A Study of Saudi Arabian Kingdom in a Constructive Spectrum

Causes of its Longevity and Grim Prospects for its Democratization

“The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty”. Jean Jacques Rousseau

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Abstract

This thesis studies and analyzes the dynamics behind the longevity of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom such as religious ideology, exploitation of public wealth; i.e. oil and the construction of historical identity for the al-Saud dynasty. It will draw on these dynamics and study the constructive utilization of these dynamics and factors in muzzling the prospects for democracy, change, respect for human rights and freedom of expression. The method used to obtain data and information is qualitative as they are mostly gathered through reading scholarly literature both from western and Islamic perspectives in order to present a balanced view and a high validity of the study. However, the validity of such a longitudinal study is hard to ascertain, I intend to collect and analyse the information in its different contexts such as historical developments and policy making. This is aptly manageable through qualitative
research as it involves understanding of the phenomenon which doesn’t require measurement and quantification. The method principally asks why the Saudi rulers have been in power for such a long time in spite of a draconian record in terms of human rights and democracy and how they have achieved to stay on power. One such constructed factor is the Wahhabi Islam which is employed as a legitimizing factor by the al-Saud rule over the region. The paper will attempt minding its constructivist framework to unravel the ideological illusions of the Saudi rule; for example how the kingdom distorted Islamic reading and subjugated the masses to such a reading and combined such a discourse with their power. Keywords: Wahhabism, al-Saud, ideology, Islam, Democracy, Identity, Constructivism, Middle East, Oil.

1. Introduction:

The Middle East is one of the most twistingly complicated regions of the world whose dilemma stems from both geographic and ideological backgrounds. The geographic demarcations of the Middle East are more dictated by ideological grounds than by regional contiguity of the Middle Eastern states. Religion and Arab nationalism are reckoned to be the outstanding elements of its demarcation. For example, Michael Barnett a scholar of the International Relations (IR) defines the Middle East geographically as a system that is formed only by the Arab League which includes Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq¹; whereas Stephen Walt another IR scholar defines the region in terms of actors who have

stakes in the region such as Israel and extra-regional great powers². Such diverse and differing definitions of the region demonstrate the ideological splitting in the region as more sensitive than its geographic formation. In other words, the nerve of the Middle Eastern political, economic, and social volatility is tied with its ideological standing.

The conflict and political instability of this region has layers of actors and factors involved. The more viable approach to study and explain the Middle Eastern complication would be through a constructivist analysis. Constructivism as a premise stands opposite to mainstream IR theories of neo-realism and neo-liberalism as it challenges the unchanging reality of the international politics³. Constructivism averts that the social world is constructed and thus not given⁴. Its constructed nature or materialism is shaped by our beliefs and norms that we have set up ourselves. This approach both practically and theoretically fits the Saudi Arabian case, as it puts up a religious aura and adeptly employs it for political projects. A constructivist study of the Saudi Arabian government would reveal the so-called rationale of its traditionalism and religiosity as it has made of it depending on time and place. The Saudi government has constructed a unique image for itself which makes it extraordinary in the eyes of the international community and the Islamic world. Its deceptive reading of religion and its hegemonic control through physical and ideological persuasions have made the al-Saud house the rightful heir to the Islamic heritage and governance in Saudi Arabia. They have turned the belief system into a systematic action-oriented ideology through which all the actions and transaction of its populace is measured. This medium is a conscious construction of the Saudi princes which get the people see the reality and make sense of the world around them⁵. Furthermore, this hegemonic grip on power doesn’t bode well the prospects for democratization and free speech because it reckons any ideology or thought other than their own puritanical interpretation of Islam antithetical and contrary to ‘Islamic’ values; thus it mars any hope for a dialectical reasoning and assumes their interpretation as both the semiotic and ideological closure⁶.

² Ibid. P. 14
³ Zehfuss, Maja (2002). Constructivism in International Relations. Pp. 3/4
⁴ Ibid. P. 4
⁵ Eagleton, Terry (1994). Ideology. P. 1
⁶ Ibid. P. 2
Another important element which this paper will look into is the Western stakes and interests in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia. The interests of the West in the Arab World are having strategic, political, economic, military and ideological grounds. For example the US State Department in 1945 described its interest in Saudi Arabia as one of the greatest material prizes in world history. These interests are said to be vested in the continuation of the al-Saud family in power and therefore are being cocooned from every kind of ideological and physical threat. The ideological legitimacy is attained through the indoctrination of Wahhabism; whereas military guarantee and support is provided by the United States of America who is mesmerized by the oil richness of the region. The combination of such hard and soft power provides an ideal hegemony for the Saudi rulers. The doctrinaire sect of Wahhabism is watertight to any reform and Saudi citizens are to comply with its principles which are in fact set up to serve the Saudi princes’ interests. After the discovery of the oil in the 1930s, the al-Saud house found yet another means to elongate its power and exploit the resources for its use and interests. The oil-chip has turned the Saudi Kingdom into one of the leading rentier states and assured it of Western backing regardless of its treatment of its population in ways which are utterly contradictory to international human rights norms and principles.

a. **Aims:**

Ideology is said to be the production of meanings, signs and values in social life which help to legitimize a dominant power. This work is set to study and analyse the prevailing ideology of the Saudi government behind its relentless power and its hegemonic control over this oil-rich region. I have a number of questions regarding their longevity of power and intend to find out proper answers as I further investigate and study the phenomenon of how they have turned their ideological reading of Islam into a closure of meaning where the Saudis don’t question its assumptions and implications but comply with them. These questions are as follows:

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8 Eagleton, Terry (1994). *Ideology*. P. 1

9 Ibid. P. 2
1. What are the factors behind the longevity of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom?
2. Are there any prospects for the Kingdom’s democratization?
3. Is the Kingdom depicted in the Orientalist prism by the West?
4. What is the role of Wahhabism as a particular ideology and its impact on human rights in Saudi Arabia?

These are very broad and general enquiries so there cannot be one factor involved in answering these questions. In the same way, the enormity and complexity of the dilemma in the Middle East which definitely influences the Saudi Arabian affairs is of vital importance in answering these questions. In other words, there are both historical and ideological realities which can account for the wide-ranging developments in the Saudi Arabian case.

I will also investigate the role of Islam especially as a legitimizing factor of the al-Saud rule over the region. This will be done in an attempt to unravel the ideological illusions of the Saudi rule through a constructivist practice; for example how the Kingdom distorted Islamic reading and subjugated the masses to such a reading and combined such a discourse with their power.\textsuperscript{10} The metamorphosis of Islamic teachings in terms of the Wahhabi ideology and its respective impact on other spheres such as human rights, democracy, transparency and openness has been draconian as everyone should see them through the Wahhabi prism rather than the inherent virtues in them. In the same vein, this intensive study will actively engage in the historical development of the al-Saud ascendance to power and its manipulation of both internal and external resources in order to tighten its grip on power. The internal resources are both material and non-material such as the oil, the two holy cities of Islam and non-material such as the birth of Islam.

2. Methodology:

This paper intends to investigate the trajectory of the longevity, backwardness and chronicity of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom through a close examination and analysis of both abstract and concrete dynamics such as Wahhabi ideology, resistance to democracy, identity, oil, and historical facts. It’s a theory-oriented case study and I will be using constructivism as my theoretical framework in order to review and study the aforesaid tendencies. I have intentionally picked constructivism for its general and sometimes abstract nature because it’s

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. P. 2
fitting and seems most apposite with the intended case study; keeping in mind both the abstract and concrete dynamics in explaining the nature of Saudi Arabian backwardness and its grim prospects for democratization. The study of Saudi Arabia as a case-study poses a number of challenges which impacts the validity of the findings. For example, variables such as democracy, religion, political culture, state strength and so on are notoriously difficult to measure\textsuperscript{11}. In the same way, to assess the Saudi Kingdom through a constructivist standpoint could most suitably be approached through qualitative analyses in so far as the number of variables and indicators is concerned.

I have chosen Saudi Arabia for its paradigmatic nature in the Middle East as it encompasses the religious, economic, historical and political dimensions of the region in its entirety. Islam is the exhortation and buzz-word when it comes to the Middle East and it’s best represented by non-other than Saudi Arabia as it houses the two holiest sites in Islam and is the birth of this third Abrahamic religion as well. Saudi Arabia is said to be the most closed society of the world like North Korea; however its closure to the media and the outside world is not that pronounced as that of the North Korea’s. Moreover, economically Saudi Arabia is the largest producer of the petroleum in the Gulf region and is one of the closest allies of the West both strategically and economically, as has been witnessed in the course of history during the Cold War period. Historically, Saudi Arabia has played a major role in shaping the region both geographically and politically whose reality is manifested through the longevity and chronicity of conflict and identity shifts in the region.

My study has five phases which are the theoretical presentation in relation to the case studied; followed by the overall picture of the Middle East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. The first phase describes my theoretical approach in depth and relates it to the general theme of the paper. Secondly, I provide a brief but relevant sketch of the Middle East both geographically and politically whose aim is to taper it off with my case study. I then present a short but relevant picture of Saudi Arabia and its recent history in order to stick to the logic of the paper. Fourthly, I go through both the intrinsic and extrinsic features of Saudi Arabian backwardness and highlight these core features briefly. The purpose of presenting these core aspects before the actual analyses is to avoid confusion and overlapping since the study requires a lot of historical background. As I have mentioned earlier, answering my

\textsuperscript{11} George L, Alexander & Bennett, Andrew (2005). \textit{Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences}. P. 19
research questions would require a thorough study of the case and the best way to achieve my goal is to whittle down each factor and present it separately. This would make it both easier and more relevant when I touch upon them in more details in the analyses and discussion section. The fifth segment of my essay presents the most substantive part which analyses and discusses the case study and answers the research questions in more transparent and elaborate fashion. In the analyses part, attempts are made to tackle the questions by investigating the extent of affinities between internal factors such as religion, tradition and autocratic rule with social and political stagnations. In addition to the internal motives, the analyses part dwells on exterior aspects such as foreign interventions if they are in an Orientalist fashion or not in order to bring forth balanced and reasonable answers to the questions. In the final section, the paper ends with a conclusion restating the findings.

a. Qualitative Research:

Qualitative research in social sciences and humanities employs epistemological grounds and includes ‘ethnography, participant observation, unstructured interviews, the case study and historical analysis based on documents’¹². Since the topic I have chosen is a case study and cuts across a number of different disciplines, it’s most suitable to use the qualitative methodology. For example, the paper uses literature from a number of different disciplines such as political science, continental philosophy, economics, sociology and international relations. I also intend to use current mass media reports about the region, especially about its political and economic developments. The sources used to obtain data and information are mostly approached in a qualitative manner and then are gathered through reading scholarly literature both from western and Islamic perspectives in order to present a balanced view and a high validity of the study. However, the validity of such a longitudinal study is hard to ascertain, I intend to collect and analyse the information in its different contexts such as historical developments and policy making. This is aptly manageable through qualitative research as it involves understanding of the phenomenon which doesn’t require measurement and quantification¹³. The method principally asks why the Saudi rulers have been in power for such a long time in spite of a draconian record in terms of human rights and democracy and


¹³ Ibid. P. 315
how they have achieved to stay on power. These questions cannot be measured in a quantitative manner because the more analytic aspects such as language, signs and ideology are to be explored in depth and qualitative method is the most suitable to employ.

b. **Background:**

As one of the unique and significant issues for the discipline of IR; the study of the Middle East has been central and of burning interest in the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries. There has been numerous scholarly authorships and media coverage of the Middle East touching upon every major and minor development in the region. These exposures and writings range from both the more forthright economic and geopolitical perspectives of the Arab-Israeli conflict, role of political Islam, oil, Western intervention and interests to the more shaded socio-cultural aspects of Bedouin cultures, traditionalism, camel breeding and non-political Islam. Edward Said’s influential book ‘Orientalism’ is one of the classic works capturing both the geopolitical and cultural significance of the Middle East. This seminal work is reckoned as the gateway to postcolonial studies. In addition to this, Middle East has gained currency as the hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism as the noted extremist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda and others have originated from here. During the past few decades there have been floods of scholarly works on the East in general and Islam in particular such as *The Clash of Civilizations, Satanic Verses, the Truth about Mohammad, While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within, Religion of Peace?: Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't, Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* etc. These works have been instigated by changes in the international arena such as the Arab-Israel crises, the Iranian Islamic revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Rushdie affair, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the balkanization of former Yugoslavia finally and most importantly the tragic terrorist attacks of 9/11. These historical events and changes have been dramatic in shaping the current stance on Islam in the Western world.

The Saudi Kingdom’s portrayal in spite of its draconian interpretation of Islam and brazen support of terror has been low-lying and shaded both in the Western media and academia. The factors behind such a travesty are politically motivated and economically backed. For example, if Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* talks about Islam as a religion whose borders are drawn with blood; it doesn’t include Saudi Kingdom. In the same way, Huntington calls the Iranian revolution or the Gulf War as ‘Islamic Resurgence’ while the
Saudi support to terrorists is not reckoned as a cause for such resurgence. It glosses over the atrocities committed by the Saudi-Wahhabi pact and represents the Saudi Kingdom as a victim to the hardliner terrorists rather than their willing backer\textsuperscript{14}. Such a distortion and bias stems from the US and Saudi Kingdom’s strategic and economic alliance therefore the Saudi rulers are excluded from such a demonization. On the other hand, the demonization of Islamic states such as Iran, Syria, Iraq and others are prevalent in the West. Their images as enemy and the Other have been promulgated and propagated through the mass-media and the political structures; presupposing such defined stereotypes for them. For example, these stereotypes have been very influential in framing the Muslim world as monolithic; this happened during the Oklahoma bombing when the experts blamed the Middle East terrorists for it without any due assessment first\textsuperscript{15}. The political command and influence of mass-media in the West have been as tremendous as its cultural aspect. Adorno called the totality of mass-media industries and advertising as the ‘cultural industry’\textsuperscript{16}; whose influence dramatically affect the ‘consumer’s judgements’ in regard to Islam, the consumers are the people of the Western world who understand Islam through the screens of their TVs and computer monitors. Likewise, Edward Said asserted a more or less similar account of the Muslim image in the West as he observed:

\begin{quote}
For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is ‘news’ of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategies, and although they are marginal to the culture at large-the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to western civilization. Now this is by no means the same as saying that only derogatory or racist caricatures of Islam are to be found in the West….What I am saying is that negative images of Islam are very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond not with what Islam ‘is’…but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be: Islam and the West: A Clash of Civilizations? Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate that particular image of Islam and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all others\textsuperscript{17}.
\end{quote}

\textbf{c. Theoretical Outline:}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Huntington, Samuel (1993). \textit{The Clash of Civilizations?}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Esposito L, John (1999). \textit{The Islamic Threat: myth or reality}. P. 212
\item \textsuperscript{16} Edger, Andrew and Sedgwick, Peter (2004). \textit{Cultural Theory. The Key Thinkers}. P. 1
\item \textsuperscript{17} Esposito L, John (1999). \textit{The Islamic Threat: myth or reality}. P. 212
\end{itemize}
The discipline of IR is said to have originated out of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which led to the formation of modern nation-states. The main concerns of the discipline are thus about the state of affairs among the nation-states such as peace, security, foreign policy, diplomacy and the likes of them. The discipline is approached through a number of different theories such as neo-realism, liberalism, Marxism last but not least constructivism. I am using constructivism in this paper as my theoretical tool to study and analyse the Saudi Arabian state of affairs.

Constructivism is ‘the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world’\(^{18}\). Thus, the main tenet of constructivism is that knowledge and social reality are constructed and the material world is not given. This social knowledge is attained on the basis of otherness, in other words, meanings, objects and other actors provide the basis for one’s own meaning. However, the objects of our knowledge are not independent of our own interpretation and at the same time we use our constructed knowledge to form social reality\(^{19}\). Alexander Wendt argues that the constructed nature of social reality can best be sensed in international politics because identities and interests are constructed and supported by the intersubjective practices\(^{20}\). His famous statement that ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ accepts that there is not a higher authority than the state itself in the relations among them to dictate and bring about order; however it’s not determined historically as claimed by neo-realists but through social processes\(^{21}\).

Secondly, constructivism argues that this social knowledge transforms into social practice through basis of meanings that objects and other actors have and these meanings are not inherent in the world but develop in interaction among people\(^{22}\). Furthermore, social knowledge doesn’t arise in a vacuum; there has to be impetus and propagation for this knowledge in order to be consciously acquired by people. This is the very ideological entity of the social knowledge which carves the social meaning in stone and people accept its

\(^{18}\) Zehfuss, Maja (2002). *Constructivism in International Relations*. P. 7

\(^{19}\) Av Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse-Kappen, Beth A (2002). *Handbook of International Relations*. P. 95

\(^{20}\) Zehfuss, Maja (2002). *Constructivism in International Relations*. P. 12

\(^{21}\) Ibid. P. 13

\(^{22}\) Ibid. P. 15
genuineness. Finally, constructivism deems ideas as interests and therefore claims that they are ontologically intersubjective with a purported epistemologically objective reality. Once these ideas are instilled and permeated they are automatically acquiring a sense of reality, as if they are the norms. This very normative characteristic that they acquire makes them acceptable and in times unquestionable like collective meanings. Once this normative character of the social knowledge is spread and embraced the formation of identity and distinction of interest come into the picture. Identities are made or acquired through collective meanings and they are developed through interaction with others. Collective identities are co-constituted with interests and attained through set institutions which are socio-historically contingent. Historically, society has been organised into different institutions which serve at different times and are thus constructed to work for a particular way of governance or collective meaning be it lordship, monarchy or republics. These collective identifications define a particular way which vows for the interests of a particular group steering the way forward.

Constructivism advocates flexibility and considers our actions and practices as the guarantor of a systematic change. It disagrees with neo-realist understanding of the self-help assumption and claims that ‘states find themselves in a self-help system, because their practices make it that way’. Anarchy in the structure of the international relations is a myth according to constructivist theory because its authors are states who are socially constructed themselves. They have set up the anarchy myth as the relatively stable structure; however it depends on the interaction between different actors. The question of security among states is said to be the central tenet of anarchy; but it differs from state to state and is all a matter of their interaction. For example, security seems to be the dominant concern between Pakistan

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25 Maja (2002). Constructivism in International Relations. P. 13
26 Green M, Daniel (2002). Constructivism and Comparative Politics. 122
27 Ibid. P. 122
29 Ibid. P. 65
30 Ibid. P. 67
and India whereas between Pakistan and China it would be a matter of cooperation. Thus, within one ‘anarchic’ system we get different assumptions and interpretation which are dictated by the intersubjective actions among states.

d. Delimitations:
The scope of a qualitative study on Saudi Arabia is supposed to be enormous and encompassing a diverse number of aspects and spheres in order to account for a high validation. However, this paper has delimited its scope to specific areas of exploration and analyses in so far as the capacity and volume of the work is concerned. The paper will suffice to include a limited number of areas such as the role of ideology and historical facts in studying the al-Saud ruling family’s unceasing dominance in Saudi Arabia as its prime indicators. I will not discuss the more prevalent and paradigmatic question of the Arab-Israeli problem; not that it would deviate me from my intent or is less relevant to this essay. But the Arab-Israeli crisis is a critical and significant issue in its own right and requires a lot of work which would be out of the scope of this paper. In the meantime, the Arab-Israeli predicament would require a shift in my methodological approach as well, because its nature is utterly global and would entail a number of other actors and indicators.

Saudi Arabia is the world’s largest oil producer and it has a vital impact on both the perpetuation of the Saudi rule and its international image. The oil factor is of supreme significance in any kind of study and analysis of the Saudi regime; however the oil chip wouldn’t be the centripetal component of this study because that would get the focus on exogenous factors rather than endogenous factors such as the role of religion, history and traditionalism. Because, oil is one of the vital means to keep in touch with the outside world and at same time, the al-Saud house uses it as a diplomatic bargain chip. There will be a fleeting look at the oil affluence and that would consider it as a domestic element in the perpetuation of the Saudi rule. Moreover, considering the theoretical approach of this paper, the study will not dwell on personalities and individuals as the primary actors in this study; even though, they can be of critical importance in shaping the political and economic landscape of the Saudi rule. Constructivism doesn’t consider individuals as having the monopoly over shaping the political and economic nature of a system rather it believes in a collective of actors and factors involved in drawing the contours of a given system be it a state, institution or a union.
3. The Middle East:

The Middle East is a conflict-ridden region whose name is almost synonymous with political instability and Western intervention. The political instability of the region can be explained through Middle Eastern ‘exceptionalism’ whose prominent indicators are traditional rule, dependence on oil and a ‘primordial’ notion of religion and ethnic identity. In the same way, the recurrence of the Middle East as a site of Western intervention is prompted by its strategic location, oil richness and ideological difference with the Western world. Thus both the local and foreign factors are vital in explaining the tragic and chronic state of affairs of this region.

To begin with, it would be relevant to have a brief look at the formation of states in the Middle East. The state as it’s in the Middle East is a product of modernity; i.e. the impact of western military powers and of the expanding capitalist market from 1600 until the colonial era 1882-1945. In addition to the modernist aspects of the state in the Middle East such as various institutional bodies of the executive, the judiciary and the legislature, they have attached a religious aura to the state as well imbued with Islamic teachings in order to claim legitimacy and maintain that Islam doesn’t sanction distinction between religious and secular power. However, this normative assertion gets invalidated as we look at different states in the Middle East. For example, states that claim legitimacy in Islamic terms have been mostly named after their different ruling families such as the Saudis. Moreover, these states in practice don’t comply with the unitary notion of the Caliphate as was the case in the pre-modern states during Mohammad’s time and his companions. The modern states in the Middle East demonstrate a clear distinction between those with religious authority and those with executive power. It’s purely an issue concerned with the anachronic role of ideas, values and interests constructed to serve a particular group.

The 1950s were vital in the formation of the Arab modern states and the main factors prompting these state structures were Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism. Nasser’s

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31 Halliday, Fred (2005). The Middle East in International Relations. P. 43

32 Ibid. P.44

33 Ibid. p. 44

34 Ibid. p. 44

nationalist Egypt was the trailblazer of Arab nationalism which spurred it into the entire region of the Middle East. On the other hand, Nuri Said of Iraq was more conservative and opposed the Nasserite rhetoric\textsuperscript{36}. Such differences cast the Middle East into a bipolar system of rivalry and were respectively supported by the then Cold War contenders, the Soviets and the West\textsuperscript{37}. The 14 July overthrow of the Nuri’s regime by General Kassem in Iraq briefly heralded the end of the Middle Eastern bipolarity. However, the two military leaders of Egypt and Iraq were far different than they had thought; thus the end of bipolarity was quite short-lived. Kassem was too radical in his nationalism and on top of that wouldn’t kowtow to Egypt as the pioneer of Arab nationalism\textsuperscript{38}. During the contention between these two strands of Arab nationalism in Iraq and Egypt, the flame of conservatism was dimly burning in Saudi Arabia which consequently replaced Iraq as the number one counterpart in the Middle Eastern bipolarity\textsuperscript{39}. This great shift occurred in 1962 and introduced a puritanical version of Islam as the ideological rival of Arab nationalism spearheaded by the Saudi rulers\textsuperscript{40}. During this period, Saudi Arabia gained a systematic context which clearly defined her position as the great conservative power which should be reckoned with. It used Islam as a mobilizing factor in attaining a special status for itself in the region.

4. Saudi Arabia:

Saudi Arabia or the land of the two holy mosques is the birth place of Islam and is the largest country in the Arab Peninsula. Its modern history begins in the 17th century when Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab reached a religio-political covenant in order to ‘purify’ Islam\textsuperscript{41}. Ibn Saud was a ruler in the central region of Al- Najd in a small township called Deraïya; whereas ibn Wahhab was a religious reformer who adhered to the strictest interpretation of Islam. Ibn Wahhab was chased out of his native town for preaching against the long-hailed traditions in Islam such as the worship of the prophet, praying at holy shrines etc\textsuperscript{42}. In 1744, ibn-Wahhab arrived in Deraïya which made ibn-Saud delighted for receiving a

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. P. 437
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. p. 437
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. P. 432
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. P. 436
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. P. 437
\textsuperscript{41} Gold, Dore (2003). Hatred’s Kingdom. P. 20
\textsuperscript{42} Ali, Tariq (1999). The Clash of Fundamentalisms. P. 74
preacher expelled from a rival potentate. Ibn Saud needed ibn Wahhab’s literal interpretation of Islam to solidify his rule and justify his lootings under the pretext of permanent jihad and expanding his authority. The two men needed each other and therefore their quasi-religio-political ménage provided legitimacy to the new Kingdom. Ibn Saud’s military prowess combined with ibn Wahhab’s ideological dexterity paved the ground for such a long-lasting rule over the region. The two men struck an alliance then as ibn-Saud assured him of his safety and ibn-Wahhab in return promised his ideological patronage to the would-be ruler of the region. In their mithaq or covenant ibn-Saud established the first Saudi state and ibn-Wahhab determined its official creed and it was essentially a political construction of religion, recreated to serve a particular goal. Their covenant didn’t stop at the religio-political level as the two men furthered their ties by intermarriage. Ibn-Saud married ibn-Wahhab’s daughter and the descendants of these two families the Al-Saud and the Al al Sheikh would serve as the leaders of the original Saudi for generations to come.

The modern history of Saudi Arabia as a modern state; however, begins in 1922 when Abdul Aziz ibn Saud recaptures Riyadh and carves the longevity and durability of the Saudi rule in rock for generations to come. The central body or institution is the Saudi monarchy with Koran as its constitution. The discovery of oil in the 1930s is reckoned as a milestone in its engagement in the world affairs. Having the largest oil reserves, Saudi Arabia is the world’s leading oil producer and exporter. Its oil wealth and importance to the global economy are key features impacting the country's external relations and shaping Saudi Arabia’s internal politics by giving the al-Saud dynasty unmatched wealth to maintain its control. There have been neither recognized political parties nor national elections in the history of Saudi Arabia, except the local elections which were held once in the year 2005; however the participation was reserved for male citizens only. The country’s council for ministers was set up in 1953 by the king whose main duty is to advise and recommend the formulation of general policy and directs the activities of the growing bureaucracy and

43 Ibid. P. 76
44 Ibid. p. 20
45 Ibid. p. 21
46 Ibid. p. 21
47 Ibid. P. 78
48 www.bbcworldservice.com viewed on 7-04-09
consists of a prime minister, a deputy prime minister and twenty ministers\textsuperscript{49}. The numerous advantages that Saudi Arabia enjoys such as the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and the claim of Islamic revival through its draconian interpretation of Islam called Wahhabism gives it a special status in the world. The rulers of Saudi Arabia have been mindful of this fact and have exploited it rightly; however king Faisal of Saudi Arabia was its first ruler who had a constructivist approach to using Islam as an ideological tool\textsuperscript{50}. He used Islam as the sole counterpart to avert the nationalist aura in the Arab world initiated by Nasser of Egypt. Faisal formed the ‘Islamic Entente’\textsuperscript{51} and took its lead; in spite of being a symbolic act, it had huge repercussions for Saudi Arabia as the leading Islamic country. The Islamic identity has played a significant role in attaining the Saudi interests. Its princes have been adept enough to use their Islamic chip in the Cold War against the spread of communism which directly posed threat to their valuable oil wells. In order to avert the communist expansion, they sided with the capitalist bloc and fuelled their proxy war in Afghanistan by channelling financial and military support to the Afghan \textit{mujahidin} in the mid 70s and 80s.

Saudi Arabia led by the Saudi-Wahhabi pact has meticulously exploited Islam both materially and ideologically to strengthen its power. For instance, before the oil discovery, their vital income came from the Haj pilgrimage which the Saudi princes used for luxury and lechery. While during the Arab-Israeli war right after the Second World War, the Saudis publically cheered and supported Arabs against the Israelis; however they didn’t send troops to the front and even arrested those among their own subjects who went there to fight\textsuperscript{52}. The oil discovery in the 1930s tremendously transformed the Saudi economy. After the end of the Second World War, the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) took the initiative to hunt for oil in this region. The prospects were blushing which led to the invitation of other US based companies such as Exxon and Mobil to share the costs\textsuperscript{53}. By 1949, ARAMCO crude oil production had reached a half a million barrels a day\textsuperscript{54}; and the increment continued.

\textsuperscript{49} Ali, Tariq (1999). \textit{The Clash of Fundamentalisms}. P. 74
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. P. 76
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. P. 75
\textsuperscript{52} Schwartz, Stephen (2002). \textit{The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror}. P. 115
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. P. 116
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. P. 115
till Saudi Arabia was recognized as the world’s largest oil producer. The new oil phase passed the Wahhabi-Saudi state to its new interlocutors, the Americans and made it a global power with its theo-political ideology an issue for the world\textsuperscript{55}. The oil discovery opened a new material structure for the Saudis to use it for the consolidation of their interests. They used the oil card to achieve a better deal with the Americans than they had with the British. Under the new conditions, American military and technical personnel would be admitted to the kingdom, opening a US Air Force base in Dhahran in 1946\textsuperscript{56}. Finally, oil was reckoned as a breakthrough for both the Saudis and its American interlocutors. Saudi Arabia was allowed to be included in the founding conference of the United Nations and at same time, the US adopted a ‘hands off’ policy towards Saudi internal and ideological matters\textsuperscript{57}. The US interest was direct access to Saudi oil wells instead of their willing and unceasing support to the Saudi Kingdom and its backing at the international arena.

\textbf{a. Wahhabism:}

The revivalist sect of Wahhabism is the literal interpretation of Islam with a passionate drive for change and piety in Islam which was inspired and propagated by Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Ibn Wahhab was born in 1703 in the village of Uyaina which was situated in Najd in east-central Arabia\textsuperscript{58}. Ibn Wahhab however was not confined to his birth place as he travelled around and learnt more about Islam and its different practices. It was in Medina that he came across Ibn Tamiyya’s passionate statements who had argued in 14\textsuperscript{th} century that the menacing and sinister foreign influences had seeped into Islam after the Mongol invasions of the Middle East\textsuperscript{59}. Ibn-Wahhab sought to return to the fundamental principle of Islam which is monotheism and condemned the then Muslim practices as heretic and contrary to the ideals of Islam. Such an initiative meant getting rid of alien and irrational beliefs and practices and introducing a common and shared goal through the strictest interpretation of Islam called

\textsuperscript{55} Schwartz, Stephen (2002). \textit{The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror}. Pp. 110/111
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. P. 113
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. P. 114
\textsuperscript{58} Ali, Tariq (1999). \textit{The Clash of Fundamentalisms}. P. 17
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. P. 18
Wahhabism\textsuperscript{60}.

Ibn-Wahhab’s worldview reflected both the epistemic status of Islam in terms of its orthodoxy and its practical aspect or orthopraxy\textsuperscript{61}. According to him, Islam’s status as the social knowledge was not enough to achieve either total salvation\textsuperscript{62} or eternal life in the hereafter. His concern was the pragmatic aspect of this social knowledge which God would judge Muslims on the basis of how they lived their lives, rather than just on the basis of their belief\textsuperscript{63}. Islamic scholars always emphasised Islamic law over theology in the course of the Islamic history; however ibn-Wahhab was mindful and advocate of their respective and mutual importance\textsuperscript{64}. For him, a complete and thorough Islamic world-view could only be achieved through constructing this social knowledge of Islam and forming an identity so that they would be ingrained. The source of his theological repertoire came directly from Koran and Hadith which he considered as infallible\textsuperscript{65}. However, his vision of these two binding sources of the Islamic jurisprudence was doctrinaire as he called for a return to ‘pure beliefs’\textsuperscript{66}. These pure beliefs were stoning to death of adulterers, the amputation of thieves, public execution of criminals\textsuperscript{67}, ban on grave and shrine visits and a number of draconian measures whose brunt was borne specifically by women.

The onslaught of modernization enraged the pragmatists of Wahhabi ideology called the \textit{Ikhwans} or brethrens who had helped spread the Saudi rule over the Peninsula by dint of their swords. Ibn-Saud experienced the tension with the \textit{Ikhwans} and it was the rejection of modern technology such as rifles, the telegraph and telephone, radio and automobile transportation by the \textit{Ikhwans} as inventions of the Satan\textsuperscript{68}. Mindful of the need

\textsuperscript{60}DeLong-Bas, Natan J (2003). \textit{Wahhabi Islam}. P. 9

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid. p. 41

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid. p. 41

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid. p. 41

\textsuperscript{64}Ibid. p. 42

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid. p. 45

\textsuperscript{66}Ali, Tariq (2003). \textit{The Clash of Fundamentalisms}. P. 73

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid. P. 74

\textsuperscript{68}Schwartz, Stephen (2002). \textit{The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror}. P. 106
and use of modern wares, ibn-Saud dexterously replaced the extremist *Ikhwans* with the secret police called the League for the Encouragement of Virtue and Prevention of Vice\(^69\). The creation of this body has helped lessen the influence of modernity on the mindset of the Saudis and its ideological grounding and at the same time has enabled the country to face the modern challenges of statehood. For example, when Saudi Arabia created its first institutions of the modern state, it borrowed a lot from the western models such as sending students abroad to acquire technical expertise and importing western elements of statecraft\(^70\). These modern initiatives, however, didn’t change Saudi Arabia very much because the religious component of the Kingdom didn’t move to the margins\(^71\); instead it took the modern discourse and employed it to face the challenges. After the end of the Second World War, trends such as decolonization, spread of the western political and cultural influences were dynamic and secular tendencies were taken as evidence for the ‘passing of traditional societies’\(^72\). But these were not as effective in the Saudi case; on the contrary Saudi Arabian rulers were cunning enough to exploit their religious conviction and further centralise their rule using these very modern techniques and discourses.

Wahhabism has always functioned as a systemic norm, dictating the practices and interests of the Saudi rulers. The normative character of Wahhabism justifies the Saudi actions in accordance with its values and rules. The mechanisms behind upholding Wahhabism as a norm are domestically institutionalized and internationally recognized through state legitimacy and its political integrity. Its approach to instilling the consciousness of the people and normalizing itself is based on its governmentality through the educational system and imposition of the strictest practices. Moreover, it rejects pluralism and doesn’t separate religion from politics. Wahhabism is the backbone of Saudi educational system as more than 80% of elementary schooling consists of Wahhabi doctrine\(^73\) which teaches a starkly dichotomized perception of identities. It even dichotomizes those Muslims who don’t share the Wahhabi doctrine. For Ibn-Wahhab, Prophet Mohammad was not as significant and

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\(^69\) Ibid. P. 108


\(^71\) Ibid. P. 74

\(^72\) Ibid. P. 76

\(^73\) Ibid. P. 76
he saw himself as an equal to him\textsuperscript{74}; moreover his own brother Suleyman accused him of conspiring a sixth pillar of Islam; i.e. the infallibility of Ibn-Wahhab\textsuperscript{75}. These repulsive novelties termed as ‘reform’ such as ban on music or limited freedom for women in the Wahhabi ideology are simply employed as escapism so that people get distracted and off the truth and thus the continuation of such practices has changed into adhered norms as if ingrained in the Saudi social context.

b. ‘Oriental’ Saudi Arabia

Edward Said’s seminal work, ‘Orientalism’ has had a profound impact on a number of disciplines and is regarded a groundbreaking work in fields as diverse as post-colonial theory, English literature, history, political science etc. According to Said, Orientalism is a framework through which the Western world gets a preconceived and defined picture of the third world especially that of the Middle East. This picture is primarily constructed with generalizations, stereotypes and otherness; in short Orientalism’s central argument asserts that this picture or knowledge of the orient is biased and corrupt and merely reflects certain interests of the Western world\textsuperscript{76}. In addition to being a dishonest system of knowledge, Orientalism is a means of control\textsuperscript{77}. Orientalism is an epistemic endeavour to depict the East as backward, irrational, barbaric and mystical; whereas the West is noted for its rationality, advancement and civility\textsuperscript{78}. Prejudice and bias of the orient legitimized European colonization of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th}; its ideological effects are still playing a major role in shaping the socio-political milieu of the region\textsuperscript{79}. These accounts of Eastern and Western dichotomies are still reverberating in the Western mass media when representing the non-Westerners in the Hollywood, the media etc. Saudi Arabia could squarely fit such a representation in so far as its acute oddity with values such as human rights, democracy, women rights, equality and

\textsuperscript{74} Schwartz, Stephen (2002). The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror. P. 70

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. P. 71

\textsuperscript{76} Jhally, Sut (2007). On Orientalism.

\textsuperscript{77} AvAs‘ad AbuKhalil (2004). The battle for Saudia Arabia: royalty, fundamentalism, and global power. P. 34

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. P. 38

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. P. 38
citizenship rights are concerned. These skewed representations, however, don’t include the house of the al-Saud.

The notoriety of the al-Saud family for misogyny, rule through lineage, practice of the strictest possible interpretation of religion like that of the 8th century and its non-observance of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights makes it to prone to such a representation; however, the Western world seems to gloss over these tarnished images and instead defend the Kingdom and proclaim it as the representing body of the Muslim world. This twisted representation is in the interest of both the Saudi rulers and their western allies. The West is concerned about its geopolitical and economic interests; whereas the Saudi rulers exploit it for having a decent international image and no internal subversions. For example, the Western world is supposedly very ambitious and emphatic on the question of human rights. Countries such as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Burma and even Pakistan have been chastised for having bad human rights records; however the Saudi Kingdom’s mention is extremely low. There are 6 to 7 million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia; however this diversity is non-existent in the governing structure of the Kingdom and no world power bothers to criticise the Saudis on this account.

Execution is a common practice under the Saudi rule; however it’s practiced in a very egregious manner violating the very essence of human nature. For instance, the UN Human Rights Watch quotes an Associated Press report narrating an execution as follows:

“Policemen clear a public square of traffic and lay out a thick blue plastic sheet about 16 feet by 16 feet on asphalt. The condemned, who has been given tranquilizers, is led from a police car dressed in his own clothing. His eyes are covered with cotton pads, bound in plaster and finally covered with a black cloth. Barefoot, with feet shackled and hands cuffed behind his back, the prisoner is led by a police officer to the centre of the sheet and made to kneel. An Interior Ministry official reads out the prisoner’s name and crime before a crown of witnesses. A soldier hands a long, curved sword of the executioner. He approaches the prisoner from behind and jabs him with the tip of the sword in the back so that the prisoner instinctively raises his head”.

Such a depiction of a torture scene reminds us of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* which considers public torture as theatrical whose spectacle serves a number of purposes. The egregious torturing of the body in Saudi Arabia is undignified and cannot be measured

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80 Ibid. P. 39

81 [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) viewed on 12-04-09
according to the disciplinary principles of the modern society. When the Taliban practiced such atrocious acts; the world termed them as barbaric, uncultured, uncivilized and Shakespeare’s Calibans of the modern day; however, the al-Saud house is exempt from such representation in spite of record-breaking practice of these humiliating practices.

C. Chronic Autocracy:
The history of the Saudi Kingdom goes back to over two centuries. The first phase of their rule over the region starts in 1744 through 1818, followed by their second ascent to power from 1824 till 1891 and their final grip on power began in 1902 up until this day. These entire ascendancies to power have been based on the piety of Wahhabi ideology giving legitimacy to the dubious religious credentials of the al-Sauds. The al-Saud have used every trick to clench their hands on power be it through marriages and faking foreign policies. The then Italian Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti once described the al-Saud’s extraordinary power full of contradictions and duplicities to Jimmy Carter. He illustrated this through exemplifying the practice of polygamy. For example it is not unusual in Islam to marry four wives but to do it for a purpose has always been a construct of the al-Saud family and therefore it would be near impossible to gauge their trickery in foreign policies.

The Saudi rulers have always had in mind the importance of both social and material aspects of ruling from the very initial days of their ascendency to power. This fact was known to ibn-Saud from day one when he pledged an alliance with ibn-Wahhab two centuries ago. Ibn-Wahhab’s religious revival and re-reading of Islam provided theological justification for ibn-Saud’s permanent jihad which involved looting other Muslim settlements and cities. The Saudis would attack and then ransack the whole colonies because the settlers wouldn’t accept their puritanical version of Islam. The Wahhabi ideology has played both financial and ideological roles for the Saudi family.

The mechanisms behind the power of the al-Saud have been replete with paradoxes; however, it’s astounding to fathom how they have balanced them. Throughout

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82 Farsy, Foaud (1986). *Saudi Arabia*. P. 70
84 Ibid. 83
their power, the Saudis have been vigilant of their strategic location, Islamist ideology and their respective ties with the West. On the one hand, the al-Sauds and the Al al Shyakh archetypically represent Islam and oppose Jews and their religion; but on the other, depend on America in spite of its pro-Israeli stance. Such brazen duplicitous politics requires systematic thought motivation aimed at permeation of distinct set of beliefs and as well as wealth in order to respectively mute domestic opposition and gain international recognition. Domestic opposition is marred through social and political censorships in Saudi Arabia; for instance, the religious police keep the public in constant check and their presence has an intimidating effect on them. The religious police has an invasive responsibility in the social, political and religious spheres of life as it enforces dress code for women, ensures that the business closes down five times day so that people perform their prayers and monitors suspected political opponents. In the same vein, the Saudi Kingdom uses its financial gains from oil and Haj in order to buy international legitimacy. For example, the Saudi total investment in the US is estimated at half a trillion dollars, mainly in stocks and bonds, bank deposits and real estate. In addition to this, Saudi Arabia is by far the biggest customer of US arms exports among developing countries, receiving deliveries worth more than $28 billion in the 1993-2000 period.

**d. Primordial Identity:**

The Saudi Arabian monarchy claims to have a confessional identification and it was in the 1982 when the then king Fahd of Saudi Arabia assumed the title of the ‘Custodian of the two Holy mosques’; thus signifying an Islamic rather than secular identity. The Saudi dominion is extraordinarily introverted and completely closed to outsiders and is the last great, forbidden country in the world. The monarchy has constructed a religious identity which perfectly serves its ends; i.e. the religious ideas and beliefs of the ruling family define the range of individuals’ religious convictions. In addition to this, the ruling family dictates a dynastic authority with an iron fist.

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87 Ibid. P. 30

88 Ibid. P. 34

Gender identity is a suitable example to describe the elemental understanding of identity in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government has constructed within its political culture an ideal type or role for women which according to their literal interpretation of Islam fits a Muslim woman\(^\text{90}\). This gender identity formation promotes public separation of men and women and thus defines the Saudi society distinct from the morally ‘corrupt’ western society. Such an ideology purported to be given is not only nurtured by the more conservative elements of the Saudi society, but also state agencies promote this ideology and believe that the continuity of the monarchy is vested in it\(^\text{91}\). For example a *fatwa* or religious verdict in Saudi Arabia about the primordiality of its Islamic identity reads as follows:

> ‘Our government, thank God, is known for its deference to Sharia law and its enforcement of it on its subjects and this is part of God’s favour on it and the reason for its survival, glory and God’s siding with it. May God stay it on the right path, reform its men, and help it to protect His religion, His book and the Sunnah of His Prophet from mockery of the mockers, the atheism of the atheists and the scorning of the criminals’\(^\text{92}\).

The quote above distinctly illuminates that Saudi Arabia is unique and is the *chosen* land and it’s upon the Saudis to implement the commands of God. Their interpretation of identity is natural and given because the ‘Supreme Being’ who is simply infallible was involved in it. The Saudi rulers adroitly exploit such an interpretation and take in the position of this infallible being, i.e. God’s representatives. For example, during the coronation of King Abdullah, representatives from all the tribes would kiss him on the shoulder and declare him as the saviour of the Saudis and thus pledge their unremitting support to him.

The Saudi ruling family is more vocal and persistent in the *orthopraxy* of its religious creed and is devout in implementing it rather than its more non-practical *orthodoxy*. This orthopraxy can easily be noticed in the segregation of sexes in the Saudi society. The Saudis are far more stringent both theoretically and practically compared to other Islamic societies like Iran or Egypt\(^\text{93}\) in such a practice. Sex segregation, women’s domesticity and their dependence on men have been mechanismically incorporated in the public life in Saudi Arabia. Men have privileges such as retaining the prerogative in marriage, divorce and child

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\(^{91}\) Farsy, Foaud (1986). *Saudi Arabia*. P. 70

\(^{92}\) Ibid. P. 33

\(^{93}\) Ibid. P. 34
custody; on top of that polygyny is a common practice in spite of being frowned upon in most Islamic countries and officially banned at least by one\textsuperscript{94}. Such an ideology is reiterated by the royal edicts and the state recognizes its responsibility to protect the family according to Islamic principles and women and children are sited together as individuals in special need of state’s protection\textsuperscript{95}. These socially constructed roles are never questioned in the Saudi society; on the contrary, they are taken to be in the human nature underpinning the Saudi royal system. The Saudi Kingdom gets the privileges of such a perception; and furthers this perception in constructing a systemic approach to understanding its interests based on meanings and social values.

5. Discussions and Analyses:

The Saudi Kingdom considers itself the sole inheritor and bacon of the Islamic heritage. Its claim for that legacy stems from the presence of the two holy Muslim sites in Mecca and Medina and as well as its revival of the Islamic faith in the Wahhabi ideology, constructed to serve its interests. The whole political system of the Kingdom is based on Islamic faith which lays down laws, constitutions and regulations and as the then Prince Fahd asserted, ‘Islam guarantees the exercise of democracy’\textsuperscript{96}; or as their basic law states, ‘The state protects human rights in accordance with the Islamic Sharia’\textsuperscript{97}. The rhetoric of the Saudi royal family purportedly stands against the instillation of the modern influences of the western world on its populace. For example, the then king Faisal once stated, ‘We believe neither in socialism, nor in communism or in any doctrine outside of Islam; we believe only in Islam’\textsuperscript{98}. Their belief, however, is time-bound and serves a particular interest and that is their grip and hold on power. Their stern interpretation is constructed to serve a given interest in a given time period; for example until recently Arabic was the sole language and Saudis were required to have competency in it; however due to global demands, the new generation is largely

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. p. 34

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid. p. 34

\textsuperscript{96} Ghassane, Salameh (1980). Political Power and the Saudi State. www.jstor.org

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. P. 8

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. P. 7
bilingual and tends to feel much at home in English\textsuperscript{99}. Moreover, it’s the Saudi royal family which has made this particular interpretation of Islam as the comprehensive norm and at the same time complied with international expectations contrary to its purported anti-modern expression; in other words, the royal family is constantly re-creating or inventing new norms in order to enable its actions. For example, during its incipient days, the Saudi Kingdom had only three ministries of defence, foreign affairs and finance; however in 1954 six more were added\textsuperscript{100} to face the challenges of the modern statehood. To this effect, the late US secretary of state Dean Acheson, once stated that the national idea of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia like any other country is, ‘to survive, perchance to prosper,’ but with the extra stipulation ‘under the Al-Saud dynasty’\textsuperscript{101}.

The Saudi people live under the shadow of a religiously inspired Kingdom and freedom of expression is severely restricted by prohibitions on criticism of the government, Islam, and the ruling family. The government owns all domestic broadcast media, closely monitors privately owned print media, has the authority to remove all editors in chief, routinely censors domestic and foreign publications, and restricts the entry of foreign journalists into the Kingdom\textsuperscript{102}. Private ownership of satellite dishes is illegal and internet access is filtered to block web sites deemed offensive to Islam or a threat to state security of the Kingdom\textsuperscript{103}. The Kingdom doesn’t permit public demonstrations especially those pertaining to political issues for it knows that its interpretation is manufactured and has loopholes which needs to be guarded. Furthermore, governmental permission is required to form professional groups and associations provided that they must be nonpolitical. Freedom of religion in Saudi Arabia is virtually nonexistent for those who do not adhere to the Wahhabi interpretation of Sunni Islam and public expression of non-Islamic religious beliefs is illegal, though private worship is permitted\textsuperscript{104}. Shiite Muslims, who constitute 7 to 10 percent of the population, face


\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. P. 6

\textsuperscript{101} Brown L. Carl (2004). Diplomacy in the Middle East: the International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers. P. 219

\textsuperscript{102} T. R. McHale (1980). A Prospect of Saudi Arabia. P. 636 \url{www.jstor.org} viewed on 090506

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. P. 623

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. P. 629
numerous restrictions on the public practice of their religion and encounter discrimination in all areas of public sector employment. Finally, the testimony of Shiite citizens is frequently discounted in the courts and they are barred from holding positions of authority in the Saudi government. Shiite religious seminaries are not permitted and numerous Shiite clerics have been arrested and sentenced to long prison terms. The Saudi rulers have made sure that the Shiite groups are utterly neutralized not to pose any threat to the Kingdom.

a. Islam as an Ideology:

Islamic law or Sharia law is the exclusive code of law in Saudi Arabia which is based on Koran and the Hadith. The Sharia law is concerned with almost all kinds of social and religious practices such as marriage and divorce, inheritance, revenge, litigation and others. The Saudi royal family sees the role of Islam as divinely inspired and thus unchangeable and original in its formulations. Such a conception of religion presumably provides the legal standings for the Saudi monarchy; however there are loopholes and noticeable traits of the use and construction of religion rather than its principled and unchanging reality asserted by the Kingdom. One such manifest construction of religion is the politicisation of Islam supported by claims such as ‘Islam is a political system inasmuch as it’s a religious one’. Such assertions by the royal family subordinate the whole political culture and governance to religiosity and avow Sharia as the only legal system. Moreover, the constructed nature of Islam as the only legal system is backed by its non-historicity; in other words the Kingdom glosses over the historical realities and discourses of Islam. Unlike the modern notion of governance and rule projected by Max Webber’s typology of legal, charismatic and traditional rules, Islam as a system of governance fits only in the charismatic and traditional patterns. Rulers in Islamic history were either charismatic such as the rashidun/rightly

105 Ibid. P. 623
107 Ibid. P. 186
109 Ibid. P. 120
110 Ibid. P. 89
111 Ibid. P. 90
guided or traditional rulers\textsuperscript{112} ascending to power through inheritance. The legal aspect or its legalization is merely a modern trend in order to show its conformance with the prevailing world-view which the Saudi princes aptly have used.

The Saudi royal family is aware of modern trends and its influences on its society and therefore adapts itself to face the challenges without succumbing to it. These challenges can question the legality of the system and thus pose threats to the application of the Sharia law in the Saudi society. For example, since the economic changes of 1975, the education system has developed and nurtured a population that is ‘more sophisticated and outspoken than ever’\textsuperscript{113}. But their concerns are alleviated through islah or reforms\textsuperscript{114} which are ironically modified to pander to their aspirations and as well as consolidate the power of the al-Saud family in political life\textsuperscript{115}. For example, the basic law introduced in 1992 founded a consultative assembly (majlis al shura) and provincial administrations which in effect consolidated the centrality of the ruling family rather than being more inclusive of the common people to take part in political structure\textsuperscript{116}. The number of members of the majlis has recently increased, but the expansion was designed for the assembly "to represent all tribes.”; however, ‘a significant portion of the population is not tribal, this justification casts light on parochial identities rather than on something larger and more inclusive’\textsuperscript{117}. These are just mirages which endeavor to safeguard the Royal family.

Islam like the concept of anarchy in IR under the house of al-Saud has been a mere effect of the Kingdom’s practice. The logic behind adherence to Islam lies in the continuation of the al-Saud household in power. The three elemental principles of constructivism, the social knowledge, social practice and social identities and interest\textsuperscript{118} roundly fit the al-Saud orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Islam. Wahhabism’s puritanical reading of Islam is introduced as the social knowledge which has provided Saudi Arabia with a

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ibid. P. 153} Gwenn Okruhlik (2005). \textit{The Irony of Islah}. P. 153 www.jstor.org
\bibitem{Ibid. P. 145} Ibid. P. 145
\bibitem{Ibid. P. 145} Ibid. P. 145
\bibitem{Ibid. P. 152} Ibid. P. 152
\end{thebibliography}
pervasive ideology seeping into every nook and cranny of the society. This ideology has justified almost everything the al-Saud household has been doing without any serious reaction from its population who are spoon-fed with this ideology through media channels and censorships. In the same way, this knowledge is turned into social practice as Wahhabism is actively upheld by the religious police and its application in court decisions. In general, Wahhabism dictates the everyday behaviors of the people. For example, it dictates to address God alone in the prayers and avoid any other worship or even visit graves of one’s parents. Moreover, everyday greeting should only be extended to Muslims, but a nonbeliever must not be greeted at all unless the Muslim is addressed first. Women are worst hit by such an orthopraxy as they are to learn that God requires pious women to cover themselves completely, including their face, and not to work with men, unless they are closely related. These initiatives might sound benign and unrelated to the perpetuation of the house of al-Saud’s grip on power; however these very societal attributes are providing the backbone of their continuity. Because the civil society is enthralled with religious charisma and they are consciously and sub-consciously veered to think in a particular manner and don’t question the dictation and will of the regal family.

Finally, the Kingdom is well-aware of the stakes and benefits of identity and therefore is very careful in the construction of identities and its exploitation for sustaining its grip on power. The immediate medium for advocating the identity discourse is through education as well over half the population is of school age and education is the most significant medium through which national identity has been strengthened. Public education has been the priority in Saudi Arabia's nation-building project since 1970; during which time Islam as interpreted in accordance with Wahhabi ideology was put at the centre of the curriculum. The influence of education in constructing identity is very strong and persuasive as the young people today view Islam especially the version associated with the royal family, not tribe or region, as the primary component of their identity in Saudi

\[\text{\cite{Ibid. P. 45}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Ibid. P. 56}}\]
\[\text{Clawson, Patrick (). A Dialogue: Saudi Arabia. P. 202 www.jstor.org}\]
\[\text{\cite{Ibid. P. 204}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Ibid. P. 205}}\]
Arabia. The Wahhabi reading of Islam makes sure that liberals, nationalists, and moderate Islamist reformists are barred from effecting any change in the education curricula which could create loopholes and leeway in their desired discourses.

b. Citizenship & Identity:

All citizens must be Muslims in Saudi Arabia\textsuperscript{124}. The status of citizenry for the Saudi people gets re-created by the house of the al-Saud. They have constructed citizenship in a way to serve their own interests and goals. The royal family’s description of its status thoroughly asserts that the power of Islam and the al-Saud family as protector of Saudi Arabia's moral integrity are one and the same. It equates the modern state with the synthesis between the ruling family and a particular manifestation of Islam\textsuperscript{125}. This dominant narrative views people as subjects (ra'ya) which means following a shepherd (ra'y) who cares for them and to whom they are loyal (wala').\textsuperscript{126} This has changed into a normative as is disseminated in textbooks, propagated by the media, and exhibited in the museums, telling a story about the unification of the tribes under the banner of Islam and the wise leadership of Abdulaziz as if the identity of Arabia is intermingled with the al-Saud household. It doesn’t mean that the al-Saud identity is static and unchanging; on the contrary it’s as fluid and constructive as the changing reality of its polity.

The official narrative has produced a civic mythology in which citizenship has four social and economic components, each and everyone strengthens the Kingdom’s image and its grip on power: family, personal behavior, Islam, and welfare\textsuperscript{127}. All these four characteristics of citizenship are linked in one way or another to the royal family. For example, the first component, identity with and loyalty to one's family, is of significant weight. Loyalty to the family structure is linked with loyalty to the state under the al-Saud because the private family is said to underpin the public family\textsuperscript{128} and the public family is in fact the royal family. The hallmark of the loyalty element is belief and Saudis are required to

\textsuperscript{124} Fox, jonathan (). \textit{A World Survey of Religion and State}. P. 228

\textsuperscript{125} Gwenn Okruhlik (2005). \textit{The Irony of Islah}. P. 153 www.jstor.org

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid. P. 153

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid. P. 153

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid. P. 153
have it without questioning the very foundation of their belief. The second element is more practical and requires compliance with the rules and regulations set by the Saudi government. Its effectiveness can best be noticed in regulating the performativity of gender identity. Women are required by draconian behavioral rules not to participate in the economy, politics, media and society. They are not permitted to drive automobiles, travel alone on domestic or international airlines and attend classes with men\textsuperscript{129}. These are the social norms which are interpreted by the religion and thus the state acts as their implementer.

The third component refers to the regime's association with Islamic values and it promotes itself as the protector of the faith. The Koran is Saudi Arabia's constitution, and the \textit{Sharia} is the law of the land\textsuperscript{130}. The regime allegedly portrays its adherence to Islam as rigid and concrete; however looking at the reality behind the al-Saud’s power one easily notices that it’s a flawed manifestation. For instance, the ostensible opposition of the clergies or the Al-al Sheikhs to the Kingdom’s link with the US is very Machiavellian because they call the US ‘the great Satan’ like the Iranian Ayatollahs but turn a blind eye to the US support of the Saudi rulers during different periods of time such as the Gulf War. Finally, the fourth component concerns the population's access to economic benefits provided by the state. With the oil-driven expansion of the economy in the 1970s through the mid-1980s, the number of foreign workers grew until they constituted about 95 percent of the private sector's labor force; thus the state began to codify what it meant to be Saudi to distribute the windfall benefits of oil revenues\textsuperscript{131}. It was defined in a way that differentiated the local population from the millions of foreign workers brought in to staff the country's burgeoning economy. In short, belonging was historically defined in social and cultural terms; but the oil boom and its subsequent riches led to a re-definition of Saudi citizenship. "I am Saudi" came to mean "I am not an imported laborer."\textsuperscript{132} Belonging was based only on this negative frame of reference and was expressed through cultural, social, and economic qualities\textsuperscript{133}.

c. **Oriental Paradox:**

\textsuperscript{129} T. R. McHale (1980). \textit{A Prospect of Saudi Arabia}. P. 638 \url{www.jstor.org} viewed on 090504

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. P. 637

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid. P. 369

\textsuperscript{132} Gwenn Okruhlik (2005). \textit{The Irony of Islah}. P. 153 \url{www.jstor.org}

\textsuperscript{133} Gwenn Okruhlik (2005). \textit{The Irony of Islah}. P. 154 \url{www.jstor.org}
The Saudi regime’s inability to escape Orientalism is vividly noticeable in its representation in the western media. Statements such as ‘there are no nations but only tribes with flags in the Middle East’ or the Empire conquered by the sword\textsuperscript{134} are common in the western media. However, these representations are not pronounced by Western governments and elites to the same extent rather it’s the voice of some leftist media groups. The contemporary oriental symbolization of Saudi Arabia significantly differs from the colonial period for a number of reasons. First, it’s not a practical colony like it used to be. In the Western colonialism of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, it was the official discourse of the empire to otherize and stereotype the colonized as uncivilized and barbaric; whereas the current Saudi representation as barbaric, modern-day inquisitor, misogynous, mystic, anti-modern, monstrous and horrifying is mostly advocated by the western mass-media rather than its policy makers. In the same way, the United States, as the heir to the Athenian democracy has glossed over the harsh realities of the Saudi society and human rights records and has vowed to protect this bizarre Kingdom with any means necessary. This enduring support of the US to the Saudi Kingdom has had differing phases in the course of history and their cultural and political differences have always been dwarfed by the harmony of their economic and strategic interests. The US makes or creates an image of the Saudi regime so that it can attain its goals and interests; such hypocrisy of the West in Saudi representation is mind-boggling, but slickly conforms to a constructivist frame. For example, in the 50s the US under the Eisenhower administration hoped to make King Saud (1953–1964) into a globally recognized Islamic leader and transform him into "the senior partner of the Arab team\textsuperscript{135}; this prospect was later augmented by the oil discovery. Moreover, during the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 by the then Soviets, the US found Saudi Arabia as the most suited ally to launch its proxy war in that region; knowing that religion was a perfect instrument to staunch the expansion of godless communism\textsuperscript{136}. The US doesn’t have a consistent standard of judgment when it comes to Saudi Arabia; merely for geopolitical and economic reasons and the Saudi Kingdom is perfectly aware of this fact. It plays a major role in dampening international criticism of the Saudi Kingdom because the US doesn’t voice any concern and regard it as a normal and able government who can provide its citizens with security and welfare.

\textsuperscript{134} Murawiece, Laurent (2003). \textit{Princes of Darkness}. P. 1


\textsuperscript{136} Ibid. P. 121
The UK and Saudi relations go back a couple of centuries when the Saudi princes were in their incipient days. During the First World War, Ottoman Turks allied with Germany and Austria and went to war with Britain; London became interested in developing links with the Arabs in order to guarantee a foothold for themselves in the region in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire. The Saudi regime emerged from the uncertainty of the First World War, the collapse of the Turkish Empire and its religious caliphate. Ties with the new colonial power were vital for the Saudi princes in order to ward off tribal feuds and the Hashimite descendants of the prophet Mohammad. Ibn-Saud always had an Englishman called Harry St. John Bridger Philby who was a talented linguist and an accomplished explorer and geographer. Philby was the brain behind constructing strategies and getting the puritanical Wahhabi ideology work alongside the British. Ibn-Sauds rule was based on power politics and never rejected British aid in spite of the fact that ‘Britain represented the mightiest Christian empire in history, a power aggressively committed, from an Islamic perspective, to the spread of unbelief’. For example, English-speaking Protestant missionaries had flooded the Middle East and in 1917 the British promised national homeland to the Jews in the Ottoman dominions; in spite of all these, ibn-Saud had reached an understanding with the British to spread Wahhabism with British aid. Such insincerity on British part is still reverberating in its dealing with the Saudi regime as it turns a blind eye to the decaying human rights record of the Kingdom. For instance, during an investment conference in London, Amnesty International was very concerned that companies thinking of investing in the Kingdom should be made aware of the human rights situation; however Peter Hain the then British foreign minister responsible for the Middle East subtly avoided the word human rights and said, “Greater openness will improve mutual understanding, develop common values and increase respect for international standards, in the social, as well as the economic spheres”. The use of the phrase, ‘international standards’ instead of human rights in his speech utterly indicated


138 Ibid. P. 99

139 Ibid. 100

140 Ibid. P. 102

141 Ibid. P. 103

142 [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) viewed on 090510
to diplomatic dexterity avoiding offending the Saudi rulers. Even after the 9/11 attacks on the US, knowing that 15 out of 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens, or it funded the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, its depiction as a corrupt government is a far-cry in the political circles of the west.

The Wahhabi regime has always turned to the West for aid in times of uncertainty and chaos. They were first protected by the British, then by the US which maintained the air base in Dhahran from 1946 to 1962 and then even by the French when a band of ultra-Wahhabis briefly got control of the Kab’ah in 1979, the French Special Forces were asked to help eject them\textsuperscript{143}. The ultra-religious aura that the regime presumes is a charade and has always played a double role. When Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1991; the Saudi princes were at a loss and completely dependent on their Western interlocutors, especially the US. The strategic and economic importance of Saudi for the US surpassed its human rights record or its non-democratic character and promptly acted to save it. The US got directly involved in the Kuwaiti war than it had assisted the Afghan resistance against the Soviets\textsuperscript{144}. Finally the US sees the religious and political sternness of the Saudi rulers as a counterweight to the leftist and nationalist elements which subsequently undermines the post-revolutionary Iranian influences in the region\textsuperscript{145}.

d. \textbf{Democratization:}

The unremitting grip of the al-Saud household on power renders the prospects for democratization very unusual and slim since they are concentrated on power and avoid institutionalization of the power. The royal family has muzzled the free press which is the only outlet preaching freedom; as it’s entirely controlled and the largest press groups are actually owned by members of the royal family\textsuperscript{146}. Arrests are arbitrary and the judicial enterprise is politically dependent\textsuperscript{147}. There are a number of variables which account for the dampening of democratization prospects in Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom has aptly exploited

\textsuperscript{143} Schwartz, Stephen (2002). \textit{The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror}. P. 182

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid. P. 181

\textsuperscript{145} \url{www.hrw.org} viewed on 090517


\textsuperscript{147} Ibid. P. 184
them in strengthening its grip on power and normalizing these variables. These variables are cultural attributes, religious convictions, traditional customs, colonial heritage and economic performances.

The cultural component in Saudi Arabia is predominantly attributed with tribalism which in essence diminishes the prospects for a healthy opposition parties. The ones which exist are mostly composed of wealthy liberal merchants who don’t dare ask for elections let alone the change in the constitution\(^\text{148}\). There has been no record of elections or any reforms of the constitution in Saudi Arabia; the Koran is the valid constitution of the country\(^\text{149}\). The religious conviction is the central element in Saudi Arabia and covers almost all aspects of life be it political or otherwise. Political parties in essence are illegal, and the king rules by decree in accordance with the constitution based on a strict interpretation of Sharia.

According to the Freedom House (FH) a US based non-governmental organization; the judiciary is sorely controld by the royal family and its associates. The king has extensive powers to appoint or discharge judges, who are selected based on their strict adherence to religious principles\(^\text{150}\). FH attests that Sharia law allows for corporal punishments, such as flogging and amputation, which are commonly practiced. In addition to this, the hegemonic permeation of religion in the Saudi society dictates decapitation as the prescribed punishment for rape, murder, armed robbery, adultery, apostasy, and drug trafficking. People sentenced to death are often unaware of their sentence and receive no advance notice for their execution. The law enables heirs of a murder victim to demand "blood money" in exchange for sparing the life of a murderer; according to FH, Saudi Arabia executes about 100 people per year, many of them foreigners\(^\text{151}\).

One major threat to the Kingdom was pan-Arabism during the 60s which could count for a detour in the political organization of Saudi Arabia. This menace, however, was shattered with the Arab defeat of the Six Day War in 1967\(^\text{152}\). However, since then, the streaks and calls for change have been reverberating in the Saudi society. These developments have

\(^{148}\) Ibid. P. 195


\(^{150}\) www.freedomhouse.org viewed on 2009-04-19

\(^{151}\) www.freedomhouse.org viewed on 2009-04-19

\(^{152}\) Tibi, Bassam (1998). The challenge of Fundamentalism. P. 193
mainly been occurring among the liberals and Islamist clerics. The liberals such as Salman al-Awada or Aida al-Qarni who were advocating change in the Saudi system soon relinquished their quest and focused on change in the religious filed rather than the political field\textsuperscript{153}. The Islamists were in the same way termed as anti-western who were tagged as derailing the ‘stability’ of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, the excessively rigid ruling of the al-Saud led to the eruption of yet another group called ‘Islamo-democratic’\textsuperscript{154} who merged both the religious and political aspects in order to weaken the al-Saud grip on power. This group is known for its diversity as it includes people from different strata and orientation in its ranks such as Shiites, liberals and intellectuals whose political platform is mobilized with both religious and political discourse\textsuperscript{155}. This group gained relative recognition after the dreadful incident of 9/11 as the Saudi rulers distanced themselves from the strict and uncompromising rhetoric of Islamism. However, their success was short-lived because King Abdullah changed his tone and came closer to the US realizing the need for a shift in his policies to fiddle with domestic and outside pressures. This strategic move by the Saudi Kingdom has been effective in calming down both endogenous and exogenous critical voices, knowing that 15 out of the 19 hijackers of 9/11 were Saudi citizens. Furthermore, King Abdullah averted the Islamo-democrats intentions by setting up nominal organizations for dialogue conferences and announced partial municipal elections\textsuperscript{156} as the new realities of its social and political program. The King announced in January of 2005 that the Consultative Council would be expanded and only the male gender over the age of 21 could vote for local councils\textsuperscript{157}.

King Abdullah’s initiative was entirely constructed as it conformed to the occasion and setting. The initiative in a way was a realization that power could not be confined rather the Kingdom should include itself in all its relations constituting all social formations. Such a strategy of King Abdullah deemed power not to be possessed but

\textsuperscript{153} Stéphane Lacroix (2004). \textit{Saudi Arabia’s new ‘Islamo-Liberal’ Reformists}. P. 345 \url{www.jstor.org} viewed on 090508

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid. 342

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. 345

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid. 343

\textsuperscript{157} Saudi Arabia Profile. \url{www.mah.se} electronic library
exercised; like a network of functions rather than being symbolized by the sovereign\textsuperscript{158}; in other words the so-called democratic openness provided the dynamism for the interests of the Kingdom at such critical moments. These changes are merely solidifying the Saudi rule and can only raise doubts for democratic prospects. The Saudi state, through these nominal changes has yet caused another dilemma for its populace and that is the country's relatively high levels of social tension as the country is becoming heavily bureaucratic, with no elected officials to control it. The royal family will always muscle its way into ownership of the main industries, crowding out the private sector and creating tensions\textsuperscript{159}. Finally, the lack of an independent judiciary means that the royal family stays above the law. Until this changes, and the Al Saud is placed strictly on the same legal footing as commoners, the state will remain imperious and this will not happen through any pressure from below\textsuperscript{160}. 

6. Conclusion:

The stability and longevity of the Saudi regime is vested in a number of factors which are interlinked and glued with one another and the conclusion of this paper determines that there is an active dynamism among them which sustains the Saudi rule. These factors have both material and non-material dynamics which the Saudi Kingdom dexterously employs. Ideologically, Saudi Kingdom justifies its rule on its citizens through a legitimating formula that takes into account its tribal past, the particular religious role that rulers of Mecca and Medina assert and the al-Saud family’s history and association with the Islamic revivalist ideology of Wahhabism\textsuperscript{161}. In addition to this, the oil money is used as the material asset to spread the belief that the al-Saud rule is the best expression of the religious and cultural traditions of the peninsula\textsuperscript{162}. The dynamism of the non-material or social aspects which are used as glue in sustaining the regime like religious ideology and tribal history give meaning to the Saudi rule as a collective of norms; and these very rulers function as the agents who

\textsuperscript{158} Hoy C, David(1998). *Foucault, a Critical Reader*. P. 134


\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
interpret these norms not as merely interests but as regulative means. Their use as regulative means is far more than plain interests because they instil and pervade the mindsets of the population and make them take the state interpretation of these norms for granted in other words it’s an idyllic amalgamation of ideology and money.

The Saudi Kingdom has defined its interests in constructing a dual platform where it concentrates on its domestic socio-political stability and at the same time proves itself as a politically legitimate state at the international level. This is done through a premise of ‘modernization without secularization’163, as it seeks out to gain domestic socio-political stability through resisting secular auras for it claims to be religiously inspired. The Saudi government uses religion as a tool of political, social, economic, and psychological oppression. Religion is used to justify tyrannical rule, reject democracy and impose severe censorship on the flow of information into and out of the country under the pretense of protecting Islam from the immoral values of “infidels.”164 The Saudi rulers employ the status of its holy shrines in Mecca and Medina and exert inconsistent religious influence throughout the Arab and Muslim communities worldwide. The Wahhabi ideology is the state’s official religion and advocates intolerance against democracy and depicts it as antithetical to God’s will and power165. On the other hand, to face up to the challenges of the modern world and achieve international legitimacy and authority, the Kingdom embraces modernization.

The Saudi state is considerate of its sovereignty ‘as the central locus of political power’ which enforces obedience166. Nevertheless in a Foucaultian manner, they do not exclude other possibilities of power and equally view them as important. The question of sovereignty and its spontaneous assumption is stretched and extended as part of the political, social, cultural, religious and economic lives of the public through discourses. The Saudi Kingdom is cognisant of the fact that power arises through numberless and usually unexamined rules that govern societal relations and shape the mindsets and bodies of the individuals167. The everyday influences that affect people in their daily lives such as the

164 Ibid. P. 213
165 Ibid. P. 214
167 Ibid. P. 11
religious polices’ imposition of Sharia law, segregation of women, inculcation of stern Islamic teaching at schools and the forbiddance of music and movies are drastically effective mechanisms of how power gets invested, colonized, utilized, transformed, displaced, extended, etc.¹⁶⁸ These mechanisms are helpful in the production of discourses which starkly affect the worldviews of the Saudi public. The mechanisms which lead to discourse production are varied, such as the exclusion of certain objects, the fabrication of binary opposites and their propagation through mediums directly affecting people.

All in all, the Saudi Kingdom’s perception of democracy, human rights, justice and equality is not prompted by the inherent goodness and amity of these concepts. Rather it calculates its interests and gains from them. The Saudi regime deftly adjusts its stance when faced with challenges and criticism. There are numerous events in the course of history which evidently reveals such constructive tacks of the Saudi rulers. The most recent of these challenges was the post-9/11 barrage of criticism and censures of the Saudi society which King Abdullah’s constructive measures countervailed. Under his command, public dialogue was permitted; however, there was a systematic hoax which provided the most conservative elements of society with institutional space to operate¹⁶⁹. For example, the conservatives were increased and given more leeway especially in the sprawling bureaucracy and the educational arena¹⁷⁰ to countervail the new ‘openness’. This mechanism pacified the critical voices and even pushed them further to the margins of the discourse. The Saud state and its representatives structure make sure that within the playing field of constructing identities and alliances only one voice is to be heard and served and that is their own conservative voices.

¹⁶⁸ Foucault, Michel (2003). Society must be defended. P. 99


¹⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 165
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