandis see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Ahmed Rashid discusses the role of Deobandi *madrasa*s in the formation of the Taliban. He argues that Wahhabiyya first came to central Asia in 1912 when a native of Madina introduced it in Tashkent and the Ferghana Vallley. It went on to reach Afghanistan from there and from India. See Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 85. On Saudi patronage of Asian religious circles, mainly *ahl al-hadith* and Deobandi schools since the 1950s, see Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, pp. 173–7.
20 In the 1970s the writings of twentieth-century Islamist thinkers such as Sayid Qutb and his brother Muhammad, and the Pakistani Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi, were reprinted in Saudi publishing houses.
21 On the participation of Arabs in general in the Afghan *jihad*, see Abdullah Anas, *Wiladat al-afghan al-arab*, London: Saqi Books, 2002; Muhammad Salah, *Waqai sanawat al-jihad*, Beirut: Khulud, 2002; Ayman Faraj, *Thikrayat arabi afghani abu jafar al- masri al-qandahari*, Cairo: Dar al-Shoruq, 2002; and Ahmad Zeidan *Bin Laden bila qina'* Beirut: World Book Publishing, 2003. Most of this literature draws on personal involvement or journalistic encounters with Jihadis in Afghanistan. To my knowledge, no academic assessment of the Arab and Saudi involvement in this war has appeared.
22 Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 202.
23 Osama bin Laden's activism against the Saudi regime is discussed in several recent publications. The growing literature on al-Qa'ida usually touches upon Bin Laden's opposition to the regime.

24 Osama bin Laden's speech of 15 December 2004, broadcast on al-Jazeera and other Arab and international satellite stations. The speech can be listened to on several Jihadi websites, from which the text can also be downloaded. I use the Arabic text in this book. Bruce Lawrence translated Bin Laden's statement. See Osama bin Laden, 'Depose the Tyrants', in Lawrence *Message to the World*, pp. 245–75.
25 Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, p. 192.
26 David Zeidan, 'The Islamic Fundamentalist View of Life as a Perennial Battle', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5/4 (2001): 26–53, at pp. 26–47
27 A Saudi supporter of al-Qa'ida and Bin Laden. See internet writer Abdullah 2005, 'Hal al-sheikh Osama wa sahbuh min atbaʾ al-sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab?', http://islah200.org/vboard/ showthread.php?s=36f3c5fe3f52c7d5eb50806410640d23&t=12, accessed 15 April 2005.
28 On the presence of Indonesian scholars in the Hijaz, see Mathias Diederich, 'Indonesians in Saudi Arabia: Religious and Economic Connections', in Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 128–46.
29 For example, Saudi Jihadi sheikh Nasir al-Fahad, like most die-hard Wahhabis, considers the Ottoman caliphate a *kafir* state because it encouraged Sufism, innovations and *shirk*. Al-Fahad, who will be discussed in chapter 4,wrote a pamphlet demonstrating the blasphemy of the Ottomans. This pamphlet draws on early Wahhabi *ʿulama* positions. See Nasir al-Fahad, *al-Dawla al-ʿothmaniyya wa mawqif daʿwat al-shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab minha*, at http://www.alsalafiyoon.com
30 On Saudi religious transnational connections in London, see Madawi al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London', in Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 149–67. On the debate between national and transnational Jihadis, see Gerges, *The Far Enemy*.
31 Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*.
32 Mansour al-Noqaydan, 'Kharitat al-islamiyyin fi al-saudiyya wa qisat al-takfir', at http://www.saudinote.com/mansour/6html.
33 See al-radd at http://www.alradnet.com/epaper/article.php?id_net=74, accessed 18 October 2005
34 Abu al-Bara al-Najdi, *al-Kawashif*, p. 13.
35 Ibid., p. 59.
36 Ibid., p. 274.
37 al-Masari, *al-Adilla*, p. 7.
38 Ibid., p. 62.
39 Ibid., p. 154.
40 Ibid., p. 233–4.
41 Yusif al-Ahmad *Ziyarat al-masjid al-nabaw*i, Madina: General Presidency of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, n.d.
42 Ibid.
43 Abdulaziz ibn Baz, *Fatawi fi al-ʿaqida*, Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, n.d., p. 5.
44 Ibid.

45 Salih Al-Fawzan, *Tanbihat ʿala ahkam takhus al-muminat* Riyadh: Wizarat al-Shuun al-Islamiyya wa al-Awqaf wa al-Daʿwa wa al-Irshad, 1412H, pp. 10–11.
46 According to a witty Saudi, Wahhabi *ʿulama* issued more than 30,000 *fatwa*s dealing with women, more than had been produced within the Muslim tradition for centuries.
47 Abdulaziz ibn Baz and Muhammad al-Uthaymin, *Muslim Minorities: Fatwa Regarding Muslims Living as Minorities*, Hounslow: Message of Islam, 1998, p. 16.
48 Ibid., p. 19.
49 *Al-Ǯumaah*, 11/10, 1420H, p. 53.
50 Ibid.
51 Abdulrahman al-Sudays, *Idhaat bi munasabat am 2000* Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 2000.
52 For an exposure of al-Sudays's contradictions, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'al-Saudiyya wa muslimu britaniya: idhaat al-sheikh al-Sudays bayn al-ams wa al-yawm', *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 24 June 2004.
53 For the divisive role of Wahhabi discourse among British Muslims see Jonathan Birt, 'Wahhabism in the United Kingdom: Manifestations and Reactions', in Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, London: Routledge, pp. 168–84.
54 Despite billions spent on the Afghan *jihad*, the majority of Afghan political parties backed Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait in 1990. Similarly, in Britain, where Saudi-sponsored religious institutions and charities flourished, several British Muslims supported Saddam and condemned the Saudi regime for its alliance with the West. According to Ahmed Rashid, Saudi Arabia failed to develop a national-interest-based foreign policy. See Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 199.
55 Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'Localizing the Transnational and Transnationalizing the Local', in Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 1–18, p. 9.

4 STRUGGLING IN THE WAY OF GOD AT HOME: THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF *ǮIHAD*

1 After Palestine, the Afghan *jihad* remains the second and most important experience that captures the imagination of Jihadis in their literature. Recently, other locations have become equally important for the second generation of Jihadis – for example, Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya and, more recently, Iraq.
2 For a chronology of violence in 2003 and 2004, see *Arab News*, 26 April 2004. For an analysis of violence from a security perspective, see Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*, Westport: Praeger Security International, 2005, pp. 109–36, A more nuanced interpretation is Roel Meijer, 'The "Cycle of Contention" and the Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia', in Aarts and Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, pp. 271–311.
3 The assessment of the intellectual origins of Jihadis polarised the scholarly community, journalists and intelligence services. Among academics, there are

those who argue that Jihadism originates from Wahhabi sources (Abukhalil, *The Battle For Saudi Arabia*; Algar, *Wahhabism*). There are also those who argue that the ideology and practice of Jihadism is alien to Saudi Arabia; for example, Natana DeLong-Bas absolves Wahhabism from any responsibility for the intellectual roots of Jihadi thought (DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*). Maha Azzam also argues that the Jihadi thought of al-Qa'ida is rooted in the Egyptian radical Islamist trend rather than in Wahhabi sources (Maha Azzam, 'Al-Qaeda: The Misunderstood Wahhabi Connection and the Ideology of Violence' London: Chatham House, 2003, briefing paper 1). Other analysts differ in their assessment of the origins of Jihadism. A Saudi convert from Jihadism to 'rational' Islam argues that Jihadi thought has its roots in the local Wahhabi tradition (Mansur al-Noqaydan, *al-Riyadh*, 11 May 2003). I am more inclined to agree with this assessment, although it must be admitted that transnational influences, described in chapter 3, are extremely important.

4 Traditional Salafi publications dissociate Jihadism from Wahhabi Salafi thought and insist that Jihadism derives from the Muslim Brotherhood and Qutbist agendas. See Oliver, *The Wahhabi Myth*.

5 Gilles Kepel sketches the process by which Saudi Arabia became a host to the exiled Egyptian and Syrian members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s: see Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds*, pp. 152–96. However, hosting members of a political party with its own intellectual Islamist heritage and activism may not always translate into actual endorsement of all this group's ideas. The cross-fertilisation of religious ideas between Saudi Wahhabi thought and that of the Muslim Brotherhood, which arrived in Saudi Arabia with the flight of the persecuted Muslim brotherhood members is more complex than is often acknowledged. It is certain that Saudis benefited from the modern organisational skills of twentieth-century Islamist movements, but they brought their own tradition into the complex Islamist scene of the last half century.

6 See Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Religious Transnationalism' and Birt, 'Wahhabism in the United Kingdom'.

7 For details on British Muslims studying at Saudi religious universities, see Birt, 'Wahhabism in the United Kingdom'. For a general overview of Saudi transnational religious networks in London see Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Religious Transnationalism'.

8 After 11 September Saudi Arabia started issuing its own lists of wanted terrorists. The first one appeared on 7 May 2003. It had nineteen names. On 6 December 2003, it issued a list with twenty-six names of wanted terrorists. Saudi security forces killed more than half of the men mentioned in both lists. See *al-Riyadh*, 7 December 2003. For an English version of these lists, together with the names of suicide bombers who perished after each attack, see Meijer, 'The "Cycle of Contention"', pp. 301–11.

9 Anthropologist Neil Whitehead offers a nuanced interpretation of violence as a cultural phenomenon; see his remarks in Andrew Strathern, Pamela Stewart and Neil Whitehead (eds.), *Terror and Violence: Imagination and the Unimaginable*, London: Pluto Press, 2005, p. 10.

10 In several studies, Saudi writer Saud al-Qahtani expressed the view that so-called Sahwi *'ulama* are responsible for the consolidation of a violent Jihadi

trend. According to al-Qahtani, the Sahwi movement gave birth to the 'excommunication giant' (*al-marid al-takfiri*). However, in recent times it has become clear that Sahwis have been criticised by Jihadis, who attacked their main figures in several publications. See al-Qahtani, 'al-Sahwa al-islamiyya al-saudiyya' (The Saudi Islamist Awakening), at http://www.daralnadwa.com. The same interpretation of the origins of Jihadism is reiterated in the works of Ali al-Amim such as *Mashayikhna wa mashaykh al-sahwa* (Our Sheikhs and the Sahwi Sheikhs). Al-Amim shows the connection between traditional and new religious scholars and the tension in their relationship. See http://www.daralalnadwa.com. (Both sites accessed 12 December 2004.)

11 Twenty-six Saudi *ʿulama* expressed an opinion on the legitimacy of *jihad* in Iraq. Sahwi sheikhs were among the signatories of a document that pronounced military resistance to the American occupation of Iraq a legitimate Jihad. See *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 8 November 2004.

12 Statement by the Council of Senior Ulama Supporting Actions Taken by the Leader Inviting Qualified Forces to Respond to the Aggression against this Country. This *fatwa* was issued on 14 August 1990 and published in the official Saudi gazette, *Umm al-Qura* (18 August 1990). For a historical interpretation of the question of using infidels to defend the land of Islam, see al-Fahad, 'From Exclusivism to Accommodation'.

13 On the trinity of excommunication, see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 14 December 2003 and 30 June 2004.

14 Nasir al-Fahad, *al-Tibyan fi-kufr man aʿana al-amrican*. This electronic book appeared in 2001–2: see http://66.34.76.88/NaserAlfahed/Tibyan2.htm. Most work cited here is posted on www.alsalafyoon.com and www.tawhed.ws/a?i=12. Al-Fahad's books and biography appeared on al-ansar at http://www.alansar.co.nr/fahd, accessed 7 April 2006. This site includes all books, *fatwa*s and articles by Nasir al-Fahad. All references to his work in this chapter draw on the content of several websites. The sites host several lengthy pamphlets written by him. (The sites were accessed on 26 November 2003, 5 November 2005 and 6 April 2006.)

15 Humud al-Oqla al-Shuaybi, 'al-Qawl al-mukhtar', http://www.yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php?t=120460 (2000), accessed 28 January 2005.

16 Nasir al-Fahad, *Muʿjam ansab al-usar al-mutahadhira min ashirat al-asaida*, Riyadh: Dar al-Bara, 1420H [2001].

17 Biographical notes on Nasir al-Fahad are constructed out of very scarce information included in his writings (al-Fahad, *Mujam ansab*) and electronic publications on his website. See http://www.alsalafyoon.com and http://www.alalnsar.co.nr/fahd.

18 The text appeared on http://www.alsalafyoon.com, accessed 26 November 2003.

19 Basheer Nafi, 'Fatwa and War: On the Allegiance of the American Muslim Soldiers in the Aftermath of September 11', *Islamic Law and Society* 11/1 (2004): 78–116. See also Basheer Nafi and Suha Taji-Farouki (eds.), *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004. See also.

20 Steinberg, 'Ecology, Knowledge, and Trade'.

21 Al-Katib, *al-Fikr al-siyasi*.

22 Nasir al-Fahad, 'Taliat al-tankil', http;//www.al-fhd.com/kutob.htm, accessed May 2003.
23 Whitehead in Strathern et al. (eds.), *Terror and Violence*, p. 9.
24 See the *fatwa* section and several other books on http:// www.alsalafyoon.com. See also 'Replies to the Misguided Opinions of Hasan al-Maliki' and 'Replies to the Rafidah in their Accusations of the Prophet's Companions', both by Nasir al-Fahad. Hasan al-Maliki is a controversial writer who challenges the Wahhabi tradition in an attempt to deconstruct the hegemony of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. His book *Da'iyya wa laysa nabiyyan* (Preacher not a Prophet), reconsiders the thought and position of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Full details are in chapter 6. See Hasan al-Maliki, *Da'iyya wa laysa nabiyyan*, Amman: Markas al-Dirasat al-Tarikhiyya, 2004.
25 In 2004 *Sawt al-Jihad* was posted on several websites. It can be downloaded in Word and PDF format. The author was able to consult several volumes, the last of which was volume 27. Links to the magazine were posted on al-neda, al-qalah, al-tajdeed, islah, al-saha, al-qaidun and minbar al-tawhid wa al-jihad. It is difficult to give links to such sites as some are no longer accessible while others continue to change their links to avoid censorship. Jihadi literature that is cited in this chapter draws on lists of publications on the *Sawt al-Jihad* website. In addition to the magazine, the website included twenty-two electronic books, research pamphlets and letters. It also included thirteen transcripts of oral sermons. The list was posted on http://www.yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php+t-117079.
26 According to Saudi-sponsored al-Arabiyya satellite television, the editor of *Sawt al-Jihad* was identified as the information minister of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Abdulaziz ibn Rashid al-Onayzi. According to the source, he was captured by Saudi security forces in Riyadh. Al-Onayzi wrote under several names. This information is unverifiable. See al-Arabiyya's al-Ayn al-Thalitha programme, 17 October 2005.
27 Saleh ibn Saad al-Hasan edited an electronic book, *al-Nabi al-fayad fi taiyid al-jihad fi al-riyadh*, which was published on the *Sawt al-Jihad* website.
28 Yahya al-Ghamdi *Sanawat khadaa*, selected sections from *Sawt al-Jihad*, issues 5–10.
29 *Muaskar al-Battar*, vol. 3, pp. 12–14: see www.hostinganime.com/battar/b1word.zip, accessed 10 June 2004.
30 Ibid., p. 15.
31 IntelCenter Tempest Publishing: see http://www.intelcenter.com.
32 *Sawt al-Jihad*, vol. 11.
33 One Saudi commentator argues that Jihadis lure young Saudi men by invoking *zaffa*, a happy celebration for a bridegroom to be, thus playing on youthful sexual frustration and sensational themes. See Minister of Interior's spokesman, Saud al-Musaybih, *al-Yawm*, 17 January 2005. See also 'Amer al-amir al-kabt al-jinsi bayn al-jana wa al-nar', http://daralnadwa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=153503, accessed 21 April 2005. Some Saudis argue that Bin Laden and other Jihadi *'ulama* use the glorious and sensual description of heaven in the Quran to lure sexually frustrated youth into holy war. They suggest that lifting sex segregation in society would be beneficial in fighting terrorism. Novelist Turki al-Hamad plays on the same theme in his 2005

novel *Rih al-janna* (The Wind of Heaven). Saudi anthropologist Saad al-Suwayan also expressed a similar opinion. Biographies of dead Jihadis reveal that most of them are married, thus making the sexual frustration theory implausible.

34 Eleanor Doumato interprets gender in the context of national identity and monarchical rule in Saudi Arabia. See Eleanor Doumato, 'Gender, Monarchy and National Identity in Saudi Arabia', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19/1 (1992): 31–47.

35 Muhammad Ahmad Salim (Issa al-Oshan), 'La tathhabu lil iraq' (Don't Go To Iraq), *Sawt al-Jihad*, vol. 7. This view echoes the document of the twenty-six Saudi Sahwi *'ulama* who declared resistance in Iraq a legitimate *jihad* but were hesitant regarding the involvement of Saudi youth. See http://www.yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php?t=116031.

36 For Nasir al-Fahd's views on the participation of women in *jihad*, see 'Minbar al-tawhid wa al-jihad', http://www.alsunnah.info/r?i=996, accessed 26 February 2004. The role of women in *jihad* is also discussed by Sheikh Yusif al-Ayri in a pamphlet called *Dawr al-nisa fi jihad al-ada* (The Role of Women in Jihad against Enemies): see http://www.lajnah22me.co.uk/forums/ showthread.php?s=af496a7229141d3a08c9818715b, accessed 16 February 2005.

37 Sheikh al-Ayri explains women's involvement in *jihad* by drawing on *shari'a* evidence. See Yusif al-Ayri, 'Dawr al-nisa fi jihad al-ada', http://www.hakayk.org/vb/showthread.php?t=1665, accessed 5 November 2005.

38 *al-Khansa, Jihad Magazine for Women*, 24 August 2004 see BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle-east/3594982.stm.

39 The Saudi-sponsored al-Arabiyya satellite channel reported a story about a female Saudi Jihadi. Um Usama admitted that she was active in supporting *jihad* through participation in internet discussion forums, promoting Jihadi thought and encouraging other women to recruit for al-Qa'ida. The story cannot be cross-checked. See http://www.alarabiya.net/articlep.aspx?p=10527, accessed 27 February 2005.

40 Neil Whitehead (ed.), *Violence* Oxford: James Curry, 2004.

41 Saudi Television, Channel 22, November 2003 (Repentance of Nasir al-Fahad).

42 Nasir al-Fahad's letter from prison, 'al-Taraju' an al-taraju' al-mazum', at http://islah200.org/vboard/showthreads.php?t=122619, accessed 22 April 2005.

43 Abdullah al-Rashid, 'Hashim al-taraju'at: waqafat ma murajaat al-Fahad, wa al-Khodayr wa al-Khalidi': see http://www.islah.tv/v/board/showthread.php?s=70119943da5813b410, accessed 24 March 2004.

44 *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 14 December 2003 and 30 June 2004.

45 Aidh al-Qarni, statement to *al-Jazirah* daily newspaper: see http://www.al-jazirah.com/178841/fe3dt.htm, accessed 15 December 2003.

46 Muhsin al-Awajy, 'Risalah maftuhah', http://www.wasatyah.com/vb/ shothread.php?s=e2e606281f92aba2, accessed 12 June 2004.

47 See Neil Whitehead in Whitehead (ed.), *Violence*, p. 6.

48 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p. 159.

49 Drawing on Michael Waltzer's study of radical puritans in England, Nadir Hashemi argues that Jihadi activism, especially that associated with al-Qa'ida,

can be seen as an agency of modernisation, an ideology of a transition period. See Nadir Hashemi, 'Islamic Fundamentalism and the Trauma of Modernization: Reflections on Religion and Radical Politics', in Michael Browers and Charles Kurzman (eds.), *An Islamic Reformation?* Lanham: Lexington, 2004, pp. 159–77, at p. 170.

5 DEBATING SALAFIS: LEWIS ATIYAT ALLAH AND THE *JIHAD* OBLIGATION

1 Lewis's articles appeared on several websites. These include al-saha, al-neda, al-islah, al-qalah, al-wasatiyyah and ansar al-Islam. The most comprehensive list appeared in minbar al-tawhid wa al-jihad, which included fifteen articles. The whole collection of his articles also appeared as an electronic book, advertised by Markaz al-ilam al-islami al-alami, the Islamic International Media Centre. The links to these websites change regularly to avoid censorship, so the full details of the links are not listed here, but one can still access http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@26.oxTgmRBMVIp.0@1dd61560, accessed 11 August 2004 and minbar al-tawhid wa al-jihad, http://www.tawhed.ws/a?i=130, accessed 16 June 2005.

This chapter is based on an analysis of several articles that appeared between 2001 and 2004 and is inspired by reading electronic responses to his articles. Furthermore, discussion with several Saudis who are regular readers of Lewis's work aided my interpretation of the work of this anonymous internet writer.

2 Lewis's website was http://yalewis.com. This website is no longer accessible.

3 Lewis, 'Ulaika yalanhum allah wa yalanhum al-lainun' (Cursed by God and Cursed by Cursers), http://yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.phb?.s=8fba70c25266fdec, accessed 20 May 2004.

4 In December 2004 Lewis's name appeared in the Security Council's reasons for including the name of Saudi dissident Saad al-Faqih on the list of people supporting terrorism. It was alleged that al-Faqih had 'correspondence with Lewis the Jihadi'. While the British government responded by freezing al-Faqih's assets, he was not convicted, thus demonstrating the lack of evidence available to pursue legal action against him. This shows that Lewis is known to US and international anti-terrorism intelligence agents.

5 Reuven Paz, who monitors Jihadi websites for intelligence and security purposes, admits that Lewis is the most popular interpreter of al-Qa'ida among supporters of the movement. See Reuven Paz, 'Global Jihad and the United States: Interpretation of the New World Order of Osama bin Laden', PRISM Series of Global Jihad, no. 1, http://gloria.idc.ac.il/islam/global_jihad.htm/, accessed 28 May 2004.

6 It is possible that Lewis took part in the *jihad* in Afghanistan, but I have seen no confirmation of this in his writings. He may have participated in a non-military capacity. If he did participate in the Afghan war, he would be a first-generation Jihadi.

7 Several articles by Lewis include English words current in the media and in contemporary political speech, for example 'world order', 'clash of civilisations' and other clichés.

8 This is a reference to a famous personality during the time of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Sulul, a Madinan Jew who converted to Islam.
9 Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Latif was discussed in the first chapter.
10 On the historical schism within the Wahhabi movement, see Steinberg, 'The Wahhabi Ulama'.
11 All biographical information is based on an article by Lewis, 'Muthakarat Lewis' (Lewis's Memoirs): see http://yaislah.org/vboard/showthreadphb?s=040943e2970, accessed 2 May 2004 and http://www.wasatiyah.com/vb/showthread.php?s=928743f196118605121dc9a9f495a2&threadid=1689, accessed 9 August 2004. Other details are provided by Lewis in other articles.
12 Lewis Atiyat Allah, *Min buraydah ila manhattan hiwar Saudi–salafi hawl al-qa'ida wa tafjirat new york* (From Buraydah to Manhattan: Saudi–Salafi Dialogue about al-Qa'ida and the Bombing of New York), London: Dar al-Riyadh, 2003, p. 13. Two other articles by Lewis explain his position regarding the changes that swept Sahwis after 11 September. These are 'Hazimat al-Islamiyyin' (The Defeat of Islamists) and 'al-Khayar al-istratiji wa al-tarikhi li shuyukh al-sahwa' (Strategic and Historical Choice of Sahwi Sheikhs). Both articles appeared on minbar al-tawhid wa al-jihad.
13 Atiyat Allah, *Min buraydah*, p. 14.
14 Muhsin al-Awajy, on Qadaya khalijiyya programme, al-Hurra, 4 May 2004.
15 *Sawt al-Jihad*, vol. 6, Shawal 1424H (The Voice of *Jihad*, electronic bimonthly magazine).
16 Lewis Atiyat Allah, 'Naʿam ya blair inaha harb tarikhiyya' (Yes, Blair, it is a Historic War), http://www.yaislah.org/ vboard/showthread.php?s=41e916364666da7, accessed 15 April 2004.
17 Reuven Paz monitors Jihadi literature on the internet. See http://www.ocnus.net/cgi-bin/exec/view.cgi?archive=33dnum796, accessed 8 December 2004.
18 Lewis Atiyat Allah, 'Nass reuven paz ila lewis atiyat allah' (Reuven Paz's Text to Lewis Atiyat Allah), http://yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php?s=b260db23167abc9, accessed 1 April 2004.
19 A representative study that discusses this dichotomy is Gerges, *The Far Enemy*.
20 Lewis Atiyat Allah, 'al-Hala al-siyasiyya wa i'adat tashkil al-nitham al-duwali' (The Political Situation and the Reorganisation of the International World Order), http://alsaha2.fares.net/sahat?128@148.LQ6fho1QonYO@.Idd, accessed 18 November 2003.
21 Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 10th edn., London: Macmillan, 1970
22 Ibid., p. 64.
23 Lewis Atiyat Allah, 'Hina yusbih al-munafiq hakim' (When the Hypocrite Becomes the Ruler), http://www.tawhed.ws/a?i=130.
24 Lewis Atiyat Allah, 'Haʿulaʾ yalanahum allah wa yalanahum al-laʾinun' http://www.yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php?s=8fba70c25266fdec, accessed 20 May 2004.
25 Lewis Atiyat Allah, 'Qiraa fi khitab al-shaykh osama al-akhir' (A Reading of the Last Speech by Sheikh Usama Bin Laden), http://www.tawhed.ws/a?i=130.
26 From Reuven Paz to Lewis Atiyat Allah, http://www.yaislah.org/vboard/showthread.php?s=b260db231b7abc9, accessed 1 April 2004.

27 Participants in Radio Islah (Debate Channel in 2005 and PTV in 2006), the media channel of the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia and Tajdeed Radio, media channel of Movement of Islamic Renewal, use the name ibn Salul to refer to the Saudi royal family.
28 Abu Jahl is associated in Islamic memory with the story of the death of Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle. It is recounted that the Prophet tried to persuade Abu Talib to declare his Islam on his deathbed, but Amr ibn Hisham (Abu Jahl) dissuaded him.
29 For example, the televised repentance session of Nasir al-Fahd and other *ʿulama* are well known among those who are interested in the story of the Jihadis.
30 For example, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* London: Penguin, 1992 and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
31 See Ahmad Moussali, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: the Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb*, Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992; Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Ibrahim Abu Rabi *Contemporary Arab Thought Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* London: Pluto, 2004; and John Gray, *al-Qaeda and What it Means to Be Modern*, London: Faber & Faber 2003. On Jihadi use of electronic media, see Gary Bunt, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000 and Gary Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*, London: Pluto Press, 2003. From a religious studies perspective, see Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth*
32 Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2003; Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds*; François Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2003; François Burgat, *L'Islamisme a l'heure de al-Qaida*, Paris: La Decouverte, 2005; Farhad Khosrokhavar *Les Nouveaux martyrs d'Allah*, Paris: Flammarion, 2003; Farhad Khosrokhavar *Quand al-Qaida parle temoignages derriere les barreaux*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2006; Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1994.
33 Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, p. 48.

6 SEARCHING FOR THE UNMEDIATED WORD OF GOD

1 For a concise historical account of the two Saudi states, see Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 14–38.
2 On the details of the pact between Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud see Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*.
3 It is noteworthy that there is a Salafi tradition in the Hijaz that glorifies the Saudi expansion in this part of the Arabian Peninsula. One contemporary writer defends this tradition against the heretical Sufi circles. See Sharif Hatim ibn Arif al-Awni in http://www. Alsaha2.fares.net/sahat?128@ 80Kum1nA5kSju.0@.1dd67394, accessed 21 October 2004.
4 Hijazi architect Sami al-Angawi highlights 'Saudi–Wahhabi' violence against archaeological sites in Mecca and Madina which in his opinion aim to

obliterate not only the Prophetic tradition but also other historical episodes, such as the Ottoman era. Ex-Hijazi oil Minister Ahmad Zaki Yamani's al-Furqan Foundation promotes Islamic heritage through the preservation and publication of books that celebrate the contribution of Hijazi *ulama* and intellectuals. A monthly magazine, *al-Hijaz*, published in London by al-Jamiyya al-Wataniyya al-Hijaziyya (the National Hijazi Association), does not shy away from reviving the idea of an independent 'kingdom of Hijaz'. It publishes scathing attacks on the Wahhabi tradition and promotes an image of the Hijaz as the land of tolerance, pluralism and religious diversity. It regards the partition of Saudi Arabia a matter of time. See *al-Hijaz*, 15 August 2003 and 15 May 2005. Hijazi authors, for example the anthropologist Mai Yamani, celebrate a Hijazi identity, defined in relation to a Najdi identity. See Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity* London: I. B.Tauris 2004. Western journalists celebrate the revival of these regional and sectarian identities and their emergence in Saudi Arabia. See John Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*, New York: Palgrave, 2005. To say that there are regional identities that are suppressed in Saudi Arabia is one thing; to call for a separate political entity to contain these local identities is something else.

5 Hijazi Sheikh Hasan Farhan al-Maliki paid a price for reviving Sufism in the Hijaz. He was prevented from preaching and subjected to harassment. When al-Maliki died in 2004, Crown Prince Abdullah made a reconciliatory gesture to his followers as he visited al-Maliki's family in person to offer his condolences.

6 For a detailed account of Saudi Shiʿi political activism, see Ibrahim, 'The Shiite Opposition'. For Shiʿi promotion of diversity and coexistence between various Muslim sects, see Hasan al-Safar, *al-Tanawu wa al-taayush* London: Dar al-Saqi, 1999.

7 The full text of the 2003 Shiʿi petition is found in *Rabi al-saudiyya wa makhrajat al-qamʿ* Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, 2004, p. 203.

8 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 199–215.

9 In the course of writing this book, many men and women initiated contact with me, hoping to voice opinions that are often suppressed. Their revisionist position is deemed threatening by the regime because it promises to dismantle the triangle of Saudi authoritarianism. They remain anonymous.

10 Both Syria and Iraq created modern ideological narratives about the past that draw on Arab nationalism in its Baʿthist version.

11 Abdullah al-Qahtani in http://www/alwahabiyya.20m.com/index.html.

12 As mentioned earlier in this book, some Saudi Sahwis dismiss aspects of Wahhabiyya altogether – for example, followers of Hizb al-Tahrir. Muhammad al-Masari is an example.

13 The author relies on Wahhabi scholar Hussein ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*.

14 For an Arabic version of Hempher's text see htty://www.sunna.info/antiwahhabies. See also Muthakarat Mister Humpher, *Saytartat al-inglis wa damuhum li Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab*, Beirut: Dar al-Funun, 2005. For an English version, see http://www.sunna.info/antiwahabies/wahabies/htm/spy1.htm, accessed 23 September 2005. Hempher's story is taken for granted as an authentic narrative about Wahhabi treason against Muslims.

15 Hempher, in http://www.sunna.info/antiwahhabies For an English version, see http://www.sunna.info/antiwahabies/wahabies/htm/spy1.htm
16 Abdullah al-Qahtani, in http://www/alwahabiyya.20m.com/index.html.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 For an anthropological discussion of Musaylima al-Kadhab in Muslim history, see Dale Eickelman, 'Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh Century Arabia' *JESHO* 10 (1967): 2–52.
20 Al-Katib 5 in http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@209.45GKmXTC2ap.0@1dd6221b, accessed 20 August 2004.
21 Al-Katib 5 in http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?14@71.g08Vn1PgeQ.0@.1dd639c9, accessed 9 July 2004.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Al-Katib 5 in http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@186.Ns4foWu9Oj.T0@.1dd6a654, accessed 23 April 2004.
25 Hasan al-Maliki, *Qira'a fi kutub al-'aqa'id* Amman: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Tarikhiyya, 2000, p. 197.
26 al-Maliki, *Da'iyya wa laysa nabiyyan*, p. 17.
27 Ibid.
28 Al-Maliki, *Qira'a fi kutub al-'aqa'id*, p. 193.
29 For example, Iranian scholar Abdulkarim Soroush and Egyptian scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl call for this separation.
30 Al-Maliki, *Qira'a fi kutub al-'aqa'id*, p. 149.
31 Sahwi sheikhs, for example Safar al-Hawali and Jihadi Nasir al-Fahad, condemned Hasan al-Maliki. Both accused him of being a covert Zaydi. Official *'ulama* share their assessment of al-Maliki.
32 See http://www.ala7rar.net/navigator.php?pname-printTopic&tid=703.
33 Discussion in this section draws on Abdullah al-Hamid, 'al-Islam halaq bi janahayn al-adala wa al-huriyyah', (Islam Flew with Two Wings: Justice and Freedom), *al-Hayat*, 30 November 2002, and Abdullah al-Hamid, 'al-Dawa wa al-mujtama al-madani: dawa ila al-ilmaniyya aw al-islam' (Call to Civil Society: A Call to Secularism or Islam?), *al-Hayat*, 29 November 2005.
34 Al-Hamid, 'al-Islam halaq bi janahayn'.
35 Abdullah al-Hamid in http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@178. QYipdQLOWM.0@.Idd7131d.
36 Abdullah al-Hamid, 'al-Jihad al-madani fi al-Islam', in http;//www.wasatyah.com/vb/showthread.php?t=19863).
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Abdullah al-Hamid in http://islah200.org/vboard/showthread.php?s=74aa699f20fe0086d14f70f6a046cb2&t=121.
43 Full details of the Arabic text are in *Rabi al-saudiyya wa makhrajat al-qam'*, p. 28.
44 Ibid., pp. 28–9.

45 Ibid., pp. 156–62.
46 Interview with a Saudi reformer who endorses the constitutional monarchy agenda, London, November 2004.
47 *Rabi al-saudiyya wa mukhrajat al-qamʿ*.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Al-Rasheed, 'Localizing the Transnational'.
51 Ali al-Damini, *Zaman al-sijn azmina lil huriyya*, Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, 2005, p. 164.
52 *Saudi Gazette*, 21 September 2005.
53 Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Religious Transnationalism'.
54 The story of MIRA is discussed in several publications. See Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* and Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*. These publications deal with MIRA in the 1990s. In this book the evolution of MIRA as it developed after 11 September is discussed. Information here is based on monitoring MIRA weekly newsletter (*al-Islah*) in the late 1990s, media statements, radio broadcasting and website. Interviews with the director of MIRA and other male and female activists belonging to the movement provide information on this political movement and its programme. For their own security, they remain anonymous.
55 Interviews with Saad al-Faqih, London, 2 March 1999 and 6 October, 12 and 28 December 2003.
56 Saad al-Faqih in http://www.yaislah.org/more.php?id=338_0_1_0M3, accessed 1 December 2004.
57 Yahya al-Amir, 'al-Muaradha al-bahlawaniyya', *al-Riyadh*, 12 May 2004.
58 Al-Faqih, *al-Nitham al-saudi*.
59 Yahya al-Amir, 'al-Muaradha al-bahlawaniyya', *al-Riyadh*, 12 May 2004.
60 Ibid.
61 Saud al-Qahtani, 'Mujrimun bi ism al-islah', http://wasatyah.com/vb/showthread.php?s=044629ec0ee25a89a, accessed 6 January 2004.
62 Saad al-Faqih 'Give up your Freedom or Change Tactics', *Guardian*, 11 August 2005.
63 Saad al-Faqih, Debate Radio (previously Islah Radio) August 2005.
64 Saad al-Faqih, 'Itiradhat al-salafiyyin ala al dimoqratiyya', 11th meeting of Mashru Dirasat al Dimoqratiyya fi al Buldan al arabiyya, Oxford, 2001. The same article is published in Ali al-Kuwari (ed.), *Azmat al dimoqratiyya fi al buldan al-arabiyya*, London: al-Saqi, 2004, pp. 67–93.
65 Saad al-Faqih, 'al-Birnamaj al-siyasi, al-haraka al-islamiyya lil islah', unpublished manuscript, n.d.
66 Saad al-Faqih, interview, London, 3 November 2003.
67 Under the pressure of soaring bridewealth and the increase in the number of Saudi spinsters, several *ʿulama* issued *fatwa*s legitimising this type of marriage, which is often conducted in secrecy. Such *fatwa*s remain controversial.
68 For full details of the raid, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'al-Saudiyya lahathat qabl al-itiqal ala al-hawa', *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 1 November 2004.
69 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*.
70 Muhsin al-Awajy's articles can be found on his website: see www.wasatiyyah.com.

71 A scathing report on Saudi Sahwi *daʿiyyat* appeared in the Saudi-owned magazine *al-Majalla* (9–15 October 2005). The report accused *daʿiyyat* of spreading a culture of death and fear. The report also argued that most of them are responsible for the psychological problems experienced by women, who are told not to enjoy life but to prepare for death and the afterlife. The report accused *daʿiyyat* of having no intellectual sophistication as they launch into attacking the West without demonstrating how the situation of women can be improved in their own society. Needless to say the report concluded that there is an obvious connection between the preaching of *daʿiyyat* and terrorism, a conclusion that is supported by many Saudi liberal journalists who follow government agendas. In such reports, the purpose is to condemn rather than explain and understand this new phenomenon in Saudi society, namely the engagement of women in the Sahwi project and how this is a function of a long history of exclusion and gender inequality. Whether rich or poor, *daʿiyyat* are seriously navigating a male-dominated landscape by choosing the most secure and least controversial means, namely Islam.
72 For women's petitions to the royal family in 2003, see *Rabiʿa-lsaudiyya wa makhrajat al-qamʿ*.
73 Personal communication with an *islahiyya*, March 2005.
74 On 27 September 2005, the *Guardian* reported that according to a Saudi source, the Saudi regime demanded that Britain deport al-Faqih and al-Masari in return for a contract worth £40,000,000 to purchase Typhoon planes from BAE. The following day it was reported that 'Downing Street made no attempt to dispute the *Guardian*'s disclosure'. See the *Guardian*, 27 and 28 September 2005. A couple of days later an offcial Saudi spokesman denied that there was a deal being negotiated with Britain to hand over the Saudi dissidents.
75 On censoring the internet in Saudi Arabia, see Human Rights Watch, *The Internet*.

CONCLUSION

1 Muhammad Zaman discusses Saudi–Wahhabi patronage of South Asian Islam in the 1950s: see Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*. Jonathan Birt sketches aspects of the association of British Muslims with Saudi Arabia in pursuit of religious knowledge: see Birt, 'Wahhabism in the United Kingdom'.
2 Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

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