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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AL-SAHWA SOCIAL MOVMENT AND THE SAUDI  
REGIME, AN APPRISAL

By

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## ABSTRACT

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Title: The Relationship between Al-Sahwa Social Movement and the Saudi Regime; an Appraisal

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Al-Sahwa is a social movement, with a clear socio-religio dimension that has emerged against the background of the Arab Cold War that witnessed a series of conflicts between the nationalism bloc led by Gamal Abd al-Nasser and the more traditional bloc led by King Faysal of Saudi Arabia. It is also a product of the modernization process that took place during the 70s in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It has emerged from the state institutions, and as it evolved it was aiming to eliminate the classical division between the political domain and the religious sphere. Al-Sahwa was able to blur this schism through engaging in politics and pursuing activism. In doing so it was able to challenge the status quo, and exercise serious pressure over the Saudi regime. During the last two decades, al-Sahwa has managed to confront the regime at the advent of the Gulf War, and to invigorate the fears of the Saudi regime in mid-2000 and during the Arab Uprisings. Al-Sahwa encountering with the regime during the last 50 years, indicates that it poses a challenge mainly when it's empowered by a regional or international event.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, particularly my supportive and loving parents Rahama Hussien and Buthiana al-Tayeb, who have encouraged, and believed in me unconditionally.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia was founded on the marriage between al-Saud and Mohammed Ibn abd al-Wahhab. The marriage was based on a division of labor agreement; in which the Saudi ruling family gained control over politics, while the traditional religious establishment awarded monopoly over the society. As more regional and domestic events took place, the schism between the two spheres started to narrow. The conventional wisdom that narrows the Saudis into Wahhabis, and limit the role of religion as a tool to legitimize the regime could no longer explain the Saudi case. In fact, the marriage of convenience between the orthodox religious establishment and al-Saud has given birth to other Islamist movements that challenge this mutual relationship, and was able to blur the constructed division between politics and society (al-Rasheed, 2007). *Al-Sahwa al-islamiyyia*, al-Sahwa or the Islamic awakening is considered one of the most influential movements that have presented a serious challenge to the status quo, and potential one to the stability Saudi regime.

Al-Sahwa is a social movement that aims to reach beyond religious rituals. Madawi al-Rasheed (2007) defines Sahwa as: “loose and fluid sub-group within the community of the faithful who from the 70s strove to establish a distinct identity for themselves” (p.66). Al-Sahwa developed due to the influence of two main reasons; the control of the Saudi state over the religious and educational sphere, and the impact of Muslim Brotherhood on the Wahhabi doctrine.

The heavy investment by the state on religious education in the early 60s and the following decades, had led to the formalization and modernization of the educational sphere. Universities and higher studies program were created and started to grant degrees for both local



and international students. Although the degrees granted did not demonstrate critical thinking and originality, they established a shift in the Wahhabi school of thought (al-Rasheed, 2007). The generation, who started to graduate from this modernized system, started to feel that the form of ritualistic Islam offered by Wahhabis is not enough. Such perception was also caused by the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood on the religious education in Saudi Arabia. In early 60s, the Muslim Brotherhood who found refuge in the kingdom after escaping Gamal abd al-Nasser regime, were able to play a significant role in the kingdom's development (Lacroix, 2011). They were at the center of the educational system, and they have contributed significantly to the Saudi public sector. Due to their central position, Muslim Brothers were able to spread their ideas and perceptions, thus, influencing the Wahhabi school of thought (Lacroix,2011). Al-Sahwa therefore does not only represent combination of the Wahhabi creed and the Muslim brotherhood doctrine, but it also a manifestation of local evolution within the society of Saudi Arabia.

### **Brief Background**

The year 1979, which witnessed the siege of Mecca and the Iranian Revolution, has played a significant role in developing Sahwi thought and political consciousness. Both events have led the Saudi regime to provide more freedom and space for those who are in the religious field in order to counter the impact of those two significant events (al-Rasheed,2010). As a result, the 80s witnessed unprecedented activity by the *Sahwis* which enhanced their popularity. Consequently, this has led them to come into the middle of the schism between the secularized political space, and the Islamized public domain. Catalyzed by the surrounding political environment of the Gulf war in 1990, al-Sahwa challenged the status quo by refusing the

existence of foreign troops in the Saudi soil following the invasion of Kuwait (Fandi, 1999). To stem their rise within the Saudi political sphere, the regime started to confront and oppress al-Sahwa movement by imprisoning their main figures, labeling the mid-90s as the years of imprisonment (Lacroix, 2011). When *Sahwis* were released from prison in 1999, the Saudi state thought of coopting them because of the vacuum that started to emerge in the religious sphere. The vacuum was a result of the death of Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz who was a very influential religious figure in Saudi Arabia. Despite the state attempts to integrate al-Sahwa within the system, it continued to pose threats and potential challenges between now and then.

Before al-Sahwa emerged, politics and public affairs were left to the Royal family; the religious establishment was mainly an institution that provides legitimacy and justification to the political domain (al-Rasheed, 2007). For traditional Wahhabies, politics is a matter of *Wali al'amr* (guardian), therefore, society should not engage in political affairs at any form. Al-Sahwa came to counter this perception arguing that political activism is a form of worship (al-Khedr, personal communication, March 15, 2017). The aim of this thesis is to study al-Sahwa as a social movement that poses challenges to the Saudi state. In this view, challenges are referred to al-Sahwa's attempts in altering the Status quo, engaging in and discussing issues that are considered a taboo in Saudi Arabia, such as political change and reform, and their ability to mobilize the public. The aim of this study is to analyze the challenges that were posed by al-Sahwa, understand why they are considered challenges in the first place, and how the state reacted to them. In order to be able to do so, the thesis would shed the light on periods of contestations, co-options and blurredness and attempts to study the activism of al-Sahwa in those different periods. Finally, this study argues that although al-Sahwa was able to introduce political activism to the kingdom in a structured way. This has led it to create political awareness within

the society, and change the division that existed between political arena, and the Islamized public, which is not only considered as an achievement, but as a clear alternation of the status quo, that challenges the Saudi regime in different ways. Moreover, it was observed that al-Sahwa is empowered the most, when there is a regional or an international event that is taking place and influencing the kingdom.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter includes the rationale; theoretical and conceptual framework; literature review; and the research methodology implemented for this study. The second chapter provides the foundation for this study. It explains the emergence of al-Sahwa, and what has influenced it. Later on, it discusses the doctrine of al-Sahwa and how it has emerged. The next two chapters are devoted to answer the main research question. In the third chapter, the study focuses on the 80s and 90s, and how those decades contributed to build the political consciousness of al-Sahwa, and what has enabled it to develop its countering policy. As the study argues that al-Sahwa has been coopted after the late 90s; the fourth chapter aims to investigate this claim. It argues that al-Sahwa was not fully coopted and it has presented a potential challenge to the state during the 2005 municipal elections, and at the advent of the Arab uprisings. The fifth chapter, which is last one, concludes the research and presents the observations and the findings of this study.

## **Literature Review**

Several studies have traced al-Sahwa's development in Saudi Arabia since the early 1990s. Western scholarship has offered detailed studies about *Sahwis* biographies, such as Nasir al-Omar, Salman al-Awdah, and Safar al-Hawali, documenting their discourse as well as their engagement with political affairs (Fandy, 1999; Okruhlik, 1999). Most of the literature has

tackled *Sahwis* as a different form of political Islam, radical *Salafis*, as well as Islamists. On the local level, Saudi scholarship has described al-Sahwa as a group of *Islamawis*, who manipulate religion to pursue political interests and ideological careers (al-Hamad, 2005). In a significant portion of the liberal as well as the official Wahhabi rhetoric, al-Sahwa is perceived as an alien group that is a result of the influence of Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (al-Abdulaziz, 2005). However, al-Sahwa as an Islamist social movement is complex and diversified. It's not only individuals and charismatic leaders; it is a full generation that is associated strongly with youth circles (Lacorix, 2011). The aim of reviewing the previous literature regarding Sahwa is to state the case for this study, which argues that al-Sahwa, was able to eliminate the division that existed between politics and religion in the Saudi society.

The emergence of al-Sahwa is usually attributed to the influence of Muslim Brotherhood. In that sense part of the literature limits *Sahwis* to *Ikhwan* or Muslim Brothers, which overlook the domestic factors that have led to its emergence. On a political level, Madawi al-Rasheed argues that al-Sahwa is one of the outcomes of the Saudi authoritarianism. In her book *Contesting the Saudi state*, al-Rasheed (2007) argues that “under state control, Wahhabi discourse mutated and fragmented in an attempt to escape the straitjacket imposed by political power” (p.6). This mutation in her view has led to the emergence of groups such as al-Sahwa and Salafis. Education is also another major cause that has led to the emergence of al-Sahwa. Both al-Rasheed and Larcoix agree on such view, however from different approaches. For al-Rasheed, modernity which brought university has produced individuals who were able to articulate their consciousness and express it in a more modern language. Such development, has later on led to the emergence of *Shabab al-Sahwa* who were “uncomfortable with the religio-political aspect of the Wahhabi tradition” (Al-Rasheed, 2007). On the other hand, Lacroix (2011)

attributes the emergence of al-Sahwa to the Muslim brotherhood's influence on the Saudi educational system (Lacroix,2011). For him, under the impulse of the Muslim brotherhood, al-Sahwa developed from the 1960s onwards.

The development of al-Sahwa has also been perceived through the lens of structural strain. Mainly how the *Sahwis* were pressured by the regime as well as other sections of the society to reconsider their earlier notions and positions, particularly after 11 September (Al-Rasheed, 2007). On the other hand, Hegghammer and Lacroix attempt to follow another approach to explain the development of al-Sahwa and the fluctuations of its role in Saudi social and political sphere (Lacroix and Hegghammer, 2004). Therefore, they adopted the concept of double-edged networks, in which it analyzes the development of al-Sahwa as a stabilizer or challenger to the Saudi regime according to its mobilization capabilities. In his book, *Awakening Islam*, Lacroix provides more details of the double-edged network concept. He argues that although al-Sahwa has started as a source for government stabilization, as it developed, it became to constitute an insurrection against the Saudi government in the late 1980s. Catalyzed by the surrounding political environment of the Gulf war, the principle of 'sectorization' that was followed by the Saudi government started to collapse. The emphasis by the author on the strategy of fragmenting religious and intellectual communities undermines the fact that state's oppression has played a determining factor. The brutal campaign against al-Sahwa, in which most of its influential leaders were put in prison, has played a significant role in reducing its support and its cohesion. Lacroix argues that "in 2011 there's no major political mobilization in the name of Sahwa taking place in Saudi Arabia"( Lacroix, 2015). Such a statement gives a sense that al-Sahwa was a very organized and well-established opposition prior to 2011, which is misleading. The entrance of new actors to the game after 2011, such as youth, on-line activities, liberals, is

the reason that has made the convergence around al-Sahwa harder. Therefore, Lacroix overlook the social, historical, and political factors that has undermined the mobilization capabilities of al-Sahwa.

There's a significant amount of literature that has focused on al-Sahwa during the Arab Uprisings. The response of al-Sahwa has been viewed either as an opportunity based, or a space to expand the existing reform's debate. In his article about "Islamists and the Saudi state in the wake of the Arab Uprisings", Mathiesen (2015) describes the different Islamists reactions toward the Saudi Arabia's role in the Arab uprisings (Mathiesen, 2015). The author argues that "since 2011 Saudi Islamist actors had to adjust to a rapidly changing regional environment" (p.7). However, it's too simplistic to claim that the Sahwis' response to the Arab uprisings is just a matter of opportunistic move. In fact, the discourse of al-Sahwa's prominent figures such as Salman al-Awdah after the Arab uprisings demonstrates a development under real social, political as well as economic conditions. Against this view, scholars like Madawi al-Rasheed disagree with opportunity based explanations. In her book, *Muted Modernists*, al-Rasheed argues that the responses of *Sahwis* as well as other Islamists could be considered as "a new discourse that has muted under specific conditions"(Al-Rasheed,2015), one of them is the wave of change that swept the region in 2011.

Finally, a bulk of literature attempt to assess the impact of the Arab uprisings on al-Sahwa. In his article "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring", Lacroix (2015) argues that the Arab Spring has invigorated debates among the Saudi Islamists, mainly the Sunni Islamists (*Sahwis*, *Islamo-liberals*, and members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) (Larcoix, 2014). The author has two main claims in his article, when it comes to the impact of the Arab Spring. First,

he argues how the issue of the political prisoners, and how it was a common ground that was able to bring not only different Islamists together, but also liberal actors and other segments of the Saudi society. Second, how the debate about the legitimacy of the Arab Uprisings has led to another local debate about the need for change in Saudi Arabia, which challenges the Saudi states and the traditional religious establishment. This has been echoed by Aarts and Roelants in their book *Saudi Arabia: A kingdom in Peril*. In the second chapter the authors look at what they describe as the holy alliance, particularly on whether it is under threat or not. Aarts and Roelants argue that this threat does not come from the official religious establishment, but it comes from those more independent religious scholars such as al-Arifi and Salman al-Awdah (Arts, 2013). Although both does not explicitly criticizes the Saudi government, their popularity in social media offers them a space where they can influence the Saudi society.

It is illustrated that the literature usually focuses on one dimension regarding al-Sahwa. Some studies are centered only on individuals and do not perceive it as an established social movement. Another part of the literature focuses on how al-Sahwa responded to domestic and regional events. However, there are very limited number of studies that view Sahwa from social movement perspective, its relationship with the Saudi regime, and the how it has challenged the status quo which is the focus of this study.

In order to conceptualize al-Sahwa within the social movement perspective, the literature review will shed the light on social movement scholarship. Social movements emerged at a certain point during the mid-1800s. Their emergence has marked a point in history where people started to change the way they participate in politics. They appeared in places like Great Britain, and then they spread into other parts of the world including colonies (Cummins, 2017). One of

the leading scholars of social movements is Charles Tilly. Although the term ‘social movement’ was introduced by Lorenz von Stein in 1850, Tilly has differentiated himself from other scholars in the field by giving social movements a very specific definition. For Tilly social movements are considered as “series of contentious performances, displays, and campaigns by which ordinary people made collective claims on others” (Tilly, 2004). Another similar definition is the definition of Doug McAdam (1982), in which he describes social movements as “organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to non-institutional forms of political participation”( McAdam, 1982). Sidney Tarrow has defined social movements as “collective challenges to elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities” (Tarrow, 2005). While Tilly’s (2004) definition has emphasized on the participation of ordinary people in public politics, the definition of Tarrow (2005) has distinguished social movements from political parties. Furthermore, Tilly (2004) has expanded his definition by adding three elements to social movements. First, campaigns which are organized public efforts that make public claims on authorities that are targeted. The second element is the social movement repertoire which includes different aspects of political actions such as; public meetings, petitions, rallies, demonstrations...etc. Finally, the WUNC displays which refers to the “participants' concerted public representation of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitments on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies” (New World Encyclopedia ,2015).

Scholars have attempted to place the study of social movements within the broader structure of contentious politics (Andrain & Apter, 1996; Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995; Tilly, 1995). Tarrow (1996) defines contentious politics as “collective activity on the part of claimants-



or those who claim to represent them-relying at least in part on non-institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state” (Tarrow, 1996). In their book *Contentious Politics*, Tarrow and Tilly (2007) differentiate between social movements and contentious politics. For them, collective actions and social movements are part of contentious politics, because some social movements do not necessarily involve politics; and not all politics can be contentious. Therefore, contentious politics could be the overlap of both.

A core concept to understand social movement is the political process theory (PPT). Also known as political opportunity theory and it aims to offer explanation of how social movements work in order to create change. Douglas McAdam is one of the pioneers in developing the political process theory. In his book *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, McAdam (1982) has developed the theory through studying the Black Civil Rights Movement. The theory attempts to offer an explanation of the surroundings, mindsets, and conditions that assist the social movement in achieving its goals. Neal Caren (2007) builds on McAdam’s work by adding five components that determines the success or failure of social movements. Those are; political opportunities, mobilizing structures, framing processes, protest cycles, and contentious repertoires (Caren, 2007).

Back to scholarship on al-Sahwa, there is almost no study that has tackled al-Sahwa through applying social movement theory, although this study does not incorporate al-Sahwa completely with the social movement theory framework, it attempts to borrow some concepts from it. Although some scholars such as Stephane Lacroix (2011) for example, have defined al-Sahwa as a social movement, their analysis does not really place it within the broader framework of social movement theory. Studies have usually viewed al-Sahwa as deviant group; although

this might seem as one of the ways to place al-Sahwa appropriately within the context of Saudi Arabia, it is a very limited approach that does not provide enough tools to understand al-Sahwa critically. Prior research work up to now has been limited to a few numbers of studies that usually focuses on one or two aspects; such as the movement dynamics, the role of its charismatic leaders, how it has come to existence, or what has impacted it through years. Whilst several studies has been carried out on Social movements as well as al-Sahwa, no study has attempted to use some parts of the social movement theory to understand al-Sahwa, how it has challenged the status quo within Saudi Arabia, the significant role it has played in introducing political activism to the kingdom, and most importantly what has empowered it through it periods of contention. Thus, this study shed a new light particular on al-Sahwa as a social movement, and generally on the literature about social movements in the Gulf.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to answer the following main question:

- How did al-Sahwa Social Movement challenge the Saudi Regime?

Through the research, the following sub-questions will also be answered?

- What is al-Sahwa?
- How did al-Sahwa emerge as an oppositional force during the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait?
- How the activism of al-Sahwa has changed after the imprisonment years?
- After two decades, does Sahwa still alter the status quo?

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is two-folds. First, it aims to understand the relationship between the Saudi state and al-Sahwa movement, particularly how al-Sahwa was able to challenge the status quo in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Second, it aims to discuss the factors that have enabled al-Sahwa to pose a challenge to the regime. The overall aim is to explain the domestic factors, namely al-Sahwa and how it has played a significant role in shaping the kingdom's political, social, and religious fabric. The study would analyze different periods in the history of their relation where al-Sahwa has confronted or agreed with the state; mainly how its activism constituted a challenge to the state.

## **Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to tackle al-Sahwa from a new perspective. It would attempt to understand how al-Sahwa was able to challenge the status quo within Saudi Arabia, focusing in the tools it has used and the conditions that have allowed it to do so. Secondly, it aims to understand borrow some concepts from social movement theory, particularly; political process theory and framing in order to provide a deep understanding of al-Sahwa.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study attempts to apply some concepts of social movement theory in order to analyze al-Sahwa, and how it has been able to challenge the status quo during the past two decades. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study would try to shed the light on the characteristics of social movements and theories that explain how they work. Also, since al-

Sahwa has also a religious and Islamic aspect, the second part of the conceptual framework will be devoted to Islamic activism.

### **Explaining Social Movements**

There are shared characteristics and theories that are used by scholars to explain social movement. Dynamism is one of the key features of social movements. Dütting and Sogge (2013) argue that social movements are dynamic in which they are influenced by circumstances, “they are contingent things, which grow or shrink in response to factors that enable or constrain them” (Dütting & Sogge, 2010). Context is another important factor that is used to explain social movements. The context in which they operate within is critical, because it contributes significantly to determining their politics, tactics and strategies. Time also plays a great role in explaining social movements. This factor is determined by the movement itself as well as internal and external dynamics. Some movements might view their commitment as taking place over generations or lifetime. Besides, movements might cease to exist if their central problem has been solved, or if they have been exposed to systematic oppression by external forces. Internal factors also play a major role in prolonging or shorting the life span of a movement (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Factors such as adapting to political goals, conflicts among movement’s members, and change in social or political context, all have an influence on the movement’s continuity. Another important characteristic of social movements is their internal diversity. By their nature, social movements carry multiple and different discourse within themselves, although a unified discourse might appear on the surface. Bayat argues that social movements are “shaped in a complex set of concentric circles, they possess various layers of activism and

constituency (leaders, cadres, members, sympathizers, free riders and so on) who are likely to exhibit different perceptions about the aims and objectives of their activities” (Bayat, 2005).

In order to understand social movements, academics have developed number of theoretical perspectives and concepts that explain how movements are formed, what influences their activism, how they mobilize masses, and what determines their success or failure.

- Collective behavior theories: social movements are framed as spontaneous mass action that is directed to challenge social norms and social order. Movement theory in this case attempts to understand participation, answering particularly why individuals participate in public protests.
- Resource mobilization theories: argue that individuals join movements based on rational choices. Incentives, potential rewards, and costs of participation are motivators for joining a movement. On the other hand, the effectiveness of a movement is measured by the ability of the participants to generate resources.
- Political process theories: social movements are influenced by the shifting of political and social contexts, in which the focus of mobilization is affected due to the creation of new opportunities.
- Framing: social movements use meaning and language to build basis for people in order to feel connected to a particular cause, basically to find resonance.
- Theories of space and place highlight the relevance and role of geographic and spatial locations in inspiring and guiding social movements. They explore how movements develop around concepts such as the ‘local’ or ‘global’, are linked to spatial locations such as the body, physical environment or the economy, movement choose and form

networks across geographies, through the use of communication technologies, and invest these actions across space and place with political meaning.

( Buechler 2011; Benhabib 1996, Castells 2010; Ghimire, 2005; Leach and Scoones 2007; Harcourt and Escobar 2005)

### **Understanding Islamic activism within Social Movement theory**

The emergence of Islamic activism in the Middle East has been attributed to cultural and socioeconomic, and political factors. In order to explain their emergence, different scholars follow the psychological approach. Some scholars view cultural imperialism as a main cause of Islamic activism. In which western culture starts to have a noticeable impact on the local issues (Wiktorowicz, 2004). This does not only explain the emergence of Islamic activism but it also considered to be a pick up line by the Islamists themselves. Wiktorowicz (2004) argues that Islamists use the discourse of Western imperialism as a mean to mobilize individuals. Burgat and Dowell (1993) argue that Islamists portrays the domination of western culture in Muslim societies as a conspiracy to attack Islam, thus leading them to express their grievances in a language similar to Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilization (Burgat & Dowell, 1993).

On the socio-economic level, many scholars argue that the failure of governmental secular projects has produced structural crises which have later on contributed to the emergence of Islamic activism. The proponents of the psychological approach believe that "Islamic activism is a response to the psychological distress produced by these conditions. In this regard, (Wiktorowicz, 2004) Ansari (1984) Waltz (1986) and Munson (1986) emphasize on the

importance of socioeconomic factors and how Islamic activists usually have a common socioeconomic background (Ansari, 1984; Munson, 1985; Waltz, 1986; Wikoeowicz, 2004).

From a political point of view, some consider authoritarianism as a main driver for Islamic activism. Authoritarian rule restricts the political space provided for the masses in order to counter the effect of socioeconomic conditions deterioration. Political parties, expression and almost any kind of political action are not allowed. Wiktorowicz (2004) states that “with few open channels for political recourses the result is societal frustration and a sense of alienation” (Wiktorowicz, 2004). The states attempts to depoliticize the civil society and crackdown any oppositional activity has made Islamic activism one of the few options to express political discontent.

Although the psychological approach might explain some of the causes that might lead to Islamic activism it could not be generalized. Political systems are dynamic; structural strains or harsh socioeconomic conditions do not always lead to activism. In fact, strong social movements usually exist in democracies where there are good socioeconomic conditions and less political strains. The main issue with this strain-based explanation is that it fails to explain issues related mobilization tactics, intra-movement differences, violence, and other issues related to the dynamics of contention.

In order to further understand Islamic activism, rationalism and the role of crucial are core factors. Rational Movement Theory (RMT) has been developed to overcome the shortcomings of psychological approach. According to RMT, individuals join movements not due to personal grievances but as result of actions that they take rationally. In that sense, movements are seen as “organized contention structured through mechanisms of mobilization

that provide strategic resources for sustained collective action” (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Another element that was added to the understanding of social movements is the role of culture, meaning, as well as social interaction. Islamist social movements nurture on religion to build a frame that offers a language for making senses of the surroundings. Religion and culture are core elements in causing and sustaining Islamic activism. Social movement leaders use and sometimes abuse religion and culture to achieve their interests, this is evident in framing, and how they exploit political opportunity.

Social movements use different tools to achieve their goals. One factor that is at the core of the work of social movements is the process of framing. Snow and Benford (1988) argue that social movements have three framing tasks through which they facilitate the movement’s goals. First, movements address issues or problems that need reformation. Second, they attempts to provide solutions for those problems. Finally, they offer a plan that aims to motivate individuals and raise collective action. The importance of those motivational frames lies in the fact that they assist in convincing potential participants to engage in activism. Another concept that is crucial to understand how social movements work is political opportunity. The concept focuses mainly on the relationship between the social movement and its surroundings, particularly the political arena. The basic political opportunity structure suggests that under advantageous political conditions, mobilization occurs. However, taking advantage of a political activism is not an easy task, it need a shared, and unified perception about the kind of opportunity and the means to exploit it.

Islamist movements are internally differentiated, dynamic and fragmented. Then, how they are able to bind those fragments together, in order to frame a discourse or take advantage of



political opportunity. Shared interest is one aspect that might be able to bring different actors together. However, assuring commonality and building consensus can hardly be achieved through shared interests only. Bayat argues that “consensus may be achieved not simply by actors’ real understanding of their shared interests, but also by their imagining commonality with others, by imagining solidarities” (Bayat, 2005) For Bayat, ‘imagined solidarities’ are characteristics that are developed within an authoritarian context. Societies develop those characteristics when freedom of speech and effective exchange of ideas are not practiced due to the repressive environment (Bayat, 2005). Against this idea, social movements are able to reach agreement on different things, which can lead them to practice their activism effectively.

In conclusion, it’s important to point out the limitation of using social movement theory as a tool to study Islamist movements. It was grounded in politically open societies; in contrast, Islamist movements are faced with different sociopolitical complexities, mainly authoritarianism and political control. Another limitation is treating Islamist movements in terms of religious revivalism, in which Islamism is considered a peculiar phenomenon in social science, which leads to excluding it by social movement theorists.

Despite the limitation, the conceptual framework in the preceding paragraphs allows me to place Sahwa within the context of social movement theory. Through understanding how social movements work, the political behavior of Sahwa could be analyzed accordingly. With the framework of social movement theory and Islamic activism, I become able to analyze the approaches that Sahwa has followed, and how it was able through them to challenge the status quo, which is the central focus of this thesis.

## **Methodology**

The study has used a qualitative research strategy in order to understand the emerging of al-Sahwa as a group that has challenged the status quo through analyzing it's relation with the Saudi regime and it's stances in different events.

The process of research has involved collecting data from secondary as well as primary resources. Two main techniques were followed: first, the available literature was surveyed in order to examine primary and secondary data which are derived from different sources. The references included but are not limited to, books, journal articles, online documents such as reports and research papers from think tanks, online newspapers as well as social media accounts of well-known Saudi Islamists. The sources were selected according to their relevancy to the main themes of the study; the interactive relation between Sahwa and the Saudi regime, the Sahwi doctrine, as well as other aspects. In the subsequent stage of surveying, relevant information were analyzed and used to support different parts in the thesis. In addition, literature in both Arabic and English language were consulted in order to have a sophisticated understanding of the topic.

Two techniques were later followed to collect data; conducting interviews and surveying twitter hash tags. Structured interviews were conducted in both English and Arabic language depending on the interviewee's preference. The questions of the interviews were guided by main research questions of the thesis; the interview data were filtered and used according to the extent to which they are relevant in explaining how the relationship between the Saudi regime and al-Sahwa is determined. Two interviews took place over Skype, Two were conducted through email, and one was conducted in person. Although interviews are significant because they cover

potential gaps that are usually not mentioned in the secondary data, this study was not able to conduct more than five interviews. The incapability to carry out a representative number of interviews was due to two reasons. First, most of the Saudi scholars and activists that the researcher has approached refused to be interviewed arguing that the topic is sensitive particularly at the mean time. Second, almost the majority of western scholars who were reached out by the researcher have claimed that the topic does not fall under their area of expertise, and their knowledge about the topic does not move beyond what is already stated in the literature, leading them to refuse to sign the consent form. Therefore, in order to mitigate this shortage of primary resource, twitter hash tags have been used as an alternative. The Saudi twitter has three hash tags that were dedicated to discuss al-Sahwa and its impact in Saudi Arabia, in which twitter users from different generations have tweeted about al-Sahwa, their engagement with it, there memories about it, and how Saudi Arabia change because of it.

The strategy of inquiry followed in this research is case study. In the sense that the study will explore in depth the Sahwa's activity, bounding it to a certain period of time; particularly since the Gulf war 1991 and up to 2015 and the Arab Spring.

## **CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS AL-SAHWA?**

### **Preface**

Al-Sahwa is a local social movement, with a social –religio dimension that has contributed significantly to the development of the Saudi political and social fabric. Al-Sahwa is a product of the state control over the religious field, and the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood who came to the Kingdom as a result of the Arab Cold War. Through years, al-Sahwa grew as a movement, its potentials have developed, and it's relation with the Saudi regime has fluctuated. Al-Sahwa did not operate in vacuum, it has influences, and was influenced by internal as well as external factors; in which all have resulted in shaping its views and behavior as a movement.

This chapter starts by providing a detailed definition and description of al-Sahwa. Then, it discusses the early formation of al-Sahwa, and how it has emerged as a result of the state control and due to the influence of Muslim Brotherhood. In this regard, it pays special attention to how the influence of the Muslim brotherhood on the Saudi education system has impacted its social fabric, and rapid modernization that has occurred in Saudi educational has impacted the formation of al-Sahwa. Later, it devotes in the second part a discussion on al-Sahwa's theoretical apparatus and how it has been developed.

### **The Meaning of al-Sahwa**

Several studies have focused on the development of al-Sahwa in Saudi Arabia. Western as well as Saudi scholars have documented the *Sahwi* discourse, its prominent figures, and its engagement with Saudi politics.. Most previous studies viewed *Sahwis* as political Islamists, radical Salafies, Muslim Brothers, and recently *Islamo-Liberals*. Local resources, particularly Saudi Liberals, consider *Sahwis* as *Islamawis*, a group who manipulate religion in order to achieve ideological aspiration and self-interests (al-Hamad, 2005). The different perceptions about al-Sahwa are due two main reasons. First, the repressive environment of Saudi Arabia does not allow groups and individuals to express themselves freely, therefore, it is really hard to know what does a certain group stands for and what are their objectives. Second, many of those descriptions lack neutrality, since each part aim to define al-Sahwa in line with his interests.

Al-Sahwa has different definitions. Some scholars provide a narrow definition to describe al-Sahwa, while others believe that a loose one is more appropriate. Al-Rasheed (2007) for example, defines al-Sahwa as “a loose and fluid sup-group within the community of the faithful who from the 70s strove to establish a distinct identity for themselves” (al-Rasheed, 2007).

Lacroix (2011) provides even a more detailed definition stating that Sahwa is “a social movement practicing a modern form of Islamic activism that until then had been absent from the country political landscape” (Lacroix, 2011). In contrast, Okruhlik (2004) prefers to follow a more general one, in which she defines al-Sahwa as “a network of solidarity with powerful cultural meaning” believing that such a loose definition is appropriate to the context of Saudi Arabia (Okruhlik, 2004). From *Sahwis* point of view, al-Sahwa is “a political act that is guided by religious interpretation in which it’s encamped with *inkar al-munkar al-alan* (negating the public evil)” (al-Awdah, 1999). Considering the previous definition and placing the discussion within the context of Saudi Arabia, this study defines al-Sahwa as social movement that has emerged from the state’s own institutions against the background of regional and local events with the aim of reaching beyond religious rituals.

Al-Rasheed (2007) states that, “Sahwa is built on a realization that ordinary man can be at the center of his own destiny. Sahwa is neither creed nor worship; it is neither religion nor politics: it is both” (p.66). It is important to acknowledge that Sahwism is a distinctive Saudi phenomenon, despite the fact that it has been influenced by foreign religious scholars and intellectuals. Sahwa is nothing but a manifestation of the evolution that Saudi society has passed through since the early 1970s. In which the influence of internal and external factors is an integral part of this evolution.

Al-Sahwa is an umbrella that consists of two main groups, *al-Sururiya* and *al-Ikwan*. The term *sururi* comes from the name of Muhammad Surur Zain al-Abidin, a Syrian religious scholar who has come to Saudi Arabia in the early 60s (Lacroix, 2011). The other group, *al-Ikwan* consists of four loosely linked sup-groups, in which all are affiliated with the Muslim

Brotherhood. Thus, all *Ikwan* groups in Saudi Arabia are under the umbrella of al-Sahwa.

Lacroix (2011) describes the organizational structure of those five groups; “these five networks were organized hierarchically and were headed by an advisory council” (p.63).

### **The Arab Cold War**

The development of al-Sahwa would not be achieved without the encouragement of the Saudi state, particularly in the 60s and 70s when it had to counter the influence of Nasserism and the leftist militants<sup>1</sup>. The Arab cold war has played a significant role in influencing the Saudi social fabric during the following decades. In an attempt to counter Nasser’s threat, Saudi Arabia initiated an Islamic bloc that would be in favor of the American interests. As a consequence of this policy, the domestic scene in Saudi Arabia was altered (Commins, 2012). The Saudi anti-Nasser apparatus consisted of a media counteroffensive apparatus as well as an educational one. The Saudi media discourse was devoted to confront Nasser’s pan-Arab socialism. *Sawt al-Islam* (Voice of Islam) was a radio station established by Saudi Arabia in order to counter Nasser’s propaganda’s radio station the *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs). The Saudi media counter offensive did not stop by establishing the radio station, but they also launched the first Saudi television network in 1962. Although it has often been viewed as an expression of the wave of modernization that was sweeping the kingdom at that time, it could not be understood separated from the propaganda context (Lacroix, 2011).

Beside the media apparatus, Saudi Arabia has also launched an education counteroffensive. The Islamic University of Medina and other Saudi universities emerged as key players in the anti-Nasser apparatus. The Islamic University of Medina, established in 1961, was relying mainly on Muslim Brothers, who were welcomed in the kingdom as a result of King Abdullah’s

decision (Kechichian, 2008). Lacroix (2011) argues that the Islamic University was established as “a competitor to al-Azhar University in Egypt, which Nasser had brought under his control with great reform in 1961 officially aimed at “modernizing” it, and which he hoped to give religious legitimacy to his propaganda” (Lacroix, 2011). At its early stages, the Saudi educational system did not witness a massive Muslim brother’s involvement. However, by the early 70s the situation started to change. King Sa’ud University, which used to be the University of Riyadh, started to transform gradually from a ‘liberal’ shelter for intelligentsia into a haven for the Muslim Brothers. This became self-evident when Abd al-aziz al-Fadda replaced Abd al-Aziz al-Khuwaitiar, its liberal ex-president (Lacroix, 2011). On other universities, such as King Abd al-Aziz University in Jeddah and Umm al-Qura University in Mecca the Muslim Brothers constituted the majority of the faculty staff since their beginning. The faculty of the different universities included Syrian as well as Egyptian well-known figures of the movement. Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb, after he was released from prison in 1971 was appointed as a professor in the University of Mecca. In addition, the author of *The Jurisprudence of the Sunna*, Sayyid Sabiq was appointed as the chair of the department of legal studies in University of Mecca (Lacroix, 2011). The Muslim Brothers had a significant influence and presence in the majority of the kingdom universities as well as other educational institutions, which has led the Saudi educational system to be at the service of the Muslim brotherhood.

Although the role of Muslim Brotherhood is central, but institutional modernization has provided foothold for the Muslim Brothers’ discourse within Saudi Arabia (al-Khedir, personal communication, March 7, 2017). The influx of petrodollars mainly in the 60s and 70s has led to a vast modernization particularly in education. Lacking elites and nationals who were able to take part in the modernization process, the Muslim brothers were those who were able to fill the gap.



Muslim Brothers, in contrast to the Wahhabi ulema, had more knowledge of sciences and modern matters. Therefore, they were at the center of educational institutions, while Wahhabi ulema have been purposely assigned to administrative roles. Kechichian (2008) argues that the adoption of “Islamic modernization” mantra by King Faysal has helped strengthen the brotherhood’s position (Kechichian, 2008). Those factors beside the Saudi state support for the Brotherhood has enabled them to openly share their notions and promote them. This was further facilitated by the 1970 Educational Policy which presented education as not only a matter of transferring knowledge, but also a tool of *tarbiya* (breeding) (Lacroix, 2011). The brotherhood did not only have the university campuses to transfer their philosophy but this has extended to extracurricular activities. These activities included but were not limited to; memorization of Koran circles as well as weekend and summer camps. While memorization circles were focusing mainly on Koranic sciences, camps included religious and non-religious activities, such as; sports, theaters, and chanting (al-Dawa, 1991).

Such dynamics would have several influences on the domestic politics. In a place like Saudi Arabia, where the state ideology is dominant, another voice, like the voice of the Muslim Brotherhood has altered the scene. The Muslim Brothers doctrine differs from the Wahhabi one in central aspects, while the first one is more about politics, the latter focuses on creed and worship rituals. Thus, the Muslim Brothers would interfere and touches upon political issues within the kingdom that were never discussed by the traditional Wahhabis. The Wahhabi ulema inability to provide a significant contribution to this process of modernization and development in the kingdom, freed the space for the Muslim Brothers. Keeping in mind that the brotherhood were in the heart of the educational system, hence, youth were the first recipient of their ideology. The same youth who were raised up with the preponderant social norms which was

based in Wahhabism, have found themselves caught between two different schools of thoughts. The Wahhabi tradition praises pious ancestors and views non-Wahhabies as their principle enemies. In contrast, the Brotherhood tradition is built against the imperial west, and godless regimes which makes it political in essence.

The Saudi students were introduced into another perception of Islam, the perception of the Muslim Brotherhood. In a context where the traditional Wahhabi principles were the lens to view the world, politics and society, the injection of the Muslim brotherhood's tradition into the domestic Saudi religious field has led to the transplantation of different notions. As a result, a social movement that was a hybrid tradition that combines the Wahhabism culture and the Muslim brotherhood principles together started to appear; this movement al-Sahwa.

### **Was it only the Brotherhood?**

It could be argued that al-Sahwa has emerged as an unintentional result of the state local and regional actions during that period. The first action, as already mentioned, was when the Saudi state provided safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Cold War. Although this could be the main trigger that has provided the atmosphere for al-Sahwa emergence, the siege of Mecca and the Iranian revolution have a significant contribution.

In the annual pilgrimage season of 1979, the first open attack on the Saudi royal family took place. Neo-Ikhwani, led by Juhayman al-Utaybi and Muhammad al-Qahtani has attacked the holy mosque in Mecca (al-Rasheed, 2010). Their causes were the degeneration of the Saudi royal family, as well as the increasing moral and religious laxity in the kingdom; therefore demanding the withdrawal of the ruling family (al-Rasheed, 2002). Al-Utaybi, an active preacher, already

has been known for his opinions on corruption, Muslim relations with western powers, and just Muslim rulers. The rebels proclaimed their spiritual leader, Mohammad al-Qahtani as the *Mahdi*, which is an unaccepted concept in the Sunni Islam. As a result, the Saudi ulema, who were mobilized by the state, capitalized on this debate in order to discredit the movement. Al-Utaybi's political messages was then overshadowed by the theological debate initiated by the Saudi state and the ulema; moreover, justifying the suppression of the rebels inside the holy mosque.

The return of the *Ikhwan* was triggered by the Islamization policy adopted by king Faysal and the corruption of the ruling family that was the result of the excessive wealth. The siege of Mecca is a manifestation of the changing landscape of the kingdom. The Islamic policy that was adopted by King Faysal has been a double edged sword. While it has elevated the Saudi State weight within the region, it has created criticism of the Saudi royal family in domestic spheres.

The situation was even worsened by the Iranian revolution in 1979. The repercussions of the revolution for the Saudi kingdom were two-folded. Saudi Arabia has been using the fact that it's an 'Islamic regime' for legitimization purposes. With the departure of the Shah, and the establishment of an Islamic regime in Iran, Saudi Arabia felt it might lose its regional weight by not becoming the mere Islamic regime (al-Rasheed, 2010). The Islamic government of Iran wanted to export its revolutionary example, which was perceived by the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia in particular as a direct threat. In addition, the rhetoric adopted by new Islamic regime in Iran was mainly anti-Saudi, and anti-western, which represented a serious threat to Saudi Arabia's national security.

The following years continued to present challenges to the Saudi regime. The 1980s were marked by several economic as well as social divisions. Corruption increased as the wealth was

mainly distributed among a close circle of royal family members; tribal nobles; businessmen and successful educated class (al-Rasheed, 2002). On the other hand, the Saudi population, which was growing rapidly, was not included in the massive wealth share. Despite the fact that Saudis were achieving high levels of education, their access to influential circles was limited. Majority of the Saudis were marginalized due to their lack of social nobility, or strong family connection. However, the rising literacy of economically marginalized was enough to make them recognize that they are disadvantaged.

The 1980s witnessed dynamism in the Saudi socio-political scene. The arrival of the brotherhood since the early 60s, and their influence on the educational and religious sector has exposed the Saudi youth into another perception of Islam; a perception that allows political activism, a prohibited concept in the Wahhabi doctrine. The same youth witnessed and some has been part of Juhyaman's movement, and followed the Iranian revolution. They have been observing the rapid modernization, the influx of petrodollars, but unfortunately they were not sensing the fruit of it. All of this has led to the emergence of a strong Islamic discourse. Al-Rasheed describes this rhetoric as one that is "promoting a return to Islamic authenticity" (al-Rasheed, 2002). Such a rhetoric has attracted those who were frustrated by the increasing inequalities, corruption, close ties to Western governments, which started to be perceived as the source of evils. In addition, some segments of the Saudi society were viewed as evil as those western powers (Tim Niplock, personal communication, March 7, 2017). The Western-educated elites, who started to become influential within the media sector and the government, were perceived as more dangerous than the west (Fandy, 1999). The result of those several developments was emergence of intensive debates. Discussions about the future of the kingdom, disputes about traditions and Islamic heritage, and arguments about relation with the West, were

taking place in private as well as public domains. Although different segments of the society were participating in those debates, the *Sahwis* were the one who played a central role. They started to question their surroundings, and they were engaging the Saudi society in this process (al-Geithy, personal communication, February 12, 2017). Sahwis were simply blurring the schism between secularized political sphere controlled by the ruling family, and the Islamized public domain monitored by the Wahhabi religious establishment, which was the center of their ideology.

Although at that time al-Sahwa could not be labeled as social movement. However, the previous factors, starting from the Saudi Islamization policy, the events of 1979, and economic downturn during the 1980s have all led al-Sahwa to realize that they need to act. All the above factors can be treated as facilitating conditions that has help along the formation of a movement. Facilitating conditions are patterns, trends, or alterations to the social environment that would later facilitate the emergence of a social movement (McAdam & Snow, 1997). Those conditions could be divided to; macro, miso and micro level conditions. The Islamization policy that Saudi Arabia has initiated and the economic downturn of 1980s could be considered as macro level conditions, since both have created changes in the Saudi social structure and resulted in offering opportunities and forming grievances. One of those changes is the influence that Muslim Brotherhood have had on the Saudi educational system, that has later on lead a generation of the Saudi students to acknowledge the schism between politics and public domain. Furthermore, the modernization process that took place during the 70s and the events of 1979 has led the Saudi state to pour a lot of money into religious education which has provided *Sahwis* with the opportunity to expand their knowledge. However, the economic downturn of the 1980s has created a lot of grievances within the Saudi society, in which al-Sahwa was translating those

grievances in their debates and discussions. The debate circles and spheres where *Sahwis* carried out discussions about the changes that were taking place can be considered as meso-level conditions because those are social networks and spheres that have facilitated the formation of the movement.

Social movements often emerge when different conditions are present at different levels in a given society from the micro to the macro. McAdam (2004) has argued that “there must be some kind of strain that creates the potential for grievances; plus the opening up of an opportunity; plus the presence of “mobilizing structures”; and interpretive processes by which people are persuaded that a problem exists and that something can be done about it” (McAdam, 2004). Most importantly, those levels should interact together which was starting to happen in the Saudi case.

### **Al-Sahwa, the hybridization of Wahhabism**

A return to the authenticity of Islam was at the center of the al-Sahwa’s counterculture. Lacroix states that “the Sahwi counterculture was defined by adherence to an ideology and to certain practices that ran, at the time of their emergence, against the preponderant social norms” (Lacroix, 2010). The social norms of that time were adopted from and were product of the Wahhabi traditional doctrine. The Saudi regime was built on the marriage of convenience between al-Saud and the Ibn abd al-Wahhab. The deal was the following; political matters are the responsibility of the Royal family, while the society and religious issues were under the control of the Wahhabi Sheikhs, in which there was clear line between the two fields. However, *Sahwi* ideology came to challenge this norm, mainly through aiming to politicize the religious domain. By this, al-Sahwa became at the crossroad of Wahhabism and Muslim Brotherhood, two different schools of thoughts with different epistemologies. On one hand, Wahhabism is

dominant interpretation of Islam that has been integrated within the Saudi social system. It is a form of Salafism that is built on the notion of *tawhid* (oneness of God) and it is against *bida* (heresy), and has hitherto been legitimizing the political order in the kingdom. This is mainly transmitted through the Council of Higher Ulema. The Ulema main function is “to express opinions on the Sharia regarding matters submitted to them by *Wali-al-Amr*” (Fandy, 1999). On the other hand, Muslim Brotherhood is more political, it is based against the West imperialism, and it believes that as Islam covers all the aspects of individual’s life, it also has a political dimension. However, the distinctiveness of each doctrine has made them easy to combine. On issues related to politics, and culture, *Sahwis* adhered to perceive it from the Muslim Brotherhood’s worldview. On the other hand, theological questions, and matters of creed were dealt with through applying the Wahhabi doctrine.

The precursors of the al-Sahwa have intended to produce a Wahhabi-friendly ideology, in which they have integrated the Brotherhood doctrine into the Wahhabi ideology. Therefore, issues that were controversial from a Wahhabi point of view have been neutralized. This was first done by Muhammad Qutb, who has contributed significantly to the theoretical development of al-Sahwa. Muhammad was the Brother of the well-known brotherhood leader, Sayyid Qutb. He came to Saudi Arabia in 1971 when he was released from prison by president Anwar al-Sadat during the same year<sup>2</sup>. When he first arrived to Saudi Arabia, he started working at the College of Sharia in Mecca as a professor, which later become Umm al-Qura University

Muhammad Qutb has laid the foundations for the injection of Brotherhood thought into the Wahhabi doctrine, through applying two main tactics. First, Muhammad started re-defining the Wahhabi concepts within the Muslim Brotherhood notions. Originally, Qutbist approach was

revolving on two main concepts, *Jahiliya* (ignorance of revelation's truth) and *hakkamiya* (absolute sovereignty of God). For Qutb, *Jahiliya* does not only describe the period before Islam, but in his writings it was used to refer to the West and unjust Muslim leaders since they are disgracing Allah's law. Qutb further equates modern Muslim societies with the period of *Jahiliya*. From his point of view, *Jahiliya* is a state of mind, it is the refusal to follow God's rules and regulation (Qutb,2000). The second concept, *hakkamiyat Allah* or the Absolute sovereignty of God mainly argues that sovereignty is for God only, and its divine character. From the Qutbist approach, since *hakkamiya* is holistic, no one should claim it. It's important to note that those concepts were originally developed by his brother, Sayyid Qutb; but when he came to Saudi Arabia he started to revise those concepts and mediate them with the Wahhabi principles.

Al-Sahwa theoretical apparatus revolves around combining politics and purification of creed. This process of cross-fertilization is a product of the work done by different scholars. However, the *Sahwi* doctrine is not static; it has been evolving and developing through years and in accordance to domestic and regional factors. For the *Sahwis*, their starting point was two center concepts in the Wahhabi and Brotherhood thought; *tawhid* and *hakkimiyya*. *Sahwis* believe that both notions are complimentary to each other arguing that once an individual believe that there's divine unity, then they should automatically believe in the unity of sovereignty. Mohammed Qutb clarifies this point in his book '*How do we preach to people?*' Qutb (2000) states that "Islam came to cancel out all man-made legislations, in order to establish only God's legislation and link it to the origin of creed" (Qutb, 2000). In this sense, the *Sahwi* doctrine has been able to fuse one of the Brotherhood central concepts – *hakkimiyya*- into the Wahhabi doctrine. The second step in the process of fertilization was through equating the pair of *al wala' wal-bara'* (allegiance and rupture) with *hakimiyya/jahiliya*. This has been done by Muhammad al-Qahtani,



who was a student of Muhammad Qutb. In his view that allegiance to the *umma* occurs when law of God is applied. In contrast, following modern schools of thought indicates that allegiance is vowed to the infidels. In traditional Wahhabism, the notion of allegiance and rupture is directed merely against non-Wahhabi Muslims; however, for al-Qahatni this notion is also directed against the west (Lacroix, 2011). Noticeably, the reformulation that al-Qahatni has done did not only influence nascent Sahwa; but it has also contributed to fusing Sahwa into Wahhabi circles.

The second part of *Sahwi* doctrine is about theorizing Islamic activism within the context of Wahhabi tradition. Muhammad Ahmad al-Rashid, an Iraqi scholar, devoted his work to legitimize organized political action. For the *Sahwis*, political activism is a central part of the Islamic creed, in which they aim to politicize every day's life. In this view, al-Rashid (1975) has relied on the work of two accepted jurists by the Wahhabi school; Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (Lacroix, 2011). His book, *Al-muntalaq* (The point of departure), is an illustration on theorizing activism in accordance with Wahhabi presumptions. Al-Rashid (1975) echoes Qutb's argument that Muslim societies today are living in *Jahiliya*, thus, an activist Islamic movement should exist in order to lead them to the right path. Al-Rashid further argues that the Muslim societies deviated from the right path unintentionally; therefore they are potential followers of the activist Islamic movement (al-Rashid, 1975). Al-Rashid's second book, *al-masar*, the Journey, is considered a veritable treatise as Lacroix has described it. In this book, al-Rashid (2004) discusses the politics of Islamic movements focusing mainly on; the movement's external policy, internal policy, and educational policy. The movement's external policy is about its relation with other groups, such as governments or other movements; its internal policy defines the form of the movement or the organization and determines the roles and rights of the preachers; and its educational policy deals mainly on how preachers are trained

and how do they train (al-Rashid, 2004). Al-Rashid contribution is significant to the *Sahwi* doctrine, and his books are central in their library; since his work has provided the foundations for the organized political work of al-Sahwa.

The *Sahwi* discourse revolves around two main notions; allegiance to the *umma* and opposing the West. In the *Sahwi* political culture, *umma* is the main priority therefore allegiance to the homeland is not their main concern. Although *Sahwis* do not encourage *Jihad*, their allegiance to the *umma* could partially explain why significant number of *Sahwis* support *Jihadis*. In this regard, the *Sahwis* claim that they stand for all Muslim in different places around the Muslim world. They further argue that in order for Muslims to support each other, borders and obstacles should be overlooked (al-Qahtani, 2003). The second principle is based on hostility toward the West and its civilization. From al-Sahwa's point of view, conflict with the west is inevitable. In this respect al-Qahtani (2003) argues that al-Sahwa does not believe in dialogue among civilization, thus, they are pro clash of civilizations theory (al-Qahtani, 2003). *Sahwis* believe that through diffusion into the society they would be able to spread their notions and ideas. *Sahwis* have used several platforms and channels in order to introduce their political culture in the Saudi societies. One of their main platforms was the lesson and preaches that they present in Mosques. This was very influential particularly in the period before the Gulf war. In addition, *Sahwis* have exploited public lectures, summer schools, cassettes, faxes and internet (later on) in order to spread and widen their influence. However, what has made al-Sahwa's discourse more attractive is their ability to use an updated Islamic rhetoric that fits the modern political, social and economic issues of different times.

. The main difference between *Sahwis* and Wahhabism is that *Sahwis* manipulate religion to challenge the status quo, while Wahhabis deploy religion to maintain stability of the state and the political system. Also, we cannot fail here to emphasize that politicizing everyday life is a *Sahwi* aim that has developed through years as will be explained in the coming chapters. Historically, the traditional Wahhabi establishment has left the political domain for the royal family; however, al-Sahwa broke the rule.

### **CHAPTER THREE: SAHWIS AS POLITICAL ACTIVISTS**

#### **Preface**

As discussed in the previous chapter, al-Sahwa emerged from the state institutions. University campuses, extra-curriculum activities, and summer camps; places where discussion and debates emerged, got influenced, and developed into concepts and doctrines. Despite the fact

that those discussions were monitored and sometimes directed by the state, they have led to the development of a movement that was able to challenge the status quo. Al-Sahwa, as already described is a fusion of Muslim brotherhood and Wahhabism in which its activities and discourse are different from the traditional religious establishment. As it grew, it was taking gradual and careful steps regarding its relation with the traditional religious establishment and the regime, however, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has led al-Sahwa to become more vocal.

This chapter will pay special attention to the process of change that started to take place in the late 80s and early 90s. It will shed light on the development of the *Sahwi* discourse, and the entrance of al-Sahwa into the political arena. The chapter would focus on the type of challenges al-Sahwa has caused to the regime, arguing that it has done so through two main ways. First, it has adopted a discourse that was unprecedented in the Saudi social and political sphere. Second, through its discourse and activities, *Sahwi* leaders were able to pave the way for a forbidden discussion in the Kingdom, the discussion of political change and reform. The chapter argues that the second Gulf war has acted as a catalyst that has helped al-Sahwa to voice its different opinion and debates. It argues that the political environment created by the Gulf war, has provided Sahwa with space and reasons to challenge the regime. The chapter concludes by arguing that al-Sahwa was able to remove the division that have always existed between the state (as a political entity) and the religious establishment which was holding control over the Saudi society.

### **The Political Awakening**

The Gulf war in 1991 marks the first page of the challenging history of al-Sahwa against the Saudi state. Before this date, al-Sahwa was adopting a more of preaching approach. From a

social movement's perspective, Islamic movements usually adopt three archetypical approaches to pursue their objectives; preaching, jihad, and embracing politics (Meijer, 2012). Preaching is a mean for peacefully spreading the call, commanding well and forbidding wrong. This strategy was followed by al-Sahwa since its emergence. Through the *Sahwi* study circles, they were trying to spread the call and awaken the society as their name indicates. Wahhabism was directed toward teaching the society the 'rightous' Islam. As discussed, political aspects were left to the ruling family, while society and its morality were under the control of the traditional Wahhabis. In this view, one could not overlook the impact of the state ideological apparatus over the *Sahwis* in their beginnings. At that time, al-Sahwa was still under the Wahhabi umbrella, acting according to its guidelines and not challenging it. And since it was the dominant doctrine, any attempts to challenge or disagree with it would be silenced. However, the Wahhabi doctrine was stagnating to being close to the regime and was not able to offer space for political public discourse. This is not to say that were no serious attempts at that time, but it is to clarify the type of political and social atmosphere that was in place. Therefore, the political assumption behind their preaching strategy was that "once Muslims lead a pious life a virtuous Muslim society will appear and political power will automatically follow without leaders having to dirty their hands" (Meijer, 2012). However, the developments during the early 80s have redirected this preaching approach into a different path. Al-Sahwa did not transform into an anti-state just because of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In fact, the decade that have preceded it has prepared al-Sahwa and equipped it to exploit the opportunity of the Gulf war and emerge as an oppositional force.

The situation started to change when the Kingdom was hit by economic recession in 1982. The fall of the Saudi oil production, the significant decline of the barrel of oil price and drop of the Saudi gross domestic product have led the Saudi state to enter a period of economic

stagnation, which has had its own socio-political repercussions (al-Rasheed, 2010). The economic recession was accompanied by the birth of the new generation; *Jil al-Sahwa* (Sahwa generation), the product of the reshaped Saudi educational system. The prospects of this generation were not similar to those who were preceding them (Lacroix, 2011). The new graduates of al-Sahwa generation did not enjoy the prosperity of the period of 70s. They were not able to become high officials or climb the career's ladder quickly as those who witnessed the miracles of the previous decade. Abir (1988) argues that "as for most graduates of the Saudi universities, they had little prospect but to find positions as minor officials in an already bloated bureaucracy" (p.130). The bureaucracy that used to accommodate the increasing number of graduates was not able to do so due to the economic recession. Steffen Hetrog (2006) states that, "most employees were forced to stay on the same level of seniority for many years. The times of rapid bureaucratic mobility for young educated Saudis had largely passed, with a demoralizing effect on late-comers" (p.124). The collective memory of the miracles of the 70s has resulted in a sense of frustration among al-Sahwa generation. This generation has already had a sense of unity because of the experiences they passed through, and shared identity as they have witnessed their aspirations hindered (al-Rasheed, personal communication, March 7, 2017). As a result, this generation started to feel marginalized and defeated which has led them to reread situation.

Al-Sahwa's re-evaluation of the socio-economic situation has led to two major developments; countering secularism, and competition in the traditional religious field. The first reaction of al-Sahwa toward the economic recession was to frame the whole situation as a secular plot against the Kingdom generally and in particular against Sahwa. A young *Sahwi* once argued that when he first entered the ministry, all of his superiors were secularists (Lacroix, 2011). For him, this was an eye opening experience because it was not normal for pious people –

like him- to be working under men who were not religious. For many *Sahwis*, the Kingdom was now a heaven for the intelligentsia, who had the objective of eradicating Islam and its values within the Kingdom.

The socio-economic conditions of the 80s have a significant influence on the formation of al-Sahwa. Proponents of the psychological approach in social movement theory argues that individual join movements as a result of personal grievances (Wiktorowicz, 2004). In the case of al-Sahwa, the frustration that have occurred as result of the economic downturn and the feeling of betraying they have sensed as the superior positions were occupied by secularists have led to the development of grievances among *Sahwis*. Although at this stage, those were only initial grievances which acted as central points around which al-Sahwa as a social movement is started to organize. Those grievances will develop later on as al-Sahwa evolves.

The concept of rejecting secularism was then developed by Safar al-Hawali, a prominent *Sahwi* scholar. Secularism for al-Hawali and *Sahwis* in general was a threat to the religious and traditional values.

“Islam is contained within *la illah illa allah* (no God except Allah) The Islamic *umma* enjoyed a leading global role for many centuries because of the *umma*’s comprehension and consciousness of the words *La ilaha illa Allah*, where the words were implemented in life. Then the status of the Islamic *umma* and its civilization started to decline. This is because the elements of *La ilaha illa Allah* were discarded or ignored” (al-Hawali, 2001).

The bottom line for him was the threat secularism poses to Islamic identity. Since then, rejecting secularism grew as a central element of the political consciousness of al-Sahwa. This was evident in the way *Sahwis* were targeting former Arab nationalists and leftists who were occupying senior positions. Ghazi al-Qusaybi was at the top of the list, followed by names such as Hamad al-Marzuqi, Ibrahim alAwaji, Hisham Nazir and many others (Lacroix, 2011). For al-

Sahwa, their perceived secularist conspiracy was a mean by the United States to achieve its goal in secularizing Saudi Arabia.

Al-Hawali's writings about secularism were nothing more than an attempt of building base for the movement's framing process. In framing the economic downturn as a secular plot against the Saudi society in general and al-Sahwa generation in particular, al-Hawali wanted to build a base for the Saudi society in order to feel connected, which would be further exploited by the Sahwi leaders.

The significance of the confrontation among *Sahwi*-liberal intelligentsia is two-folded. First, it has activated the political consciousness of al-Sahwa through the intensive debates that it has initiated and maintained. Historically, the intellectual field was quiescent, in which serious debates did not really take place. However, this confrontation has revived the intellectual field, thus, assisting al-Sahwa to build its own political consciousness (al-Hubial, personal communication, March 1, 2017). Indirectly, the dynamism that started to evolve in the intellectual field constituted a potential challenge to the Saudi state. At that time the intellectual sphere was almost autonomous and isolated, which has enabled al-Sahwa to criticize, debate and discuss relatively free from the state supervision. Although it was not directly criticizing the state, but their attitude toward the secular-plot demonstrated an aversion toward the state and its policies.

Al-Sahwa growing political awareness was able to reach the religious field as well. The heart of the traditional religious sphere was an exclusive club of the Wahhabi ulema. Leadership positions in different Islamic institutions were limited to traditional Wahhabis. Council of the Committee of Senior Ulema, the Supreme Judicial Council, in addition to *Fatwa* and preaching



were conclusively under the Wahhabi control. *Sahwi* ulema were able to create for themselves a space at the periphery; however, they had no access to the center of the religious field (al-Umaym, 2003). *Sahwis* did not mind their subordination as long as the religious field was expanding. However, with the economic crisis this expansion started to slow down, and *Sahwis* had no longer enough resources to divide among them. The recession has led *Sahwis* to recognize that even their peripheral position can no longer be sustained, thus, starting a low intensity war against the Wahhabi ulema who were at the core of the religious field (Lacroix, 2011). The traditional religious field plays an essential role in supporting the legitimacy of the Saudi state. Therefore, the aim of al-Sahwa was to strengthen their presence at the center of the religious field so they become able to alter the variables of the game. Again, the confrontation here was not directed against the state, but it would have its repercussions on it in the coming years.

### **The Emergence of Sahwa Countering Policy**

The dynamism of the 80s shaped the al-Sahwa's political consciousness, which would turn them into a challenge to the Saudi state later on. It has led al-Sahwa to structure its own intellectual foundations that would assist it not only to understand the developments that were occurring, but also to challenge them. Later on, as those foundations grew, they evolved into an opposing countering policy.

The process of creating a *Sahwi* political consciousness is itself a challenging act to the Saudi state. In the norm of the Saudi state, *ulema* and religious scholars were in control of the religious field. The religious field in the context of the Saudi state is a field that focuses on rituals and piety, and creed of the Muslim society, where politics is left to the royal family (al-

Rasheed, personal communication, March 7, 2017). In these circumstances, *Sahwis* wanted to enter the political arena tactfully.

Countering the concept of postponement (*irja*) was one of the pillars of al-Sahwa's political consciousness. Wishful thinking or *al-fikr al-irjai* (postponement school of thought) is the idea that belief (*iman*) is a matter of heart only, in which carrying out lawful Islamic duties and requirements are postponed or ignored (al-Shamsi, 2012). In this regard, al-Hawali (2001) argues that;

“*Al-fikr al-irja'i* is a phenomenon which has been emerging and developing to the degree of being a massive reality facing any *tajdid* movement.... The intention therefore has been to focus on *rukn al-amal* [the pillar of work] and its necessity for *iman* and *dawah*, the *umma* have been avoiding the pillar of work” (al-Hawali, 2001).

For *Sahwis*, action and faith are equally important, thus, faith without action is not valid. Both Salman al-Awdah and Naser al-Omar emphasize on the necessity of linking actions with faith, otherwise an individual would fall in postponement which endangers the faith. In this regard, *Sahwis* believe that reform and political change could not be achieved through reformist policies only, but also through combining work and faith together.

The second pillar was mainly developed by al-Awdah insights on Solitaries (*al-Ghuraba*). In this concept, al-Awdah develops the policy of countering which is based on the involvement with people. From his view, *al-ghuraba* are those who are physically separated from others. It also refers to abstract separation in which an individual avoids sins and forms of corruption, and adopts an Islamic religious behavior. In this view, reform and political change are usually challenged by the dilemma of isolation versus involvement. Isolation usually happens

through those parties who are corrupted; limiting relationships and stop dealing with them in order to preserve one's self-reform. Second, overcoming corruption could also happen through involvement, which happens through initiating reformists' activities within society as well as the state (al-Shamsi, 2012).

On a following note, al-Omar (1984) has added a peaceful dimension to al-Sahwa countering policy. From al-Omar (1984) point of view, ethics and values are central to political change and reform. To support his argument, al-Omar (1984) borrows the story of Moses and Pharaoh arguing that "Moses was not requested to assassinate Pharaoh or to direct violent words or pose threats to him. Moses countered Pharaoh with words and arguments, and the Pharaoh found himself obliged to open a dialogue and discussion with Moses" (al-Omar,1984). In this view, change and reform are carried through dialogue and peaceful preaching, but not through violence. Thus, one can argue that al-Sahwa was able to lay the foundations of its political consciousness, which would be later on used as a tool toward political activism within the kingdom.

### **1990: Activation of al-Sahwa Political Activism**

The invasion, which led the Saudi state to accept foreign military forces on its soil, could be considered as a catalyst to all challenges posed by al-Sahwa to the Saudi regime. First, it has activated the political activism within the *Sahwis*, directing it particularly toward the Saudi regime, which was idle before the Gulf war. Al-Sahwa become not only anti regime, but also

started to publicly embrace politics as an approach to fulfill its goals. Second, it triggered a culture of political discourse that dealt directly with the question of reform and political change. Such phenomena did not exist before the Gulf war, and has had its impact on the Saudi political sphere.

The events of the Iraqi invasion were unfolding while the Saudi regime was in a state of denial. On 9 August 1990, after seven days of the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia addressed his public. He requested the Iraqi forces to withdraw from Kuwait, and agreed to receive Arab and foreign military assistance to protect the Saudi border. He tried to assure Saudis that the existence of foreign forces is essential to the protection of the Kingdom. To provide it with legitimacy, the Council of higher Ulema has issued a fatwa on the 13th of August justifying the presence of foreign troops in Saudi Arabia (Arab News, 1990). However, *Sahwis* had something different to say.

*Al-Sahwa* condemned the presence of the foreign troops, and questioned the justification provided by the traditional religious establishment. Al-Hawali beside al-Awdah and other prominent *Sahwi* leaders took the initiative. In one of his regular weekly lessons, al-Hawali was asked by his students to comment on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, in which he addressed two critical points. First, al-Hawali attributed the Iraqi invasion to the lack of repentance (*taqwah*).

“Our problem is with our Lord. We have not reformed our relationship with Allah. Hence, He sends these upon us...We are experiencing immorality and tyranny and each rational man who reads the Quran and the Sunnah would think that those things [the immorality and the tyranny] cannot continue without punishment” (al-Hawali, 1990)

Second, al-Hawali has discussed the issue of reliance on American troops clearly stating that it is a violation of Islamic law. He further argued that the United States might exploit the opportunity to pursue its interests in the region.

“How can be the *umma* of faith and *tawhid* accept reliance on America to solve the problem instead of Almighty Allah? ...Since 1980 America has been training its army in similar geographical circumstances to the Gulf, such as in the Nevada desert. According to some analyses, it has been a US strategic plan to intervene in the Gulf, and the chance has now come for the US to put this plan forward” (al-Hawali, 2010).

Although al-Hawali did not directly criticize the Saudi regime, he has questioned the legitimacy of its decision to rely on the United States. Such a discourse was new to the Saudi political sphere. Since discussing and showing disagreement with the state’s action was not a common habit among sectors of the Saudi society, al-Sahwa was that segment which adapted this controversial discourse.

During the crisis, al-Sahwa had also shed some light on domestic politics and the need for reform. Few days after al-Hawali’s talk, al-Awdah delivered an important lecture about the collapse of the states. In his lecture, al-Awdah borrowed Ibn Khaldon’s concept of *sunnah al-Kahlfiyah* (succession) in which everything would be displaced or succeeded by something else (al-Shamsi, 2012). For Ibn Khaldoun and al-Awdah, states will always face challenges. From al-Awdah’s (1990) point of view there are several reasons that might lead to the collapse of states. Dictatorships, absence of *Shura*, corruption, weak state’s foundation, lack of transparency, are all factors that could lead a state to collapse (al-Awdah, 1990). In this context, he believes that a strong state is the one which applies sharia, hold the government accountable, and distribute

wealth on equal basis. For Al-Awdah, a strong religious foundation is essential to build a strong state; he argues that;

“The people who support the state and devote their souls and monies to establish the state do not do so to favor a particular person or a particular family. The aim is to maintain Islam and to apply sharia. If this state maintains its religious foundation and its legitimate aim, it will be a powerful state and will gain people’s support” (al-Awdah, 1990).

Although al-Awdah did not mention Saudi Arabia or refer to it directly, his discourse was very relevant to the situation within the Kingdom. His lecture took a different dimension from al-Hawali’s talk. In his lecture he attempted to draw attention to the Saudi domestic situation, and through his talk he aimed to stimulate discussion about the need for change. In December of the same year al-Awdah was invited to attend the Arab Muslim Youth league in the United States. In his speech, al-Awdah emphasized on encouraging the audience to not side with leaders, but support Muslim people who are oppressed by them (al-Shamsi, 2012).

Beside lectures and speeches, al-Sahwa used technology to spread its discourse. Local media was not covering the developments, while the international media was talking about the full military occupation of Kuwait. *Sahwis* were able to provide a more clear analysis and explanations that provide the society with a clear understating of the issues, as well as answering the Saudi people questions (al-Khedir, personal communication, March 15, 2017). Through Cassettes and faxes al-Sahwa provided an alternative to the Saudi local media. Cassettes were not under the government’s supervision, they were easily circulated, and they carried lessons with a very attractive discourse. This cassette revolution has enabled the *Sahwis* to spread their views on the crisis; however, as the society was really attracted by this discourse, *Sahwis* sharpened their rhetoric, and were empowered to expand on the issues they were touching upon.

Through lectures, speeches and cassettes, al-Sahwa was able to form a distinctive and challenging discourse. In a place like Saudi Arabia where engaging in politics was a form of *Fitna* (chaos), *Sahwis* tactfully took the risk to enter the political field. Saudi Arabia aimed to keep political activism as low as possible by prohibiting any form of a collective work that carries a political dimension. The *Sahwi* discourse in itself is a challenge to state that was not used to this kind of rhetoric. The religious establishment which was a vehicle to provide legitimacy for the Saudi regime did not engage nor support any kind of political discourse. Despite the challenge that it has brought to the Saudi political arena, the *Sahwi* discourse has brought a new and different style to it. A religious scholar or a preacher who discusses local and international politics instead of rituals and creed was definitely a development in Saudi politics. The *Sahwi* discourse contained a direct as well as indirect critique of Saudi Arabia external and internal policy. Furthermore, it has placed the foundation for questioning the current situation within the Kingdom, in addition to the need for change and political reform.

The lectures and speeches of al-Hawali, al-Awdah and al-Omar is an example of meaning construction or framing. As previously mentioned, framing is used by social movements leaders, activists, as well as members in order to construct reality and simplify aspects of the ‘world out there’ (Benford & Snow, 2000). Framing has three main core functions; focus attention, articulation mechanism, and transformative function (Snow, 2012). Al-Sahwa wanted to connect their followers and enable them to resonate with their surroundings. Through their discourse, al-Sahwa was able to achieve three functions. First, they will able to focus the public attention of toward two main issues at the time; the inability of Saudi Arabia to protect the kingdom and the need for political change and reform. Second, through framing the issues as result of deviation from the God’s path, the frame constructed by al-Sahwa acted as articulation mechanism. In

which al-Sahwa was able to tell its version of the story rather than another one is told. Third, al-Sahwa's framing process would later on perform a transformative function, in which it will transform the grievances that have existed during the context of the Gulf war into mobilizing grievances as will be discussed in the next part.

### **The Question for Change and Political Reform**

Questioning change and political reform was merely a product of the *Sahwi* discourse. The period that followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was marked by an important development in Saudi politics. The *Sahwi* discourse that happened since August 1990 broke the silence in the Kingdom and encouraged people not only to think differently but to speak out as well. It was important to note that the *Sahwi* discourse was attractive to the Saudi public because it was articulated through modern language that was appealing to the public. To follow up, al-Sahwa capitalized on the growing popularity of its discourse to attract public attention to the question of reform. In order to do so, al-Sahwa used cassettes and petitions as a mean to engage the society in public affairs, hence, politics.

To transfer its knowledge, al-Sahwa used recorded cassettes again as one of its main tools. The cassettes contained clear, focused and sometime direct discourse that addresses different topics. Usually each cassette discussed a single topic, followed by feedback, questions and answers. They were available at very low prices, and almost circulated everywhere. The Islamic cassette was a new method to contact with the society, and share knowledge publically about local and international issues. Through such an accessible tool, al-Sahwa was able to transfer its argument to the wider Saudi society. This was a challenge to the state because it was not able to control the usage of cassettes and their popular spread. In that time, it was an



innovative tool that provided an alternative to the official media apparatus, which was not able to attract the public. The cassette also challenged the involvement of the state in the public sphere as a sponsor and a controller, because it was gradually losing control over the type of information shared in it. Moreover, through cassettes al-Sahwa was able to engage society in political issues, a matter they were intentionally excluded from.

Petitions were another tool that al-Sahwa used beside cassettes to raise issues related to the Saudi politics and state affairs. But while cassettes were circulated to the public, petitions were submitted to the monarchy. In that sense, al-Sahwa was engaging in all sectors of the society, starting from its bottom to the elite.

In the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, two petitions were signed and submitted to the Saudi monarchy. Letter of *Shawal*, or letter of Ulema was the first petition submitted in May 1991. The petition was not only signed by Sahwa, but with wide range of religious scholars, preachers, professors and Islamic individuals were involved in it. State affairs and societal problems were at the center of the petition's message. The letter presented general requests on reform, since the signatories' main aim was to open the gate for dialogue with the state. Interestingly, the petition aimed to introduce the concept of political rights. It also shed light on regulation of power, stabilizing the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in addition to employing *shura* (May 1991).

The significance of the letter of *Ulema* is two-folded. First, although al-Sahwa leaders contributed significantly to the compilation of the letter, it has included different segments of the Saudi society, and was supported Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, which clearly represents the traditional Wahhabi establishment. Second, the petition discussed the issue of political change and reform

in a direct and straightforward language (al-Hobial, personal communication, March 1, 2017). Consequently, the petition was able to successfully engage Saudis in political and public affairs, not only through debates, but also through demanding change and touching upon very sensitive issues.

The second letter, Memorandum of advice was submitted in July 1991. The Memorandum was a result of extensive intellectual and organizational work. It was more comprehensive than the previous letter, and was sent directly to the office of the King (al-Shamsi, 2012). The Memorandum was discussing different topics from an Islamic perspective, focusing on issues like the marginalization of *Ulema* and preachers in public life; the judiciary system, human rights and dignity, corruption and the need of administration reform, state welfare system, the weakness of Saudi armed forces, and media's role in protecting the Islamic identity.

From the points mentioned in the Memorandum, it is clear that it was aiming to raise the Saudi state issues. Al-Shamsi (2012) argues that “the Memorandum sought to establish political rights which aimed to stabilize and consolidate the relationship between the ruling and the ruled, to regulate power to prevent exploitation and employ *shura* [consultation] to prevent anarchy” (al-shamsi, 2012). Generally speaking, the Memorandum emphasized again the topic that was a taboo for the Saudi regime, the issue of political rights; which caused a great concern to the Saudi regime.

Petitions and cassettes are essential elements to al-Sahwa as a social movement. They are forms of political action and part of al-Sahwa contentious performances against the Saudi regime. The two tools could fall under the social movement repertoire which is a major element of a social movement (Tilly, 2004).

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has acted as a catalyst that transformed al-Sahwa into an anti-regime movement. Although al-Sahwa started to form since late 60s, it emerged as social movement in the late 80s, and publicized its contention during the advent of the Gulf war. The period that preceded the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, particularly the economic downturn and the events that followed it led al-Sahwa to achieve insurgent consciousness. In which al-Sahwa generation felt deprived and mistreated. They started to sense grievances that were gradually directed against the Saudi regime. Although at that time those grievances were initial and potential, the Gulf war has activated them.

As al-Sahwa was building its political consciousness, the Gulf war came at a perfect time for al-Sahwa. Al-Sahwa was able to recognize its strength and took advantage of the political opportunity the Gulf war has created. The Saudi regime was overwhelmed with events of the war that was unfolding rapidly, which disabled it from countering al-Sahwa immediately. This has led al-Sahwa to feel a sense of symbolic efficacy, and the ability to create significant changes. As a result al-Sahwa moved from talking about the Gulf war into demanding political change and reform.

### **Repercussions of the Sahwi discourse**

As the discourse of al-Sahwa was able to alter the political and social arena, the Saudi regime started to sense the threat al-Sahwa might pose if it continues its activities. Gradually, the regime started to place pressure on al-Sahwa in order to stop its discourse and terminate its call for political change.

Despite all the pressure that *Sahwis* faced, they resisted and insisted on delivering their discourse. On the 13th of September 1994, al-Awdah was arrested, few days before his imprisonment; al-Awdah gave a public lecture entitled: Letter from Behind Bars. This lecture described as “a manifestation of political critique, political resistance, and understanding of difficulties on the road to reform, and provided a global Islamic vision” (al-Awdah, 2002). As a result, the regime called him to sign a statement that he would stop his activities and commit to that. However, al-Awdah refused arguing that such an act by the regime was a humiliation for him. When al-Awdah came back to his home, he found around 7000 supporters waiting for him (Lacroix, 2011). The crowd of al-Awdah’s supporters illustrates that the initial grievances that al-Sahwa created through its framing process, started to transform into mobilizing grievances. This has led him to make a speech about the state harassment against *Sahwis* including him, corruption, and the violation by the Saudi regime. This was followed by the arrestment of al-Hawali and al-Omar later in the same month (al- Shamsi, 2012).

## CHAPTER FOUR: AL-SAHWA FROM OPPOSITION TO POTENTIAL CONTENTION

### Preface

After the death of Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz the Grand Mufti in 1999, and Muhammad al-Uthaymeen, a member of the Council of Senior Ulema in 2001, Saudi Arabia faced a significant vacuum in the religious sphere. Al-Rasheed (2007) describes the situation of that period as the following; “at the beginning of the twenty-first century the official Wahhabi establishment seemed weak, fragmented and less credible. It had lost its monopoly over religious knowledge with the advent of the modern university and the appearance of multiple religious interpretations” (al-Rasheed, 2007). This coincided with the events of September 11 and how Saudi Arabia was perceived in the international arena as an exporter of terrorism. And this was immediately after the release of *Sahwi* leaders from prison in 1999.

After their release, they were faced by a wave of accusations linking them to the 11 September attacks. Suddenly, the *Sahwis* were placed in a defensive opposition, due to two reasons. First, they wanted to dissociate themselves from violence and *Jihadis* in the eyes of Saudi Arabia as well as the world. Second, they wanted to start a new page with the Saudi regime after a period of oppression and imprisonment. As the Saudi regime and al-Sahwa were both in a defensive position, their relationship, since the start of the twenty first century, entered a period that was marked by mutual interdependence. The regime employed al-Sahwa as an alternative religious establishment, in which it played two roles: to produce a discourse that condemns violence and to negotiate with the *Jihadis*. For al-Sahwa, this was an opportunity to defend itself against the accusations, and dissociate from the wave of violence and radicalism.

Although some might argue that al-Sahwa was fully coopted into the Saudi regime from 1999 and onwards, due to the role it played in the aftermath of 11 September, it is more appropriate to describe al-Sahwa' as a mediator at that period. However, since that time al-Sahwa did not engage in direct confrontation or contestation with the Saudi regime, but it had posed a challenge to the regime first in the mid of 2000s, and later on during the Arab uprisings which represent the potential threat that al-Sahwa can pose to the Saudi regime.

This chapter aims to investigate the period of mutual interdependence and quasi-cooptation between the al-Sahwa and the regime. It focuses on two main developments, the 2005 municipal elections, and the advent of the Arab Uprisings. Through the two cases, it attempts to analyze how al-Sahwa, despite the oppression it faced in mid 90s and the period of confrontation with the regime, still has a significant mobilization power that has re-awakened the regime's fear from it as a social movement.

### **2005 Municipal Elections and the Mobilizing Potential of al-Sahwa**

The Kingdom's first municipal elections in 2005 were a result of the domestic and international pressure on Saudi Arabia to reform itself. In 2003, the Council of Ministers took the decision to hold the first municipal elections where half of the representatives would be elected by vote, with the appointment of the other half by the King. Military forces members, women, as well as those who are under the age of 21 were excluded from the process. The elections were held in three stages, in 13 different regions of the Kingdom. The regime has set a condition in which candidates shall only campaign on local issues. Furthermore, they are not allowed to demonstrate ideological stances (Ménoret, 2005). The 2005 municipal elections were perceived as a positive step toward the process of reform in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Sahwa was able to play a significant role in the election process. Despite the fact that the voter registration was quite low, most of the voters have elected those who were affiliated with al-Sahwa (Lacroix, 2015). In each district, there were a significant number of candidates who were members of al-Sahwa or affiliated with it, and their programs were very similar. Interestingly, no candidate has publicly identified himself as a member of al-Sahwa or any other group. However, their followers and supporters knew precisely if they were members of al-Sahwa or any other network.

The candidates can be divided into three main groups. The first one represents the Islamists who received significant support from public religious figures and were very popular within the youth population. The second group constituted from the tribal candidates who were able to also receive a significant number of votes. Finally, there were the businessmen candidates who also enjoyed some popularity particularly in *al-Ulayya*, at the north of Riyadh (Lacroix, 2015).

Despite the different orientations of candidates, *Sahwis* were able to sweep the elections. Although the electoral law has prohibited alliances, they have emerged successful anyway. This has happened because the voting system itself has allowed this (Lacroix, 2015). Voters were choosing the candidates that they preferred the most as well as they were allowed to cast ballots within their own areas. Ménoret (2005) argues that this has “automatically marginalized purely local interests and helped foster an ‘ideologization’ of the electoral campaign and public discourse” (p.4). The *Sahwis* were able to use this gap in the voting system for their own interest. They had held extensive meetings among them before the balloting, in which they produce a list of their candidates and were able to send it as an SMS to large number of voters. Such an act

has prevented the fragmentation of votes that were supposed to be given to Islamists. Ménoret (2005) mentioned that some *Sahwi* voters argued that “what we finally decided upon, as a result of the Sheikhs’ recommendations, was to vote for particular candidates because they are the best people to represent us” (p.4).

In Riyadh, the five winning candidates were *Sahwis* particularly those who belong to the *ikwan*, and the other two winners were considered close to them. Dammam as well was purely a Sahwi district; seven out of the seven belong to al-Sahwa, mainly the *sururi* group. In other cities, although results were mixed, *Sahwis* were the dominant winning candidates (Lacroix,2015). The reading of the results clearly represents that victory of the *Sahwis*, despite the different groups that come under its umbrella.

The importance of the municipal elections lies in the fact that it has enabled al-Sahwa to demonstrate its popularity and strength. The elections have helped al-Sahwa to manifest its organization capabilities and their mobilizing potential. The significant triumph of al-Sahwa was not only a result of the Golden lists as some might argue (al-Sulami, 2008), but they were able to succeed because they had the capability to employ their mobilization skills using their social relations, their history and their influence. As Lacroix (2015) argues that the municipal elections proved that al-Sahwa is “the only non-state structures with a real mobilizing potential” (p.179).

The mobilizing potential of al-Sahwa could be considered a real challenge to the Saudi state. Despite the fact that Sahwa has abided by the rules, they were able to strongly encourage their supporters to vote for them. The main aim for al-Sahwa behind that was to prove their ability to influence a significant segment of the Saudi society. There is no doubt that such ability could be understood as something that causes a challenge to the state and potentially



destabilizing. This means that the influence Sahwa has, and its organizing skills could be used – if al-Sahwa desires- to mobilize people against a certain cause or an issue. Such an act, in the context of Saudi Arabia, constitutes a real challenge to the state since it might undermine its stability (al-khedir, personal communication, March 10, 2017). However, al-Sahwa preferred at this stage to play a more of double-edged position. By following the rules and encouraging their followers to participate, they were supporting the regime by legitimizing the process. On the other hand, this was not done merely to support the regime but it had its own price. They were able to demonstrate to the regime the influence they had and their mobilizing potential. Lacroix (2015) argues that “one of their main aims was to put pressure on the regime to prevent it from moving further on the way of social liberalization – on women’s issues, for instance – as Saudi liberals, and the West, have constantly been asking” (p.180 ). The second aim was also to stop the regime from reforming the Saudi educational system, which is a vital base for al-Sahwa. The mobilizing potential of al-Sahwa has succeeded in challenging the Saudi regime. This is evident by the reluctance of king Abdullah to take any step toward social liberalization and reforming education although he and his advisors were favoring a less conservative approach (Lacroix,2015).

### **The International and Socio-political Factor**

But what has empowered al-Sahwa to that degree, and what has enabled it to challenge the status quo despite the regime’s attempt to coopt it? In order to understand this, one should investigate the conditions of that specific period of time. After the wave of violence that swept the kingdom following 11 September, and the terrorist attacks started by al-Qaeda between 2003 and 2005, the equation of the game had to change (al-Rasheed, personal communication, March

7, 2017). Al-Sahwa which was oppressed since mid-90s should now become the regime's right hand in its counter terrorism apparatus. As a result, the relationship between al-Sahwa and the Saudi regime entered a period of mutual interdependence. On one hand, the regime was aware of al-Sahwa's ability to prevent their followers from joining al-Qaeda. Furthermore, al-Sahwa was able to produce a discourse that could convince other Saudis with the dangers of violence and Jihad abroad. On the other hand, al-Sahwa was accused from different parts that it is the responsible body for spreading violence in the kingdom (al-Rasheed, 2007). Consequently, it wanted to prove its innocence and distance itself from violence. Immediately, after the terrorist attacks that took place in May 2003, *Sahwi* leaders issued a statement describing *Jihadis* as ignorant and that their actions are misleading young men. Furthermore, *Sahwis* issued different statements to clarify their position and view on *Jihad*. For instance, Salman al-Awdah on his website Islamtoday published an article that explains the stance of al-Sahwa on Jihad as an Islamic obligation. He argues that Sahwis differentiate between Jihad as an important Islamic principle and its application in reality in places like Afghanistan, Egypt and Algeria (al-Rasheed, 2007).

The strength that al-Sahwa enjoyed comes from two main aspects. First, the space that state has provided for al-Sahwa to spread its anti-violence discourse and the support it has offered. Second, the control al-Sahwa was able to maintain over a large number of Saudi youth which has later prevented al-Qaeda from recruiting more followers after 2003 (Hegghammer, 2010). It is important to understand the role played by al-Sahwa here; although initially one can understand it as demonstrating loyalty to the Saudi regime, it is much more than that. Al-Sahwa has demonstrated its power, its ability to stabilize, and its mobilizing potential. This could not be achieved without the international factor that took place directly after the release of al-Sahwa

influential leaders during the 1990s. Because of international accusations that were directed toward Saudi Arabia as an exporter of terrorism and the wave of violence that swept the country later on, Saudi state provided a limited space for al-Sahwa to operate, which has enabled it to reassure its popularity among a significant portion of the Saudi society. This was later on self-evident during the 2005 municipal elections, which manifested the organizing potential of al-Sahwa, a would-be challenge for the Saudi state, if al-Sahwa decided to mobilize against it.

The challenge that al-Sahwa has posed to the state through its mobilizing potential during the municipal elections, has happened as a result of international and socio-political factors that were taking place at that time. The events of September 11 and the terrorist attacks that happened within the kingdom have brought al-Sahwa back to the political arena.

Placing this within the political process theory framework, it could be argued that the events of September 11 and the terrorist attacks have led the Saudi regime to experience serious vulnerabilities. McAdam (1982) argues that vulnerabilities in the system arise due to different reasons, those include; crisis in legitimacy of the existing political system, loosening of oppressive structures, political enfranchisement of groups that were previously excluded, and divisions within the leadership (McAdam, 1982). Although not all of them were present in the Saudi case, some of them were self-evident. It could be argued that the vulnerabilities arose due to two main reasons; first, the international and the local campaign that was blaming Saudi Arabia for supporting and exporting terrorism which has altered its image and started to influence its legitimacy. Second, the release of the *Sahwi* leaders from prisons immediately before the September attacks has automatically placed them at the center of the game. Due to those vulnerabilities, a political opportunity existed for al-Sahwa to change and intervene.

## **Al-Sahwa in the Advent of the Arab Uprisings**

During the Arab Uprisings, al-Sahwa has re-wakened the fears of the Saudi regime. Al-Sahwa's assessment of the Arab uprisings was different from the official state's response, as well as the traditional religious establishment. Prominent figures of al-Sahwa such as; Salman al-Awdah, Aid al-Qarni, and Nasir al-Omar were in the frontlines of those backing the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia.

On a local level, the Arab uprisings provoked the debate of for the need of change within the Kingdom. As a result, several petitions were drafted in the early 2011 that call for political reform. Although the Saudi regime reacted immediately and censored the sites, old reforms and youth activists were able to circulate those petitions and increase the number of supporters (al-Rasheed, 2015). Since 2011, four petitions were drafted, in which two has been largely supported by *Sahwis*. *Towards a State of Rights and Institutions* which was released in February 2011 was signed by an array of *Sahwis*, this includes but not limited to Salman al-Awdah, Muhammad al-Ahmar, and Suleiman al Rushoudi (dawlty, 2011). The document has implicitly called for a constitutional monarchy while keeping commitment to Islamic principles. According to al-Rasheed (2015) "this petition was the work of Islamist reformers who wanted to avoid the controversial constitutional monarchy; in order to appeal to a wider circle of those associated with the Islamic awakening" (p.36). Another reason is that Islamists did not want to sound very critical of the regime which could initiate another wave of oppression against them. The cautious tone of al-Sahwa is demonstrated through the discourse they have adopted since the advent of the Arab uprisings. The petition was able to collect around 9000 signatories; such number reflects

the significant number of supporters that al-Sahwa still has, and their ability to reach the ordinary Saudi (al-Rasheed, 2015).

A second petition, *the Call for Reform*, was framed in a form of traditional advice. It has also gained the support of different *Sahwi* figures including Nasir al-Omar. However, the rest of the supporters were mainly *Salafi* religious scholars (2011). The demands of the *Call for Reform*, did not call for major transformation in Saudi political system like the previous documents. In fact, it aimed to remind the Saudi leadership of the agreement between Ibn Saud and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The demands in this petition were focusing on freeing the political prisoners, unemployment and corruption. Although this petition did not go popular as the previous one, but it demonstrates again how some of the *Sahwis* were trying to adopt a cautious tone that would not directly criticize the Saudi regime (al-Rasheed, 2015).

While the above petitions were focusing on local issues, regional concerns were also discussed in a new document. *Bayan al-muthaqafin al-saudiyyn* (Statement of the Saudi Intellectuals), was another petition that represents Saudi intellectuals and was intended to condemn the intervention of Saudi Arabia to remove the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Egypt. The petition did not explicitly mention Saudi Arabia, but it has denounced foreign intervention in Egyptian politics (al-Arabiya, 2013). The petition has an Islamic theme. It has started by phrases from Quran that encourages believers to cooperate and support each other. The petitioners, throughout the document, have rejected the foreign intervention, the shed of blood during anti-coup protests, and the suppression of freedom of speech after the coup. After the circulation of the document, the Saudi authorities have called a number of Islamists and

*Sahwis*, such as; Mohammed al-Arifi, a prominent *Sahwi* leader. As a result, he was barred from going to Qatar to deliver talks and sermons (al-Rasheed, 2015).

On an individual level, some *Sahwis* were following a more critical rhetoric. In March 2013, al-Awdah posted an open letter as warning to the Saudi regime. Al-Awdah (2013) warned the Saudi government by stating that, “people here are the same as everyone else in the world. They will not remain silent forever if some or all of these things are constantly denied to them” (Islamtoday, 2013). Al-Awdah also discusses the issue of political prisoners, and he has shed the light on the causes of tensions within Saudi Arabia. Most of the solutions he suggested were crafted in the form of questions; “where are the channels of communication between us and our leaders? And “how can a country that relies upon personal connections instead of institutions ever hope to face real challenges?” (Aarts, 2015). Such rhetoric illustrates the call for popular representation, which is something that the Saudi government is not happy with. As a result, the government started to limit his activities by first banning his TV show, “you have rights” (al-Rasheed, 2015).

With regard to the regional developments that were taking place; al-Sahwa was more or less in a disagreement with the Saudi state and its counter-revolution. The only exception was Bahrain and Yemen, were the two parties have supported the Bahraini government and were against the *Houthies*. The uprisings in both Bahrain and Yemen are portrayed as sectarian war between Sunnis and Shia. Referring to the *Sahwi* position on Shia, it becomes clear why al-Sahwa’s discourse was similar to the Saudi state one. On the other hand, the Saudi support for the coup in Egypt was faced with local disagreement from al-Sahwa circles (Mathiesen, 2015). In social media, supporters of the Muslim brotherhood have voiced their dissatisfaction with the

coup that was supported by Saudi Arabia and UAE. In fact, most of the *Sahwi* figures have denounced the coup; expressed their frustration with it and the Saudi role in it whether explicitly or implicitly (al-Hobial, personal communication, March 1, 2017). Immediately, the Saudi state took measures to clamp down such forms of dissent. Saudi Arabia labeled the Muslim brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Furthermore, it has warned from showing any signs of support or empathy with it, as well as criminalizing the four-finger<sup>3</sup> symbol on social media. Furthermore, the Saudi government closed a prominent publisher who had become a voice for the *Sahwis* to publish their ideas about the Arab uprisings. The publisher's booth was also banned from the Riyadh book fair (Mathiesen, 2015).

In the Syrian case, both parts have supported the Syrian opposition; although the reasons of their support were different. Al-Awdah argued that the Saudi government has positioned itself as the main actor in the process of counter revolution. For al-Awdah and other *Sahwis*, Saudi Arabia did not support the Syrian opposition because they were on the side of the masses, but because it was trying to maintain their strategic interests (Aarts, 2015).

Despite the fact that the regime and al-Sahwa were having a similar position with regard to Yemen and Bahrain, their reasons were different. The intervention in Yemen was largely supported even from those who were criticizing the Saudi government for its bad policies in Egypt and Syria. Two main reasons could explain this shift. First, the new cyber security laws have undermined the discussions in social media, therefore leading to less vocal criticism. Second, the sectarian aspect is a key explanatory factor. Al-Awdah for example has supported the Saudi intervention in Yemen and based his support on religious and sectarian basis. Furthermore, he adopted the narrative of the Saudi government against Iran. Muhammad al-

Arifi, advised those Yemenis who fight with the *Houthies* to abandon them so they would not be used by the Iranian state. Aid al-Qarni who is another key figure in al-Sahwa, also supported the Saudi intervention in Yemen. However, it is important to place this sectarian narrative in context. The *Sahwis* since their early establishment have been following a sectarian approach. While it was not that explicit prior 2011, the Arab uprising has made this sectarian tune more vocal (al-Rasheed, 2015). It could be argued that the agreement between the Saudi state and the *Sahwis* about the intervention in Yemen is a result of structural factors, more than al-Sahwa's desire to adhere to the Saudi regime's stance.

### **Back to the Future?**

Al-Sahwa perceived the Arab Spring as its open gate toward repositioning itself in the Saudi political and social sphere. The Arab Spring led al-Sahwa to think that change is needed in Saudi Arabia, as they saw other Islamists participating in revolution, were at the forefront of transformation, and took power throughout the region. After the repressive years that al-Sahwa passed through during the mid to late 1990s, the 2001 momentum led al-Sahwa to become influential again on the social and political issues. This happened as the Saudi state reopened the public sphere and authorized the *Sahwis* to reappear in order to counter the radical Jihadi impact. Gradually, al-Sahwa has regained its considerable authority; it started to represent an alternative to the official religious establishment because it offers a moderate and more appealing religious discourse. In addition, they were very cautious while attempting to rebuild their position among their own followers and to avoid repression by the government. Against this view, it could be argued that *Sahwis* had already reinvented and rebuild their position as peaceful activists who aim to reform the regime gradually. This has all occurred before the Arab Spring, and on the eve



of it the Sahwis peaceful activism increased with a view to influence new followers, and presented the product of their *tarjuat* (retreats from their original positions). Thus, as a political actor al-Sahwa wanted to benefit from the political and social momentum that the Arab Spring has created, in order to expand its influence.

The tone that al-Sahwa adopted during the unfolding events of the Arab uprising could be described as critical and cautious. Al-Sahwa was able to challenge the status quo this time through its classical and updated means. Petitions, as a *Sahwi* traditional tool, were one of the main approaches that al-Sahwa adopted to voice its opinion on the regional developments. The two petitions supported by *Sahwis* were accepted among a significant number of the Saudi society which was an indicator of the potential and the influence that al-Sahwa still enjoys. Social Media was al-Sahwa's new medium to reach to different parts of the society and spread its views and ideas, which were in most of the cases against the regime and its policies in both implicit and explicit ways.

Al-Sahwa perceived the Arab uprising as a window for opportunity. The importance of the Arab uprisings lies in the fact that it showed that al-Sahwa still has that mobilizing potential that can challenge the regime, however, this challenge was not sustained. The contentious attempts of al-Sahwa could be understood in light of the regional events. The Arab Uprisings and the momentum it created have empowered al-Sahwa, because it has created a crisis of legitimacy within the whole region, and Saudi Arabia was no exception. With the advent of the Arab uprisings, al-Sahwa started some of its contentious repertoires; this was done mainly through petitions and the discourse it has adopted. However, al-Sahwa was not able to create a challenge similar to the ones it has created previously, due to several reasons. Tilly (1978) argues that the

interaction between interests, organization and opportunity determines the social movement level of collective action and mobilization threat. Interests refer to the potential gains that a social movement would receive from participation. Organization refers to network or the unification among social movement members. Opportunity, as previously mentioned, is the vulnerability in the system, possibility of oppression or amount of political power (Ritzer, 2007). Applying those factors to understand al-Sahwa's cautious position during the Arab Spring, it could be argued that two factors were absent. Although the Arab uprising provided a perfect opportunity for intervention, al-Sahwa has lacked the organization, and there were no clear incentive for it to participate. The opportunity was on the horizon, but the absence of clear potential gains and a unified identity has hindered al-Sahwa from posing a sustained threat to the regime.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

When studying social movements, there one question that is often been asked; has this social movement been successful and achieved its goals? The definition of movement outcomes in terms of success or failure detracts a lot from the work that a certain movement has done through years. Success and failure are both subjective; they depend on the views of the part that is doing the assessment. Furthermore, it is difficult to measure the impact of a movement, especially those potential impacts that appear through years and might be produced by different factors. In the context of Saudi Arabia, this task might seem even harder, because it is almost impossible to know the goals of al-Sahwa. The oppressive nature of the regime, does not allow transparency among the society, therefore what stated by al-Sahwa in public might differ completely from its real agenda. However, throughout this study, it could be argued that al-Sahwa's main goal was to get a place between the social and the political sphere. It would not be true to state that al-Sahwa wanted to take power, but more accurately al-Sahwa wanted to influence power relations within the kingdom, and that what has threatened the Saudi regime.

Although it is hard to determine whether an observed change is the product of a social movement or not, gathering data about other actors assists in reaching a conclusion. Al-Sahwa when it was first formed emerged in an environment where most of the other actors represented the state and its ideology; this includes the religious establishment, media as well as some interest group. Therefore, it could be argued that al-Sahwa especially during the period of the Gulf war was able to produce some changes. Raising the question of political change and reform, and introducing a religious language that challenges the regime, in which all are alternations by al-Sahwa in the Saudi status quo. However, in the following decades after the Gulf war it becomes hard to determine the change produced by al-Sahwa because the number of actors has increased in the Saudi political sphere.

The conventional wisdom about Saudi Arabia is that it derives its legitimacy from Islam, particularly Wahhabism. What is often overlooked in the literature is that Islam can be a double edged sword. As it had provided Saudi Arabia with legitimacy and was a main pillar during the establishment of the state, it could also act against it and de-legitimize it. Al-Sahwa al-Islamyia has succeeded in providing another form of Islam within the kingdom, an Islam that was able to contest the status quo, provide an alternative discourse, and engage heavily in politics. Which does not only has challenged the Saudi regime, but it has also posed a threat to other Islamic sects and religious groups who seek protection from Saudi authority. This could be highly applicable to the Shia communities in the eastern province in Saudi Arabia. Since the early days of al-Sahwa, its discourse has been portraying Shias as the other and the infidels.

Generally speaking, Al-Sahwa has introduced two main mechanisms to the Saudi context. First, it provided an alternative and appealing religious discourse that was accompanied

with modern language. The Sahwi discourse was not outdated as the Wahhabi one, but it was able to engage and discuss modern issues with a religious language which attracted the Saudi society. Another tool, was introducing petitions to the Saudi political culture. Through petitions, al-Sahwa was able to reach the monarchy and voice its opinions and demands. It was a mean that had clearly eliminated the division between politics and religion, and illustrated that an ordinary religious man is able to discuss and engage in political affairs; and this differentiate it from Wahhabism. The Wahhabi school has always been a tool that is used by the Saudi regime to justify its actions when needed, and therefore the Wahhabi discourse was focusing mainly on ritualistic Islam, worship, and creed. In contrast, Sahwi discourse has a more political tone, and addresses political issues, and sometimes issues that are related to the legitimacy of the regime i.e. during the second Gulf war. Furthermore, technology was an important tool that al-Sahwa was able to use effectively. This started by using Islamic cassettes, and ended nowadays by engaging through social media, which indicates the pragmatism of al-Sahwa as a movement and its ability to develop and follow modernity, again unlike Wahhabism. Al-Sahwa's ability to adjust through time could contribute to change Saudi Arabia political and social sphere; in fact, that what al-Sahwa has been doing since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Al-Sahwa would not be able to achieve the previous with the political opportunity that has existed within international and regional events. Through the course of the last twenty seven years one can notice that al-Sahwa has challenged the status quo or the political system when there is an event that influences the Kingdom. This was self-evident in three major events; the Gulf war, 11 September attacks, and the Arab Spring. Al-Sahwa was able to benefit from such events by creating a discourse that resonated with society and their feelings during that period of time. During those events, Saudi Arabia was under serious threat; the Gulf war had manifested

its military weaknesses; September attacks placed it under international and local pressure; and it was not immune from the unfolding events of the Arab Spring. Al-Sahwa was able to rapidly coordinate its common knowledge on these political issues, in order to exploit the situation for its favor.

Studying al-Sahwa has different implications. On the political level, it gives a glimpse about how social movements in the context of the Gulf act and react. Al-Sahwa had a moral and social impact. It had been able to mobilize and teach people political language that combines Islam with modern political skills. Most importantly, Sahwa has placed it-self between politics and religion, and broke the taboo of political activism in Saudi Arabia, which was its first aim. For policy makers, understanding how al-Sahwa was able to do so is vital, although in a place like Saudi Arabia oppression is one of the few options available.

Questions about the consequences of al-Sahwa as a social movement, how it matters and what are the products of its activism during the past years should be addressed. This study should trigger researchers to try to incorporate different phenomena that take place in the region within the different theories of social science. The conventional wisdom that this region is peculiar, hence, we should study it without paying enough attention to theories and concepts that emerged in other part of the world, could no longer provide us with critical understanding of it.

As any study, this thesis has different limitations. The main shortcoming of this thesis is the fact that it was not able to interview *Sahwis* and people who were directly linked to al-Sahwa. As already mentioned, in a place like Saudi Arabia what is often stated in literature and media might be different from what is really going within the Sahwi circles. Therefore, having the view of Sahwis in this study might have led it to a different direction, and could have possibly altered

the conclusion. Thus, this study could be taken further with the aim of hearing al-Sahwa's own perception of what has happened through the last two decades and what its intake on those developments.

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## Appendix A: Consent form

### **The Relationship between Al-Sahwa Social Movement and the Saudi Regime; an Appraisal**

I am a student in the Gulf Studies Master's Program at Qatar University. I am studying al-Sahwa social movement and its relation with the Saudi regime.

The purpose of the research is to address some of the research gap regarding the role of al-Sahwa within the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The interview was designed to be approximately 20-40 minutes in length. However, you are free to expand on the topic or talk about related issues. Also, please keep in mind that you have the right to withdraw from participating in this research at any time during the period of conducting the study.

It's important to note that participating in this study is voluntary. Therefore, you may skip answering any question at any time. The interview will be recorded through a voice recording application on the phone of the researcher. The audio recordings will be disposed of after the research is done. We will keep the data in a secure (inscribed) file on a personal computer. Only the researcher and faculty supervisor mentioned above will have access to this information.

There will be no financial compensation for the interviewees in this research. The research should not pose any psychological or physical harm to the interviewees. If you would like to see the results of the research, contact the researcher through the information provided at the end of the paper.

*If you are willing to proceed, move to the next page.*

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## Appendix B: Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This was part of king Faysal approach to lead the Islamist block in the region in order to counter Jamal abd al-Nasser socialist ideas.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammed Qutb was born in 1919, in Musha-Upper Egypt. Until the death of his brother, Muhammed was much less influential. However, he grew up very close to the doctrine of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>3</sup>The four-finger symbol or Rabia sign, is the namesake of Rabia square in Cairo, and was affiliated with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers.

