

INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the historical and intellectual backgrounds of some influential movements in Saudi Arabia, within a binary framework of liberal/conservative or modernist/fundamentalist. Thus, I have to examine the religious and intellectual differences of those movements that may lead to creating conflicts between them.

In addition, this study provides possible solutions to conflicts and schism between schools of thought in Saudi Arabia, by focusing particularly on moderate Islamic thought as a new movement that may promote greater harmony. This is shown by looking critically into the thought and views of Dr Salman al-Odah, widely considered to be one of the most important moderate thinkers in Saudi Arabia; beginning as an extreme Salafi, he underwent a drastic transformation in his thinking and attitudes.

This thesis concludes that moderate Islamic thought can allow us to obtain a clear and better understanding of the main reasons for the struggle between different movements, and apply that on Saudi society, instead of attacking others who have opposing attitudes or different beliefs. It is also important to mention that this plurality of thought is very important for developing the freedom to express opinions within the confines of the law in the application of religious or philosophical ideas. The thesis also concludes that such approaches will help promote dialogue and understanding between different groups or schools of thought. It is hoped that this can also develop cognitive skills, through the exchange of ideas and views between different schools and intellectual movements.

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DEDICATION

To The Glory of God

This thesis is dedication to my husband, *Adil Al-Shoaibi*, for his continuous support and significant encouragement.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Prologue

Civilised nations have come to understand, throughout their history, that the cultural elites, irrespective of their intellectual trends or diversity of thought, are the ones concerned with the propagation of change, reformation, and the development of the awareness and the capabilities of society. In this way, society can develop the rights of its citizens and raise the level of its ambitions, in order to attain achievements that lay the foundation of a partnership to build the state, in accordance with the rule of law and a society of institutions, as well as to dismantle autocracy and avoid the predominance of one group over another (Ruba'i, 2013).

But the current situation in Saudi Arabia may overturn this balance, as the intellectual scene in the Saudi arena illustrates the extent of the intellectual conflicts between the different religious and intellectual groups. The reality of the cultural debate in Saudi Arabia, since it was united at the beginning of the 1930s, is about issues that we consider, as Saudis, fundamental issues. Such issues include should a woman cover her face or not? What is the religious ruling for a woman driving a car?¹ Who are the Islamists and how do they define themselves? Who are the liberals, and do they really want to cause corruption in the country, among its people? What is our duty towards the different intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia? (al-Guniem, 2013).

To some countries and their people, these issues are not considered fundamental, yet they have a negative impact on Saudi society, as they have obscured thinking about other key issues and intellectual development. In fact, they have made Saudi society preoccupied with issues of intellectual difference, which ensures it lags further behind in the development of civilisation that results from intellectual pluralism.

¹ During King Abdulla's reign, women achieved relative improvement in their rights. Women were appointed in the Advisory Council and they took part in local elections. During King Salman's reign in 26th of September 2017, Saudi Arabia agreed to let women drive by next June. JAWAD, H. 2017. Saudi decree allowing women to drive cars is about politics, not religion. *The Conversation*.

One may know that there are many groups in Saudi Arabia. Most of these groups or movements adopt Salafi thought but under different names, such as jihadist Salafi or traditional Salafi, which makes it difficult for a remote observer to differentiate between these movements, although it is very clear to those who are interested. In addition to that, the members of these movements, with all their differences, do not officially declare these names and affiliations, due to political reasons on one hand and intellectual, cultural and social reasons on the other.

It is quite clear that religious freedom is the most effective way to tackle extremism, because extremist thinking is based on mono thinking. Diversity of ideas, groups, and social and cultural formations may weaken the standing of these extremist groups, but it is certainly not enough to eradicate extremism. Democracy and freedom of speech are among the most effective ways to solve the problem of intellectual conflicts, but they are not the only solution.

Although there are different groups fighting under the name of religion, and different religious points of view exist, which have negatively affected Saudi society, during the reign of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia experienced an era of reformation, openness and development. This intellectual differences and conflict made use of the intellectual and cultural differences that exist among the various groups in the Saudi intellectual arena to produce a system that accommodates all groups in Saudi Arabia, irrespective of their differences, and opens the door to constructive intellectual dialogue and an open civilisation that accepts differences and makes use of them in building and developing the country.

Saudi society continued to be a closed environment that has one intellectual approach towards ideas, events, and people. Most generations in this society have grown up with this view. But in the last two decades, a plurality of sources of learning have developed as a result of freedom of information. This has created wide and tangible intellectual differences in Saudi society, which is natural, as it is impossible that a plurality of sources of learning does not lead to diversity in vision and thought. It is a rule that different thoughts compete for the receiving audience. One tool of this conflict is “labelling”, i.e. “stereotyping”, the other, meaning presenting the other as a stereotype that has negative connotations for the receiving audience, with the purpose of turning the audience away from it and from its

ideology. The mere mention of the stereotype conjures up in the mind of the audience those negative connotations. Labelling the other is a result of this ideological plurality.

The labelling of the other is what intellectual movements in Saudi society do. It happens in every society that is culturally vibrant; every movement in our society tries to label the other.

What distinguishes Saudi Arabia from other states is that, though it seeks keeping the traditional principles from the past, it has never closed its eyes by looking at the future. It has never seen its future in its past, it has always seen the future in the hope that may grow in its culture, because its mature vision is heading in a straight, endless line, where there is no end to development, no limits to any adventure and no roof to hold back any creative human attempts to look up. The traditional mind may not stand in the way of creativity as a method to face current conflicts. The ready-made solutions do not require any extra thought, and if it cannot completely deny what is new, the traditional mind will work on degrading the importance of it. Intolerance is not an individual choice, because it has a tendency to become a generalised feature of a society.

Our society is an Islamic one; its social choices are Islamic choices. There is no doubt that the Islamic identity that we adopt is not driven by the Islam produced by extremists, and which is against the spirit of this age and the inventions, theories, and visions produced by people on the basis of modernity and change. Our Islamic message is not an extreme interpretation of Islam.

Therefore, a continuous emphasis on moderate Islam can save us from conflict between different groups², and from religious and intellectual extremism. Only moderate Islam can stand against the extremism that threatens to spread across the Muslim world, including Saudi Arabia, with differing degrees of inflexibility and moderation.

² In every intellectual current there are those who propose modernisation as a resolution to current conflicts, and they consider it a basis for progress, development and co-existence AL-HAMAD, T. 2004. illusion of moderation.

From here, moderate Islam becomes a clear call for Islam as a religious identity, and to set its principles in society as principles of public guidance, in order to face conflicts that result from the religious differences of various groups.

The influence of the Kingdom in terms of its position in Islam is clear in all Muslim countries. It is, at the same time, a required religious influence and the majority of Muslims are convinced of that. A tolerant religious identity will have a positive impact on the journey of the devout in all Muslim countries in the long run. It is a historical responsibility that rests on the Kingdom, through its geographical and historical position, to establish and promote moderate and enlightened Islam. This is an Islam that loves life and pursues progress and development, by making use of differences in religious issues to develop and build minds (A'mo, 2016).

In reality, the agreement that results from being in conformity with traditional practices means the absence of diversity in vision, as all visions are reflections of one original: a traditional vision that almost everyone agrees with. This necessarily means the absence of human choice, and that everyone is confined to one solution instead of different solutions for all. A range of visions and solutions mean a higher probability of positive transformation, as diverse opinions that change societies may lead to progress and development in that society. The problem of conflict in Saudi Arabia is not only between traditional Salafism and contemporary modernism; it is within Salafism itself. I will explain the differences between the Muslim Brotherhood and the modernists, between the traditional Salafists and the liberals, between the Sufi and the traditional Salafi, and even the most intractable conflict, between Sunni and Shia³.

In every age, one finds a great diversity of thought, opinions and approaches. This often includes opinions that are sharply divided between the proponents and opponents of certain ideas or tendencies and this state of division, even polarization, both reflects and impacts upon society. The multiplicity of streams of thought –

³ Religious rules or opinions, regarding religious, social or political issues, are among the most important causes for conflicts. People seek knowledge and adhering to Sharia teachings. Huge differences surface according to the way each scholar interprets Sharia based on his own vision NGUYEN, M. 2010. Causes of Ethnic Conflict: Examining the Role of Religious Diversity and Contagion Effects.

including religious and secular thought – in Saudi Arabia has recently led to ideological and cultural strife and a crisis of increasing polarisation (Zaidy, 2000).

In recent decades, the Saudi community has been exposed to waves of Westernisation and to influences that are contrary to the values of Saudi society as a result of globalization, the effects of the media and what has been called the “oil boom” (Alhabab et al., 2013).

Saudi society is almost entirely made up of members of two Islamic sects, the Sunni and the Shi’a⁴. The Sunni are the majority in Saudi Arabia and, despite the fact that both Sunni and Shi’a doctrines agree on many theological issues, such as the Qur’an, the Prophet’s hadith and on some Islamic law, the application of this law varies between the two (Tristram, 2013). The major difference between them lies in the choice of their successor to the Prophet Muhammad. Most Muslims agreed that the most able and pious of the Prophet’s followers should become his successor or caliph. For Sunnis, Abu Bakr, a close companion of the Prophet, deserved to become the first caliph. Other Muslims, adherents of the Shi’a creed, believe that the leader of the community (the caliph) had to be Ali, who was Muhammad's cousin (Perrlu, 2012). This is one of many differences between the two groups, including differences in doctrine and some of political outlook. Sunnis are in turn divided into several schools based upon differing religious interpretations. These groups, a spectrum from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood, include a variety of beliefs and philosophies, such as the Jaamiyya, the Suroriya, the Sufis, and others. The Shi’a are also divided into several sects, including Ismailis, Zaydis and Shi’a Imami, as well as the Alawite creed (Ebrahem and Alsadeg, 2013). Each of these sects has different principles and beliefs and some different interpretations of some concepts, which require an independent research (Shaheen, 2007). It is therefore important to appreciate that Islam embraces a wide range of schools of thought, each of which has significant differences, whether between Sunni and Shi’a or between schools of thought within each, not to mention the differences between these and the various

⁴ There are a number of Shia currents in Saudi Arabia, but, in general, there are no clear differences among them in practice; as if they were one ASSAF, A. 2013. *Shiite movement in Saudi Arabia* [Online]. almoslim.

bodies of secular and liberal thought in Saudi society. Liberalism is one among many social and intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia in terms of having specific rules, principles and beliefs (Batoush, 2011).

It may be that the 11th September 2001 attacks on the USA had some influence in speeding up the development of liberalist thought in Saudi Arabia. The notion of freedom of speech played its part also; it had been more or less suppressed in the interests of anyone who could control the various avenues of opinion (romizan, 2009).

The liberalist current in Saudi Arabia is composed of numerous ideologies and aims, which branch out according to the understanding and purpose of its adherents. However, it does have three main components: first, the Islamic liberalist current⁵, which strives to bring together liberalism and Islam, attempting to establish general methods of binding together religion and modernism. For example, it combines Islamic law with the liberality of modern ideologies and secularism, and subjects these to the strictures of religion (romizan, 2009) in terms of adoption of Islamic texts, and in same time accepted modern views on social and cultural fields, but still under the framework of Islamic law, also, refused conservative thought (al-Sharif, 2016).

The second component is the political liberalist currents. This liberal trend is purely secularist, and considered by conservative Muslims to be a reiteration of Western thinking, which contradicts, in their view, Islamic teachings. Political liberalist currents in Saudi Arabia can be further broken down into two different groups (liberal socialist versus liberal capitalist). The first liberal group is rather socialist, where social democracy favours equality and urges the state to interfere to support society (e.g. equal opportunities and supporting poor families). The second liberal group is capitalist, objecting to any intervention by the state to take care of social problems. It also views equality as granting individual freedom to find work in a

⁵ Most of the disputes presented by the liberal current is directed against Islamic trends, as liberals have no political opinions or vision in Saudi Arabia LACROIX, S. 2010. *The Elite's Ambition; Reality of Saudi Society. ALMajalla.*

market economy, where skills and services are subject to supply and demand (Wabili, 2012).

The third and final component comprises new liberalist currents. This new component was formed after the fall of the Soviet Union and its presence and activity became more visible after the events of 9/11. The purposes and aims of this current can be summarised as follows:

- * Freedom of expression and religious freedom, without undermining heritage
- * Pluralism of political ideologies.
- * Adaptation of religious rhetoric and education to promote moderation.
- * The application of democratic principles.
- * Strong opposition to dictatorship in any form.
- * The establishment of civil society.
- * The promotion of tolerance and peace within society.
- * Respect for the independence of individuals.
- * An emphasis on secularism and upholding the relationship between religious and national interests (Romizan, 2009).

Although Saudi Arabia is characterised as a religious country, different cultural and intellectual movements have influenced Saudi society. It has been argued that liberalism is one of the most important emerging trends in the country today (qadami, 2005).

At the end of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, liberalism, in fact, has had a significant impact on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, especially at a time of cultural pluralism and intellectual diversity in Saudi Arabia due to the presence of different intellectual currents. The major effect of liberal ideology on Saudi society has been the increased struggle between religious and liberal thought, due to the great number of differences between these two currents in their ideas,

principles and objectives (Azza, 2009). In addition, it is difficult to challenge and change Salafist thought in Saudi Arabia according to the strong and old history of Salafism. The Salafi movement was born in the region of Najd in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula in the first half of the eighteenth century, and the Saudi kingdom was the first state guardian of Salafi thought in the Muslim world (Stanley, 2005). Liberal movements have suffered and been attacked by religious currents in Saudi Arabia. This may have ensured that they do not come into contact with the intellectual and religious roots of Saudi society, and have not had a mainstream role in the country, as other currents have. However, liberalism has managed to prove itself in Saudi Arabia relatively, as an intellectual and philosophical trend in different ways, such as socially or as doctrinal thought. For example, the opening of the Saudi liberal network site, and full social networks calling for intellectual freedom in Saudi Arabia, such as in some TV programs like "Self", which displays many ideas and opposes the strict approach of Wahhabi ideology, and calls for intellectual freedom in Saudi Arabia.

In addition, the recognition of other currents to oppose the Saudi liberal thought, which indicates the existence of an independent and a complete current, perhaps the ideological conflict between liberalism and strict Salafist is the strongest examples. (Alomani, 2012).

People with a religious outlook predominate in the Kingdom and have a great influence on Saudi Arabian society at the social, intellectual and cultural levels. But the religious character of the state does not imply an absence of liberal and secularist currents, which indeed compete for influence by means of intellectual and media activity. Such currents, some of which are clandestine, in Saudi Arabian society, show a trend towards diversity.

The diversity of beliefs that produced the current state of intellectual strife has been variously attributed to the following factors. First, immigrants of Saudi students to some Arabic countries, such as, Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon, and then recently arrived in the country, and returning Saudi students have brought with them divergent opinions and ideas in relation to creed and worldview, which they developed abroad. Furthermore, the scientific and technological advances taking place in Saudi Arabia are also broadening intellectual horizons. The modernisation of the Saudi system of

government, including signs of certain elements of social and political democracy, has also increased exposure to different and sometimes-conflicting ideas. The result of this intellectual disruption has been an increased ideological polarisation between different systems of thought, whether between religious groups with differing beliefs, or between conservative and liberal streams of thought. This increasing polarisation and divergence of opinion shows the importance of moderate Islamic thought, which strives to be centrist and attempts to distance itself from bias, religious intolerance and sectarianism. This also strengthens the moderate religious camp and enables them to promote more moderate views and confront the neo-liberals negative approach to religion in Saudi Arabia.

Moderate Islamic thought has spread more widely than before in Saudi Arabia, as cited by a number of publications promoting a wider outlook and seeking to clarify its purpose in all its variations (Najar, 2013). Several Saudi thinkers promoting a moderate Islamic creed have arisen in the Kingdom, encouraging moderation to counter the risks of polarisation in society. One of the leading contemporary Islamic thinkers in Saudi Arabia is Dr Salman al-Odah; the present thesis is a case study of his works. I will focus on the development of his moderate and rational attitude and outlook as his views changed and evolved, in addition to the contributions that he has made to contemporary moderate Saudi thinking.

This study focuses on the intellectual and ideological conflicts between different schools of thought in Saudi Arabia, including the main differences between them in terms of principles, ideas, and attitudes towards religious and intellectual issues in Saudi social life, especially those issues that have caused conflict between groups. This thesis also illustrates the religious and intellectual history of Saudi Arabia from the 1980s to the present, to highlight significant reasons for the struggle between groups, as well as to show the emergence of each current in Saudi society, such as the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Jamisim, Surrorisim, Sufism, and others. Showing also the importance of defining them through their principles and thinking. In addition, an aim of this research is to show the importance of moderation in Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia as a solution to this conflict, by tracing the thoughts and views of Dr Salman Al-Odah, whom I consider to be one of the most important moderate thinkers in Saudi Arabia, and who undertook an intellectual transformation

from extreme Salafi to embracing a modern and more flexible attitude towards religious and intellectual issues, and to understand the main reasons behind this transformation.

1.2 The importance of the topic and the reasons for choosing it

In each community, intellectual pluralism and cultural diversity can play a variety of roles. This helps promote dialogue and understanding between different groups or schools of thought. They can also develop cognitive skills, by facilitating the exchange of ideas and views between different schools and intellectual currents. Saudi Arabia, however, has an intellectual and social crisis of intellectual and cultural conflict because of the variety of currents in Saudi society, both religious and liberal.

The history of ideologies in Saudi Arabia from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows that Saudi Arabia had one acceptable body of thought, namely the Salafism⁶, although there are many other groups with other ideological aims, such as Al-Suroriya, Al-Jaamiya, Sufism, the Muslim Brotherhood, and others. These other groups were for many reasons silent and did not have any function within Saudi society. However, in the middle of the 1990s, liberalism as well as additional religious denominations began to emerge in Saudi Arabia for several reasons, which I will discuss them on later chapter. The conflicts between liberal and secular, and between religious denominations, have had negative effects on Saudi Arabian society. For instance, some people have embraced a specific school of thought, such as following Salfism or liberalism, by accepting its rules and rejecting any principles from others currents. Consequently, a person with fanatical zeal will strongly object to the country's moderate Islamic orientation. Therefore, it is important to discuss this issue in Saudi Arabia in order to understand the main reasons behind it, and to propose some possible solutions to it

⁶ The Salafi doctrine is based on understanding the Quran and the Prophetic tradition with reference to the early three centuries of Islam, mostly as prescribed by Ibn Taymiyyah (died 1328) LIVINGSTONE, D. 2013. Ibn Taymiyya, and the occult origins of the salafi movement. *Conspiracy school* .

This research is of great importance in its exploration of significant themes. It highlights the background of Saudi Arabia, in particular the historical, religious, political and social contexts, in order to understand the background of each religious and intellectual current and uncover the root of the intellectual differences between them. This is of use in discovering the problems that result from them and the ways to solve these; the importance of this research comes from focusing on the current notion of moderation within Saudi Islamic thought. This is especially important due to the current deeply divided condition of Saudi Arabia, where vast differences and seemingly intractable conflicts separate intellectual concepts and cultural elements. These are differences that have had a significant impact on the Saudi people, with both negative and positive results.

1.3 Statement of the problem

For various reasons, the diversity of intellectual currents plays a significant role in each community by way of cultural improvement, the development of civilisation and the education of people until they become accustomed to accepting or rejecting opinions or ideas that differ from or oppose their own. This plurality of thought is very important for developing the freedom to express opinions and apply religious or philosophical ideas (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

However, in Saudi Arabia there is much to oppose this plurality. The situation today shows that having a variety of ideologies and different cultures is not considered a reasonable way to develop intellectually as an individual or as a country. Rather, the opposite is recommended, as the ideologies of different groups are enough to bring about intellectual conflict and the segregation of society. As a consequence, extremism of thought due to the different currents in Saudi Arabia has become apparent (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

Most religious and intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia are prone to sudden outbursts of propaganda with no direction or justice, underlying their extreme nature and their distance from any attempt at mutual dialogue. Common issues have become rare between the groups, to an extent where conflict is inevitable; it does not encourage what we would call dialogue or a search for a justified opinion. For example, we see the followers of the Salafi school as distinguished by a belief in the

superiority of their ideology and who pay no attention to different opinions from other schools. Another example is the liberals habit of looking for errors in other schools of thought and criticising them without entering into dialogue or seeking a civilised acceptance of their different ideologies (Ruba'i, 2013).

In reality, these intellectual currents, including religious, and liberal elements, are essentially points on a spectrum that represents the range of cultures. A Salafi will differ in their core principles from a liberal. The rejection of this spectrum is what leads to ideological division in Saudi Arabian society and, as a result, severe conflicts occur between the representatives of each school of thought. The cause of this is a refusal to tolerate differences (Wiktorowicz, 2006).

Conflict essentially revolves around issues that are held excessively strongly by the conflicting groups. It is common for the dialogue between these groups to consist abuse and profanity towards the opposition, while refusing any form of dialogue or debate over unresolved issues. This type of approach is monologue and not dialogue where there is serious engagement and conversation so as to reach truth.

The existence of such gaps between the various schools of thought has had a profoundly negative effect upon Saudi Arabian society, and upon its intellectual and social cohesion. Thus, there is a requirement to seek a moderate solution that would eradicate these conflicts.

The aim of this research is to study the historical basis of the evolution of these ideologies, be they religious or liberal, in Saudi Arabia and to expose their core principles and aims. This would put us in a position to unravel the fundamental reasons for the differences between the ideologies and the ways in which they have developed. We should also concentrate on the notion of a moderate Islamic trend and try to shed light upon its principles, such as the importance of positive solutions to bridge the gulfs between ideologies in Saudi Arabia.

Currently there is very limited information in the English-speaking world available about the intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia between extremism and moderation, including those in religious and liberal thought and main differences between them that causes an intellectual struggle and major conflict between those variety of movements, or of the importance of moderation in modern Islam as one of the most possible solution to reduce the gap between different school of thought, or

how to make a bridge between them. The present research has the aim of filling this considerable gap.

1.4 Objectives and purpose of the research

- 1- To highlight the Saudi Arabian background, including the political, social and historical context, in order to understand the main reasons for the emergence of new religious and liberal currents in Saudi society.
- 2- To explore and display the main intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia, both religious and liberal, from the 1980s to the present, and follow their significant impact on Saudi society. This will help us understand the thoughts and perspectives of their adherents and learn the differences between them.
- 3- To analyse the relationship between different schools of religious, or liberal thought in Saudi Arabia in terms of their principles, ideas, effects and representatives, in order to reduce the gap and resolve the major conflicts between them.
- 4- To study the notion of moderation in current Saudi Islamic thought, by identifying Dr Salman al-Odah's thinking, and his intellectual transformation, in order to show the importance of moderation in Islam and refute extremism.
- 5- To study Saudi society's perception of the positive and negative impact of intellectual currents upon Saudi Islamic thought.

In achieving the above objectives, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the reasons for preventing the disclosure in the past of some of the intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia? Did the government play a part in this?
- What contributed to the emergence of these intellectual currents in Saudi society?
- What are Saudi scholars' 'opinions of methods to mitigate the impact of the conflict between religious and liberal currents in Saudi Arabia?
- What factors influence people's perceptions of the impact of intellectual currents on moderate Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia?

- What does moderation in Islam mean? Does this body of thought have a system and principles? What are the most evident benefits of moderate Islam in Saudi Arabia?
- What is the role of Salman al-Odah in this intellectual field? What are his views regarding current liberal/secular trends in Saudi Arabia?
- What are the most important concepts and tools for building a culture of awareness and dialogue between different intellectual currents?
- What is the scope for intellectual dialogue between Islamists on the one hand, and the various other intellectual currents on the other?

1.5 Literature review

Many studies have taken place regarding the historical and political contexts in Saudi Arabia, as reviewed by Joas Wagemakers and Mari Wankanie in their research report “Saudi Arabia between conservatism accommodation and reform” (January, 2012). This study discusses political and intellectual life in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the Saudi vision in terms of the history of Saudi Arabia and its civilisation. Since my research focuses in some depth on the issue of present intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia, including the historical background of each current in Saudi Arabia, I will also discuss the first emergence of these intellectual currents in Saudi society, and the main reasons for this emergence. The historical and political context in Saudi Arabia and its effect on intellectuals and students has attracted other researchers. These include Abdulaziz Al-Khudr, in “Saudi Arabia – A Biography of a Nation and a Society: A Reading into the Country’s Experience of a Third of a Century of Intellectual, Political and Developmental Transformations” (2011) and Umar bin Ibrahim Al-Zubaidi in “The Saudi Mosaic: Philosophical, Political and Doctrinal/Sectarian thinking in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” (2011). These works concentrate rather on the detailed history behind the principles of political thought in Saudi Arabia. In addition, they discuss life in Saudi Arabia and its history, since oil was discovered. They also present the country’s religious and cultural ideologies and their influence on Saudi society in terms of reconciling struggles and differences, whether cultural, political or religious, between the intellectual groups in the country.

Therefore, one aim of my study is to discuss liberal and religious thinking and to illustrate the ideologies in Saudi Arabia, since the two studies mentioned above concentrate on the political circumstances, viewing the intellectual currents and their different forms and stages as ways of resolving issues between the different currents. They also gather material on the variety of religious, intellectual and political thought in Saudi Arabia, from their roots in the past to their development today; they address the diversity of current approaches and their symbols, both constant and changeable, in the local intellectual context. They also put the different religious schools into perspective and look at the differences that surround politics and the law. However, in my research I will focus more on Saudi Arabia's background in terms of its history from the 1980s to the present, in order to highlight the political and religious system as well as its impacts on intellectual and liberal thought in Saudi society.

The historical context of Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century attracted a French researcher, Charles Saint-Pro, who wrote "Islam L'avenir de la tradition –entre revolution et occidentalisation" "The future of Islamic tradition- between revolution and Westernisation" (2010), which traces the course of Salafist thought in Saudi Arabia, starting with the doctrines of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab and shows how his ideas and thinking permeated Saudi society. This book is focused on the nature of the dispute between the various Islamic schools of thought and intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia, a theme that will play a significant role in the present study.

Another important study is "Najd, the Salafi Reform Movement: Social, Political and Religious Conditions during the Three Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi Arabian State", written by Al Juhany Uwaidah (1983). In this research, the author discusses the different political settings in Saudi Arabia and the state of the country before the appearance of the Wahhabi current by studying the climate, environment and Najd society, as well as other influential factors. My study differs from this significantly, in that I will be paying greater attention to the main intellectual and religious ideas circulating in Saudi Arabia at present, starting from what Dr Salman al-'Odah has to say as the country's most prominent representative of moderate Islamic thought.

Dr Aziz-Al-Azmah-narrates the history of Islam, including the political and social life of modern Islam, in his book 'Islam and Modernity' (1993). The conflict between fundamentalist Islam and the West are highlighted by the concept of fatwa. This book examines how much of this antipathy between the two cultures is based on shared romantic notions of unchanging cultural identity. Al-Azmah shows that, in fact, Islamic fundamentalism represents a break with important aspects of Islamic tradition and should be seen as a general characteristic of populist nationalism. Using his knowledge of history and the intellectual life of Islamic societies, Al-Azmah calls for a deeper understanding of the way in which the term 'Islam' is used in politics, society and history. This benefits the current study by focusing on the historical, political and religious context in Saudi Arabia, which will be the second chapter of this thesis; it also develops a deeper understanding of some intellectual currents from their history, as Dr Azmah discussed.

Many studies have been carried out focusing on Wahhabi thought, including its roles and practices. Jonas Otterbeck in his article "Wahhabi ideology of social control versus a new publicness in Saudi Arabia" (2012) focuses on Saudi social and religious heritage, its history and economy, in order to understand the meaning of Wahhabi doctrine. He also discusses some of the current social issues in Saudi society. His article is helpful for explaining the significant role of Wahhabi thought in Saudi Arabia, while making a distinction between current religious conservatives, on the one hand, and the emerging intellectual or liberal trends, on the other. This is useful for this study as it further explores the motives of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia.

Another important study focusing on Wahhabi thought is "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?" (2009) By Dr Ahmad Moussalli, a professor of Islamic studies at the American University in Beirut. Mousalli illustrates a number of opposing trends in modern Islam, such as Wahhabism, Islamism, and Islamic radicalism, in order to compare, contrast and understand the logic underlying moderate and radical thought. His comparative study, contrasting traditional currents of Salafism, and other radical doctrines with moderate and liberal trends, provides an avenue for further research.

One of the most important books about Shari'a and the application of Islamic law in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and which shows the extent of the effect of the Sunni Salafi thought on Saudi laws is the book "Islamic Law and Legal System" studies of Saudi Arabia", (2000) By Vegal, Frank E. The writer sheds light on the concept of Islamic law in Saudi Arabia and how this law derives its principles from the Sunni Salafi doctrine in Saudi Arabia. This study shares with this book a focus on understanding Salafi thought in Saudi Arabia, which is studied in Chapter Three of this study. When categorising the most important currents in Saudi Arabic, I have found that Salafism was one of the most influential intellectual schools in Saudi Arabia. But the writer, Fuqal, takes a different approach from my research, as he studies how to apply these Islamic laws in Saudi society and the main consequences of applying them.

Contemporary Islamic ideas in Saudi Arabia have attracted many scholars, from religious movements in particular. Among the first studies was Dr Khaled Al-Mashouh's book "Religious Currents in Saudi Arabia Ranging from Salafism to Jihadism 'al-Qa'idah' and what Lies between them", (2012). In this book, Dr Mashouh presents the most important religious doctrines in Saudi Arabia, starting with Salafist thought in its various manifestations, moving on to the views of the Suroriya, Jaamiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwaani) and ending with those of the 'modernists' and liberals. Mashouh reveals the most important principles constituting each intellectual current and considers the effect that each set of doctrines has had on Saudi society. The difference between this study and the present one is that Dr Mashouh presents only religious thoughts in Saudi Arabia, whilst this study presents and analyses liberal and secular thoughts in Saudi Arabia as well. This study also has a complete chapter on moderate thought in Saudi Arabia, which includes Dr Salman al-'Odah, and highlights the reasons behind the fluctuating character of moderation, which Dr Khalid's book does not touch upon. Another scholar who is interested in both religious and liberal elements of Saudi Islamic thought is Dr Waleed bin Abdullah Al-Huwayreeni, whose book is called "Transformation among Islamists: From the Flames of September to the Spring of Revolutions" (2012). He examines key factors behind the intellectual changes among Islamists in Saudi Arabia in the wake of the Arab Spring. Unlike this book, the

present study will present religious thought, and conceptions in Saudi Arabia, whether religious or liberal, systematically and with analysis, beginning with the reasons why these notions entered the Saudi Arabian consciousness. I will also analyse these notions by citing their fundamental assumptions and attitudes. In this study, I will compare the Wahhabi doctrine, in its different forms, and the liberal trends, regarding basic religious and liberal notions in Saudi Arabia. (Referred to as 'moderate' thought by Dr Salam al-Odah in 2011).

We should commend the book *Islamists and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: Documenting and Analysing the Discourse of the Leaders of Islamic Renaissance in the period 1981-2006* by Dr Mansur al-Shamsi, which is based on his PhD thesis in the UK from 2003, and which he revised in 2006. Dr Muna Al-Sawi translated it into Arabic, and it consists of 430 pages. This book investigates the discourses of three scholars who belong to the new generation, who represent a modern, internal Sunni Islamic reformative leadership: Safar Al-Hawali, Salman Al-Odah, and Nasir Al-Umar. Being a scholarly Sunni Islamic reformative group, they represent a political intellectual power that aims to achieve political change and reform in Saudi Arabia through mediation. The book relies on quotations of those concerned with studying these scholars. It discusses the political struggle of the reformative leadership, its various stages, and extent in the period 1981-2006.

The objective of this book is to study the concepts of reformative leadership with regards to intellectual change and political reform. The author also discusses carefully and in detail the discourse of the reformative leadership from 1981, when political reform and change started to develop within this discourse. The author identifies some models and concepts that the three scholars dealt with, such as Islamic Sunni jurisprudence in general and Islamic political jurisprudence in particular. The jurisprudence of the reformative leadership delves deep into Islamic Sunni jurisprudence and Islamic legal political works, old and new. The author aims to provide a better understanding by clarifying how the reformative leadership took a pioneering role in the movement for political change and reform.

In my current research, I agree with some of the concepts that the book discusses and disagree with others. The direction of the book is political, as it aims to clarify the drivers of the process of political change in the Kingdom, whereas the objective of

my research is intellectual and cultural, but through clarifying some aspects of political change that have taken place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I have referred to this in the second chapter of the thesis, mentioning that through these changes and their drivers, we can identify the most important aspect of intellectual and cultural change and development.

Additionally, the book studied the opinions of three thinkers of the Saudi renaissance — Safar Al-Hawali, Salman Al-Odah, and Nasir Al-Umar — by exploring their main inclinations and opinions that target political change, which may also include intellectual and cultural opinions. My research, on the other hand, is a more comprehensive and detailed study of the thinking of the preacher Salman Al-Odah. The aim is to study the most important changes to his mindset that took him from being a strict cleric, whose views were described as “extremist”, to one of the most prominent moderate thinkers.

An important review of the intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia is the book of "Toby Matthiesen", in which he traces the politics of the Shia in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia from the nineteenth century until the present day. This book outlines the difficult experiences of being Shia in a Wahhabi state, and casts new light on how the Shia have mobilised politically to change their position. Shia petitioned the rulers, joined secular opposition parties, and founded Islamist movements. Most Saudi Shia opposition activists profited from an amnesty in 1993 and subsequently found a place in civil society and the public sphere. But since 2011 a new Shia protest movement has again challenged the state. *The Other Saudis* shows how exclusionary state practices created an internal other and how sectarian discrimination have strengthened Shia communal identities.

This can be very helpful in understanding in depth the nature of Saudi social life and how can the Wahhabi thought controlled the society, also to focus on some of other religious movement such as Shia creed which I highlighted on both of chapter two and three of this current study.

One of the concepts that are important to this study is the renewal of Islam, as this concept includes several intellectual and religious dimensions. Muhammad Sa'id Khair Bistami authored in 1996 a book titled “The concept of renewing religion”, whose 290 pages are rich with knowledge and valuable information. Bistami’s study

investigated the concept of the sound renewal of Islam, differentiated it from wrong concepts, and explained its domains, regulations, and effects. His study also examined the reality of the renewal that was adopted by various approaches that appeared under the hegemony of modern Western civilisation to interpret religion and make align it with the present, which are known by the name of modernism.

The research is divided into three parts: the first is about the Sunni concept of renewal, the second is on renewal in modernism, and the third critiques the second.

Modernism refers to most popular concepts about religious renewal in our present time, which came about because of religion being confronted by the Latin Western civilisation. In the West in the late 19th century, a movement for renewing and developing religion to align it with the needs of the time appeared. This movement appeared within Catholicism and Protestantism, and was called modernism in the West. Judaism witnessed trends that are similar in thought, principles, and aims. Similarly, in the Muslim world, the conflict between Islam and Western civilisation led to the appearance of inclinations similar to those in the West.

The research also aims to show that there are two concepts of renewal, one of which is right and the other is wrong. The sound understanding is the Sunni concept, which means renewing religious concepts to be compatible with the needs of the present, but within the Islamic framework. The wrong concept is what modernism offers, which tries to present a mix of Islamic and pre-Islamic Arabic thought and tries to reconcile them. It uses methods of unjustified interpretation and manipulation of Islamic teaching, and it also makes concessions and justifications in the name of personal reasoning (*ijtihad*).

In my study, I have explained the correct meaning of religious renewal by discussing in detail the reformation mission that Shaikh Salman Al-Odah promoted, which is considered a historical Islamic legal mission and was meant to be political, in addition to being scientific, cultural and intellectual. The aim of my research is to highlight the beginning of a new stage of thinking and life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Talking about this reformation task of the preacher Salman Al-Odah requires tracking the concept of “religious renewal”, which is an acceptable Islamic term. The

word “renewal” relates to what is “new”, and there are three meanings that are connected and complement each other, as professor Bistami says:

- 1) Renewing something that existed before the renewal.
- 2) Renewing something that had been destroyed or corrupted and had become unsuitable.
- 3) This thing recovered its condition and position that it had before its destruction and corruption.

An important PhD thesis of the Egyptian scholar Dr Basam Albatoush “Social thought in Egypt how liberalism entered Saudi society- (2011). Although he does not directly discuss liberalism in contemporary Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia, he gives some important accounts of its development in general, such as the meaning of liberalism and its influences on the Islamic world, and he cites Saudi Arabia as an example. Another significant book on liberalism is “Liberalism in Saudi Arabia and its Arabian Gulf” by Waleed Al Romizan (2009). This considers the birth of liberalism and the most prominent thinkers and philosophers in Saudi Arabia. The difference between the present study and the above studies lies in their different aims. This study aims to clarify the liberal and religious schools of thought in Saudi Arabia in order to highlight the intellectual differences between them and the main reasons for the conflict between their representatives, trying to narrow the gap between them. The above publications, in contrast, have a political orientation. Besides showing the meaning of liberalism generally, they prefer to discuss the condition of Saudi Arabia in political terms, as suggested by the way in which they highlight the various doctrines that sprang up at every stage in its political development.

The characteristics of Saudi liberal thought have been highlighted in Richards’ article “The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia” (2003). He demonstrates the main factors and motives for the emergence of liberalism in Saudi society. In addition, he discusses the ideological debate between liberal intellectuals and thinkers from other schools.

The nationwide struggle between different ways of thinking has also been discussed by the Saudi writer Dr Ali bin Muhammed al Ruba’i in his book “The conflict

between Currents in Saudi Arabia” (2013). He deepens our understanding of the rivalry between intellectual currents by focusing on their meaning and highlights the reasons for their continuing antagonism. He goes on to examine the explicit impact of this conflict on Saudi society and on the leaders of the various schools of thought. His findings certainly enriched the discussion in Chapters Three and Four of this study, which deal with the conflict between religious and liberal currents in Saudi Arabia (Ruba'i, 2013).

Critical studies of the moderate element in Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia are of interest to a number of researchers. Among them is Ali bin Talib, in his study, “Political Stakes of Moderate Rhetoric in Relation to Contemporary Reality in Saudi Arabia” (2008). He underlines several factors in the resurgence of moderate Islamic thought in Saudi society. In addition, he studies the concept of moderate Islam and its affect and influences on Saudi society. In the present study, however, the meaning of this concept will be applied specifically to Dr Salman al Odah. Another prominent native scholar is Salman al Omari. In his “Islam as the Religion of Moderation throughout Its History” (2009), he argues that many scholars, Saudi philosophers in particular, have a good understanding of moderation in Islamic thought, now more than ever, in light of the conflict between current traditional and liberal trends in Saudi Arabia. My study will seek to define the meaning of moderate Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia, and to show how Saudi people benefit from it.

Moderate Islamic thought is discussed by Abdulazize Oada in “Islam: a Religion of Moderation”(2010). Although he does not locate moderate Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia, he discusses the essential points of the meaning of moderation in Islam, giving a definition and demonstrating its influence as well as its principles and aims. The present study focuses on the concept of moderation in Saudi Islamic thought, which is a result of the major struggle between intellectual currents.

The most recent study of moderation and moderate Muslims is by Mohanad Najar, in the article “Moderation and Moderates: Criticism and Common Milestones” (2013). He divides his research into three important parts. The first part looks at the philosophy of moderation in Islamic thought, alongside its representatives, such as Dr Salman al Odah, with his vision and influence on Saudi thought. The second part is a social analysis of religious currents in Saudi Arabia. The third part, which has

significant relevance to the present study, considers the reasons for the appearance of this moderate tendency, together with the influence of moderate Islamic thinking in Saudi Arabia.

Another important work regards to the modernising trend of Islamic thought is “Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939” written by Albert Hourani, 2007. It is one of the most comprehensive studies of the modernizing trend of political and social thought in the Arab Middle East.

Albert Hourani studies the way in which ideas about politics and society changed during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, in response to the expanding influence of Europe.

His main attention is given to the movement of ideas in the Middle East. He also shows how two streams of thought, one aiming to restate the social principles of Islam, and the other to justify the separation of religion from politics, flowed into each other to create the Egyptian and Arab nationalisms of the present century.

In addition Hourani identifies intellectual dichotomies that may be extracted and applied to the Saudi context, which can help me to understand intellectual responses and their emergence, historically and politically, across the Middle East.

Also, there is an important book called “*Muted Modernists: The struggle over divine politics in Saudi Arabia*, 2015” written by Madawi Al-Rasheed. This book provides the intellectual and religious conflict between Saudi State and civil society; in addition, it has a good discussion about traditional notions of Saudi conservatism, as well as highlighting the long tradition of engagement with modernism in Saudi Arabia. The author was heavily criticized and in certain instances condemned by the Saudi regime and Wahabbi clerics due to the critical approach she took towards examining and challenging Saudi Arabia’s engagement with modernism, especially, after the Arab uprisings.

To conclude, aspects of recent intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia, in particular as understood and practiced by religious and liberal thinkers, should be further discussed to define how moderate Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia is emerging. Therefore, this research intends to determine how different currents of thought influence Saudi Islamic scholars to use a moderate tone in their judgments.

“The Time of Awakening”⁷: “Modern Islamic Movements in Saudi Arabia” (2012) by the French researcher in political sciences Stephane Lacroix, which was originally his doctoral thesis, analyses and documents the history and sociology of the formation of Islamic movements in Saudi Arabia from the middle of the twentieth century until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. This book presents a historical view of the birth of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its development. It emphasises one very important point, which this thesis analyses: how Muslim activists moved from other Arab countries to Saudi Arabia, settled there, started promoting their ideologies and joined a movement that combined politics with religion, under the name of the “Islamic Awakening”. Lacroix followed the formation of the Islamic Awakening movement in Saudi Arabia, including its intellectual and political sources and its prominent stages, movements and symbols. His praise of Salman al-Odah’s thinking is related to many issues that I have referred to in my thesis.

Lacroix presented a thesis written in French called “The Saudi Islamists, a Failed Revolt” which was published in 2010 and translated into English under the title “Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia”. In this thesis, Lacroix confined himself to highlighting the thinking of Islamic politicians, but the present study shows the religious, political and even liberal thinking to enable the reader to distinguish between each group and its intellectual stance, and then offers the most relevant solutions to reduce the intensity of intellectual conflict between different groups.

The most important part of the research is the study of Salman al-Odah’s transformation from extremism to moderation. The Saudi researcher Turki al-Dakeel wrote a book called “Salman al-Odah from Prison to Enlightenment” (2011), in which he said that it is not only Salman al-Odah’s transformation that needs close examination, but the character of this preacher who has had a great impact over a number of decades on people from different backgrounds.

⁷ Dr Salman al-Odah regards this as one of the most important books, which impartially embarked on intellectual awakening in Saudi Arabia, despite having some reservations about its effects WAEL, M. 2012b. *The speech of the claimant was the culmination of the awakening movement* [Online]. Islam today.

Al-Dakeel's book is distinct in its precise analysis of al-Odah's character before and after his time in prison. It mentions the most important transformations in al-Odah's character. The present study has mentioned the most important issues that clearly show the intellectual transformation of al-Odah, as well as the reasons behind this transformation, which al-Dakeel did not refer to. It is important to mention the reasons that created this intellectual transformation, as it may help the reader understand the reasons that led al-Odah from extremism to moderation.

In 2010, a French book by Charles Saint-Prot was published called "Islam: L'avenir de la Tradition Entre Révolution et Occidentalisation" and was translated into English and Arabic under the title "Islam: The Future of Tradition between Revolution and Westernisation" in English, and "Islam: The Future of Salafism between Revolution and Westernisation" in Arabic.

The book consists of three main sections. In the first section, the writer deals with the true Salafism from the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) up to the eighteenth century. The second section deals with Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, the reformer of the Salafi movement, the spread of his reformist call and the establishment of the first Saudi state.

I have discussed in my thesis some aspects of the message of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab and the impact of the alliance between him and the founder of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the spread of Salafism among all educational institutions in the country. The Salafi ideology spread in Saudi Arabia with the support of the government, while the Kingdom benefitted from the religious support of Shaikh Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab and his followers. In the third section, the book deals with Salafism and the challenges of the modern world, and also deals with the past, present and future of Salafism. That is to say, it looks at the most important stages that Salafism went through, including the calls for reform, especially after September 11, 2001. I have referred to this reformation in the third chapter of the present study, where I blame the traditional Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia for the religious pressure that its followers have faced and its lack of attempts to reform in line with this new era. This has led to some violent acts, such as those of September 11, 2001, which saw the participation of a large number of Saudi Salafis. With this clear structure, Saint-Prot's book used a similar approach to the present study, making it

an important reference on the first, second and third stages of the Saudi state, and the features of each stage, consisting of the most prominent Islamic movements and an analysis of their positions in religious and intellectual circles in Saudi Arabia.

Salman al-Odah has written many books, but his book “The Childhood of a Heart – Before Remembering and Beyond Forgetting”, published in 2011, is considered one of his most important, and helped me to follow the intellectual conduct of this preacher. It includes information about his lifestyle in the early years, scholars that influenced him most during the early stages of his life and his analysis of intellectual issues both before and after he was sent to prison in 1994. This analysis helped me uncover the issues that affected the thinking of al-Odah and led to the intellectual transformation that resulted in much debate about his personality. Analysing some of the cultural issues that al-Odah presented in this book, they are linked to the period in which he dealt with them, which has helped me to realise the actual reasons behind his transformation. “The Childhood of a Heart” is considered one of the most important books on Salman al-Odah and his aspirations, concerning religious, intellectual and even social issues.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research study involves interviews with some scholars and philosophers from different backgrounds and schools of thought in Saudi Arabia, and I had planned to make the interviews in Saudi Arabia, but due to the sensitive nature of my research study as well as the political issues that Dr al-Odah has with the Saudi government, the Saudi embassy requested that I do not make these interviews and I complied so unfortunately they are not included as part of my research.

This limitation has led me to base my research on a content analysis approach. I focused on Dr al-Odah’s work and contribution to the Saudi society by comparing his works and writings before his intellectual transformation and subsequently after his transformation.

I have highlighted the most important features of his old attitude through an examination and reading of these works; his books, articles, interviews and other sources.

After this I explored his works after his transformation and whether this changed his level of influence and the significance of his contribution to the society.

However Dr al-Odah is one aspect or example, although significant, to the recent changes and modern socio-political construct of Saudi society. A great number of books, articles, journals, newspapers, magazines, and electronic sources focus on the intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia, including the moderate tendency. Data from these sources will be analysed and interpreted in depth. Once gathered and analysed, the primary and secondary data will be used to answer the research questions, which encapsulate the main lines of enquiry of the thesis. In addition, the methodology used should be clearly linked to the explicit hypotheses, predictions or questions that formed part of the stated research problem.

It is clear that using analytical and descriptive methods to evoke the political and intellectual life in Saudi Arabia requires all the relevant information to be studied. Furthermore, any problems arising in the analysis should be recognised and tackled appropriately.

Further important methods for the development of this thesis include the demonstration of relevant information that had been acquired by presenting the key summary data within the body of the text. The data collection should be carried out in a well-structured way, so that a clear presentational sequence unfolds and the reference sources that relate to the topic should be cited. Furthermore, specific terminology and words that may have some ambiguity should be defined and discussed.

My thesis aims to highlight the most salient observations that I have made during this research. Of particular importance and relevance are the new ideas, which may hold a possible solution to the intellectual tensions between different schools of thought in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Finally, by predicting possible trends in the future of Saudi intellectual thought, potentially foreseeing how moderate Islamic thought may positively impact on relationships between the intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia, I hope that this may help to open the door towards a new kind of Saudi society, away from struggle and intellectual conflict and towards toleration of a variety of different thoughts and intellectual trends.

1.7 Study approach and methodology

Studying the intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia, with all their differences and impacts on society, is mostly important and worthy of study. Multiplicity of thought can be one of the most significant factors of cultural enhancement and development of Saudi civilization, improving people's thinking, through exchanging ideas between different schools of thought, as well as developing cognitive skills between intellectual and religious movements.

To obtain the data, my fieldwork research study is based on mixed methods, textual, combined, analytical and descriptive methods.

The first method is textual or literary and it includes a literature review of related references. This provides a literary background involving reading, analyzing, interpreting, comparing and challenging different viewpoints and schools of thought. Quotations and viewpoints will be cited accordingly, and a full list of references will be included.

The second method is a combination of analytical and descriptive methods.

The analytical method depends on deep and critical discovery of specific attitudes, approaches, and behavior of someone, or of specific phenomenon. This method involves analysing books and articles that have been written by a selection of scholars and thinkers from different backgrounds, highlighting their variant viewpoints and attitudes. The material thus collected is subject to a descriptive and critical analysis, referring to any information that relates to the research.

The descriptive method is also carried out to obtain data necessary to the current research. It serves a particular function in investigating Dr Salman al-Odah's intellectual journey, underlining his gradual transformation from extreme and puritan dogma to moderate, tolerant school of thought.

This method also highlights the main reasons and direct factors of Dr al-Odah's intellectual transformation that made him one of the most renowned thinkers in the Arab world, promoting moderation.

The intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia are worthy of research study, and much of the data has been archived and covered using these two important and effective methods; but there are still plenty of issues and topics related to my research that require significant and further study.

1.8 Research limitation

The research limitation is divided into two main parts.

Firstly, temporal limitations which is undertaken in chapter two of this thesis (“Historical, Political and social context of Saudi Arabia”). I have highlighted the three periods of the Saudi state: the first Saudi state (1744-1818), the second Saudi state (1824- 1891) and modern Saudi Arabia (1902- present), including historical, political, and intellectual elements of Saudi life during these three periods. This is vital to make a comparative study highlighting the most important factors that led to the emergence of a variety of schools of thought in the Saudi society, following and analysing specific timing of their emergence.

In addition, I have highlighted Dr al-Odah’s life and intellectual transformation, which has a positive impact on Saudi thinking, in chapters Four, Five, and Six. I have also divided his contribution and influences on Saudi society into three periods: before (1994), his time in prison (1994-1999), and after imprisonment (1999- current time). This temporal limitation led me to follow his thought, ideas, and attitudes towards some issues in each of this three stages.

Secondly is spatial limitation. In this study, I have researched the religious, politico-religious, and liberal movements in Saudi Arabia, analysing their formation, subdivision, and main differences between them. I mainly highlighted movements in Saudi Arabia. I also referred to some external currents which had a direct impact on Saudi society, or they have intellectual and dogmatic connection with movements in Saudi Arabia. This is covered in chapter three of this study.

This research is not intended to judge the integrity and validity of the movements, or their faults. Studying the intellectual movements and researching different schools of thought will be as neutral as possible. I relied on narrative style in the most parts of this thesis because I depended on historical references. However, I have also used an analytical style explaining the intellectual and religious sides, and social life in modern Saudi Arabia which I personally experienced. Therefore, I used analysing, illustrating, and I gave comments and some suggestions related to my research. I have been keen not to judge, right and wrong, any movement, and I followed scientific research rules. I have also avoided extreme opinion or strong statements.

1.9 Definition of Terminology

This research study uses an array of descriptive labels, which require defining these terms in order to place them in a usable spectrum. These terms are extremely problematic at the level of usage and application. Thus, the thesis theoretically deconstruct some important terms as following:

Fundamentalist

Fundamentalist means something that is committed to fundamentalism. It is a religious movement that is distinguished by its strict belief in the literal interpretation of the religious text. Fundamentalism normally has a religious element pointing to firm adherence to a group of religious beliefs that cannot be reduced. Islamic fundamentalism is as an Islamic movement that calls for the adherence to the ways of the past and attempts to go back to the basic principles of the religion and live in a similar way to the way that the Prophet and his companions lived. They adopt strict adherence to fundamental Islamic doctrines and practices that are often linked to the desire to increase the impact Islamic Shariah in politics and society. They abide by the external meaning of the text and its literality and mostly reject having different opinions. They fight the non-Islamic influence of the West, which the West and liberal and modernist Islamists call for. The Islamic fundamentalism has emerged in several countries, and usually, the Wahhabi version is propagated as Saudi fundamentalism.

Modernist

Saudi Islamic modernists are a group of Islamists who want to reinterpret Islam, reread its text and reinterpret it in a continuous and flexible way so that Muslims can develop institutions of education, politics and law in agreement with the West but within an Islamic context. They think that several enlightened, intellectual, political and secular Western studies can be accepted Islamically or be reshaped in an Islamic form (Khamran Talattof and Moaddel, 1999).

Revivalist

Revivalists are people who call for an Islamic revival and a return to Islamic popularity, especially through Islamic preaching gatherings, by regular calls to renew the adherence to fundamental Islamic principles, and to rebuild society in accordance with the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, most of

which is a modern Islamic trend. The concept of renewal has played a very important role in the modern Islamic awakening in Saudi Arabia, and the arguments of this trend in Saudi Arabia are of a reformist and political nature (AbuKhalil, 2017).

Liberal

Liberalism in Saudi Arabia is a trend that was established on the ideas of freedom and equality. It is a trend that emerged as an opponent to the Islamic trends. It is a trend that does not have any political aims at all (Alhabab et al., 2013). They are a group of intellectuals and elites Saudis who are influenced by liberalism in general, and they have control of the media channels in Saudi Arabia, such as newspapers, publishing houses, radio channels and satellite channels, and they have control of some governmental departments as well.

The liberal trend in Saudi Arabia focuses on social demands more than political demands. It focuses on women's rights, resists the influence of religious institutes such as General Presidency of the Promotion of Virtue and the Presentation of Vices, supports the arts and calls for easing the restrictions on art in general and in Saudi cinemas in particular (Alomani, 2012).

Traditionalist

Traditionalists are those who call for traditionalism, which is to abide by Islamic beliefs and traditional practices that derive from the Qur'an and Sunnah (Halverson, 2010). They consider it important to defend them and abide by their traditions, observing complete obedience to the ruler/Sultan on the basis of it being a religious duty, without any attempt of moderation.

Conservative

A conservative Saudi is a traditional person who wants adhere to religion, principles and social practices, and does not to be influenced by the West, especially in matters that oppose Islam, by preserving the traditional religious situation and social customs, and encourages the existence of the traditional social institutions in the context of culture and civilization (Al-Badah, 2010).

1.10 The theory of social movements

The intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia are a mixture of traditional movements that were adopted by different sects before the emergence of Saudi Arabia, and new

movements that emerged due to internal and external factors, such as political issues and matters related to the structure of the state, some of which benefited from contact with other movements, or were influenced by non-Saudi intellectuals who came to work in Saudi Arabia.

To understand the formation and the structures of these intellectual movements and their demands, the theory of social movements is being used, which is considered one of the most important methods of bringing about political and intellectual change in society by adapting the collective action of these movements. So, it is very important to examine the formation of these social movements and how they work (Staggenborg, 2011).

Initially, social movements come into existence when a group of individuals develops resentment for a specific situation. They believe that collective action is the best way to overcome this situation. One of the most important components of social movements is that they always seek to bring about change or to resist change in a society; in other words, they try to affect the social order in which they live, (Toch, 1966) Pj 3-5. As an example, Saudi Arabia is witnessing an increase in the influence and impact of intellectual movements, whether they are of political, social, economic, cultural or even international nature. These movements differ greatly in their experiences and interaction with the country and society. Since the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia have become an interesting phenomenon for many researchers and specialists in Jihadi movements, due to the influence of these movements on Muslim minds. But these movements have not become part of official organisations and official parties (Ramzy, 2015).

The formation of some of these movements was the result of inherited traditions before the emergence of Saudi Arabia (Al-Mashouh, 2012). The Sufi, Shiite and traditional Salafi movements existed before and continued after the emergence of Saudi Arabia. Some of them developed and used social activities to demand reforms from the state. Furthermore, the emergence of the Sufi movement was the result of support from the Ottoman Empire. It continued to spread socially among the families in certain areas, such al-Hijaz and al-Ahsa, but it is a silent and inactive movement that does not have any political orientation and has not brought about any reform. It

is confined to hidden rituals that are carried out in houses and on private farms (Al-Fawzan, 2005).

Some of the elites of the Shiite movement, which inhabits the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, have been influenced by the teachings of non-Saudi Shiites and have called for reforms and demanded special rights to be given to them. They even called for a separate state and have had violent confrontations with the authorities for several years (al-Hassan, 2010). They have carried out several demonstrations and killed Saudi security personnel. Some of the Shiites were killed and arrested in an attempt by the Saudi state to stop the Shiite violence, bring about security, and arrest the extremist Shiites who had carried out terrorist operations or supported terrorism. This resulted in many protests that were covered on the social media. There has been a long series of political events that have led to the development and emergence of the Shiite movement, and they have been covered by intellectual, social and political studies (Assaf, 2013).

The Salafi movement, on the other hand, with many of its elites continuing to follow the traditional way, remains a scholarly and Islamic mission calling for monotheism and the abandonment of innovation (Al-Mashouh, 2012). However, in the 1990s, a new Salafi movement with a political tendency appeared, and that is the Saruri movement, which demanded the implementation of several reformist issues of different natures in the internal and external stand of the authority. They demanded rights because of the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood on them, but in a modern Salafi style. As a result of this, the Jami movement emerged, which is against the Salafi movement. It prohibited the formation of any political or social activity that went against or criticized authority (Al-noaim, 2012).

Alongside the intellectual, cultural, informational and social openness, sending students abroad and hard-line religious movements, a liberal movement emerged calling for the free mixture of men and women, allowing women to drive cars, the existence of cinemas and being open to different ideologies than Salafism. But the liberal movement does not have any significant desire for democracy or political reform; its goals were limited to certain social issues. There have been several debates, conflicts and conflicting stances within these groups on different occasions (Ghaithi, 2010b).

It is worth mentioning that some Salafi movements existed in the Juhayman al-Otaybi group (which seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca) in 1979, al-Qaida group and some of those who joined ISIS. With the Arab Spring, the constitutional reformist movement emerged from different groups and individuals who were actively using social media to call for strikes and demonstrations, and they formed groups and parties, but they were weak and of informal nature.

We can focus on six social movements that are active in intellectual, cultural and political movements, and that do not have any official institutional body because the existence of political parties and trade unions, and organising demonstration and strikes, are not permissible (Menoret, 2016). These social movements are summarised in the next section.

There are some related

1.10.1 The Sunni Islamist Movements, or Islamic Awakening

Islamic Awakening is one of the earliest social movements in Saudi Arabia. It represents a mixture of the Muslim Brotherhood from different Arab countries and some Saudi activists with Islamic political backgrounds. Some of exiled Muslim Brotherhood members from Egypt and Syria came to Saudi Arabia from 1950 onwards. Historically speaking, the royal family of Saud welcomed them, and but it prevented them from forming the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood formally. So, the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood were divided in four informal groups: two in the central region of the state, one in the eastern region and another in al-Hijaz. From the 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood were active in the Saudi educational sector and media channels. They criticized the influence of foreign experts in state institutions.

Some Salafi groups and Muslim Brotherhood groups emerged as part of the Awakening in the 1960s and 1970s. At the beginning, and by using revolutionary thought, they started to reinterpret some of the religious texts from which the state derives legitimacy. They criticized some of the formal religious institutes and called for political reforms, which developed in some cases wherein extremists used violence against the state and its foreign supporters.

Salafi thought tends to reject organized political work and calls for self-reform in order to reform society. However, the Muslim Brotherhood believes in organisational politics as a means to reform the society and the state. The

Awakening consists of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi, which means it falls between the two ideologies and has more moderate reformist aims based on Salafi beliefs.

The position of Saudi Arabia in cooperating with the United States and Europe to protect the region and prevent chaos and war has had a big impact on reformists who consider the regime's position as a gateway to the reoccupation of the Middle East. However, major scholars have made a religious decree permitting foreign help according to considerable legal evidence (Al-Rasheed, 2006).

For this reason, the reformist activists participated in the protest movements that emerged during the First Gulf war, 1990-1991, as Saudi Arabia was the base for Western armies. Saudi Islamists called for severing military ties with the United States and Europe, as well as for the independence of the jurisdiction, respect for human rights, freedom of expression, the prohibition of torture and the end of corruption. In response to this, the state strengthened its power by adopting a fundamental law in 1992 and crushed the Islamist movement after 1993. After releasing them from prison towards the end of the 1990s, some of the activists were permitted to participate in additional reform policies, but then they called one more time for political changes during the long Arab Spring in 2003, when they supported the constitutional system. They called one more time to respect human rights. The 2000-2005 shelling against the West led to widespread arrest of some of them (Al-Rasheed, 2015).

Some of the reformists participated in municipal elections in 2005 wherein some Islamist candidates won, in the first election to be carried out since the beginning of the 1960s. They managed to overcome the strict election rules that prevented forming coalitions among candidates and where the platforms were clearly based on religion. In response to that, the Islamists and the Salafists among them who won several seats and formed a secretive coalition using networks of activists. But these elections did not bring about any political gains. Voters could only vote for half of the members of the municipal councils; the government appointed the other half. They could not make any changes with these positions (Pascal Menoret, 2009) pj. 51-75, 515-33.

In 2011, on the eve of the Arab Uprisings, the Awakening activists published many petitions to King Abdullah, among which “Toward a State of Rights and Institutions” called for the introduction of elections and more Salafism, but with a call to reform. They supported the ousted president of Egypt, Mohamed (Al-Rasheed, 2015), PJ 35–40. In February 2012, many Salafi activists formed al-Ummah Party (hizb al-umma), despite the fact the all political parties were banned. They called for elections and the separation of powers, which led to the arrest of all founding members.

1.10.2 The Association for Political and Civil Rights, or HASM

The most important political movement that came out from Sunni Islamism is The Association for Political and Civil Rights, or HASM, an abbreviation for determination. Senior activists from Awakening, defenders of human rights and civil rights activists, founded the movement in 2009. They revived considering Islamism as an activity of civil society, and they outlined a vision for political reforms. The movement called to put an end to repression, respecting the rights of everyone, including political prisoners, and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. HASM activists made direct and non-violent work the core of their strategy. According to the Islamic activist Abdullah al-Hamid, “verbal struggle” and “peaceful struggle” should be the only manner of opposition. The party members criticize both the system of providing private councils to the ruler, which the religious institute calls for, and the repression of political activities that religious figures ignore. According to them, the repression that is being practised by the state and the ban on peaceful protests are the main two factors behind the rise of political violence in the period between 2003 and 2004, when al-Qaida launched a series of attacks in the Arabian Peninsula against Western military and security experts inside Saudi Arabia. The public persecution of HASM activists in 2011-2012 became an opportunity to work in groups and call for reforms. The activists used it as a platform to criticize repression and to voice their opinions about the political reforms. All the founding members of movement were put on trial, and they got long prison sentences from Riyadh Specialized Criminal Court, which was founded in 2008 to decide on cases of terrorism. This court dissolved HASM in 2013.

1.10.3 The Shiite Islamist Movement

Most Saudi Shiites live in the oil-rich eastern region of Saudi Arabia. Although the elites of the Saudi state, most of the time, depict the Shiite Islam as an Iranian agency, in fact the movement emerged in the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala in the 1950s and 1960s, and in Kuwait in the 1970s. Saudi Shiites are linked to the international Shirazi Movement, which is headed by the Iraqi scholar Muhammad al-Shirazi, who spent the last thirty years of his life in Lebanon, Kuwait and Iran. The Saudi Shirazis protested in 1979 against repression and being marginalized, and they formed the Islamic Revolution Union in the Arabian Peninsula, which then was renamed in 1991 to become the Saudi Reformist Movement. It became close to the Awakening and the royal family at the same time. The only Saudi Shiite group that is linked to Tehran is Saudi Hezbollah (Hezbollah of Hejaz), which is smaller, and was founded in 1987. They carried out violent operations inside Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s and the mid-1990s (Matthiesen, 2014).

Activists from the Saudi Reformist Movement signed national petitions calling for political reforms during the Arab Spring in 2003. They published their own petitions, Partners in the Nation, calling for official recognition of Shiite jurisprudence, and for all citizens, and to improve the representation of Shiites in the administration and courts. During the 2005 municipal elections, the Shiite Muslims won most of the contested seats in the city of Qatif, and half of the contested seats in the city of Hofuf.

In 2006, protests broke out in the eastern region in response to Israel's war in Lebanon and in support of Hezbollah. Dozens of protesters were arrested. The clashes that took place between the Shiite and Sunni pilgrims in 2009 in al-Madihan al-Munawwarah led to large demonstrations in the eastern region.

During the uprising in Bahrain in 2011, Saudi Shiites demonstrated in the street in support of the demonstrations in the neighbouring countries. The rebellious Nimr al-Nimr led several protests in the city of Awwamiyya, which spread to the cities of Qatif, Safwa and Hofuf (Matthiesen, 2014). The street protests lasted for a long time, which in turn caused the security forces to restrict their activities in 2014. They arrested tens of the activists and imprisoned them for their disobedience and for insulting symbols of the royal family, such as the prince Naif, may Allah have mercy

on him, and the prince Muhammad bin Naif. Between 2011 and 2014, the uprising in the eastern region was one of most distinguishing factors of the Saudi version of the Arab Spring in 2011.

1.10.4 The Anti-Corruption Movement

The Anti-Corruption Movement was formed during and after the severe floods that hit the city of Jeddah in 2009, 2011 and 2015. On 25th of November of 2009, or “black Wednesday”, heavy rains caused unprecedented floods that swept the city of Mahinah, causing the death of 100-400 people and the destruction of houses and infrastructure, especially in low-income areas. Activists and local residents helped in the affected areas because most of the civil defence and fire fighters were in Mecca to serve and help the pilgrims. In Jeddah, networks of pro-Palestinians activists, 61 environmental activists and Sunni Muslims supported the flood victims.

The scope of the disaster led to a collective search for answers in the city of Jeddah regarding the reason for the disaster. Very soon, the activists pointed the finger at the municipality, which they accused of negligence and fraud, as it gave building permits indiscriminately without updating the drainage systems and implementing safety and security conditions. Appropriate drainage systems covered only around 8% of Jeddah. On 28th of November 2009, the lawyer and activist Waleed Abu al-Khair filed a case against the Municipality of Jeddah on behalf of the victims’ families (Fadil, 2010). The crowd’s anger agitated King Abdullah, so he formed a commission of inquiry, and tens of local officials were sent to prison (al-Sibyani, 2013).

1.10.5 The Anti-Repression Movement

After the September 11th attacks, Riyadh cooperated in the war the United States led against terrorism, in particular by inviting FBI agents to Saudi Arabia to collect evidence and participate in interrogating terror suspects (J. Harrington, 2004). When al-Qaida launched an anti-Western campaign by carrying out several bombings between 2000-2005 in the Arabian Peninsula, many of its members disappeared and many more were arrested by the security services.

In 2010, there were around 12,000-30,000 political prisoners in the state. Because of this, some of the prisoners’ families became active and demanded the release of

these prisoners, improved prison conditions, or a reduction in their prison terms. They demanded their release or a trial (Alsharif, 2011).

The Anti-Repression movement began in October 2003 when a large demonstration took place at the first human rights conference that was held by the Ministry of the Interior. The families and relatives of political prisoners organised dozens of demonstrations and strikes in the mosques of Riyadh, in front of the Ministry of the Interior and in several cities, especially the central region. The protestors staged dozens of protests and regularly confronted the police. These protests continued during the Arab Uprising in 2011. In early 2011, for example, several women marched to the Ministry of the Interior calling for fair trials for their relatives, and among the slogans they chanted were “Release the innocent ones” and “Where are our children?” (Al-Rasheed, 2015) Pj 47.

The state doubled its security measures after the Arab Uprising. The Royal Decree of 2014 defines terrorism as “Any act... aimed to harm public order or the safety of society, and the continuity of the state... or insulting the reputation of the state and its prestige”. In the same year, the Ministry of the Interior announced a list of terrorist acts. Among them are “to spread atheism”, “to have doubts in the principles of Islam that this state is build upon” (article 1); “to pledge alliance to any political party, organization, movement, group or individual” (article 2); “to support or become a member of or show sympathy with or to publicize or to participate with any organisations or groups or movements or gatherings or political parties, including the social media networks” (article 3); “to call for or to participate in or publicize or to encourage strikes or demonstrations or meetings or declarations” (article 8); “to attend conferences or gatherings or meetings... that may lead to...disagreements in society” (article 9). So, according to these broad definitions, any form of organized activity, even if it’s peaceful, might be labelled as an act of terrorism and division in society. The Muslim Brotherhood itself is called a terrorist organisation as it follows rules that are contrary to the aforementioned laws.

1.10.6 The Labour Movement

Trade unions were banned in Saudi Arabia in 1947, and strikes were banned in 1956, after Aramco was paralyzed due to the successive worker action that took place in

1945, 1953 and 1956. In spite of the long interim period, strikes have revived due to the deterioration of the social situation in the state, especially among the unqualified workers and university graduates, and the decline in oil prices.

Since the end of the 1990s, unemployed graduates, school and hospital staff, public utilities workers and even Mecca Grand Mosque staff started organising collective action and holding strikes in protest of unemployment, low wages, unpaid wages and privatisation. The economical restructuring and privatisation provided new reasons to protest against the current working conditions (al-Quwaifili, 2012). Private companies are more sensitive than state-run companies when it comes to losing working days due to strikes, or to the existence of any issue that may threaten its operations. For example, the staff of Etihad Etisalat carried out a strike in 2011 against low wages, and spread to other areas of the company and forced it to revise its wage structure (al-Quwaifili, 2012).

Workers in the construction sector, most of whom are foreign, started protesting.

Employees of the Saudi Binladin Group, one of the premier construction companies in the state, have staged many strikes since the end of the 1990s in protest of low wages, late payment and the termination of contracts. Thousands of Binladin workers staged strikes and demonstrations in 2016 (Donaghy, 2016).

Four social movements, the Sunni and Shiite Awakening Movements, the Anti-Corruption Movement and the Labour Movement have been successful in the last ten years, though at a small scale. They managed to win in the 2005 municipality elections in many cities and brought corrupt government employees to justice, and forced institutions and companies to look at their workers' demands.

The Islamists took part in the 2005 election campaign, but Muslim movements were not welcomed and municipal councils have limited importance. Their victory was proof of their ability to mobilise. It also showed that, instead of boycotting imperfect elections, Islamists observed election procedures while working with complicated election rules. The participation of Islamists in the elections and their long-term support of constitutional monarchy is proof that they believe in elections as a legitimate tool of reformation.

Government officials delayed the first meetings of the municipal councils for more than a year, which emphasises how insignificant they are (Intikhabat al-Riyadh,

2005). Because of this, it was said that that the turnout in the 2005 election was low, lower than the 2011 and 2015 elections. At the same time, and due to the weak role of the winners of these elections, the state stepped up its campaign against organized political activity and fought against it, and has defined it as terrorism since 2014.

The main reason behind the failure of the protest movements in Saudi Arabia is their incapability to unite over geographical and political boundaries. The Sunni Islamic groups are divided, and so are the Shiite groups. Most of the time, anti-repression and anti-corruption movements are locally based. In general, protests movements in Saudi Arabi are not ready to resist the strong regime of the state, and so no one dares to violate the law, even lightly. The legal position of Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, which is supported by the Supreme Scholars Committee's fatwas in favour of the state's positions and decisions, has made the public submissive and obedient, especially since the economical and religious situation in Saudi Arabi is very good and people live in a state of peace, security and good living conditions. They also fear the experiences of other Arab countries, which have been destroyed or have experienced wars and disturbances during the Arab Uprising, especially when the region is experiencing several internal and external conflicts on different levels, which have added to the recent unstable economic conditions.

1.11 Modernity

The term "modernity" refers to the emergence of a group of Islamists that tries to form a new ideological and intellectual stance against the current traditional ideology and liberalism by presenting a modern alternative that is in line with a new understanding of Shariah texts by re-interpreting and analysing them, which is agreeable to some liberal and modern thesis (Moaddel, 2005).

Due to the spread of globalisation, Islamists and others have been influenced by new facts. Their thinking, approaches and methods in dealing with the new era have changed. This emerged from an attempt to merge Islam, civil rights and freedoms and led to a focus on rights and not only duties, to accept diversity, for tolerance and equality between men and women, to give women rights, to be culturally and intellectually open, to deal in a flexible manner with history and reality, to look to the future instead of focusing on the past, and to call for democracy, civil rights,

rationality and progress. They have found interpretations of Islamic texts that support their position. In the wake of the changes in the world order, globalisation, the communication revolution and the diversity of modernity and post-modernity, some Islamic groups have reshaped themselves and their identity to serve their goals and mission.

Many theories that supports these ideas have been presented, quoting Islamic legal texts and the teachings of scholars who support these ideas (Yildirim, 2012) Pj 35-44. Many Saudi scholars have taken this direction; some of them have changed their traditional thought to modern thought because of their experiences, personal reasoning and being influenced by the elites of this movement in other Arab countries, while others evolved the teachings of the scholars, whether Saudi or Arab. Some of the elites of this group have demanded the introduction of political reforms by calling for democracy, for example, while others did not raise any political issues but confined themselves to intellectual issues of an enlightened and rational nature away from political issues (Lacroix, 2015).

Some of the liberal Islamists of a political orientation started, from 1998, to reshape their call for political reform using a democratic Islamic approach, and at the same time, directed their criticism in an unprecedented way at Wahhabi concepts and iterated the importance of the inseparability of political and religious reforms. On this basis, they managed to form an alliance with non-Sunni Islamists in the intellectual Saudi arena of liberals and Shiites, and created a political, national and democratic anti-Wahhabi platform. They have begun a new trend in the political and intellectual Saudi arena.

This is considered to be unique because of its new religious and political content on the one hand, and the different backgrounds of its supporters on the other, whether in terms of generation, region or intellectuality, which reflects the existing diversity in the region. Though some of those intellectuals identify themselves as centrist, enlightened and even rational, most of them have agreed to identify themselves as reformists or, as al-Aziz al-Qasim put it in 2003, “a group of liberal Islamists or Islamist liberals”. Stephane Lacroix uses the term “The Islamic-Liberal reform” to identify the intellectual framework of this new trend, calling them “Islamoliberal”.

The September 11th attack is considered a fillip to the Islamo-Liberal movement. Before this event, intellectuals from this group used to express their opinions in informally in their private councils, internet forums and news articles, but after the attacks they started to make use of the new political climate in the kingdom to create a bigger consensus for their approach and to change their ambitions to statements and political petitions, which was rewarded by a petition that was presented to the Crown Prince Abdullah in January 2003. The reformation steps that were taken by the Crown Prince Abdullah in 2003, the most important of which were organising a national dialogue conference and announcing a partial municipal election, were in response to local demands (Iacroix, 2012).

On the media front, it was clear that informational openness that started in 1999 has had a positive effect on the development of the Islamo-Liberal movement by creating better ways for its members to communicate with each other and express their opinions publicly (AlQedemi, 2012).

The daily Alwatan newspaper, which began in 1998, played an important role in this process. It allowed the publication of actual political debates in its pages. The Islamio-Liberal became very active on internet forums, which they used to discuss and spread their ideas. Two forums played an important role in to propagating this group. The first one is the Alwasatiyyah forum, which was founded by Muhasin al-Awaji in 2000. He is a former member of the Awakening movement, part of the platform for moderate Islam, which attracted many Islamio-Liberals. The second forum was founded at the beginning of 2002, and is called Tawa. This forum identifies itself as a place for intellectuals who believe in and respect free thinking. Its members form a varying ideological perspective of intellectual liberals (Chaplin, 2011).

Since the September 11th attacks, the harsh criticism the Western media levelled at Saudi Arabi has caused shock in the state. This has helped to create a climate of national unity. Since then, the intellectual Islamo-Liberals have made use of this opportunity to present their project and create a political platform capable of uniting the Saudi intellectuals, and then all Saudi society. This unified political message has been formed in several stages, mainly through statements and petitions, reminding

observers of Saudi affairs of the state of agitation that Saudi Arabia went through after the First Gulf War.

The first step in that direction was a statement in April 2002 titled “On what basis do we live?”, which was an answer to an open letter signed by 60 American intellectuals, including Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, which presented a moral justification for the war that Bush’s administration declared against terrorism. They expressed their will to hold a dialogue with their American counterparts, but strongly reaffirmed their strong connection with their Saudi and Islamic identity through a speech.

Additionally, the varied signatories aimed to support the national theme of this statement. Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Qasim successfully played a major role in this project with some of his Islamo-Liberal friends in attracting the support of almost all social and political groups, including liberals and women. Even Islamists of a more radical nature, such as Salman al-Odah and Sifr Safar Al-Hawali, according to observers, found this project a chance to improve their image. The clear absence of the Shiites was most probably due to the existence of radical scholars such as Ibn Jabreen, who was known for his stance against Shiites in the past.

The main objective of al-Qasim and his friends was to show the external aspects of the Islamo-Liberal political project and the Islamo-Liberal reformist project, and to gauge whether they are the result of consent of all Saudi society.

On May 5th 2002, Alwatan’s editor, the Islamo-Liberal Yousof al-Deeni, expressed his happiness in an article: “This statement rewards with a crown a new era in intellectual harmony that represents our actual national unity as it has successfully created a new united intellectual vision capable of destroying the delusional and icy barriers that have been formed over a long history of conflicts between the so-called dualism of moderation and originality, tradition and logic, nationalism and Islam and democracy and shura.”

On the other hand, the aim was to attract the support of the Shaikhs of the Awakening movement and make use of their legitimacy in the Islamo-Liberal project. But al-Qasim’s bid failed; the Shaikhs who belong to the growing Salafi Jihadi movement, who consider themselves the guardians of Wahhabi doctrine and its principles, such as making alliances with Muslims and disassociating themselves

from atheists, strongly criticized the content of the statement and attacked al-Odah and Al-Hawali for their support of the statement. The pressure on them was so immense that they had to sign another statement in which they disagreed with every principle they supported in the first statement.

In a similar manner, many of those who signed the first statement published other statements later on, announcing their withdrawal from the first statement, which created a storm of criticism in Saudi media and on the internet, mainly targeting the Islamists signatories for their opportunism. After two months of media agitation that was created by this issue, nothing was left in the initial statement.

It seems that the first attempt to unite the Saudi intellectual movement into one national Islamo-Liberal platform failed.

After all, the debates that lasted for long time after publishing the text gave Islamo-Liberals and their ideas unprecedented local coverage. Certainly, this would help them push their social and political project forward (Dekmejian, 2003).

In August 2002, a group of intellectuals and Shiite and Sunni Islamo-Liberals prepared a statement to deal directly and clearly with the internal problems that face the Kingdom, and called for political, economic and social reforms. The matter required five months of discussions, collecting signatures and drafting notes. Finally, in January 2003, a letter that was called “A vision for the nation and its future” was sent to the Crown Prince Abdullah and other members of the royal family (Ibrahim, 2007).

The declaration starts and ends with complete allegiance to the royal family. It consists of several political demands, such as the segregation of authority, establishing the rule of law, the adoption of equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their location, tribe or doctrine, the introduction of elected local shura councils all over the Kingdom, full freedom of expression and giving a chance for civil society to emerge.

Another statement entitled “The dangers that threaten the unity of the nation” is concerned with social issues, respect for human rights, an end to discrimination, improvement of public services, a reduction in unemployment and, finally, the role of women, who constitute half of the society, they should have their rights protected by Shariah.

In addition to this, the signatories demanded the release of all political prisoners, reemployment of the activists and freedom to all citizens to express their opinions without any fear of having their passports taken away or losing their jobs. Finally, they demanded the establishment of a national dialogue council open to all representatives of regions and social groups.

Despite all of that, it seems that Islamo-Liberals omitted some highly controversial issues in order to gain Saudi intellectual consensus. Among these issues is the issue of the reformation of educational subjects, which is a matter of violent disagreement between the liberals and the Islamists in the media and on the internet, and the role of woman in Saudi society, which was hardly referred to. Many thought that women did not get the attention they deserved.

Although the language of the text might not look religious, in contrast with “The memorandum of freedom” that was given by 107 scholars and Islamic activists to King Fahad in 1999, we should not jump to conclusions as the signatories were keen to assert at several points in this letter that Shariah is the suitable frame for all the reforms they were calling for (Kapiszewski, 2006).

In addition to that, although the signatories acknowledged these concepts between the lines, words such as democracy and parliament were absent from the text, and all that we can find is the Islamic concept of Shura.

Al-Hamid, who is one of leaders of this statement and who had obvious influence on the content, said that the intention is to deeply root the reformist discourse in Islam. The ambiguity that shrouds the Islamic discourse of a liberal nature or the liberal discourse of an Islamic nature explains why most Western media channels, and even Arabic channels, failed to understand this initiative (Lacroix, 2015).

In fact, and after being described by several articles as a liberal petition, some newspapers, such the Washington Post, preferred to caution its readers from that text, which was written (according to the newspaper) by dangerous fundamentalist and opponents of the United States (Alshayeb, 2004).

Although the statement “On what basis do we live?” represented to some extent the external component of the reformist Islamo-Liberal program, the “Vision of the present and the future of the nation” can be considered its internal component. So, the intellectuals were not successful in creating an historic mutual closeness between

two powers that for a long time have been considered irreconcilable, but they were successful, through successive statements, in forming a moderate and national Islamo-Liberal discourse that managed to attract unprecedented consensus.

The first reaction to this petition was positive in general. This began with Crown Prince Abdullah, who received forty of those who signed it in his palace and assured them of his support, before adding that he was not the only one at the helm and that the journey of reformation needs time.

After a few days of these historic meetings, the semi-official Saudi newspaper witnessed the birth of Rabi' al-Riyadh (The Spring of Riyadh) in the form of articles of a liberal nature that implicitly support the general outlines of this statement (Lacroix, 2015).

Crown Prince Abdullah regarding the Islamo-Liberals organising the national dialogue conference in 2003, which was one of their demands, took the first concrete step (Ghrash and Radian, 2003).

For the first time in the Kingdom's history, thirty scholars belonging to different religious groups, Salafis, non-Salafis, Sufis, Shiites and Ismailis, were called to sit together under the patronage of the Crown Prince. These long discussions resulted in recommendations that can be considered the first reply to the political and social demands of the Islamo-Liberal movement.

On the political front, the meeting approved the importance of implementing these reforms, and guaranteed freedom of expression and fair distribution of wealth (Muammer, 2004). It can be considered that the October 2003 declaration was the first tangible step towards partial municipal elections in 2004 (Saqr, 2004).

On the religious front, these recommendations can be considered a painful blow to Wahhabism, because they acknowledged the intellectual and sectarian diversity in the kingdom. Secondly, they criticized the exclusion tendency in Wahhabism, which is the principle of "sadd al-Dharai" (prohibition of what may lead to committing sins), which, according to the recommendations, "should be used from now onwards in a measured and moderate fashion". What is really interesting in implementing this principle is that women do not have the right to drive cars. In addition to that, none of the scholars who were called to attend the conference were the prominent

religious figures in the Wahhabi religious establishment, which desires to marginalize women's rights issues (Lacroix, 2015).

1.12 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organized into seven chapters, starting with this introductory chapter and ending with a conclusion and summary. For a variety of reasons, all the information in this research may play a significant role in Saudi Arabian society. Moreover, it may have a major impact on Saudi people, since it comments on their way of thinking. In the first place, it discusses issues that are currently of the greatest social concern, that is, the intellectual conflict in Saudi Arabia between different school of thought, such as religious and liberalist thinking, or the struggle between Sufism and Puritan Salafism, as well as others. In addition, it highlights the results and impact on Saudi society of this great conflict between groups. In addition, it demonstrates the importance to the country of moderate Islamic thought, balancing religious extremism and liberalism.

The following chapters of this thesis are explained below.

Chapter Two, "Historical, Political and Social Context of Saudi Arabia", approaches the intellectual life of Saudi Arabia from the 1700s to the present, specifically in the mid-1980s and the early 1990s by illustrating its political, social and historical situation and the effects of this on the mindset of the country's citizens. In addition, the chapter mentions the main factors that paved the way for the emergence of other influences on the liberal and religious thought of Saudi Arabia, suggesting political and cultural reasons for them and also individual contributions from specific individuals or representatives of a school of thought.

Chapter Three, "Intellectual and Religious Movements in Saudi Arabia, from the 1980s to the present: Their Formation, Divisions, and differences" defines the period when these intellectual currents emerged in Saudi society, from their origins in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the present. It highlights the religious currents during this period, including the most important principles and claims of every religious group, discussing their leaders and members. In addition, it goes into the differences between them, whether these are religious, or intellectual/philosophical.

Finally, this chapter focuses on Saudi society as it faces the current intellectual and social crisis of the conflict between these currents.

Chapter Four, “Salman al-Odah and the Awakening of Islamic Moderation”, will examine the life of Dr. Al-Odah, in order to provide background information to explain why he is such an important figure for the future of Saudi Arabia. It will begin by looking at the stages of his intellectual development from his childhood and student years, through his period as a radical scholar, up until the Arab Spring period and his work as the driving force behind the Renaissance Forum Project. Also, this chapter will examine the controversies surrounding Dr. Al-Odah’s transformation, and conclude with a summary of why he is such an important figure in contemporary Saudi discourse. This chapter examines this leader’s life and thinking, examining his approach in his writings and his views on the intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia, assessing his contribution to Saudi Arabian thought.

Chapter Five, “Factors that influenced Salman’s thought”, will discuss the most important factors that have influenced al-Odah’s thinking, in order to show why he has transformed from extreme Salafi to modern thinker, including some important religious and intellectual issues that he has clearly and radically changed his opinion about.

Chapters Six, “Building Bridges between groups” focuses on Salman al-Odah’s views as the most significant representative calling for moderate Islamic thinking in today’s Saudi Arabia, as the best solution to reduce the gap between different schools of thought, and to build bridges between them. The stages of his intellectual evolution have included a conversion from strict Salafism, and ultimately have led to his present eminence as an exponent of moderate Islam, calling for moderation in religion and politics. This chapter seeks to emphasise the most marked effects of his ideology.

Chapter Seven, “Conclusion”, ends this thesis by drawing conclusions from the thesis and making recommendations for further research. It also explains opinions and attitudes towards the intellectual and religious currents in Saudi Arabia, and the differences between different schools of thought, in order to show the importance of the moderate Islamic approach illustrated by Salman al-Odah’s thinking after his intellectual transformation.

In this chapter, I have introduced the intellectual and cultural complexity of Saudi Arabia and the main factors responsible for polarization by reviewing key literature written by both Arab and non-Arab scholars on the phenomenon. The study will in fact focus on the works of Salman al-Odah and his intellectual transformation and his emphasis on moderation as a way forward in the Kingdom.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SAUDI ARABIA

2.1 Historical Background of Saudi Arabia from the 1700s to the Present

Introduction

Here, I will focus on the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi society as a new nation-state. I am particularly interested in the different phases this nation formation took. I will make references to how religion and politics have interfaced in the Saudi context. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (SA) represents to every Muslim state and nation a strategic cornerstone, since it is considered the cradle of Islam. It is the Land of the Two Holy Mosques. It contains the Holy Mosque in Makkah surrounding the Kaaba, towards which all Muslims around the world turn while performing daily prayers, and travel to if possible in order to perform the Hajj, and also the Prophet's Holy Mosque in Al-Madina Al-Munawarah, which contains the tomb of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Therefore, Saudi Arabia occupies a pre-eminent position among Islamic countries on a religious level (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

In addition, Saudi Arabia has become one of the most influential countries in the world, since it has one-third of the oil resources found outside Central Asia, China and Russia (Fasileef, 1995). It is the world's largest producer and exporter of oil. The discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia transformed the country from an important country for Muslims only, to a country that is important to both the major developed nations and developing nations. The main reason behind this transformation is that global industry has shifted from using coal as a fuel source to oil, which has risen to global prominence. The widespread significance enjoyed by Saudi Arabia has naturally influenced its policy. On the one hand, it became concerned with Islamic issues. On the other, it depends entirely on Western companies in terms of oil extraction, refining, distribution, transportation and marketing. Beyond doubt the oil industry transformed the Kingdom from a very poor country, dependent on revenue from the Hajj, to a very rich country in a very short period of less than 40 years (Alamer, 2014).

As the social structure of Saudi society is distributed across cities, deserts, and countryside, there are certain characteristics that have distinguished Saudi Arabia from most Arab countries, which had an impact on its social and cultural structure at the time of its foundation. One of the most prominent of these characteristics is that Saudi society never experienced the presence of imperial, colonial armies, as happened to many Arab countries. This contributed to the society keeping its traditional culture, which is dominated by religiosity and conservatism, which tribes and families inherited from their predecessors. This natural social isolation, which discouraged colonial countries from having an interest in occupying this land, with its peculiar geography and holiness, has undoubtedly contributed in the development of a society whose values were not affected by Western modernity, as happened during that time to other Arabic societies (al-Huwayreeni, 2016).

Saudi Arabia has great potential and many features that give it a unique position. However, to examine its potentials and characteristics, we should first examine some historical, political and social aspects of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These aspects represent the background against which all the intellectual trends discussed below whether religious, intellectual, or historical events should be seen (Al-Khudr, 2011). It should be noted that the emergence of the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia started with the formation of centralised local governments (Emirates) in the large oases of the Hijaz area. However, these Emirates were not considered states in the usual sense of the word, despite their continued attempts to control the surrounding territories, as they failed to establish permanent political entities (glozmay et al., 2012).

First, Saudi state (which coincided with the first rise of Wahhabism) (1744 - 1818) and the second Saudi state (1824 - 1891), some tribal alliances contributed to the expansion process. However, since Wahhabism is a religious movement that seeks to restore a traditional form of Islam, the driving force behind the consolidation of the Saudi regime was the Najd urban tribes, i.e. peoples who lived in cities and oases (al-Rasheed, 2002).

The forming of the Wahhabi Saudi Emirates eventually led to the establishing of a modern state, in today's sense, in 1932. However, in its early days, the regime of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was very like that which prevailed in the old

Emirates. However, when oil was discovered, Saudi Arabia transformed from an earlier political consciousness to that of a modern country⁸. Wahhabi religious leaders benefited greatly from their alliance with the emerging state. This gave Wahhabism an opportunity to spread its vision and principles within Saudi society, through the means that the State provided for them (glozmay et al., 2012).

2.1.1 The first Saudi state (1744 - 1818)

The history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is very rich. It dates back to the alliance forged with the Wahhabi movement (Wynbrandt, 2010). The alliance provided ideological impetus for the Saudi Arabian dynastic rulers, and thus these families took up the role of defenders of the true creed of Islam. Historians such as Hussein Bin Ghannam illustrate Saudi Arabia in social and political terms as the home of instability, chaos, and insecurity, not to mention religious and social disintegration (al-Rasheed, 2002). Hence, the first Saudi State decided to institute religious reform of what was at the time the prevailing corruption of Saudi society. The alliance made between Imam Muhammad bin Saud and the religious leader “Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab” in 1744 encouraged them to cooperate. Thus, the first Saudi state emerged in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula. Supreme power in this kingdom was shared by two elite groups: a political group that came only from the House of Saud, and a religious group that was formed mainly of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his descendants. This politico-religious merger let the scholars work on interpreting the religious texts, while the rulers practised politics (Iacroix, 2012).

During this period, Saudi Arabia experienced a political, educational, and social renaissance through the innovative call launched by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. His religious appeal opened up a new era for the kingdom in way of educated people in Saudi Arabia after a long time of darkness and lack of knowledge (Al-Mashouh, 2012). After the alliance was made between Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Imam Muhammad bin Saud, the latter asked the Sheikh not to

⁸ ARAMCO had a huge role in introducing the Western culture to some segments of the Saudi society. A prominent example is Aramco TV which had an intellectual and cultural impact in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states through airing (Western) cultural and entertainment shows. DOSARI, S. A. 2005. Aramco - the pre-satellite channel. *Alsharq alawsat*.

leave Ad-Diriyah, a small oasis near Riyadh. When the Sheikh agreed, the Saudi dynasty went on to further conquests and controlled the surrounding territories (Lacey, 2011).

A recent study into the relationship between scholars and clerics on one hand, and the government in Saudi Arabia on the other, by the researcher Alejandra Galindo Marines is worth noting. This study focused on the period from the end of the 1970s until 1999, and the researcher noted the mutual reliance between the scholars and the government. The argument is that the scholars have a greater authority in determining the legitimacy of the royal rule, and the legitimacy of the royal Islamic Sunni rule is fundamental, so the Saudi government works hard to preserve this legitimacy. This is an important point for understanding the essential role of the Islamic Sunni clerical institution in Saudi Arabia (Marines, 2001).

There are some important points that has affected on the first Saudi state, which I will highlight.

Taking Control of Al-Oyaynah

The warriors of Al-Oyaynah led by Uthman bin Muammar, were firm supporters of the Ad-Diriyah people and some of the Al-Oyaynah princes were related through marriage to the House of Saud. However, the Prince of Al-Oyaynah was accused of secretly contacting Muhammad bin Afaliq, the governor of Al-Ahsa, and according to rumour, he betrayed his allies. Therefore, in June 1750, his own people, who were followers of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, killed him. Power was seized by his cousin, Mishari bin Ibrahim bin Muammar, who was living nearby (Snaitan, 2008). Ten years later, Al-Oyaynah had lost its independence and Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab ousted Mishari, relocated him and his family to Ad-Diriyah, and appointed another governor. When he arrived at Al -Oyaynah, the Sheikh gave orders to destroy the palace of the Muammars and thus took control of Al-Oyaynah (Hamouda, 2000).

Initial Disturbances and Taking Control of Huraymila

Between 1750 and 1753, the emirates of Manfoh and Huraymila, which were among the first Emirates to make alliances with the Wahhabis, tried to extricate themselves from Ad-Diriyah's control Sulaiman, the brother of the Sheikh, encouraged an uprising in Huraymila (Althagafi, 2010). He sent messages to all the Najd leaders

inviting them to denounce the teachings of his brother. As a result, unrest broke out in Huraymila, although the Sheikh managed to subdue it in 1755 (Hamouda, 2000).

Conflicts in the Surrounding Areas

The Prince of Riyadh, Daham bin Dawas, was the main rival of the Saudi dynasty. Riyadh and Ad-Diriyah were constantly at war. The people of some other areas and oases, such as: AlWashm, Sudair, Thadiq and Huraymila, fought on the side of Dham. In the late 1750s, the people of Al Ahsa reappeared on the political scene under the leadership of Ar'aier bin Dajeen bin Saadoun, and launched a campaign in the centre of the Peninsula, but they did not succeed (Al-Shatri, 2013).

In the period of 1805, the Wahhabis refused to grant Iraqi and Iranian pilgrims permission to enter Holy Makkah to perform Hajj, considering them to be unbelievers (*kafirs*) and thus forbidden to approach the Holy Places. In 1806, they extended this to pilgrims coming from Al-Sham and in 1807, they extended it to pilgrims from Egypt and Morocco (Al-'Arniri, 2002).

Thus, the opportunity to perform the Hajj then was limited to the followers of Wahhabi in the Arabian Peninsula. The followers of other Islamic doctrines could not undertake the pilgrimage for fear of being killed by those who claimed that they were moving closer to Allah by killing innocent Muslims who followed other doctrines. Therefore, the people of Najran, who belonged to the Isma'ili Shia sects; some of the people of Al-Ahsa and Al-Qatif, who followed Imami Shia doctrines; the people of Yemen, who were Zaydi Shia⁹; and the people of Asir, who held to the Sufi doctrine, did not perform Hajj. Nor did the people of Hijaz, most of who followed Imam Shafi'i's doctrine; they concealed their faith and refrained from performing Hajj for fear of being killed by the Wahhabis, who asked people about their monotheistic beliefs. The first Saudi state eventually fell, after a long struggle that spread its control over the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula. Ad-Diriyah was completely destroyed (Al-Hajj, 2009).

⁹ The Zaidi sect is described as the closest branch of Shia to the mainstream Sunni Muslims, as it is greatly influenced by Sunni teachings ALI, A. 2015a. *Zaidi: Shiite sect closest to the Sunnis* [Online]. Islamist movement. 19/ 1/ 2015].

Through extrapolation this points, it is clear that political reformation is the mostly important in this period on one hand, and on the other, there is one acceptable school of thought in the Saudi society which is Wahhabism. However, strongest of this thought does not mean the absence of other religious or intellectual movements in Saudi first state, but they may have not any function on the society, or they were silent according to the Wahhabi control.

2.1.2 The second Saudi state (1824 -1891)

The second Saudi state existed between 1824 and 1891. With the loss of Egyptian control over the politics of the Arabian Peninsula, and the unwillingness of the Ottoman Sultan to expand the Ottoman forces deployed on the coast of the Arabian Gulf, the emergence of a second Saudi state over a limited area of land was encouraged by Najd's population, and some princes of other neighbouring countries, such as Oman's prince "Sa'id bin Sultan" (Hamouda, 2000).

The new Saudi state controlled a smaller area of land than the Ad-Diriyah Emirate had. Also, the governors of the second Saudi state tended to focus on political, and not religious, matters. Imam Faisal bin Turki played the greatest role in establishing this state, which through his efforts emerged two years after the fall of the first state. However, it had ended by the reign of Prince Abdullah bin Faisal. It did not undertake any intellectual or reformist activities because the members of the Saudi royal family were busy restoring their rule in the land of their fathers, which had fallen into the hands of the Ottoman Empire. This time, the religious leaders did not enjoy the same power and authority as those of the first Saudi state had done, despite the presence of the sons and grandsons of the founder of Wahhabism, Sheikh Muhammad, including his grandson Abdurrahman, who returned from Egypt in 1825 (R.Mortimer, 1993).

The borders of the second Saudi state did not exceed the borders of Najd, and its political concern was focused on gaining complete control over Najd. The leaders of the House of Saud fought between themselves and with the leaders of the House of Al-Rashid in a series of civil wars. The intellectual conflict between the brothers was mainly related to approaches to government: Abdullah was Salafist and followed the Wahhabi current, but Saud believed in the separation of religion and the state; the

Hijaz area remained out of the control of the Saudi leaders, and this may have one of the main causes of the rapid collapse of the second state (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

2.1.3 The Emirate of Riyadh and Modern Saudi Arabia (1902- Present)

In 1902, modern Saudi Arabia came into existence in the form of a small area of land around the Riyadh area. On January 15th 1902, Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul-Rahman bin Faisal Al-Saud took control of Riyadh. Later, he expanded his control to Al-Aflaj, which is located to the south of Riyadh, and went on to control land to the north of Riyadh. He took control of Al-Qassim and Al-Ahsa in 1913 and of Hail in 1921 (Esmat, 2011).

The rise of the third Saudi dynasty can be considered the re-emergence of the religious element, because it managed to politicise the religious authorities in terms of conservative royal objectives. Upon the return of the Saudi dynasty, Wahhabism was revived. However, this does not mean that no other intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia played an important role at the time (Al-Juhany, 2012).

A serious threat faced by King Abdul-Aziz was the rebellion of some religious figures, most notably the leaders of the Saudi Brotherhood, who had fought Abdul-Aziz, as well as some local religious figures. But in the battle of Al Sabla in 1929, he managed to kill or capture the leaders, the most famous being Sheikh Al-Duwaish.

The historical stages through which Saudi Arabia passed had a big impact by enriching Saudi society with many ideas, and religious and non-religious concepts. Internal battles and external wars helped greatly to introduce intellectual movements of all kinds to the intellectual scene in Saudi Arabia (Iacroix, 2012).

Spreading Wahhabi Control

It took the Saudi dynasty thirty years to spread its sovereignty over most of the Arabian Peninsula. Following King Abdul-Aziz's control of Riyadh, he fought the Al-Rashid family to regain control of Najd, starting with Al-Qassim in the south of the region. In 1913, the Saudi forces invaded Al-Ahsa and ended Ottoman rule there (Blanchard, 2006). During the First World War, Abdul-Aziz made an alliance with Great Britain, which provided him with the weapons and money that he needed for his struggle against the Al-Rashidi, who supported Ottoman rule. In 1921, the members of the Al-Rashid dynasty surrendered to the Saudis. Abdul-Aziz set as his

next goal expansion into Al-Hijaz, including the two Holy Cities of Makkah and Madina. In the years 1924 -1925, Saudi forces seized control of Al-Hijaz and the Hashemite Kingdom collapsed. In 1932, Abdul-Aziz announced the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Commins, 2006).

This resulted in the restoration of the authority of Wahhabism. It became the ruling doctrine, and political considerations helped to speed up the process of imposing Wahhabi standards (Commins, 2006).

2.2 Political Configuration of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia exhibits considerable overlap between state and society, for many reasons. The Saudi state can be considered multifunctional since the State is everything; it can interfere in all aspects of life, positively or negatively. It is above civil society and controls it. The establishment of the Saudi state started with a tribal coalition and then the unification of the main regions. Contemporary Saudi society in spite of the enormous social transformations it has witnessed since 1964, which have increased in pace since 1973, is not united, but religion in the state is still the decision - maker (Salameh, 2008).

Saudi Arabia adopts specific standards that help to form its religious, political and social identity. The ideology of (Salafism) has had a great impact on Saudi Arabia ever since its emergence, and even more so after it stabilised. A religious school was formed after the call for reform by Sheikh Muhammad more than two centuries ago (Salameh, 2008). The tribal system has social and political significance, remaining the key unit of social, economic and political organisation in both Saudi Arabia and in general throughout the Gulf. The state has legitimacy in so far as it represents the interaction and balance between the different segments of society. This has been successfully achieved in Saudi Arabia and over time has helped to stabilise it (Al-Khudr, 2011).

Comparing Saudi Arabia's political development with its economic and social development shows that the former is slower. Not many administrative political changes occur and the few changes that occur are made quietly. The movement of the political wheel seems intermittent (al-Rasheed, 2002).

The political system in Saudi Arabia is not democratic. However, it usually responds to what the people want and request (Lacey, 2011). The political culture of Saudi Arabia is not the result of a specific situation, a short interval or a transient political event. It is the result of the accumulation of the country's historical, politico-religious, social and geographical heritage. This rich heritage has been built up over a long period, through the many practices and experiences of Saudi society. If we take into account many of the important factors, such as the nation's intellectual and religious background and its tribal nature, together with the nature of Arab societies in general and the geographic location, we find that these factors contributed significantly to the formation of a special political culture exclusive to Saudi Arabia (al-Hamad, 1992).

In a country that occupies such a vast area of land as Saudi Arabia, some may believe that mixed and varied political cultures are inevitable. But in fact Saudi society has a unified political culture and a unified political system (Alaiwi, 2012). Saudi political culture encourages subordination and political withdrawal from all types of political practice, forming a single pattern to which society has cleaved. The main reason for the absence of any other political culture can be the country's simple social structure. In addition, to the capacity of its leaders to play a skillful political game which has ceded them absolute power over governance, and allowed them to run their political systems successfully at all levels (Mohammed, 2005).

Saudi society looks at its political system represented in its government, with the absolute confidence that it has an inherited ability to run the country well. Thus, does not encourage necessarily ordinary people to aspire for political participation. This is further compounded by religious and tribal tradition. The political structure of Saudi Arabia reinforces the principle of political seclusion and a culture of not discussing matters of governance. It supports leaving these matters to the Saudi royal family (Alaiwi, 2012).

Any calls by the Saudi people for political participation, or demands to participate in the affairs of governance are viewed by religious scholars and by the political class of Saudi Arabia as a way of calling for secularism; changing Sharia and imposing man-made laws that encourage immorality and corruption. Others believe that these

calls do not suit the simplicity of Saudi society, which cannot function but by receiving orders from the state (Aqeel, 1988).

This political monopoly of authority in Saudi Arabia and the great failure to foster public participation has had a significant impact on the emergence of many intellectual currents, political currents in particular, that call for opposition to the Kingdom's political rulers and stress the urgent need to change the political structure and pattern of the state (Hofmann, 2003).

The Islamic and political movements that have erupted in the Islamic world have played an important role in the development of Saudi Arabia's intellectual, religious and political climate. For example, the pro-Nasser, Communist, and Labour movements have affected many Saudi people (al-Lami, 2014). In addition, the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood, which came to the Kingdom when its members fled from to the Kingdom when its members fled from the persecution of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and when Hafez al-Assad's attacks on the city of Hama, had a drastic impact on the development of politico religious thinking in Saudi Arabia. Their ideas were later discussed in schools (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

2.3 Intellectual and Social Life in Saudi Arabia from 1700- to the Present

2.3.1 Intellectual trends and debates

Although Saudi society had managed to combat its lack of development, referring to the rural, nomadic stage that held back Saudi society for many centuries, it can be said that it is still clinging to the values of the past (represented in Wahhabism) and resisting the requirements of modernisation. This conflict between the past and the present not only exists in state institutions and the public sphere, but also in the minds of Saudi individuals who favour conservative traditions and fear change, despite all the cultural changes that have taken place around them (Al-Khudr, 2011). Saudi Arabia cannot be described as uncivilised. But it has not reached the global level of openness and contemporary urban culture. At the same time, a strict Muslim cannot accuse Saudi society of deviating from Islamic values, yet its experience of Islam has not turned out to be a desirable model (Snaitan, 2008).

It was oil revenue that subjected Saudi society to its most profound transformations. The discovery of oil forced Saudi Arabia into contacting the world. The resulting intellectual shifts impacted significantly on the people, in terms of scientific development, in particular. However, negative dimensions in Saudi Arabia emerged with the introduction of intellectual and cultural pluralism, and the emergence of many different religious and liberal movements (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

The developmental boost that Saudi society witnessed at the beginning of the 1990s, transformed it from a desert containing urban areas to a series of modern cities. Moreover, its significant economic, industrial, and educational changes have been described as a developmental revolution. All the details about this great shift, both intellectual and material, were provided to the people by a media controlled by the religious and political elite of the country. No other sources of information had any influence on the community during the period of intellectual transformation, because there were no other organisations or independent media to inform them in words or pictures about the community and the world. Certain individuals, who acted independently of government control and did not conform to Saudi stereotypes, were given only limited opportunities in this period to express their convictions (Al-Khudr, 2011).

The simplicity of Saudi society had a challenge for this intellectual shift and consequent adjustment in civil society to occur easily and smoothly. Amidst all Saudi Arabia's plans for intellectual and social development, it had one steady principle, the commitment of the state and society to the principles of Islamic Sharia and the preservation of traditions, as well as the cultural and ethical values associated with them (al-saif, 2003).

Hence the sources of knowledge underlying the intellectual shift were not made public by the government, in accordance with their traditional vision of civilisation. Religious pronouncements did not allow any plurality of intellectual and doctrinal ideas in the religious institutions. The media whether TV, print media or radio, was controlled by an official vision that was limited in its coverage the social, economic, and political developments and events. Saudi society did not have enough significant knowledge and awareness to struggle against this. On the contrary, illiteracy and a simple vision of things were its main features. However, in spite of the official

attitude to new ideas, the shift in educational, political and social understanding significantly increased awareness until Saudi society began to evolve intellectually (Al-Khudr, 2011).

Saudi society consists of three categories: nomadic, rural and urban. The nomadic Bedouin represent 21.77 percent of the population and the rural 26.87 percent: the urban category represents 51.36 percent. On an intellectual level, society is divided into two categories. The first is the traditional category, which rejects change and is mostly composed of hardliner followers of the views and doctrines of the Wahhabi scholars. The second category contains advocates of change and development through technological openness; from this group comes the call for new liberal thinking to be applied. These two categories include many intermediary schools of thinking and religious and liberal movements that were introduced into Saudi Arabia at various times (Al-Tuwaijri, 2001).

Over more than 250 years of Saudi history, Wahhabi scholars have developed noteworthy pragmatic behaviour; they supported Saudi policy in order to protect their alliance with Saudi rulers, even if it contradicted their religious beliefs. Looking at Saudi history shows that sometimes it was the Wahhabi system that controlled the process of political decision-making, not the princes who founded the Kingdom such as Muhammad bin Saud and his son, Abdul Aziz, who ruled from 1765 to 1803. The result was that the principles of Wahhabism are strictly applied in modern Saudi Arabia and in its foreign policy, whether in educational institutions, or in the law and the judiciary, and in social transactions (Glozman et al., 2012). Wahhabi religious authority continues to dominate Saudi Arabia, still influences legislation at the highest level and refuses to recognise any other religious party. Moreover, it still attacks other religious denominations and tries to suppress them through its own political influence.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rejects the idea of political parties and intellectual diversity. Parties would threaten the institutions of the monarchy, because they represent different ideas that may not be compatible with the policies of the ruling establishment, since they contribute to the formation of groups and movements that might weaken the political unity of the country. So it is in line with their views to

protect Wahhabism, compel Saudi society to conform to it, and reject other religious currents or intellectual rivals (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

This relationship between the political representatives of the Saudi dynasty and the religious leaders of the Wahhabi movement changed over time. When the founder of the Wahhabi sect, Sheikh Muhammed died in 1792, Wahhabi scholars lost the power that they had previously enjoyed. This gave a first glimpse of intellectual and ideological pluralism in Saudi Arabia (glozmay et al., 2012).

2.3.2 Towards a new Saudi society with a plurality of views

Because the Saudi state declares that its only source of legislation is Islamic Sharia, Wahhabism is significant in all aspects of life, whether political, economic, social, or legislative. This has contributed significantly in curtailing the role of other Islamic groups, and of intellectuals, who had become active after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The Wahhabi system remained the only system of government in Saudi Arabia, and this caused other religious and intellectual movements in the country to atrophy. The previous way of life was impossible to continue in the light of a world filled with intellectual and ideological diversity (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

Other intellectual and religious movements were silent, and almost devoid of any functional or public social role, for many reasons, the most important being the political support for Wahhabism, and Wahhabi control over Saudi society. Despite this, many religious and intellectual movements began to appear in Saudi society. At the beginning of the eighties, Saudi Arabia entered an era called the Saudi Awakening, marked by a range of religious and intellectual movements (Rasheed, 2012).

For centuries, Saudi society remained closed to all except one intellectual vision of life, according to which many generations have been brought up. This continued until two decades ago, when multiple sources of ideas began to emerge due to the increasing openness of the media. This is what has produced the notable intellectual differences, it is a natural result of receiving new ideas from multiple sources (Islamtoday, 2012).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Saudi Arabia witnessed the first signs that new social forces were emerging on the political scene, and social conflicts were

intensifying to unprecedented levels. For the first time, working people in Saudi Arabia raised their demands and other issues for reform in the political, economic and social fields, and this political stance by workers possibly paved the way for religious and political diversity (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

2.3.3 The first emergence of new intellectual movements in Saudi society

In this section of my research study, I'm going to discuss specifically the first emergence of the specific religious and intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia including the main reasons behind this emergence. However, in chapter three, I will discuss those movements in more detail, for example the definition of the movements and their formation, sub division as well as the main differences between them.

Saudi society today is witnessing the formations of new religious and non-religious movements, both overtly declared and undeclared. The most prominent and largest religious doctrine in Saudi Arabia is Wahhabism which is still strong in the community, and consists of schools that have a lot of influence (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

After the First Gulf War (1990), the term 'Surori'¹⁰ surfaced in the religious arena. It is true that Saudi Arabia is almost devoid of any partisan political formation, but it is a part of the world that is home to a range of intellectual movements and cultural systems. There are some of new groups appeared with Wahhabi ideas and forms. One of the main movements of the time was the Suroriya current, which was founded by Muhammad Suror Zine El Abidine, who was born in 1938. He was a Syrian who came to Saudi Arabia in 1965 because of pressure on his organisation from the Syrian security forces. Like most Islamists, he found in Saudi Arabia a religious haven (Al-Khudr, 2011).

Suror was able to attract Saudis to his movement since his doctrine had a Wahhabi background. He also adopted some of the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding organisation and secrecy. His doctrine spread quickly and emerged in Saudi Arabia as an independent movement (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

¹⁰ The Surori branch originated and emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, but it adheres to the teachings of the Salafi doctrine. RAMZY, S. 2015. *The Jihadi Surrori movement- Jurisprudence, structures, and the Arab Link*, Arab Knowledge office.

Suror succeeded in forming a network of followers, aides and allies who worked on the dissemination of his thinking throughout Saudi Arabia. He presented it as Saudi Arabian, although he himself came from Syria. This is because his movement emerged in response to the intellectual, religious and political life of his new home. His thinking combined the Salafi and Wahhabi doctrines, on the one hand, and, the thinking of Sayyid Qutb on the other, which fundamentally clashed with state policy, and therefore incorporated the political secrecy of Hassan al-Banna. The Suroriya movement combined the organised political mindset of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi ideology (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

Surorism is considered one of the most important and most complex doctrines in Saudi Arabia. It managed to emerge in the face of the Saudi Islamic mindset and is still prevalent among young Saudis. The evidence for this is its strength in challenging the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Jami and Wahhabi groups, who together represent the largest force in Saudi Arabia. Suroriya adopted a strong political positions over Iranian expansion, the Palestinian issue, the Iraq war, and the world wide war on terror and al-Qaeda, which started in 1994 (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

Another movement entered and appeared in Saudi society is the Muslim Brotherhood. It left its impact on Islam all over the world, including Saudi Arabia. It was founded by Imam Hassan al-Banna and still influences Saudi Islamic thinking. The presence of this movement in Saudi Arabia is attributed to the first meeting of King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, and Hassan al-Banna, as pilgrims, when the King was asked by al-Banna whether a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood could be established in Saudi Arabia, and the King replied diplomatically that “we are all Muslims and we are all brothers” (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

This may have been the first meeting between the Brotherhood and a Saudi leader, but it is not certain that it was the first appearance of the Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia. In spite of an invitation to take part in the Hajj at the beginning of the 1950s, Saudi Arabia did not open its doors to them or even allow them to open an official branches there, unlike Syria, Jordan and other countries that welcomed them (alesaad, 1995).

In the late 1930s, Hassan al-Banna expressed a growing interest in Saudi Arabia, and came to the Holy Land almost every year to perform the Hajj. He took advantage of

these trips to strengthen his ties with the leaders of Al-Hijaz, who soon adopted his ideas, and thus he used them to strengthen his ties with Saudi officials (alesaad, 1995).

But the actual existence of this intellectual movement in Saudi Arabia was due to the expansion of the Nasserite current. When King Faisal Al-Saud called for Islamic solidarity and many religious and political movements entered the Kingdom, with citizenship being granted to some of their representatives, the Muslim Brotherhood was the first and had the largest share in terms of stability in the Kingdom. It founded many schools to spread its ideas and founded institutions to publish newspapers. It also carried out economic activities, and established cultural institutions (Jami, 1993).

However, the Suroriya movement kept itself secret and did not publicly announce its affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood, for political reasons, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It may be said that in the modern world the only Islamic movement upon which an Islamic country was founded is the movement of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The Wahhabi call resulted in the formation of the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia and was based on the doctrines of its founder (Commins, 2008).

If we analyse the relationship between any intellectual movement and its founder, we will find a close and strong relationship between its beliefs and its proximity to the social conditions of its homeland. In comparison to the emergence of the Al-Jami movement, we can find that the sacred aspect represented in Makkah and Madina overlapped with the political aspect in Al-Jami thinking, since the House of Al-Saud announced the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia after King Abdul-Aziz bin Saud unified the population, history, and culture of several areas of land. By linking this religious interpretation of the political position of the Al-Jami to King Abdul-Aziz and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, we find that the Al-Jami movement integrated the religious and civil elements of society (Gharaibeh, 2004). They did so by considering the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet as the religious reference of Islam running every aspect of civil life. Therefore, the political-religious overlap in Al-Jami thinking is unlimited (Jami, 1993).

Jamism¹¹ is an important movement appeared in Saudi society. Muhammad Aman Al-Jami came to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj in the 1920s. Then he sought knowledge in the Holy Mosque of Makkah, where he was educated by the Sheikhs working there, most notably Sheikh Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, whose thinking was Wahhabist and who helped Al-Jami obtain a position as a teacher in Saudi Arabia. There is no doubt that the recommendations that Al-Jami obtained from some Wahhabi thinkers, and the fact that he obtained a teaching position in Saudi Arabia, were key factors in the spread of Al-Jami thinking in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Al-Jami established a special methodology for his movement, which attracted many students, in particular because it was in agreement with Wahhabi thinking, which pervaded Saudi Arabia. Finally, Al-Jami, relying on religious pretexts, affiliated himself completely with the Saudi state (al-edaney, 2013).

Al-Jami's thinking has produced the most widespread Salafi criticism of other Islamic movements since its emergence in the 1990s, notably the Muslim Brotherhood and the Suroriya movements. Al-Jami's thinking is a religious and political phenomenon of religious and cultural life. It has had a great impact both culturally and socially, but as a doctrine or a current it was not announced publicly in the country until late in the life of its founder. In addition, it can be said that it was the culmination of Al-Jami's scientific path. Some references date the public appearance of this movement to the period of the First Gulf War at the start of the 1990s (Jami, 1993).

One of the most important creeds and religious currents in Saudi Arabia is Shi'ism. The history of Shia doctrines in Saudi Arabia is associated with the early days of Islam, because Shia followers have existed since then the Shia made allegiance to Ali ibn Abi-Talib and his family. The Shia doctrine is not new to Saudi Arabia, as all historians, both ancient and modern, agree. However, they differ in their estimates of how long ago this current settled there (Ismail, 2012).

The existence of Shias clearly in the Kingdom astonished everyone else. Traditionally, the Shia represented a minority in Saudi society and attracted little

¹¹ The Jami branch emerged on the basis of being opposed to any anti-establishment, political and Islamic movement. It considers opposition (to the state) a violation of early Salafi doctrine, which, in turn, causes conflict and corruption.

attention. People tended to be mystified about the origins of a Shia minority in a country ruled by Wahhabist doctrine. But, in November 1979, after the Shia uprising against the persecution that they claim to suffer from Salafi thought, the world started to take an interest in their problems and difficulties (ebrahem and Alsadeg, 2013). Many questions were raised about their origin in the most important regions of Saudi Arabia. Because they are still an unknown component of society to many, it may be helpful to investigate the Shia in Saudi Arabia from historical, cultural, and identity perspectives, in particular because of the huge increase in their numbers in the Eastern Region, and Al- Madina (al-Hassan, 2010).

Since the foundation of the Kingdom in 1932, the Shia minority strongly believes that they have been subject to sectarian discrimination in Saudi Arabia. However, King Abdullah made a speech asserting the need to improve relations between the different religious currents, especially between Shia and Sunni thought.

Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990, had a great effect on Shias in Saudi Arabia, as it helped to raise their hopes of expanding in the Kingdom (Iacroix, 2012). The war sparked conflict between the Shia and Salafi currents in the Kingdom (Taleb, 2004).

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq prompted the Shia to call for their rights and point to their role as an important religious community everywhere, especially in the Shia regions of Saudi Arabia. The standing of Shia religious leaders varies across the Kingdom, but in the Eastern Region and Al- Madina, they play an important role in the lives of the Shia citizens (Gharaibeh, 2004).

Religious and spiritual currents had a great impact on intellectual Saudi society; perhaps one of the most important is Sufism.

Some scientists and Sheikhs has defined Sufism as followed:

-Zakaria al-Ansari, said: Sufism is a creed which known as the conditions of recommending the souls and the liquidation of ethics.

- Sheikh Abu al Hassan al-Shazly said: it is self-training on docile to God, with fidelity in love.

- Ahmed Zarrouk, said: It intended to repair hearts, and directed to God only (Zarrouk, 2005).

Therefore, Sufism is an Islamic sect and an old doctrine; they emerged in the Eighth century, and the movement reached its peak in the late of Ninth century, becoming available to all Muslims (Khaliq, 1984).

Its ideas and thinking as a religious current spread widely throughout Saudi Arabia. A great number of Saudis have followed Sufism, until Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century opposed it, forbidding people to join and follow it. He called them instead to join his movement and follow his call, and as a result many of Saudi people obeyed (al-Shobaki, 2002). But Sufism still exists in Saudi Arabia, especially in the Western, Eastern, and Northern Regions and in some parts of Riyadh. Its leaders still appeal to others to accept its thinking and religious approach, even in prosperous, developing Muslim countries, notably Saudi Arabia, and individuals are active in propagating it (Zeno, 2000).

Sufism is considered a secret current as there have been a number of attempts to stamp it out, such as crack downs on Sufis in Saudi Arabia by the supporters of traditional Wahhabism (Amer, 2010).

Saudi Arabia is considered the stronghold of Salafi traditional thinking, which adopted a Wahhabi stance in the middle of the 19th century that went on until the foundation of what is known as the third Saudi state in 1932. This is when most of the regions were unified under one royal family making the Wahhabi doctrine dominant. However, Al-Hijaz in the west and Al -Ahsa in the east are traditionally considered to have high concentrations of Sufis. It may be said that the Sufi doctrine in Saudi Arabia differs from that of Sufi schools in other Islamic nations, this is because the nature of the regime in Saudi Arabia is characterised by its Wahhabism and depends on individuals more than institutions (Alaam, 2011)¹².

The Liberalism began to appear in Saudi Arabia the middle of the 1990s. This was when the figures of the Saudi Awakening were being held in prison for opposing Saudi political rule, such as Dr Salman al-Odah, and Safar al-Hawali, also, there was an absence of effective scholars such as bin Baz and bin-Uthaymeen (two of the

¹² The Sufi branch was common and dominant in most of the Arabian Peninsula during the Ottoman reign. Now, under the reign of the Saudi monarchy, Sufism diminished and it barely exists in most of Saudi Arabia. MISBAR, A. 2012. *Sufism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf*, Dubai.

leaders of Wahhabism), whose opinions were very important to the Saudi people. Added to these factors were the effects of the Internet and the huge growth in communications technology, which facilitated access to liberal opinions something that had not been easy before, because the regime had been able to restrict people's access. All these factors facilitate the Liberal current to be one of the intellectual movements in Saudi society with huge impacts (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

It is clear that attempting to revise traditions, renew Saudi religious discourse and re-read philosophy, was one of the reasons that founded the Liberalism in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Saudi liberalism begins from criticising traditional opinions, such as the enshrined Saudi religious schools, and also as a result of people's suffering from extreme thought (Nabulsi, 2010).

In addition, Liberalism was introduced to Muslim countries through secret associations formed by individuals who were affected by Western thinking and impressed by its material prosperity (alsolamia, 2009).

Liberalism as a philosophical, religious, or non-religious approach, and a social pattern imposes conditions for its emergence and development which must be understood (alqadami, 2013).

The term 'liberalism' is thought to have only recently emerged in Saudi Arabia, despite the early emergence of modern activities there, since liberalism was born to oppose the Saudi Awakening (Azza, 2009). Over the years, it had no clear project, but in the years immediately after the millennium the "social Liberals" split from the "political liberals". The term "liberal" was not used widely in Saudi Arabia before the 1990s, but this did not mean that it had no modern activities.

After the Second World War, in 1945, some Saudi students who had travelled to Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq, came home having been influenced by nationalist, and left Arabic ideologies, which they had encountered abroad. Indirectly, this process was helped by educational and industrial institutions, such as Aramco, which hosted many Arabs from neighboring countries who had also been influenced by these ideas (Wabili, 2012).

2.4 The Main Enablers of Intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia

Many factors have fostered the emergence of intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia. Some of these are internal, whereas others are external reasons.

2.4.1 Internal Reasons

1-Monopolizing political power

According to the agreement made between Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the governor of Ad-Diriyah, Muhammad Al-Saud, absolute political power was exclusive to the House of Saud (R.Mortimer, 1993). This power has remained in the hands of the House of Saud to the present day, without any participation from any other political entity. This domination of state affairs from just one family made many other public institutions and entities demand participation in the government, or at least have the power to make decisions. As a result some entities tried to overthrow the regime and take up the reins of power through public revolutions, considered the simplest expression of the desire to get rid of the dominant political, social, or economic bodies. There have been more public revolutions against Al-Saud than can be counted, for example, the insurgency and revolution of Brotherhood against al Saud in 1926, they have asked to open the doors of democracy in governance, and the rejection of political monopoly, but this revolution ended with the victory of al Saud in March 1929.

The general feature that links all revolutions against al Saud is that intellectual currents call for political freedom, and want an end to political monopolies in the Kingdom (Wahba, 1961).

The monopolization of politics by one family gave rise to much intellectual activity, and encouraged people to resist the limited political work available to them, to demand a victory for democracy and to give everyone the right to political freedom.

2-Monopolisation of religious authority

The political authority in Saudi Arabia was sanctioned by the religious authority, according to the agreement between them. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was called the imam of advocacy, and religious authority was granted to him and his descendants. This agreement had a catastrophic impact on the progress of other religious currents in the Kingdom, because the political rulers took control of the

;religious authorities that devoted themselves to preserving the regime, serving their goals and implementing their plans. The religious authorities founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab are still prominent, refusing to allow any other religious body to take an effective part in the religious and social life of the Kingdom (Joas wagemakers et al., 2012).

The political supporters from al Saud have adopted many methods to make this doctrine the sole source of religious thinking in the country, either by saying that other currents are irreligious and rejecting their ideas or by alienating people from other currents, either religious or enlightened, and accusing them of atheism.

Wahhabi thinking has monopolised the religious authority, mainly for the same reasons that had contributed to the consolidation of new principles and modern trends which are considered the first breakthrough of the appearance of other many intellectual movements in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular currents contrary to this, such as Wahhabi religious intolerance and the secular liberal current (Al-Sakkaf, 2004).

3- The absence of elite Wahhabi preachers and scholars led to an intellectual and cultural vacuum in Saudi Arabia, which drew in many other intellectual currents, For instance, the absence of major figures of the Salafi movement such as Sheikh Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, and Sheikh bin Uthaymeen, who typified Wahhabism, allowed the others of religious and intellectual currents to be appeared.

This absence focused the minds of Sheikhs and scholars on the boldness of the new movements that were spread in the Saudi society, thanks to their intellectual power to express opposition. These new movements described the Wahhabi monopoly of religious thought as intellectual retardation, preventing the country from modernising and refuted the traditional claim that Wahhabi orders should be followed uncritically in order to maintain the authorities in power (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

4- 15 out of the 19 involved in the attacks on the US of 11th September 2001 were young Saudis, from one of the most important regional powers. This led to accusations concerning the intellectual and religious background of Saudi people, which at the time was limited to a Salafi outlook (Al-Mashouh, 2012). The accusations were aimed at the thinkers and scholars of the sect, claiming that they

bore responsibility for creating these events, and as a natural reaction, the intellectual trends in Saudi Arabia divided. With the help of the US and the West some secular ideas crept into Saudi Arabia, which led to strong criticism the prevalence of religious ideas (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

Despite the negative impact of 9/11 on the world in general, not excluding the Middle East, some positive outcomes results began to appear, such as a conviction that the doctrinaire Saudi state and its tough stance, which calls for the violation and diminution of the rights of offenders, was regressive. The demands for pluralism increased and instead of intolerance discourse to find common ground were welcomed as a way of solving the current doctrinal crisis.

Thus, new approaches were considered, representing different doctrinal movements and calling for a re-adjustment of the relationship between state agencies and religious bodies. There was a call for the state to adopt more tolerant policies towards unofficial doctrines in the country, confirming everyone's full right to enjoy protection and freedom of activity. Given this urgency and the external pressures for change, the future king, Abdullah, called for national dialogue in 2002 when he was crown prince.

For the first time, doctrinal pluralism was recognised implicitly by the state; the leading exponents of each doctrine were invited to discuss different national issues at a round table meeting. The level of tension began gradually to decline, religious figures of all doctrines began to meet together in a national dialogue, and this stimulated the growth of intellectual pluralism and liberalism for Saudis. The representatives of each movement openly declared their principles and views, even if they opposed Wahhabist religious views (Alshayeb, 2013).

5-The success of some leaders of intellectual movements in publicising their views gave them the boldness to found parties. The most prominent of these was Al-Jamiya, which openly began religious activity in Saudi Arabia in the early years of the 1990s. It was led by Muhammad Aman Al-Jami, who visited Saudi Arabia and spent much time in Al Madina, he faced many difficulties in penetrating Wahhabi strongholds but eventually spread the thinking of the Al-Jami movement. In a message for Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, he said that many of those who are associated with science and the call for goodness speak ill of their fellow preachers

secretly in their meetings, and some of them record this criticism on tapes that they share with others, even advertising them in lectures at mosques. This behavior contravenes Allah's orders. One of the most significant calls of his movement was for all advice to the ruler to be in secret; a preoccupation with politics was not of religious significance. He called the Wahhabis dissidents (Khawarij), and showed that his movement was completely unsympathetic to politics (Jami, 1993).

6- Salafi jihadists exemplify a departure from traditional Wahhabi thought. As represented by Al-Qaeda, they have a practical intellectual movement, which depends on religious roots in the text of Qur'an, but it differs in type and in its method of application. Most of its adherents reject the concerns of senior Wahhabi scholars such as bin Baz and bin Uthaymeen, and others from different currents over the danger of cracks in the structure of the Wahhabi religious community from an intellectual current calling for jihad as the basis of Islam, even if it costs lives (Ibrahim, 2009b).

7- Political asylum and the search for stability in another country also played their part. It is worth mentioning that political factors caused the immigration of members of the Muslim Brotherhood into Saudi Arabia. Refugees forced the Gulf countries to open their doors; for example, the Muslim Brotherhood escaped from Nasser's rule in the 1960s and Hafez Al-Assad in the 1980s (Al-Otaibi, 2014a).

The Muslim Brotherhood were given complete freedom in terms of education, and the books and teachings of Sayyid Qutb were accepted in the curriculum (for instance, his book "Signs in the Road" was adopted as a book for secondary teachers in Saudi Arabia. In this book, Sayyid Qutb describes the society of the twentieth century as ignorant. His brother Muhammad Qutb was a political refugee and teacher at the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. For a while, he lived in Makkah and wrote a book called "The Ignorance of the Twentieth Century" (1992) (Nabulsi, 2008). Despite the high position attained in the late 1950s and early 1960s by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, they were officially forbidden to engage in political. In addition, it was confirmed in a declaration by the Saudi Minister of the Interior in 2002, that all Saudi political problems could be traced to the Muslim Brotherhood rules, especially after Abdul Aziz Al-Saud eliminated the rebellious section of the movement of the Brotherhood of Those who Obeyed Allah.

Other thinkers of the Saudi Awakening movement, which began in Egypt, and not in the Gulf as many claim, affected some Wahhabis. Many groups produced the Egyptian influence on Salafism in the 1970s, from the views and writings of Sayyid Qutb and Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, and new Salafi thinking. The new views of the Brotherhood, the party and the whole political organisation were transferred to the territory of Saudi Arabia when the creative members of the movement fled Egypt for political reasons (Shamsuddin, 2008).

8-The intellectual violence of some movements and a desire to demonstrate these mistakes fostered a new movement. For example, we find that the reason for the emergence of the Suroriya current is its intellectual approach, opposing both that of the Muslim Brotherhood and that of Wahhabism. After the first Gulf War in 1990, the term Suroriya grew better known in Saudi Arabia after continuous conflict between the Salafis and the advocates of the Saudi Awakening; Surorism as a politico-religious movement intellectually opposes them both (Al-Khudr, 2011). This current saw that Wahhabi actions in the Kingdom were not Islamic in concept (for an Islamic current in Saudi Arabia). El-Abidine, its leader, had studied in the scientific institutes of Al-Ahsa and Al-Qassim. His most prominent pupil was Sheikh Salman Al-Odah.

This movement is also called the Qutbi movement after Sayyid Qutb, who contributed many of its ideas and from whom originated the political opposition and clear thinking for all its campaigns and projects. Although the Suroriya movement refers to Salafism, it was mainly derived from the secret Brotherhood organisation, which is believed by its members to advocate a system of governance and the necessity of obedience. At the same time, Qutb did not share the Brotherhood's belief in forming effective political parties in the community. Whatever its tenets, the Suroriya movement formed the largest sector of views in the Kingdom, in the Najd region in particular (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

9-The intellectual and moral control of Saudi women from some Wahhabi extreme rules, as well as the frequent prohibitions on women's behaviour, was debated by the Wahhabi regime under Salafi authority, and a deep isolation from rational thinking. For example, women in Saudi Arabia may not drive vehicles. This is an exceptional case. Wahhabis issued it as a fatwa without evidence, claiming that driving caused

many problems for women, would make it easier from them to encounter men, and would therefore increase the incidence of adultery and rape. They also strongly opposed providing personal identity cards to women, fearing that public and private sector employees would see women's faces, which should not be revealed to strangers. This reason, with its triviality and the primitive mindset that it reveals, has as its motive the desire to keep women under the guardianship of men, since personal identity cards will allow them to move freely without guardians. This – according to Wahhabism – breaks down men's authority over women. It is noteworthy that these conditions have not relaxed, despite rumours of incorrect legal rulings as a result of the judge or staff member not daring to match a woman's face with her image on her identity card (Najd, 2004).

Educational opportunities for women are also restricted, except for medicine and nursing. Women may only be educated in areas where mixing with men after graduation is not possible. For example, a female student cannot attend courses on engineering, agriculture or the media. The Wahhabis in exchange for allowing the government to give girls any right to education imposed this prohibition. There are also some Wahhabism fatwas concerning women, such as those prohibiting women's education; Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in part 16 of the book of Sunni pearls, said schools that required the mixing of boys and girls, and the removal of the veil abandoned Islamic morality. These are some examples that illustrate the past social status of Saudi women, in a framework of hardline Wahhabism, which resulted in an explosion of feminism, aimed at achieving a kind of intellectual freedom (Kadhim, 2009).

10-The discovery of oil and petroleum in Saudi Arabia and consequent economic prosperity enabled the previously secluded Wahhabi sect to transform into a global movement and spread to many countries. By the end of the 1980s, despite spreading Wahhabism around the world, the Saudi Wahhabist state did not accept the legitimacy of any other groups or schools of thought than themselves (Iacroix, 2012). The globalization and increased trade with the West as an exporter of oil exposed the country to many intellectual currents, not least those in the Western secular liberal mainstream, in addition to absorbing intellectual power, and the ability to criticise and oppose traditional views. This approach may have been imported from other

countries as a by-product of business networking (Alamer, 2014). These internal and external transformations served to expose the hidden policies of Saudi Arabia, which began look self-contradictory or the policies of a puppet government. Saudi Arabia felt a turn of the intellectual wheel, when Aramco came to the country, in particular the Eastern Region, and played a role in re-organising the community, resulting in labour movements, intellectual and political division and the spread of the English language, which all opened horizons of knowledge and access to international attitudes and beliefs. At the same time, oil played a role in strengthening the state and its educational institutions, and the state tried to control the ideologies spread within these institutions. It succeeded in controlling the Salafi movement, but the thousands of Saudis now studying all around the world picked up ideas more directly than by relying on a preacher mosque. Many scholarship holders came back with progressive ideas and a different view of religious and intellectual issues (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

2.4.2 External Causes

11- Successive Gulf Wars actually had positive benefits for the people of Saudi Arabia, reflected in the birth of new and diverse political and intellectual movements. These wars, after the Saudi people ceased to be pre-occupied by their own problems, forced the Saudi people to examine a new state of affairs. The fact is that the opposing forces represented other religious and intellectual orientations and different beliefs, and the conflict between the representatives of the different and contradictory currents had to be resolved (El-Najjar, 2001).

There are many who say that the repercussions of the three Gulf War helped to educate people and enable them to demand major changes. The Saudi people are no longer as ignorant or oblivious as they used to be, but have become intellectually active, participating in multidirectional religious and intellectual currents, because the Gulf crisis, as its greatest service, has made them desperate to claim their intellectual rights.

12- The Arab wars have impacted on the growth of political movements in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the Arab-Israeli conflicts have attracted support from many countries that are hostile to political change. After the Egyptian government, under

Nasser, declared itself anti-Israeli, many Saudis joined to military organisations in Yemen, Egypt, and Syria and served under nationalist Nasserites trained in arms. They intended to be politically and ideologically active, and the Nasser's anti-Israel speech encapsulated these ideas and political and intellectual concepts. In this way, they were introduced to the people of Saudi Arabia. The Arab wars increased the strength of the Salafist movement in Saudi Arabia to meet the urgings of the Islamic discourse of Nasser. An attempt was made to submit a draft of this address as a progressive Islamist project of the Progressive Nasserites in Egypt (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

13- Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the entrance of intellectual movements in the Kingdom, above all the liberal secular mainstream, was increased access to information, and the emergence of the post-Awakening generation. The expansion of scientific and cultural activity via the World Wide Web compelled the Arab world, including Saudi Arabia, to read foreign sources and absorb intellectual and cultural claims to freedom and democracy, moving away from traditional puritanical thinking. Most of these sources were closely related to the culture of European liberalism, hence Western-based liberal notions infiltrated Saudi society due to the emergence and spread of the Internet. Documents such as WikiLeaks describe the significance of plays, and programmes from the US and other cultural and media attempts to change the pattern of thinking and life inside the Kingdom soften the puritanical element of Wahhabi thinking, inspire the spirit of intellectual freedom, and try to change this thinking through claiming the right to be free and open (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

14- Scientific missions to Europe and the translation movement led to a very significant infiltration of liberalism into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as is obvious from the present role of the media in the supply and the introduction of unfamiliar ways of thinking, seeking to raise up Saudi people and liberate them from the authority of their Wahhabi leaders (Iacroix, 2012). If Saudi Arabia is an economic leader because of its oil wealth, we find that it occupies a place in the media arena which is not simple. Wahhabi thinking and its illiberal religious policy have been undermined by the 1,200 Saudi students studying abroad in 1962, which rose to 5,000 in the mid-1970s. The number of Saudi students abroad continues to increase;

for example, in 2012-3, the number rose to 149,742 . These students must culturally integrate with the children of different cultures, and as a natural result we see much leakage of Western influences into the Kingdom from its own people (Alahmari, 2013).

This chapter has looked into the socio-cultural and transformations that Saudi society has gone through from the 18th century to the present. I have also considered key personalities and proponents in the creation of those movements and organisations formed. I have particularly examined some factors responsible for the Wahhabi doctrine in Saudi Arabia. However, the chapter has also discussed the fact that there have existed other intellectual currents that have affected the Saudi society.

CHAPTER THREE: INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA FROM THE 1980S TO THE PRESENT; THEIR FORMATION, DIVISIONS, AND DIFFERENCES

Introduction

This chapter explores new intellectual dynamics in the Kingdom in order to further promote its socio-economic transformation. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a contemporary example of a Salafist religious nation state, in which the political landscape is dominated by religion. Indeed, the essence of political activity in the Kingdom is inextricably linked to what is understood to be in the national religious interest. This takes into account numerous factors, such as social changes, external dynamics, the bureaucratic concerns of governance and an understanding of the influence of such factors within modern societal and political frameworks (Al-noaim, 2012).

It is believed that there is a noticeable intellectual and cultural development among the various Islamic currents, bringing them closer to accepting and accommodating difference in perception, notwithstanding the disparity and degree of contrast between the groups. Those engaged in this discourse find this progressive tolerance to be coupled with the original duty of remaining firm and steadfast in their own conviction (Aldukhayyil, 2012).

However, it can be argued that, despite this seeming endurance and stability, Saudi Arabia is facing a historically unprecedented threat, with the Salafist movement at the heart of a dangerous struggle. As an intrinsic part of the establishment, it is argued that the actions and positions attributed to the Salafist movement are responsible for negative perceptions of and opposition to, the Kingdom. This has made the movement a target for detractors, both regionally and internationally (Aldukhayyil, 2012).

The dynamism and vigour of the Saudi Arabian intellectual scene can be traced back to the First Gulf War (1990-91). The stringent discussion became markedly more

intense after the September 11th attacks, following the reverberations of the event throughout Saudi thought and discourse (Al-noaim, 2012). The aftermath of the attacks caused many to accuse the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of exporting a backward and reactionary interpretation of Islam– an anachronistic form of Islam, which had not developed since the teachings of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th century radical reformer and revivalist preacher from central Arabia. Such a religious movement was thus considered incapable of embracing modernity or reaching anywhere beyond its original heartland. It required the discovery of oil, and the resulting wealth and influence to give this exclusive creed the tools that it needed to spread both within the kingdom and internationally (Iacox, 2012).

The propagation of this doctrine caused many Muslims within the Kingdom to consider it a central part of both their religious tradition and their national identity, rooting its conservatism in the national conscience. A clash of this kind between a superficial modernisation and the deep-seated reactionary tradition caused a backlash in which the conservatives prevailed, favouring what they perceived to be traditional values dictated by social custom. In the 1970s, this conservative dominance retrogressively transformed public discourse into a preference for the glories of the past and an increasingly firm adherence to inherited thoughts and customs. Indeed, it was this steadfast resistance to the new and suspect onslaught of modernity that encouraged the development of new strategies to address the movement emerging from this sizeable backlash (Helal, 2014).

Eventually what remains in the Saudi Arabian population is one of the region's highest levels of diversity of belief. As well as representing the Sunni, Shia, Salafi and Sufi doctrinal distinctions, the country displays a diversity of political, ideological and intellectual movements representing various denominations (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

In the history of civilised nations the cultural elites in different areas are considered to be the ones in charge of creating change, social reform and development, partly by improving the community's awareness of the rights it might attain and raising the level of its ambition in order to achieve the targets set up in the establishment of the state (Ruba'i, 2013).

This elite is also responsible for dismantling tyrannies and preventing one current of thought from dominating the rest. But Saudi Arabia is completely different. There, the current scene suggests that the people cannot take advantage of the coups and intellectual revolutions going on around them, such as those in Arab countries such as Tunisia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia can see that some religious currents use the laws of God as a pretext to exercise power and consider themselves partners in governance. These religious elements view themselves as guardians of the people, who know what is best for the nation (Ruba'i, 2013).

The idea for this thesis originated from my attempt to extrapolate areas of Saudi cultural thought, where most of the rights considered essential are centred on the following points: whether women's faces should be veiled or not, whether women should be segregated from men or in touch with them, whether women should be allowed to drive cars; who the Islamists are and what their characteristics may be; who the Saudi liberals are; whether they would like to create corruption in the country; and, if so, what should be done to prevent them? Such questions and issues have already arisen in some Islamic countries, whose economy depends to a large extent on Saudi funding, while in other opinions, Saudi Arabia was unable to educate its people to see past fruitless controversy. In addition, the dominant social culture has not been able to shift the economy to an intellectually and industrially productive condition.

I think that the main reason for this inability is the intellectual conflict between the various intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia. Sometimes the adherents of Sunni Salafi Islam attack the adherents of Shiite creed, and vice versa, while members of the Islamic Brotherhood struggle against the adherents of the Jami movement, mutually rejecting one another's opinions and lacking the tolerance to accept that others may hold contrasting views.

In addition, if liberalism can show a pretty face that has attracted some Arab countries, the people of Saudi can see only the ugly face that has opposed religion in various ways. Therefore the intellectual mentality in Saudi Arabia has become weak, the main reason being the conflict between movements.

This is why I want in this thesis to monitor the aspects of conflict in the intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia between those with either liberal or

Islamic trends, and those which are trying to harmonize the existing currents, so as to provide an acceptable discourse which would defuse the crisis of intellectual conflict and build a new edifice of moderate thought that has, for example, plenty of valid distinctions and judgments on the relationship between Sunnis and Shiites, or between liberalism and Salafism. This moderate current needs intellectual consolidation and a totally scientific study. Many hopes and aspirations could be established through this current and I want to focus on these to put together a road map amid all the criss-crossing and complex tracks (Ai'at, 2010).

3.1 The religious movements in Saudi Arabia

Religious movements in Saudi Arabia are the currents that affect social, intellectual and doctrinal thinking as a result of the religious nature of the country and are the most far-reaching of the currents and have the greatest effect on society. The general affiliation to Salafism is considered the common denominator of the Islamic currents in Saudi Arabia. This does not negate the existence of many different non-Salafist schools to which these currents belong, but in general the religious currents in Saudi Arabia are the currents that concern beliefs and religious concepts which are somewhat distant from political activities (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

The religious traditionalists held sway in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, exercising almost unchallenged influence over its education. This was appropriate to the simplicity of traditional local communities and the humble, uncomplicated requirements of regions where the living conditions were challenging and harsh. Similarly, conservative religious figures held overwhelming influence over matters of education, public thought and discourse (Al-noaim, 2012). These figures mostly held distinguished positions of privilege as custodians of religious orthodoxy and guardians over intellectual discourse. They used these positions to reinforce control over any initiative that might lead to intellectual modernization. It was unknown for people to take the risk of associating themselves with “secular” thought, as the conservative religious establishment called it, or any other concept with a similarly negative connotation amongst the religious hierarchy (Al-noaim, 2012).

It is important to define the relevant terminology and what the key terms indicate or imply, and to give flexible definitions of such vocabulary items, whatever the field

of discourse. Therefore, I want first to identify and define the terms and the subjects they refer to in the context of intellectual and religious thought in Saudi Arabia, its origins, and its various distinctions and classifications.

These definitions must represent as accurately as possible, the understanding of each term in public discourse and the significance of the definitions. A full definition, with the evolution of meaning over time, would take longer than is feasible in this thesis and is not the main objective of my study. Hence, I believe that a brief review of the terms must suffice. Subsequently, I intend to clarify the main groupings of these currents, classifying them as distinct through creeds and doctrines, or through their principles and methods.

Salafism, a school within the Islamic creed represents both “the perfection of inherited Salafism, which was formed in the Islamic Middle Ages”, and “its suitability for application in today’s world” (AlQedemi, 2012).

In the public mind “Salafist” can indicate many different things. It is often used to impute a heavy literalist textual emphasis on a revived, uncontaminated tradition of Islam. This understanding is often conceived as opposed to progressive, reformist or modernist trends. Numerous researchers in the Arab world, such as George Tarabishi and Aziz Al-Azmeh, favour such an interpretation.

The word “Salafist”¹³ has been used broadly, sometimes applied even to those who are not considered to be within the bounds of Islamic thought. Seeming oxymoron or self-repetitions such as “Salafist Marxist”, “Salafist Nationalist” or “Salafist Islamist” have been used, often to portray others as staunchly dogmatic adherents of schools of thought, who reject critical or reformist views (AlQedemi, 2012). Hence, the Salafist current, which typifies a large proportion of Saudi society can shelter them all under this broad definition, though it is in fact composed of many different schools with varying methodologies, understandings, sects and divisions, Salafism as a religious movement, has a very distinctive essence. It can be defined as an adherence to the methodology of the Prophet Muhammad and his disciples and companions (the “pious predecessors” or “salaf al-saalih”), who originally shaped

¹³ Some consider Salafism a blessed era, not a sect of Islam. ALBOOTI, M. S. 2010. *Salafism: A blessing stage, Not Islamic doctrine.*, Damascus, Syria, Dar Al feker.

the religion, and to whom a debt is owed. Indeed, although Salafism is principally focused on aspects of creed and doctrine, it was founded as the Wahhabist movement, which currently represents a broad group of contemporary Islamic movements (Albooti, 2010).

The Salafists fall into two main types: orthodox and Jami thought. The first believe in the official government-sanctioned Salafis, which has also been called the “Salafism of the authorised clerics/scholars”, represented by the Council of Senior Scholars, the Standing Committee for Religious Edicts, and the official scholars of the Kingdom who are prominent in the media and the religious judiciary. The nature and the doctrine of this movement are characterized by religious edicts concerning among other things matters of the Islamic creed, monotheism and polytheism, religious law and the transactions and judicial governance of trade, transactions and marriage. These traditional Salafists generally take an apolitical stance, leaving matters of politics to be dealt with by politicians. Their classical Salafism applies to most of the students of sacred religious law in the Kingdom and the official religious bodies sanctioned by the state. They are an ever-present and influential faction, unaffected by the theories and ideas of modern Islamic movements and implacable before their demands (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012). Hence, we can see that they are often at odds with emerging ideas and movements, in particular in the domains of politics and economics, as well as in intellectual discourse.

The vast majority of Saudi religious scholars, then, can be classified as classical Salafists. This type of traditional Salafist often demands appeasement by the state, which sees it as the sole guardian of the message of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the Salafist doctrine (Commins, 2006). These scholars maintain that obedience to the rule of the royal family is religiously mandated, unless the family shows signs of frank disbelief or apostasy. They also serve as advisors to senior politicians, in particular in matters that arouse controversy and debate, understanding that state institutions cannot always act in accordance with the advice of the religious establishment. A recent example of the influence exercised by the establishment scholars is a fatwa (religious edict) issued by the Council of Senior Scholars in late October 2010 forbidding women from working as shop assistants, two months after the Ministry of Employment issued a law permitting it (Al-Mashouh, 2012). It was

well known that senior politicians did not generally welcome the edict, yet the edict of the Council of Senior Scholars did not directly criticise or condemn them. Indeed, it would not have caused such a stir had the Ministry of Work not been committed to acting according to the edict (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

These official religious institutions are considered a source of strength and one way for the establishment of the Salafist movement to exert influence over other Salafist movements in Saudi Arabia. They also seem to indicate how far the Salafist movement in the Kingdom influences the government. I refer to this religious current as the official/establishment Salafist movement corresponding to the religious institutions mentioned above, since it is the religious mouthpiece of the political establishment. Thus, government officials do not hesitate to offer their frank and open support to this Salafi current. Several royal Saudi princes have made their support clear over the years, articulating the support by the Kingdom for the doctrine of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and defending his legacy from detractors. Given the position of the Kingdom at the heart of the Muslim world, due to the presence within it of the two holy sanctuaries of Makkah and Madina, and its sponsorship for spreading Islam along Salafist establishment lines, their religious influence has expanded across the Muslim world, and their spiritual hegemony has become entrenched (Alshyook, 2013). The Salafist establishments fear that they might lose their privileged position as wielders of great influence by becoming involved in politics. This has probably contributed to the generally passive attitude held by these religious institutions towards certain political issues. Although the religious movement is responsible for many political decisions over the years, they leave the direction of politics to be determined ultimately by the state (Al-Jazairi, 1981).

This group is close to the authorities as well as to certain independent Salafist figures and groups. In addition, the attitude to this current in practice depends on the fact that it refuses to engage in the democratic process, being sceptical of its legitimacy, and has a frequent tendency to turn towards traditional issues and shy away from finding means of change as required by the community (AlQedemi, 2012).

This would mean abandoning the legal tradition and the theological interpretations of Islam that have accumulated over centuries and depending on the Qur'an, Sunnah and the reliable narrators instead. All the common familiar Islamic formats would be

eliminated, including Sufism and Shi'ism, and Muslims would be under strict regulation. These are the most important features of Salafism (Vogal, 2000). Another point to note about the official Salafist current is its dominant presence in the official institutions, in particular religious and educational ones, as well as its dominance of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which is considered an absolute authority for Salafists and holds sway in the judicial institutions under Salafist influence (Al-Zubaidi, 2011). This all suggests that the Salafist current in Saudi Arabia is beyond criticism, because its mechanisms for defending itself are so resilient; they are in the hands of the teachers, the security guards, the Imams of the mosques, the judges, the advisers, the lawyers, and even the businessmen. In all sectors, the Salafists are strongly represented (al-Rasheed, 2002). Official Salafism divides into two main forms, conventional religious institutions¹⁴ and the Jami current.

3.1.1 Conventional religious institution

Conventional religious institutions are at forefront of Saudi society, where traditional religiously conservative discourse still prevails in the national culture. In addition, traditional religious institutions through their strict discourse, have imposed intellectual control on all forms of cultural expression and almost never allow anyone to deviate from their official line (al-Mozainy, 2008).

The traditional clerics alone have for a long time embodied the intellectual life of Saudi society. Conventional Salafi discourse is characterized by a set of features that have ossified over time to such an extent that it is culturally closed and protected from criticism and change. It is perhaps attributable to the unwillingness of Salafists to communicate with others. The traditional clerics have been in the Kingdom for a long time and have been so content with their way of thinking that they pay no regard to the opinions and practices of other Muslims, whom they consider deviant (al-Olaiwi, 2014).

¹⁴ Educational Salafism is primarily concerned with teachings of the Quran and Prophetic tradition. Salafist scholars and preachers concentrate on educating a new generation of religious, conservative Muslim youth. Salem SALEM, A. 2013. *The differences between Islamist*, Egypt, Centre Namaa for research and study.

The privileged position of legal experts in Saudi Arabia has emerged through the application of Islamic Sharia as the law of the state. In addition, these people occupy the second rank, below the royal family, in the political structure of the state. They are also responsible for making all legal decisions, since they alone have the legal authorization to do so. In cases with a bearing on internal affairs, they play a major role in mobilizing public opinion to legitimize the regime (A.Kechichian, 1986).

It can be difficult to determine whether the conventional current actually regulates the behaviour of Saudi citizens, or more generally their cultural patterns. It is also difficult to turn a blind eye to many of the socio economic and political indicators and demands of young people, who outnumber the rest of society; what is going on is an explosive “battle of modernity” - an open battle that will leave profound effects not only on modern discourse, but also traditional religious discourse itself and the institutions which produce it. Despite these indicators, some people believe that religious institutions still clearly influence society, effectively controlling most citizens as the custodians of values, keeping an eye on public behaviour (Al-noaim, 2012).

3.1.2 Jami Salafism

The Jami religious trend is a modern Salafist movement with an aggressive attitude towards any political discourse opposed to the established political order and Muslim government, no matter what the nature of the government or regime, its laws or legal system, and even its regard for fairness, justice, reason or whether it has the interests of its subjects at heart. Therefore, according to them, goodness stems only from supporting the established regime, and all evil stems from resistance to it. This movement is historically attributed to the Ethiopian religious scholar Muhammad Aman Al-Jami who died in 1996, as a guest and teacher in the Holy Prophetic Sanctuary in Medina and a teacher in the Islamic University of Medina. He represented a line of Salafist thought which opposed those Salafists who had disputed the decision by the Saudi government to allow foreign forces to enter the country. The rhetoric of this religious movement gradually crystallised over time to espouse hostility towards all politicized Islamic discourse, i.e. religious discourse with a political content that differed from the established political order. Among the

most prominent and distinguished leaders of this current were Rabi' Al-Madkhali, Falih Al-Harbi, Al-Rayyes and others. Their polemical discourse often involved categorizing their opponents on the basis of attitudes to the ruling authority, often a central feature in Jami rhetoric (al-Maliki, 2014).

This central feature derives from the religious principle of “obedience to authority”, shared by all Salafists of various backgrounds and denominations. All Salafist political engagement revolves around it, taking precedence as a rule even over human rights, the sovereignty of the nation, and personal liberty. This is based on the precept adopted by Jami Salafists that the demands of security and stability supersede the observance of individual rights and liberties (al-Maliki, 2014).

Jami Salafism implies that anyone professing the Islamic faith who has arrived at a position of leadership and power even through suppressing opponents by force - has earned the political legitimacy that merits obedience to them, willing or not (Jami, 1993). The only exception is obedience to a command to sin or to commit an act of disobedience, which a Muslim must not obey, while taking great care not to publicly denounce or condemn the leader in a manner which might turn others against him. Jami also forbids publicly disputing with the ruler in these matters, even if this is done through peaceful and nonviolent means. The individual's duty in these circumstances, according to the Jamiya, is to adhere to the Islamic principles of patience, and to offer advice in private so as to avoid sowing public discord and spreading anarchy. Even if the ruler has reached a high degree of injustice and immorality, Jami asserts that such a scenario is less dangerous than openly condemning a leader. Muhammad Aman Al-Jami, the founder of this movement asserts, “... this blessed Salafist doctrine has a positive regional impact in the realm of Saudi Arabia, one which is palpable and clear to anyone living in this country, be they citizens or newcomers. The most distinguished and widely beneficial of these impacts for the state and the worshippers therein is the establishment of a Salafist Islamic state in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula (AlJaami, 1993).

In conclusion, Jamism, as a local movement within Saudi Islamism, is hostile to any political trend described as anti-authority, because it seems to diverge from the path of the righteous Islamic predecessors who called only for obedience to the Muslim ruler.

From the standpoint of the anti Jamists, Jami leaders are guilty of “blind obedience to authority” and “the vendors of fatwa”. In addition, the word Jami has come to indicate, in their writings, anyone who is unquestioningly loyal to the official authority or the ruler. With this in mind, the Jami movement has succeeded in curtailing the influence of the awakening groups (those questioning the exaggerated respect for the traditional) by analyzing their sermons and recordings. In addition, it has used in its criticism, textual evidence from the Qur’an and Sunnah, relying on the wide Islamic knowledge of Sheikh Muhammad Jami and his followers. It has used this deep knowledge to challenge the doctrines of its opponents, who responded by challenging the credibility of Jamism, shedding light on its claim to be defending the state. Moreover, the opponents of Jamism have tried to create a credibility gap between it and Saudi society, taking advantage of its leaders’ closeness to the ruling authority (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

3.1.3 Shiites

The Shiites, after the death of the prophet (PBUH) swore allegiance to Ali Bin Abi Talib as their Imam and Caliph and wanted his sons to have the right to succeed him, believing it injustice to let sovereignty fall into other hands. The Imamate, according to the Shia, was not an issue of self-interest in which the Imam reaches his position through being chosen by other Muslims but rather a fundamental issue and one of the pillars of the religion. Historians differ about the time when Shiism first emerged. Some say that its origin can be traced to the group who believed that the prophet’s successor should come from his household alone, the most obvious choice being his uncle, Al-Abbas, and next, his cousin Ali (Ameen, 2004). Some researchers (in particular Shiites) say that Shiism dates back to the lifetime of the prophet, thus making it concurrent with Islam itself. However, the Sunnis consider this view, groundless (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

The doctrines of Shia have several areas of conflict with those of the Salafist religious intellectual. These doctrinal and religious conflicts always divide the Sunni Salafists and the Shiites. One of these differences can be seen in the issue of the Imamate, which Shiites see as one of the pillars of Islam. They consider Ali Bin Abi Talib the rightful first Imam, regardless of the Sunni Muslims ‘advocacy of Abu

Bakr Al-Sadeeq. The issue of the Imamate is, however, too complex and too far removed from the central topic to enlarge upon here. It lies at the heart of the sectarian hostility between the Salafists and the Shiites, in particular it amplifies the difference between their interpretations of Islam in the Qur'an, and their attitude to the Hadith; some of Shiites believe that both the Qur'an and the Hadith have been distorted which can reduce their reliance on these books as a religious support (Shaheen, 2007). In the website of Dr Salman Al-Odah site (Islam Today) assesses the level of disagreement between these two. He says that between them is a fundamental difference, which extends as far as their origins. Although the difference between them was politically conceived and focused specifically on the issue of the Imamate, it then evolved to include doctrinal issues deriving from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and certain basic principles, such as the attitude of the Companions of the Prophet Mohammad (Ai'at, 2010).

The Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia has always been considered a source of political unrest, tension and revolution. In their writings, the Shiite communities used to lead the protest movements, which are why they permanently oppose the conservative Salafi cast of mind, which is committed to the principle of obedience to the ruler. Some of Shiite scholars were able to set up schools and produce intellectual doctrines that could, crystallize more of the currents considered those of enlightenment in Islam. The disputes between the Salafis and the Shiites, however, persisted for a long time, remaining latent within the intellectual structures of Arab and Islamic thinking. The Shiite position is based on taking a dialectic view, because the control of minds by an individual under certain conditions turns to the strength of materialism. Shiites were always looking for change and renewal, while the Salafists were seen to be conserving values that were already established by Ibn Taymiyyah (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

3.1.4 Sufism

This current among the Salafists generally includes the groups committed to three of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, namely, the Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi'i. The fourth is the Hanbali. Sufis accept the Ash'ari creed, which depends on

Qur'anic verses and the texts of the Hadith which rely on the authorization of attributes (Khaliq, 1984).

This current is very ancient in origin. It was the religious legacy of an idea that has been prevalent in most Muslim countries for many centuries. Most of the regions of the Kingdom adopted the concepts of Sufism, especially in the period of Ottoman rule 1299-1923. It was the prescribed approach in the Two Holy Mosques (Makkah and Madina) and also in Al-Ahsa, Nejd and southern Saudi Arabia. However, once Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab appeared, it grew very restricted and weak and came under attack through the distortion of its symbols. But the teaching of Islamic Science played an important part in its preservation. Some teaching impregnated with Sufi thought remained in Makkah, Madina, Al-Ahsa and other parts of the Kingdom. There were still many Sufis in these areas, accorded great status, and some of them even occupied ministerial posts in the government (Zeno, 2000).

This current was one of the most important thought in most Muslim countries in the past and still is today. This is due to the fact that many of the citizens of those countries live or work in Saudi Arabia; some of them have helped to maintain the current (Zarrouk, 2005).

Most of the social activities of Sufis today involve discrete charitable volunteer groups, because Sufism is considered to go against the social norm. Official approval is never given for the establishment of Sufi religious centres. However, Sufis may learn Islamic Science and may attend religious centres where the Qur'an and Islamic Science are taught. Regarding the ceremonies and practices which count as Sufi by definition, such as Mawlid (celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad), they are not viewed as official, because they are enacted in farms, homes and generally in private (AlArabiya.net, 2006).

This peaceful current in its extrapolation. Its followers, per se, make no political demands. In addition, history records no sedition or disorder that they have instigated, because they take the Sunni approach and tend not to incite disobedience to a Muslim ruler but rather loyalty. An example of this is that Judge Abdul Latif Al Mulla welcomed King Abdul Aziz to Al-Ahsa, and invited him into his own house

in a village in Al-Ahsa. All the people of Al-Ahsa, including the elite, swore allegiance to him. The house is now known as the House of Allegiance.

After the events of September 11, it should be noted, this school of thought began to spread in some regions of the Kingdom, and has not stopped. Most of those who were affected by this current were students, who realized that it was a moderate tendency, typical of the approach of Sunni scholars over time (Al-Fawzan, 2005).

Among the most important features of this current is that it attracts some who are eminent in Islamic Science. Some of them hold positions of Judges in the courts of Makkah, Madina and Al-Ahsa, or that of professor in departments of Islamic studies in Saudi universities. In addition, we may find them in large religious centres, such as that of the Council of Senior Scholars a body representing the senior scholars in Saudi Arabia, in the Fiqh (jurisprudence) and the understanding of Sharia issues. Sheikh Qais Al-Sheikh Mubarak is one example; he belongs to a commission of senior Islamic scientists, teaching Al-Maliki Fiqh to the people of Al-Ahsa, Sheikh Abdul Wahab Abu Sulaiman is another, who teaches the people of Makkah. Sufism is an individual tendency, which praises asceticism and a severity of worship. This approach leads to distinctive ways of thinking and behaviour known collectively as Sufism. It seeks to educate the self and then transcends it; to get to know God through detection and observation, not by following conventional paths (AlMadani, 2005).

The Salafist current considers the Sufis as unbelievers, and merely misguided, because they believe in the subrogation, union with God and the unity of existence. Sufis sometimes claimed that their Sheikhs have supernatural powers, according to the science of the unseen and personal meeting with the prophet (PBUH). Moreover, they believe that their religious knowledge comes directly from God without any need for formal lessons or learning. The most prominent scholar of Sufism at present is the Sufi Abu al-Hasan Al-Shazly, who says: “We look to God through the insight of faith without searching for evidence and proof, because through love, knowledge will be there in the heart without evidence or proof.” It rejects the Salafist current, in the sense that Salafists exaggerate their description of the prophet, using musical instruments in praise, and are not committed to Sunnah in terms of their appearance (Al-Najjar, 1990).

I have so far outlined the conventional religious currents in Saudi Arabia, including scientific Salafism and its various branches, such as Al-Jami and traditional Salafi institutions, the Shiite current in Saudi Arabia, and finally Sufism. These schools of doctrinal thought are very different from each other, as seen in the intellectual and doctrinal conflicts between them. These are considered the most widespread, as well as the most influential on Saudi society in general, and on its intellectual circles.

I turn next to the kinetic religious currents, which intellectual life in Saudi Arabia also contains. Almost all of the kinetic religious currents are reluctant to reveal themselves. This is because Saudi society refuses to admit to its intellectual currents in public; it has refused to publicly reveal the truth about the existence of these currents.

3.2 The kinetic religious movements

The religious kinetic currents may be defined as major Islamic movements, which currently call for commitment to Islamic principles as they are set out in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and the application of Islamic laws to people's lives today (Vogal, 2000). They are also the ones that clash with the policies of the countries in which they operate. (Al-Zubaidi, 2011). They are represented by a number of dynamic movements and groups, such as the Islamic Groups, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad group, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, the Salafi Movement in Kuwait, and dynamic Salafism in Saudi Arabia. The practical action of this current is to participate in the democratic process under the name of "the common interest" or "the necessity" but still objecting to the basis of the democratic system as a contradiction to the origins of Islam (AlQedemi, 2012).

At the beginning of 1928, Saudi Arabia sheltered a large number of Islamists from Egypt and then from Syria when they were on a collision course with the political authorities of their countries. Most of them had worked at schools or universities in Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi intellectuals and the Saudi media promoted their books and publications, as well as the literary and exegetical productions of Islamic notables many of whom were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The books and theses were freely distributed in large numbers and were broadcast on the radio (al-Odah, 2011a).

The reports of many Brotherhood activists in Saudi Arabia led to the growth of the dynamic currents. For this reason, and because of the profound influence of the dynamic currents, they and their most prominent concepts should be described, noting the most important difference between them and traditional Salafism.

Salafists steer clear of political affairs, in order to maintain their position in the state. In contrast, the kinetic currents, including both the Muslim Brotherhood movement and the Suroriya current, attack the state policies and call for the legitimate application of all the Islamic regulations. One of the researchers “Salah Labeb” who is interested in the affairs of Islamic movements says: “The conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist call is considered to be a radical, fundamental and doctrinal conflict and a conflict for existence, too” (Labeb, 2014).

Since its inception, the Salafist call worked to correct the doctrinal direction of the Islamic dynamic currents. It also focused a good deal on the literature, trying to straighten the intellectual track of the Muslim Brotherhood under the pretext of encouraging it to commit itself to the Sunni approach, and stay away from political opposition (Labeb, 2014). Also, the Salafist wanted the Muslim Brotherhood movement to abandon the practical and political side of Islamic life. In addition, it aimed at making the Brotherhood accept all the decisions of the state and to engage itself to obey the Muslim ruler in all circumstances, virtually turning itself into a follower current and no longer being a representative one (Algerian, 2012).

Religious Kinetic movements can be divided into two main types, The Muslim Brotherhood and the Suroriya movement.

3.2.1 The Muslim Brotherhood

Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt in 1928 (one of the reformist school students, led by Rashid Rida), wanted to build a regulatory framework for the promotion of the reformist ideology. The Brotherhood movement had at first a double aim: to resist foreign occupation, and to work to establish an Islamic state which followed and imposed the Islamic faith (Iacroix, 2012).

The Muslim Brotherhood had for a long time been interested in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to be teachers in its schools and universities¹⁵, also interested living in a country such Saudi Arabia since the late 1920s, indeed, when Hassan al-Banna showed a growing interest in it. He used to visit the Holy Land each year to perform the Hajj (alesaad, 1995).

He took advantage of those trips to strengthen his ties with the elders of Hijaz who were deeply influenced by his views and ideas. He made use of them to strengthen his ties with the Saudi officials who confirmed their support for him (Tammam, 2002). However, this support did not mean that the Saudi authorities wanted the movement to be established in Saudi Arabia. This is shown clearly by a famous story, when Hassan al-Banna requested King Abdul Aziz, in October 1946 to establish a branch of the organization in Saudi Arabia. But it would have contravened the law forbidding political parties in the country; therefore the King refused to allow it, saying, “we are all brothers and we are all Muslims” (Iacroix, 2012).

The Muslim Brotherhood is considered one of the biggest contemporary kinetic Islamic movements; it calls for a restoration of Islam as it was revealed in the Qur’an and Sunnah and for the application of Islamic law in society. This is a call that has clashed with the policies of countries working and contributing to striking a balance between secularism, liberalism and nationalism in the Arab region (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

The emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Saudi Arabia is one of the most politically sensitive issues there and any declaration of belonging to it is viewed with extreme caution in Saudi Arabia. However, many influential persons are known to be its members. Moreover, its members have taken up political and civil positions by political agreement; some of them are preachers and others are Islamic Science specialists such as Dr Awad al-Qarni and Dr Ali bin Hamza Al-Omari.

¹⁵ In the 1970s and 80s, the Muslim Brotherhood controlled education, especially at universities, and media outlets, mainly during king Faisal's reign. In 2014, Ministry of the Interior in Saudi Arabia declared the Muslim Brotherhood, inside and outside Saudi Arabia, as a terrorist group. AL-OTAIBI, A. 2014a. Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia. *aawsat*.

Moreover, regions of the Kingdom such as Hijaz, the central region, and the eastern region hold different sections of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Mashouh, 2012). Some claim that the Muslim Brotherhood movement has failed, and if it has, the reason may be that it lacked clear leadership and could take no specific line on crucial issues, notably their attitude toward the ruler. The movement was intellectually split between the concept of obedience to the ruler or “the Imam”, as they call him, and the rejection of his political attitudes (zaidy, 2000).

Perhaps it lacks application at the social level because of some cultural deficit in the movement’s thought; however some of its concepts can be observed at the following levels:

- 1- People became interested in political matters and kept up with its news.
- 2- For Islamic Science specialists, the Muslim Brotherhood Movement helped indirectly to strengthen their position, because the governing authority in Saudi Arabia realized the important role that such people could play in support of the political regime (zaidy, 2000).

Since the Saudi environment can be described as completely closed, this movement got little opportunity to appear. Its thinking deepened and strengthened its educational and intellectual establishment, but now the situation in Saudi Arabia has changed and it has become better adapted for the movement to express itself and declare its paradigms and its civilizing project. It proposes the election of municipal councils, national dialogue conferences and active liberal currents, but if this movement continues to work secretly it will be exposed to marginalization and disintegration in any upcoming democratic process. The Muslim Brotherhood as a movement is well structured. It undertakes dynamic missionary activities, and is extremely powerful among young people, who are ready to revolt, as well as a reform movement in the name of changing Saudi society (Al-Otaibi, 2013b).

Because of its intellectual differences, this movement did not survive the accusations and official attacks of the Saudi rulers and even some fanatical individuals, who believed that the existence of this movement in Saudi Arabia brings affliction and corruption to society and that the movement was the main source of terrorism (al-Izzi, 2004).

The movement suffered from intellectual conflicts. For example, the conflict between the Suroriya and the Brotherhood had a significant influence on the order of Saudi Brotherhood's house and had to disappear from society and the media. The Brotherhood was at one point fighting on several internal and external fronts, including a sharp conflict for authority in the Kingdom against the Salafists and the fanatical Jami current. However, the conventional view of these events is discredited and there is no longer a prevailing view of the conflict. In addition, the reform movement in Saudi Arabia is still expanding. Although the secrecy that was another feature of the Brotherhood's thinking helped to impede its progress, it would not remain silent forever (al-Izzi, 2004).

This movement had few chances to express its attitudes in the midst of such intellectual hustle or to add its voice on many issues. However, the Saudi scene now suggests that this movement will grow stronger as time passes and it will express its views at all levels, internal and external. Moreover, the liberals are not afraid of the conventional Salafi movements nor the Suroriya movement, but they are afraid of the movements that have not so far manifested themselves (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

3.2.2 Alsuroriya

The origin of the religious current called Suroriya is attributed to Muhammad Surour Zine El Abidine, a Syrian who moved to Saudi Arabia. At first he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and engaged in political action. Through the Brotherhood he found work in Saudi Arabia in 1965 (Al-Khudr, 2011). Muhammad Surour confirmed that he had been one of the Muslim Brotherhood followers, until the end of the 1960s, when a dispute with Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia obliged him to leave. Perhaps, as certain sources have it, the reason was that the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia was treating its members according to their nationality. Being Syrian, he did not continue his relationship with the Egyptian Brotherhood, in particular with Manna al-Qattan, who was the general observer of the Brotherhood movement in Saudi Arabia. The conflict between the two intensified until Manna al-Qattan mentioned his name to the government authorities on the pretext that he posed a threat to Saudi security. In consequence, Muhammad Surour established an independent current that attracted many Saudis, because it included a Salafist

element and the Muslim Brotherhood's principles of organization and confidentiality. However, he claimed a high degree of spirituality for himself. He said, "there was no comprehensive approach in Saudi Arabia", meaning "no approach to an Islamic movement" (Al-Mashouh, 2012). In this sense, the Muslim Brotherhood was considered neither a Salafist movement nor a brotherhood, but both at once. It was Salafist in its terms of reference and was dynamic in term of its concepts. It differed from Salafism in being dynamic and politically active and from the Brotherhood in not being organized. In addition, it included only Salafist elements, whereas some of the Brotherhood might be Sufis, while others belonged to Salafism. In addition, it was an organization that had its own symbols and also had a framework and an administration (alhayat, 2014).

Surorism is an approach that differs from both the Muslim Brotherhood and traditional Salafism. It is based on the combined thought of two important Islamic figures: Ibn Taymiyyah and Sayyid Qutb. Ibn Taymiyyah contributes his strict Salafi position against other groups and sects, such as Shiites, and his view of doctrinal content. Sayyid Qutb, Surorism is tinged by his revolutionary thought. In addition, the groups who follow Surorism or Qutb's school made a significant impact in Surorism's decision to disobey the ruler when necessary, which is a belief of the Sunnis (Al-Rayes, 2010).

The question of who is to rule is the main issue in Suroriya thought and, according to their answers, they assess calls, invitations and states. Surour composed his book *The Prophets' Approach*, "in order to reflect on the call in its dynamic form"; because he believed that the academic Salafi books could not move the rebellious crowds. He says, for example, "I looked in the books of doctrine and I saw that they were not suitable for the current era but were solutions to the issues and problems of the era in which they were written. Our problems require new solutions and besides, the style of books of doctrine is not flexible" (Abidine, 2016). So his logic and phraseology are trying to combine those of Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood. In this respect, the Salafi approach is considered to be contemporary in its acceptance of confrontation (Hijazi, 2010).

However, what distinguishes the Suroriya current is that it has a clear religious vision of many things. It has a clear political and intellectual vision of any issue and

project, even when it strongly opposes, on the political and intellectual level, what it sees as inconsistent with its vision (Al-Ahmadi, 1998).

The spread of this thought in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the eastern and Western regions is believed to be limited. However, the eastern region has witnessed a hidden conflict between Suroriya and the Muslim Brotherhood movement since the beginning of the 1990s, in particular when Suroriya has attracted important religious adherents in the eastern region. In the Western region, in contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood is still the most popular movement, while dominance of Riyadh remains a matter of dispute between the two. Qassim, however, is indisputably seen as the homeland of Surorism (Shaheen, 2010).

Suroriya has succeeded in creating a generation that is fond of reading and knowledge, but at the same time, like other religious movements, it has failed, to keep up with the rapid modernization of society. It also faced an actual crisis through its relationships with other currents. For example, it is not at peace with the Salafist “Aljami.” This is shown in the recordings of warnings from Suroriya and the great attack, which it met from such Salafist Jami figures as Rabeeh Al-Modkhaly and Muhammed Aman al-Jami. Its dispute with the Saudi Brotherhood became apparent, as a conflict about which of them should influence young people, endow charitable institutions and preach. Like other currents, it suffered from sharp intellectual attack, but it presents a dynamic intellectual approach that has had a great impact on Saudi young people in particular. In addition, it was able to establish civilian and charitable institutions along Suroriya lines, although some, such as Al-Haramain charity, were closed after the events of 11 September (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

3.3 Liberalism in Saudi Arabia

Liberalism has a fundamental essence, which liberals agree on, despite their different orientations and applications of it. In all ages they have considered it a tool for reform and production. This essence is represented by the axiom that “liberalism is considered to be the beginning and the end, the motivator and the aim and the origin and the result in human life”. In addition, it is the only intellectual institution that does not aspire to achieve anything but free human activity, explaining and judging its different aspects (al-Solami, 2009).

Before going further into the meaning of Saudi liberalism¹⁶ of various kinds, we should refer to a possible definition of liberalism and refine its meanings.

The term is not Arabic but is derived from the Latin word “libertas”, which denotes a generous, noble and free individual. In one sense it refers to free economic thought, that is to say, a belief that the state should not interfere in economic activities, because the duties of the state should be limited, and not exceed the freedoms of people (Rabe'a, 1998).

Freedom is not only considered one of the principles of liberalism, but a fundamental one on which others rest.

Intellectually, liberalism means freedom of thought and speech. This is the aspect on which the other meanings of liberalism rest. Economically, it means freedom to own personal property; politically, it refers to freedom of assembly, to establish political parties and to elect and hold accountable the ruling authority (Hubab et al., 2013). The concept of liberalism has two main pillars, namely, intellectual freedom and freedom of speech. Any violation to either fundamentally damages the concept of liberalism and corrupts its theoretical basis; in turn this would affect its attitude in practice (alqathami, 2013).

It is an intellectual doctrine that focuses on individual and collective freedom and sees the need to respect the independence of individuals. In addition, it holds that the main function of the state is to protect the freedom of its citizens. This liberal system rests on a secular ideal of maximizing the human being, who is autonomous in realizing his or her needs (Al-Saqqaf, 2012). The US Academic Institution goes on to say that “the new liberal system, which drew on the thought of the Age of Enlightenment, began to replace the human with the machine” at the centre of Saudi Arabia. People can understand everything with their intellect and can also “develop themselves and their communities through systematic and rational reaction” (Al-Saqqaf, 2012).

¹⁶ The term 'liberal' remains taboo in Saudi society. This is why liberals opt for referring to themselves as enlighteners, modernizers and reformers. On the other hand, some scholars argue there is no real liberalism in Saudi Arabia. AL-RSHEED, A. 2012. Saudi Liberalist after Arab Spring and the Rise of Islamist. *ALMajalla*.

Jamil Saleeba says that “liberalism is a doctrine of liberty, philosophical and political which decides that the unity of religion is not necessary for good social organization and that the law must ensure the freedom of speech and belief” (Saleeba, 1994).

The Encyclopedia Britannica states “it is rare to have a liberal movement without having mystery, but some of them break down because of it”, adding, “since the word freedom implies ambiguity, then that will be the case with the word liberalism or liberal”. The liberal individual may believe that freedom is just a special right that is associated with the individual and not others and also that the role of the state must be restricted, or he may believe that freedom is associated particularly with the state and the state may have the ability to use it as a tool for strengthening freedom. In addition, if the name of liberalism is mentioned, it will seem as revered as the apostles or “the messengers”(Russel, 1989). It is closer to the mystery, and through it, an individual can recognize a number of distinctive features (Russel, 1989). One of the main factors of the ambiguity of the term liberal is the mystery in the concept, where the former can completely depend on the latter. It should not be forgotten, too, that the concept of freedom couldn't be separated from that of liberal in any condition in which the human considers himself as liberal. However, liberalism, as a concept which if widely discussed, is very difficult to agree on and control, because each person who thinks about it depends on having the freedom to maintain his own idea (Fouad, 1993).

Liberalism is an intellectual phenomenon that carries a number of connotations. It is difficult to reach a consensus about any specific concept of it. Most scholars may agree that liberalism cannot be accurately defined; crystallizing a clear and precise definition of the concept of liberalism is difficult and perhaps useless (Ziyada, 1988). Difficulty in defining the concept is due to its association with the major problems from which most of the concepts in the social sciences suffer. The concepts are not merely verbal functions with a meaning that can be understood through dictionaries, but are ideas reflected in experience and associated with history, including conflicts, difference and harmony. This is what gives the concept its multiple meanings, in the sense that a unified liberalism is a generalization and this naturally generates mixtures of ideas and sometimes severe confusion about the concept (romizan, 2009).

Perhaps the reason for the difficulty specifying what “Saudi liberals” means is that this description was given to the opponents of the dynamic, traditional, Salafi religious movement in particular. This broad and diverse fabric is composed of liberals, secularists and Islamists, who incline towards openness, moderation and enlightened Salafism (Adnan, 2012).

Another reason for the difficulty in determining the meaning of liberalism is its intersection with other concepts, for example, the concept of the educator and the thinker, where the two sometimes seem to be synonymous. Some describe liberalism as an extension of the ideas of enlightened philosophers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when educators were a natural extension of philosophers at the sectarian and ideological levels. The emergence of educators had been linked with intellectual and political conflict; even educators are sometimes defined as people actively opposed to authority. The educator should be an individual who is committed to raising issues that are inconsistent with any political pressure (binSnaitan, 2005).

A Saudi educator is an individual who has a high degree of contemporary and non-contemporary knowledge and is also interested in national affairs and social issues. This concern is reflected in what he or she writes of attitudes through the educational means available to them, such as books and the visual media. Hence, as some believe, Saudi liberalism may be a form of culture (binSnaitan, 2005).

Historians date the emergence of liberalism as a societal term to the end of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Whenever it arose, factors and conditions contributed to its emergence “as a concept” which over time would turn into a complete perspective on culture and lifestyle (Azza, 2009).

I am referring here to liberalism in its popular sense, specifying no liberal current in Saudi Arabia, nor any liberal individuals. Individuals or groups are not necessarily agreed on a certain vision, or interested in something as broad as the idea of reform. However, we will find that some of them were clearly opposed to the attitudes of the liberal reformers of politics.

After this general discussion of the term liberalism, the next step is to determine its meaning in Saudi Arabia. In seeking to clarify what the term means in the present

condition of Saudi society (Alomani, 2012), it is applied to liberal, secular Islamists, who tend to be open and moderate.

The reason for the difficulty in determining the meaning of liberalism is that the concept intersects with other concepts such as those of the “intellectual” and the “thinker”, which sometimes seem to mean the same as the “liberal”. Moreover, some describe liberalism as an extension of the ideas of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, as we have seen. The “intellectual” nowadays is a natural extension of “the philosopher” in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, at the sectarian and ideological level. The figure of the intellectual has been associated with intellectual and political conflict, even if the word intellectual is sometimes used about any active group that opposes the people in authority. The intellectual is an individual who is committed to raising issues that are inconsistent with political pressure of any kind (binSnaitan, 2005).

Some Saudi thinkers argue that the Saudi liberal current cannot be listed or included under any name or description, due to its lack of adherents and intellectual sources of knowledge or even of a dynamic or cultural production that can be relied upon to monitor it (Al-Mashouh, 2012). But they are merely individual attempts, and we cannot be sure that they represent a current in its entirety. Others, however, argue just the opposite, including the liberal scholar, Shaker Al-Nabulsi, a writer in Al-Watan newspaper and the author of the book *Saudi Liberalism Between Illusion and Reality*. He confirms the existence of an independent Saudi liberal current, remarking: “Those who deny the existence of the Saudi liberal current, deny the daily and weekly enormous amount of intellectual, cultural and Saudi liberal output which calls for reform, change, development and keeping up with the times”(aL-Rsheed, 2012).

Max Fier defines intellectuals as “a group of people whose special abilities and talents enable them to meet the achievements of cultural values”(AlQedemi, 2012). The cognitive link between liberalism and culture is plain here, yet Jamaluddin Al-Afghani defines intellectuals, as “those educated persons who enjoy a critical and philosophical spirit and use it to review their past and to mediate their present in order to explain human nobility and also enlighten the people of their nation and guide them to the right path” (Al-Zaidi, 2009).

With the previous definitions of the intellectual in mind, we can define the Saudi intellectual as someone who has achieved, to a high degree, contemporary traditional learning, motivated by an interest in national affairs and social issues. This interest should be reflected in what is written of attitudes through the available means of education, such as books and whatever else can be read. Hence, liberalism in Saudi Arabia is considered to be one aspect of the culture, according to some.

Despite the diversity of philosophical doctrines underlying liberalism and the multiplicity of directions associated with thinkers and philosophers, most agree that it is centred on the concept of freedom, whether political, social, or economic (AlQedemi, 2012). Thus, liberalism is the doctrine that calls for freedom in politics and economic affairs as well as in thought. It also calls for accepting the ideas and actions of others, even if they are incompatible with the ideas and deeds of the liberalism, which are mainly based on intellectual freedom, freedom of belief and freedom of behaviour (al-Solami, 2009).

A Saudi liberal is one who is convinced of the ideas of liberalism associated with an individual who believes in freedom regardless of being Saudi or non-Saudi. A Saudi liberal is someone who supports renewal, openness, reform, and pluralism and supports public and private freedom. In contrast, a conservative is someone who is associated with authenticity, tradition, customs and past regulations (al-Rsheed, 2012).

The liberal current in Saudi Arabia is not fully organized, because of its fear of the strength of religious institutions and the close relationship of these with the state, but some liberal meetings and assemblies take place in homes or within academic institutions. Most liberal leaders or those who have a liberal cast to their thinking and approach refuse to be confined within this category, because they do not believe that they belong to any current or political party. Nevertheless their thinking is free from the traditional view that adheres to religion (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

Liberalism has infiltrated Islamic countries through “secret associations” whose members were affected by Western thought and impressed by its evident civilization. The vast majorities of Muslim nations still adhere to Islamic orthodoxy and are not in need of such Western ideas and systems, but certain factors have weakened the confidence of the nation in its religion and paved the way for liberalism to be

introduced, without any resistance, into Muslim societies. These factors are represented by doctrinal deviation, political despotism, stagnation and imitation. They were not considered direct reasons for the emergence of liberalism, but they created an acceptable ground and a suitable climate for being satisfied with it. There is no doubt that the main reason for the spread of liberalism in the Islamic world has been colonialism (al-Solami, 2009).

Liberalism has entered the Islamic nations via colonizers who sought to reconstruct the colonized countries on a liberal basis compatible with the interests of the colonizer. Al-Mustghrebeen (those who advocate Western civilization) had a very important impact on the expansion of the scope of liberalism and the demand for it. The call for liberalism was associated with the public call for freedom and the adoption of Western civilization to keep up with the scientific and cultural progress that the West has made. Because the Islamic world has, to a great extent, become familiar with the concept of liberalism, the people's concept of it in Saudi Arabia has changed and admitted multiple varieties of it.

A) There is a contemporary current that links the call for freedom in Islam to Western civilization. This kind of current set up the foundations of liberalised Islam that more or less combined Islam and the values of Western civilization. In addition, such thinking opened the doors for the manipulation of religion in the name of "allowing multiple readings of religious texts" and "criticism of religious discourse" (al-Solami, 2009).

B) The second current is the secular current, which calls for the adoption of Western liberalism without linking it with Islam. Dr Taha Hussein says of the Renaissance "it is to do what the Europeans do and to trace their steps, so as to be their rival and their partner in civilization whether it is good or bad, with its sweetness and bitterness and what is being liked or disliked". This current calls for Western liberalism without modifying it to comply with Islamic laws (Hussein, 1983).

In his book, *The Religious Currents in Saudi Arabia*, Dr Khalid Al-Mashouh divides the liberalism in Saudi Arabia into two main currents:

The first is liberals such as Suleiman Aldhyan, Abdul Aziz al-Qasim and Nawaf Al-Qadimi, who are committed to Islam and at the same time insist on modern

procedure; they have launched direct criticism against the Islamic movements in general and Salafism in particular. They call for freedom within Islamic restrictions. The second consists of people such as Abdullah Bejad, Mansour Al- Nogaidan and Adil Al- Tarifi who began by criticizing religious thought, but then abandoned the restrictions of Islam and turned to open liberalism free of such restrictions (Al-Mashouh, 2012).

In the present study I discuss the second type of liberalism because I believe in the first current of modernism that looks for common ground between Islam and Western modernity and religious reform in line with modernity. I also try to discern what may be the best way to bring to an end to all aspects of intellectual conflict among the opposing currents in Saudi Arabia.

3.4 Intellectual conflict between movements in Saudi Arabia

The history of Saudi Arabia illustrates that intellectual movements and cultural debates have been controlled not only by the political rulers, but also dominated by conservative Salafi. Because of this we can see the major struggle between religious and intellectual schools of thought in society, especially between puritan Salafists and extreme Liberals. Perhaps the absence of dialogue between them is a significant reason for the struggle (Joas wagemakers et al., 2012).

(Joas Wagemakers) has a view about the intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia, and he explains the event of Wahhabi's control and the struggle between currents. He said that "is not all thinkers and intellectuals take Wahhabism as their intellectual point of departure, but that all Saudis—simply because they live in Saudi Arabia— will have to take Wahhabism into account whether they like it or not, even if only as something that they reject" (Joas wagemakers et al., 2012).

A paradigm shift occurred in Saudi society between the early 1970s and the late 1980s. American Newsweek described the situation as "the largest attempt to get rid of backwardness since Japan started to move toward civil society in the past century" (al-Janabi, 2004).

In my opinion, this was the focal point for opening the conflict between intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia. However, some thinkers believe that the conservative current, including all its various schools, never had any problem with any liberal or

secular trend, nor would ever have one. The real problem lay in the rapid nature of change in our time, which imposes the need to interact with change in an enlightened way. For the liberal current the major problem is not with the radical religious current that once attacked it, but its ability to crystallize a civilized religious discourse that interacts with the major concepts of a traditional culture and community. Others believe that an intense conflict rages between Saudi liberals and Salafists in Saudi Arabia, both intellectual and political. It boils down to a conflict between religion on one side and liberty on the other (Ruba'i, 2013).

Although Saudi society has witnessed several cultural shifts, which changed the intellectual structures of a wide section of its people, it is still in the midst of these shifts and has not yet, reached a point where it can formulate a specific rhetoric. However, this inability does not apply to typical religious rhetoric, which is the most acceptable to its audience and the most transitory on the intellectual level (East, 2014).

It should be recalled that the Islamic extremists groups have transformed and directed their fight against the other currents within the country. For this reason, the "Awakening Rhetoric" had to adapt its extreme position to a more moderate one. For the same reason, the call for moderation emerged, led by some preachers (called "The Awakening Sheiks") of whom perhaps the most prominent is Dr Salman Al-Odah (Al-Qahtani, 2004).

At this point in the discussion, I must point out that some researchers who are interested in Saudi intellectualism altogether deny the existence of a liberal current in Saudi Arabia and wonder if it possesses a liberal intellectual voice as an independent current with influence, followers and supporters. They wonder too whether any Islamic currents are in conflict with this current, or whether the accounts of it are based on media and Internet hype (al-Moqhem, 2005), consequently the supporters and opponents of the liberal current have not yet settled the controversy. In my opinion, the liberal current in Saudi Arabia is not yet fully developed and could grow greater; it is not yet able to rise and advance as an independent current. Perhaps the strength of other currents in terms of organization and application have disorganised liberalism, and perhaps the seniority and political support provided by other currents have affected it adversely.

Muhammad Al-Moqhem, who writes for the Body of Culture site, says, “I do not oppose the existence of intellectual pluralism in any society, even in Saudi society. In my opinion, it is a healthy and positive thing. However, I can’t confirm that the liberal current exists inside the Saudi society and is in conflict with the Islamic current. Indeed, those who talk about the nature of conflict between liberals and Islamists are the imitators; they imitate the neighbouring Arab countries and they attempted to transform the conflicts in these countries to the reality of Saudi society, where circumstances are completely different. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a totalitarian state, hence the existence of a liberal current in Saudi Arabia is vague and its elements are not complete yet. The liberals in Saudi Arabia do not call for political and economic liberalism only for social liberalism. So, how can we call them liberals? We can call it ‘Saudi liberalism’, as if we were introducing a new ideology to the world” (al-Moqhem, 2005).

However, its opponents all confirm the existence of a liberal current in Saudi Arabia which intellectually, politically and culturally combats the Salafi movement. Although liberalism in Saudi Arabia suffers from many profound intellectual crises of terms, of philosophical backgrounds, of everyday behaviours, of agreement on the foundations of liberalism itself, it has been able to present itself in many areas, speak in multiple voices and appear in different forms. However, liberalism, in Saudi Arabia is looking for a way of beginning its intellectual, cultural and social project (al-Amiri, 2010). The evidence for its existence is the great attention paid by researchers and activists to it through Saudi newspapers and magazines, as well as the existence of an Internet network in its name. It is active, effective and includes many concepts and invitations. Moreover, liberalism in Saudi Arabia has followers and supporters who speak in its name and call for its ideas to be applied.

It cannot be denied that Saudi liberalism played a part in forming some state institutions; that some liberal administrators succeeded in many of their projects; that liberal thinkers succeeded in spreading their thoughts and ideas; and that the liberals who work for the popular media succeeded in setting the priorities for public opinion, for the last ten years in particular (Hubab et al., 2013).

In the controversies over liberalism in Saudi Arabia, the Salafists have been, and will be, the stronger, since the Salafists have influence over thousands of institutions and

commissions in Saudi Arabia and are involved in all the organizations of the country (Lacroix, 2010).

Yet there is an overlapping and blending link between Salafism and liberalism. Salafism practices a kind of liberalism in that it grants itself a degree of, or even semi-absolute, freedom to infringe the rights of the non-Salafi under multiple religious slogans which focus on the fight against heresy – any innovations in the religious field - in order to protect the monotheistic religion. Salafism, as a contemporary practical process, has a wide and long history of accusing and classifying others as non-believers and heretics (al-Snaidi, 2011).

Admittedly, Saudi liberals take an approach, which is no different from the Salafist approach of seizing on the statements and slogans raised by other liberals. The so-called “others” influence both Salafis and Saudi liberals. While the Salafis are influenced by the early 2nd century Muslims [in Arabic, Assalaf], we find that the liberals in other countries influence the Saudi liberals. In addition, the Saudi liberals accuse the Salafis of wanting to apply to today’s society the thoughts, ideas, sayings and practices of the early Muslims, on the basis that “they are men and we are men and we can think of our contemporary issues as they did”. This is true, but the Saudi liberals do much the same across space that the Salafis do across time, adopting and imitating the culture of others (al-Breedi, 2008).

Following this list of the most prominent intellectual and religious currents in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s and 1990s, we should turn to the most prominent intellectual and religious differences that prompted conflict between them.

Sometimes the source of difference is different religious beliefs and sectarian disputes between Islamic groups. For instance, the Shiite sect has religious beliefs that greatly differ from those of Salafism. The religious beliefs of the Sufi current contradict many of those in the Salafi current. However, the differences between these two and the Salafis never caused intellectual conflict such as occurred between other movements, nor did it cause any crisis among them. This may be due to the adherents of Shi’ism, and Sufisim, who tend toward pacifism and want to avoid conflict between Muslims (Salem, 2013).

Thus, I am not concerned in this study with differences in religious belief between these groups; instead, what concerns me is to delineate the most prominent

intellectual differences between contemporary movements in Saudi Arabia, which have led to many struggles and to the current intellectual crisis in the Kingdom.

The most important problem for the Salafi current at present lies in its awareness of itself and its relationship with its own methodology. For instance, scientific Salafism differs from other types of Salafism, because it lacks the dynamic component of organization, such as characterizes the Jamis, another Salafi movement. Moreover, the main difference between scientific Salafism and Jamism lies in their theoretical concepts. Where Jamism exaggerates the need to obey the Islamic ruler and its practical side, Jamis are far too inclined to attack their opponents and question their fitness to be Salafis. This is what has led the Jamis to their prevailing negative attitude toward scientific Salafism (Salem, 2013).

The differences between their theoretical and practical concepts made it predictable that the Jamis would not accept the dynamic from of Salafism, which is known as Surorism. The differences may have led the Jamis to exclude the Suroriya from recognition as Salafists. But Dynamic Salafism is a mixture of Salafi religious belief and the precept of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political organization (Salem, 2013). Surorism considers itself to be the authentic representative of true Salafism, which calls for monotheism also demanded by Scientific Salafism and for Jihad, as demanded by the Muslim Brotherhood Movement (Shaheen, 2010).

It should be made clear that this conflict between those who call for modernization and those who are conservative, is based on the existence of modernity as exemplified both by Western modernization, with its political, social and cultural assumptions, and by the possibility of reconciling Western modernity with the heritage of Islamic doctrines, which may lead to conflicts over intellectual, doctrinal and jurisprudential issues (Ruba'i, 2013).

General features and common traits underlie the disagreements between different movements of thought in Saudi Arabia. Most of these disagreements and differences can be attributed to ignorance and injustice. In addition, each party has the conviction that it alone possesses ideological purity and a feeling of complacency. Moreover, each movement pretends that its beliefs are absolutely right and rejects the wisdom and goodness that others may offer, besides isolating itself from them (alqathami, 2013).

The disagreements between different movements in Saudi Arabia are due to the overlapping and intersection of some ideas and beliefs, the competition to attract the people from certain age groups the absence of Shura (consultation), centralized leadership, the preference of loyalty to efficiency, the continued conflict between generations and the remembrance of historical disputes between Islamic sects (Salem, 2013).

The following are some of the causes of intellectual conflict among religious currents in Saudi Arabia, seen as a result of a lack of knowledge and abandoning some of God's revelations. This is explained in the verse: "they forgot some of what they were reminded of" (The holy Qur'an, Al-Ma'idah, 14), where worst of all, they abandoned the limitations that God revealed to his prophet. Every current, therefore, developed its own version of Islam, except the secular Liberalism, where its subsections and roots are defined accordingly. The end product is what God has warned us of: "when they ignored our limitations"(The holy Qur'an, Al-Tawbah, 97), they were destined to enmity and hatred among themselves". Each religious current ended up calling: "you have your own religion, and we have ours"(The holy Qur'an, Al-Kafirun, 6).

After listing some of the traits that characterize the conflicting parties representing different currents, I want to highlight some of the specific features, in one current or another, that have led to disagreements.

1-Salafi-Salafi Disagreements

The disagreement between Jami Salafism and other Salafi movements

The main conflict between Jamism and other Salafi currents concern obedience to the Muslim ruler and never accusing rulers of being non-Muslim or Kafir. Jamism calls people to bear the injustice and tyranny of certain Islamic rulers, while at the same time calling for commitment to the power of education. They see this as the only way for reform, with the strong belief that this was the way taken by the Good Ancestors, and illustrate other approaches as innovations, which do not comply, with the approach of the Good Ancestors. Thus, the reaction to Jamism varies; some accuse it of betraying most believers and working only for the benefit of the ruler, while others classify it as "odd jurisprudence". Some ignore this controversy for fear

of the action of the security forces or because they are not well-informed enough to enter into such controversies (Salem, 2013).

2-The disagreement between Dynamic Salafism (Surorism) and Scientific Salafism

The area of cooperation and rapprochement between these two currents is very wide, because the leaders of Dynamic Salafism are interested in science and are anxious to stay away from disputes and conflicts. However, there is one prominent source of disagreement between them; the organizational and political work that characterizes Dynamic Salafism. Although both Scientific Salafism and Surorism agree in opposing the establishment of political parties, both these forms of Salafism, unlike Jamism, consider this issue as less than pivotal or a source of conflict; in fact, this has created convergence between Scientific and Dynamic Salafism. But the Jamists fiercely criticise Scientific Salafism (Ahmed, 2011).

3-The disagreement between Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood Movement

The mental image of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in the minds of Salafists can be attributed to a defect in the reform programmes of the latter, paying little attention to the Sunnah and Islam as creed, and a tendency to be more lenient towards the jurisprudential choices on which the Brotherhood is based. These, together, crystallized the most prominent motive for conflicts and disagreements between the Salafists and the representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood as to which is the legitimate outlook (Algerian, 2012).

It was clear to the Salafists that the representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood movement take a lax and uncontrolled approach, which they call 'moderate'. This is apparent in the prominent intellectual and religious authorities of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Al-Qardawi, Al-Qazali and Muhammad Ammarah, who adhere to the modernity and enlightenment movement (Al-Mogadem, 2014).

The difference between Scientific Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood is that the former relies on rules and principles derived from the holy Qur'an and Sunnah, while the latter is an organized group, with leaders and members, in which the strict rules of membership must be obeyed.

The second source of disagreement is the Salafi perception of the reform project taken up by representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and the concessions they

make in this regard. However, for Scientific Salafism, the tenets of Salafism alternately reject and approve political action as a way of achieving reform, but they will not accept the significant concessions that the Muslim Brotherhood offers. Thus, the political practices of the Muslim Brotherhood, by Salafi standards, are clear evidence that their approach is not right. Meanwhile the members of the Muslim Brotherhood consider themselves to be the only representatives of moderation, and they view Salafists as people with closed minds (Al-Sahabi, 2013).

4-The disagreement between Jami Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood

The Jamism attitude to the current governments, their opposition to the present regime and the organizational work and establishment of political parties are considered to be the main reasons for disagreement between Jamism and the other religious parties in Saudi Arabia. Thus, it might be expected that the Muslim Brotherhood would lead the other movements in the disagreement with the Jamists, since the Brotherhood is the largest organization opposing the governments of the Arab states. Moreover, the conflict between Jamism and the other Salafi currents arises because the Jamists used to describe them as being under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and its thinking.

Thus, the first concern for the Jamists is to criticize the Muslim Brotherhood and warns others against it, criticizing its dynamic opposition to the present regime, and also its expanded tendency to extrapolate contentious issues.

However, the organizational and political trend of the Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to its scientific nature and its inability to initiate a coherent discussion with the Jamists, provides considerable reasons for it to hesitate to involve itself in intellectual controversies with the Jamists (Salem, 2013).

5-The disagreement between Dynamic Salafism (Surorism) and the Muslim Brotherhood

Surorism was, at first, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. However, after the intellectual revisions made by some of its members Dynamic Salafism separated from the Muslim Brotherhood and has become an independent body with its own method and approach.

The personal relationships which used to exist between the leaders of the two currents of thought contributed to alleviating the historical conflicts between them,

although the old disputes between them in approaches and principles are still unresolved (Salem, 2013).

The two currents have their own political trends. They also differ methodologically; Surorism derives from the jurisprudential rules of conventional Salafism, which means that all the followers of the Suroriya movement are Salafists, while the Muslim Brotherhood is a group and cells (virtually a political party) that combines Sufi thought with Salafism. However, Surorism is a combination of Salafism, the thinking of Ibn Taymiyyah and that of the Muslim Brotherhood. (Al-Sakran, 2014).

6-The disagreement between Conservative Salafism and Liberalism

The conflict between Salafism and liberalism has a religious and jurisprudential basis Salafism calls people to adhere to their Islamic heritage and to reject all the concepts that recommend an imitation of Western modernity. This has led to severe conflict between the two movements.

The Salafi-liberal conflict is considered to be the strongest intellectual and doctrinal conflict that Saudi Arabia has ever witnessed.

Liberalism views Salafism as an intellectual affliction that threatens moderate Islam and challenges the static and unchangeable concepts that Salafism adopts; instead it recommends modernity, openness and flexible thinking (romizan, 2009).

Liberals may want the conventional concepts to be changed or some Islamic views to be changed that do not comply with our times. Thus, the religious and intellectual differences between the Salafists and the liberals are critical. The liberal current criticizes the extremist Salafi views for adhering to intolerance, while the liberals reject religious fanaticism and the domination of one set of views over most of the state's institutions (alqathami, 2013). In turn, Salafism criticizes the views of the enlightenment as a violation of Islamic rules, which according to them must not be changed. These points of difference have led to a sharp Salafi-liberal conflict in Saudi Arabia, which reached a peak when King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz came to power. He reduced the influence of the religious Salafi organization and limited its control over the various sections of society (Al-Hajj, 2009). This allowed the other currents in general and liberalism in particular to gain a substantial margin of intellectual freedom in way of display their ideas, or apply their view in the society. In addition, his establishment of the King Abdullah University of Science and

Technology, situated in the village of Thule, north of Jeddah, gave Saudi Arabia its first educational institution that allowed male students to mix with female students; but it led to sharp confrontations between the liberals and the Salafis, who refused to countenance this idea. Within this context, Dr Salman Al-Odah said, “The difference is divine and cannot be prevented. However, if these differences did not exist, this would lead to the absence of a lot of interests and benefits. Therefore, the difference should be invested in a positive way so as not to turn into preparation and readiness for conflict” (al-Odah, 2012b).

To conclude, the lack of negotiation between the two currents, together with the failure on both sides to take a moderate approach, is the main reason for the fierce battles between Salafism and liberalism.

Opinions differ and the dispute has intensified between liberalism and Salafism, throwing up different parties, which somehow defined their own way of launching criticism and fighting other currents.

“We should not let this dispute control our minds and our relationships”, Dr Salman Al-Odah’s view was seen as the awakening of moderation, which mediated between these currents in a modern and influential way (al-Odah, 2012b).

Dr Salman Al-Odah stressed that intellectual radicalism is one of the most important obstacles to change and development in the country. As Saudi society is going through serious intellectual clashes and conflicting convictions between a conservative current, on the one hand, and a liberal thought one, on the other, extremism among various intellectual currents may hamper progress and will contribute to intellectual decline and religious reactionarism. Dr Al-Odah added that the idea of confrontation among various currents is not the way forward, and that contemporary Saudi thought has to get rid of this intellectual dilemma and try to encourage dialogue. This is only possible if all parties abandon radicalism (Brake, 2010).

Dr Al-Odah has repeatedly maintained the importance of moderation and tolerance in Islam. In his explanation of moderate Islam in Katara Theatre, he stated “Moderation is a moral process that requires knowledge and differentiation; it is a moral concept based on fairness and rejecting radicalism, and, it is, therefore, an expression of intellectual stability” (AlArabi, 2015).

To Dr Al-Odah, moderation is a human value shared by intellectuals who encourage its spread among individuals to reflect their opinions and positions. He argues that it's not fair to say that most of us are Islamists or liberals, intellectuals or politicians, as judging others according to our own personal vision is far from moderation (Al-Oadah, 2008).

I will be discussing Dr Salman Al-Odah's vision, as he is one of the most important Islamic figures calling for intellectual moderation as an ideal solution to address conflicts among various intellectual currents in Saudi Arabia. The next chapter will be dedicated to discussing in more detail, his intellectual vision.

I have discussed the various intellectual currents and movements in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I have particularly dwelt on the notion of Salafism and its different undertones notwithstanding other intellectual currents from Sufism, Shiism, and Muslim Brothers to Liberal thought. This chapter has also examined the different entrenched positions held by the different currents. It has been observed that moderation and tolerance seem to be the way forward moving away from antagonism.

CHAPTER FOUR: SALMAN AL-ODAH-SHEIKH AND THE AWAKENING OF ISLAMIC MODERATION

Introduction

Dr. Salman Al-Odah has become one of the most important proponents of moderate thought in Saudi Arabia¹⁷. A former radical cleric and scholar, his imprisonment in 1994 led to a transformation in his thinking and outlook on fundamental issues concerning society and pluralism. This transformation in turn led to Dr. Al-Odah, on his release, becoming one of the most prominent figures in ongoing attempts to find a middle ground between the conservative trend and modernists schools of thought in the Kingdom.

Dr. Al-Odah has attracted a great deal of attention due to the nature of his transformation. He is one of the most prominent examples of comprehensive intellectual change from extremist to advocate of peaceful coexistence; from radical Salafi to an open-minded thinker on modern issues (al-Khail, 2006). As a *sheikh* (senior clergyman), he was originally at the forefront of religious extremism in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s and early 1990s. But since his release from prison in 1999, he has simultaneously called for tolerance and moderation on one hand, and warned of the dangers of extremism and narrow-mindedness on the other; the latter consisting of views that he admits to having shared in the past, but has now firmly rejected (Omar, 2016).

This represents a huge shift in the religious discourse of Dr. Al-Odah, because his ideas and beliefs were, at one time, considered to exemplify religious extremism. Not only has his message and way of speaking changed, but even such individual elements as his personal photos; these now express greater openness, often featuring him smiling and looking happier in outlook than before.

¹⁷ A number of Saudi scholars have undergone a stage of intellectual development and transformation. Dr Salman al-Odah's personality is one of the most prominent, popular and effective. He has far more published works and media attention than his counterparts. His fame went from national to international. AL-DAKEEL, T. 2011. *Salman al-Oadah from prison to Enlightenment*, Madarek.

Whilst Dr. Al-Odah calls for a focus on the shared values of love, compassion, and justice in daily Muslims life, instead of violence and sectarianism, he attempts to effect change from within Salafism, rather than imposing it from outside. As a result, it may be that his views will become more popular and engender a wider appeal than if Dr. Al-Odah rejected the Salafi approach altogether.

To set the importance of Dr. Al-Odah's thought in context, it is first necessary to explain the current ideological divide that exists in Saudi Arabia. Existing intellectual movements in the Kingdom can be divided into two main categories:

1. **Conservatives movements** are as the name implies, based on traditional practices and beliefs that are thought to remain relatively unchanging over time. Members of these movements believe that current thought should conform to these traditions. Movements in this category tend to reject external influences, and consider the presence or appearance of opinions that conflict with tradition to be deviations from, or corruptions of, pure original practices. This traditionalist school of thought takes its fundamental concepts from the intellectual heritage passed down from the earliest generations of Muslim scholars, and is therefore at odds with contemporary thought (Al-Qadimi, 2012).
2. **Modernistst movements** are those that follow a school of thought, which embraces a plurality of opinions. Members of these movements believe that intellectual conformity to societal traditions leads to blind imitation, a lack of innovation, complacency and social rigidity. Adherents to this ideological position mainly import their ideas from Western society and culture, which many see as placing them at odds with their own social and cultural heritage (Wabili, 2012).

Both movements have become isolated from each other, due to the depth of the intellectual conflict between them. This isolation has led to the emergence of a third school, which may prove to be the best solution to the conflict between traditionalism and modernisation: a "moderate" school of thought (Ruba'i, 2013), within which, Dr. Al-Odah is one of the most prominent individuals.

This moderate school of thought seeks to find a middle ground between traditionalist and modernising movements. It does so by seeking to combine what it sees as the best parts of each movement. Dr. Al-Odah respects traditional heritage, whilst seeking to take advantage of contemporary modes of thought to reinterpret this heritage in order to ensure its applicability to the 21st century.

The fundamental tenets of this moderate school are:

1. A belief in the importance of maintaining relationships between different members of society with different views. This requires the acceptance that differences of opinion on important topics are inevitable.
2. An approach to different opinions that is known as “interactive”, in which a plurality of opinions is seen not only as acceptable, but actually as a positive benefit to society, as it drives intellectual mobility and innovative solutions to social issues.
3. The initiation of dialogues between adherents of different intellectual schools will lead to concrete results in the achievement of happiness and prosperity, which is the common goal of all sides.

Dr. Al-Odah’s reasoning, in establishing this position and founding the Renaissance Forum Project, is to provide a means of developing modes of thought that suit the requirements of the modern era, from within an Islamic framework.

One of the reasons that Dr. Al-Odah has been effective at spreading his message, as well as his position as a bridge-builder between the antagonistic positions of traditionalists and modernisers, is his innovative method of approaching *dawah* through the use of modern mass communication technology. This approach utilises the Internet, audiovisual media and print publications in order to spread the message of moderation and tolerance as widely as possible. Dr. Al-Odah’s website features a varied group of Muslim scientists and intellectuals who provide guidance on Islamic issues (IslamToday, 2014b), and his Twitter account has over five million followers. Much of his popularity can be attributed to his status as an independent thinker, expressing views that are seen as transcending the ongoing intellectual conflicts in Saudi Arabia.

On the topic of the need for a moderate school of thought, Dr. Al-Odah has said:

New Arab generations rise, building themselves, surprising us with what is new. Let us listen to their voices, let us get closer to them, let us respect their legitimate interests and tendencies, let us take into consideration their youth, which explains their haste. However, rushing to embrace a call for change is not always bad and things will be perfect if people grow unified, souls become harmonised, when love prevails and when trust becomes the basis governing human relationships to build a better future for us all, regardless of our differences. (Al-Oadh, 2013) P, 41.

In this way, Dr. Al-Odah urges individuals and groups to avoid turning doctrinal differences into irreconcilable disputes, whilst opening the door to moderate Islamic thought.

Through the development of my interest in the intellectual currents and cultural changes occurring in Saudi Arabia, I realised that there is a highly developed intellectual movement within the Islamic spectrum. As a representative figure in this movement, Dr. Al-Odah addresses a wide range of topics from a moderate Islamic viewpoint, including those usually seen as the preserve of both traditional Islam and contemporary culture; his efforts open the door to a renewal of jurisprudential interest in issues that top the list of concerns in Saudi society. Although initially concerned primarily with *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) alone, he has developed an interest in a broad range of intellectual, cultural and philosophical issues. His method of combining new methodology and a deep background in cultural heritage allows him to approach seemingly complex and intractable issues.

This combination of a modern outlook and explicitly Islamic values has attracted attention far beyond Saudi Arabia. Dr. Ulrike Freitag, Director of the Center for Modern Oriental Studies at the University of Free Berlin, and author of the book *Saudi Arabia: Modernisation and Conservatism in a Changing Kingdom* (Freitag et al., 2014), said:

Salman Al-Odah now is the person who represents the rational modern sound in Saudi Arabia. He embraces the position of moderation, and he criticizes the current situation of Saudi society,

where old habits are based on cultural traditions rather than religion, such as detracting women rights. He also demands giving women the rights they are given under Islamic rules. (Freitag et al., 2014 P, 187).

Dr. Al-Odah's broad appeal and international profile contributed to the decision to choose him as the focus of this study. However, it was the radical transformation of his thinking that made him a particularly attractive topic of study. This is particularly relevant now, as there is a growing belief that Saudi Arabia is about to enter an era of increasing "moderation", since the government has begun to take a number of progressive steps towards political and religious reform (Lacroix, 2015).

Although Dr. Al-Odah's thinking has not been fully accepted by either the Saudi government or religious establishment, his popularity in new media shows his success at presenting his thinking to Saudi society in general. Moreover, his position outside the established structures of power means that he addresses new issues without fear that his frankness in criticising common customs and traditions will affect his reputation (al-Dakeel, 2011). There is a common belief that Saudi Arabia's current intellectual crisis requires new thinking to find a solution that is best for the future, intellectually and culturally, and this gives legitimacy to the study of Dr. Al-Odah's views after his intellectual transformation, as the potential source of a solution.

This chapter will examine the life of Dr. Al-Odah, in order to provide background information to explain why he is such an important figure for the future of Saudi Arabia. It will begin by looking at the stages of his intellectual development from his childhood and student years, through his period as a radical scholar, up until the Arab Spring period and his work as the driving force behind the Renaissance Forum Project. These stages are:

1. Early years: childhood influences, education and early preaching
2. Preaching pre-imprisonment
3. Imprisonment and transformation
4. Post-imprisonment period
5. The Arab Spring and the Renaissance Forum Project

Following this, the chapter will examine the controversies surrounding Dr. Al-Odah's transformation, and conclude with a summary of why he is such an important figure in contemporary Saudi discourse.

4.1 Early years: childhood influences, education and early preaching

Salman Bin Fahed Al-Odah was born in 1956 in al-Basr, near the city of Buraydah in Qassim, central Saudi Arabia. From an early age, he was taught strict adherence to Islamic teachings, and was greatly influenced in this by both his family and teachers. He says of his childhood influences:

“I grew up in al-Basr village and I studied at its mosque, under the guidance of Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasir al-Barradi. I studied there in my first two primary stages before I moved to Al-Hweizeh School. My first educator was my mother, Noorah Alluhidan, from whom I absorbed literature, language, morals, poetry, love of life, love of people and tolerance. My second educator was my father, from whom I learnt patience, relationships with others, self-dignity and Islamic principles” (al-Dakeel, 2011)P,46).

It is clear from this that Dr. Al-Odah at this stage was strongly influenced by both of his parents. His father particularly provided a strong role model for him, and provided an example of the courage of convictions that he would come to display in his later life. He recalls, “accompanying his father and experiencing the processes of buying and selling in his father's shop”, which gave him the “chance to mix with people and exchange views with them”. This in turn stopped him from “being afraid or worried about confrontation” (mbc.net, 2009).

The basic condition of Al-Basr village is reflected in his personality, in that he tends to favour simplicity in many things. His family's house was simple and built of mud. He says about his early days that “the normal habits in the village are reflected in my behaviour, specifically in going to sleep and waking up early, and playing with the children of our neighbours” (mbc.net, 2009).

Dr. Al-Odah was interested in poetry and literature; he was, and still is, fond of both traditional and contemporary poetry, and has memorised a range of poems by

different poets. His first attempt to write poetry was a tercet (a three-line form of poetry) about his home region, Buraydah. Indeed, he was eager to read all kinds of literary books and magazines of an Islamic mindset (Break, 2011).

Dr. Al-Odah graduated at the faculty of Shari'a and Religious Principles in Qassim, and then moved to Buraydah where he spent five years studying at the Scientific Institute. His skills as a speaker and orator became apparent when he was a student at the Scientific Institute. His great passion for reading meant that he would often visit libraries, and he then began to give lessons based on his reading at the Al-Omer mosque after the Fajr prayer, where a number of young people would come to attend his seminars. He continued to do this for many years, and became popular due to his eloquence and oratory skills, as well as his remarkable ability to explain the Hadith and Qur'anic verses. His mosque seminars began to attract older people, as well as an ever-increasing number of younger ones. He then began his Islamic studies journey, moving from one mosque to another, preaching at each. He recorded his scientific and religious lessons on cassette tapes, which were disseminated widely and attracted the admiration of other religious scholars and thinkers (Al-Rayes, 2014).

In the mid-eighties, Dr. Al-Odah formed his initial religious outlook through a concentration on the teachings of Najid scholars, and the views of Sheikh Muhammad ibn abd-al-Wahhab. He avidly read works by Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna, and was influenced by many Salafist scholars (Al-Oadh, 2011). His most important personal teachers were Sheikh Saleh al-Bulehi, whom he described as "the one who has a sweet smile", and Sheikh Abdurrahman al-Dosari, "the political Sheikh", who debated against Nasserites and Baathists, discussed peace with the Jews, and talked about the Hakimiyyah (the sovereignty of Allah) in a highly spiritual manner. Dr. Al-Odah was also influenced by Sheikh Ibn Othaymeen, whom he described as "the Sheikh who has deep knowledge, piety and faith". He was also influenced by Sheikh Abed al-Aziz Bin Baz, whom he described as "an Imam, tolerant, lovely, wise, observing the dignity of others and having a great ability to understand people" (Break, 2011).

He began to visit Riyadh on a regular basis, and meet there with young people from Mecca and Medina. In these groups, Dr. Al-Odah began to discuss issues such as

kufr (disbelief) and *iman* (belief), particularly for those who are unaware or ignorant; the application of Islamic law as revealed in the Qur'an and Sunnah; and religious perspectives on politics and government. After being appointed a teaching assistant at the College of Religious Basics in Riyadh, he decided to pursue a master's degree there, in the Sunnah Department, which was very popular for those students looking to specialise in Islamic law. Dr. Al-Odah had a particular interest in studying *fiqh*, and his master's thesis was entitled "The Alienation and its Legal Rulings in the Light of the Prophetic Sunnah". He was awarded a degree with honours in 1988, after two years of study at the College of Religious Basics in Riyadh (Break, 2011). He went on to receive his doctorate, for a thesis entitled "Explaining the Attainment of the Objective in the Book of Purity by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani". He defended this thesis in Jeddah on 4 March 2004, before a panel that consisted of Sheikh ibn Jabreen and Dr Khaldoun al-Ahdab, and was awarded his doctorate with honours and the recommendation that it was published (IslamToday, 2004).

4.2 Preaching pre-imprisonment "from the late 1980s until 1993"

The religious discourse of Salman Al-Odah has passed through a number of stages from the early 1980s until the present day. We have seen in the previous section how his early thought was influenced by Salafist thinkers, and also because of the upbringing of al-'Odah was in the Najdi environment, which is Hanbali-Salafi dominated. Within such an environment he also studied legal jurisprudence and creed with scholars who were influenced by the salafi ideology such as a Sheikh Ibn 'Uthaymin. However, Sheikh 'Al-Odah did not suffice by only concentrating on the salafi ideology, rather he was aware of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology via his reading of the books of Sayyid Qutb. Therefore Sheikh 'Al-Odah combined between the Salafi ideology and Muslim Brotherhood ideology. In addition, due to him being influenced by the Najdi environment, which strongly refuses to change, some of his opinions in jurisprudence and creed were somewhat extreme (Ghalib, 2013). During this period in the 1980s and early 1990s, his mindset was characterised by intolerance, strictness and zealotry. As a popular extremist Salafi, Dr. Al-Odah was even considered by some scholars and researchers to be more extreme in his views regarding obedience to Muslim rulers than Osama bin Laden. He was also strongly

anti-Jewish and vehemently opposed to the American military presence in the Arabian Gulf. He can therefore be considered partly responsible for the wave of Islamic extremist violence in the region that resulted in the loss of many innocent lives by his lectures (Abdullah, 2007).

When reviewing the public attitudes of Dr. Al-Odah from the 1980s until his imprisonment in 1994, we find that his lectures had two main themes, with a number of sub-topics within each:

1. **International events within the Islamic world.** These issues included the Palestinian situation, the war in Bosnia Herzegovina, the first Gulf War and many other current events in international politics at the time. This led to an increasing international audience for Dr. Al-Odah; his cassettes spread widely and there was great demand to attend his lectures. His audience grew from largely being Islamists in Saudi Arabia, to including those from neighbouring countries whose political issues he also addressed (Hegghammer, 2010).
2. **Domestic issues.** These were the issues that were the most popular with his followers. The issue Dr. Al-Odah tackled here include attitudes towards women, secularism, and the government, the influence of the USA in Saudi Arabia and education (al-Dakeel, 2011).

When we look at his views on specific issues during this period, we see a consistent approach being followed, which was supported by Dr. Al-Odah's speaking style, which was considered to be charming and eloquent, drawing on his deep knowledge of Islamic culture and history. One of the most prominent features of this stage was Dr. Al-Odah's adoption of audio recordings as an effective means of communication, beyond the reach of official media; these cassettes were traded widely in a society that still mainly relies on oral transmission of information, and where listening is easier than reading, in particular for old people, many of whom are illiterate or struggle to read. Young people too found his recording easy to listen to, copy, and spread.

He considered the liberal call for women to be allowed to drive to be an attack on traditional religious values. As he saw it, this was a liberal conspiracy designed to

confuse students and preachers into undermining traditional values. In one of his lectures, he said: “my obsession is to disclose the conspiracy against Muslim women in this country. We should not be deceived about what is being said about it: that it is just a call to allow women to drive cars”. He even accused the women involved and their families of profligacy and treachery, and went as far as to support the publication of a brochure entitled “Names of Immoral Women who Call for Corruption on Earth” (AlQahtani, 2003). His speeches provided a strong moral justification for women to be banned from driving, coming as they did at the same time that the Saudi government was taking legal action against a group of women who had taken to driving in Riyadh on 6 of November 1990s as a protest against the law;(Al-Khudr, 2011) these women were dismissed from their jobs and everyone involved were arrested, including those who had produced a video in favour of the women (Wael, 2012a). His vocal participation in the debate on the issue of women drivers greatly increased Dr. Al-Odah’s profile and attracted new followers, including some women who felt that he was protecting them from temptation with his stance on the issue (al-Dakeel, 2011).

Dr. Al-Odah was also extremely vocal on the subject of women in occupations, particularly those working as nurses in hospitals. There were two main reasons given for his opposition to women working in this field. The first was that this would give women plenty of opportunities to mix with men. The second reason was that female nurse in hospitals may be required in certain circumstances to remove their hijabs. Dr. Al-Odah was particularly incensed that the authorities did not seem concerned by this and were happy to let it occur, in violation of national laws and societal norms (2001). This conservative understanding, which Dr. A-Odah encouraged, was very popular in Saudi society, leading to civil institutions warning both the state and society about the danger of an increasing number of unmarried Saudi women working as doctors and nurses. A negative image of women who hold these positions was gradually established, suggesting that the medical field was awash with moral corruption and degradation (2001d). Dr. Al-Odah wanted women to be banned from working in medicine altogether.

Indeed, Dr. Al-Odah’s extreme views on female employment extended to women working in factories. Dr. Al-Odah was scathing of this: “new calls have emerged that

urge Saudi women to take governmental jobs and work in factories. For instance, newspapers say that women now work at confectionery factories in Jeddah to augment the national income, as they claim”. He wanted to forbid any work of this kind due to its potential to cause harm to society (2001d).

Women’s education was another area in which Dr. Al-Odah held strong views during this period. He opposed women’s education in general, and their participation in public life. He was, for instance, totally opposed to women learning English literature – a field he thought should be completely forbidden to them as it contained obscenities and intemperate discourse, which Muslim women should be protected from (2001d). He also strongly criticised the mixing of male and female students in educational institutions, as they did at King Saud University whilst he attended it; he believed it to be contrary to Islamic morals and laws, harmful to the dignity and social cohesion of the Saudi nation, and ultimately in line with the goals of the enemies of Islam (2001d).

Before his transformation, Dr. Al-Odah was also fiercely critical of the vast majority of the Saudi press. His articles were published in *Al-Bayan*, a Salafist Saudi publication, but he refused to be interviewed by the mainstream Saudi media. Instead, he launched attacks against the mainstream media such as the *London Middle East* newspaper. He said that the press was exploited by secular writers who used it to spread corruption through the propagation of their misleading views and beliefs. He added that newspapers encourage men and women to mix, and also carry advertisements that promote tourism. Travelling to liberal countries, he insisted, would lead to the secularisation of Saudi society through foreign influence that is incompatible with Islam. Moreover, he criticised the poetry that is published in newspapers, claiming that some of these poems are examples of decadence. He went on to say that the reason for publishing such poetry is to make as much money as possible; newspapers are not interested in content, or concerned with improving the ability of society to reflect, and they also care nothing about their country’s religion or ethics (al-Dakeel, 2011).

When Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Dr. Al-Odah collected signatures from scholars and clerics in support of a written statement in which he opposed the entry of “Crusaders” into the Arabian Peninsula. He also delivered the same message

in a sermon in his mosque. He was summoned before the prince of Al-Qaseem district, but was accompanied by a large number of his followers, who smashed the gates of the palace and insisted on not letting the prince detain him. Nevertheless, a few days afterwards, he was arrested and temporarily imprisoned in Riyadh from 1994 until 1999 (IslamToday, 2014b).

In November 1990, he released an audio recording entitled “We Are Not Stupid Enough”, in which he criticised the Saudi government for allowing foreign troops to enter the country. He also linked this foreign intervention to the movement to allow women to drive, calling it a deliberate invasion of the Islamic world aimed at Muslim women. His actions with regards to the Saudi government during this period were perceived as indirect accusations that it was being non-Islamic. In addition, he released another audio recording in 1993, “Guide Me to the City Market”, in which he urged young people to abandon government jobs (Alodah, 1993).

This stage reached a climax with his audio recording “A Message to the Police”, in which he encouraged police officers to disobey the government and the authorities. He made this direct appeal to individual police officers: “my brothers, they filled your heart with fear, they made you look at clerics as violent men. In turn, they made the clergymen fear you, as if you were the sword directed against his neck. Thus, you and the clergy have become hostile to each other”. He also released the recording “Behind Bars”, in which he predicted that he might be arrested and wished that his imprisonment would be the spark that would ignite a dormant fire that would incinerate tyranny and corruption (Tayeb, 2012).

During this period, specifically before 1994, he also organised a petition, known as the Memorandum of Advice, which was signed by more than one hundred religious scholars. It called for a Shura Council, as well as media censorship under religious guidance, and for a review of all the Kingdom’s laws to ensure their conformity with Shari’a. After the memorandum was leaked to members of the Council of Senior Scholars, he was imprisoned with religious and official approval.

At this stage, Dr. Al-Odah was so zealous concerning religious issues that a member of Al Qaeda named him as the individual who had most inspired him to adopt violence and extremism. A prominent figure in Al Qaeda, Yousif Aleiri, sent in 15 of August 2000, Dr. Al-Odah a message acknowledging that “by your effort, our

awakening project changed reality, and by your thinking and guidance it has become balanced and perfect. Deep gratitude to you and other scholars for what the awakening project has achieved” (Aleiri, 2000). This clearly indicates the effect that he had on young people during this period.

These statements and positions accurately capture Dr. Al-Odah’s attitude before his imprisonment, and typify his discourse during this period. In this way, he contributed towards a societal focus on external issues rather than internal ones, by publicly disapproving of such things as beauty, music and art, and campaigning against allowing Saudi women to operate in a range of fields or activities. This point had direct Saudi society directed by *fatwas* in every aspect of day-to-life (al-Dakeel, 2011). However, as we will see, he later wished to forget this stage of his life, and tried to do so by deleting all the intolerant and extremist lectures and sermons on his website archive; he now refuses to answer questions about this part of his life, although he has said that he had no clear intellectual vision at this stage (al-Odah, 2011).

4.3 Imprisonment and transformation, from 1994 until 1999

In 1993, Dr. Al-Odah was living in Riyadh and working as a lecturer at King Mohammad Bin Saud University. During this year, he was expelled from the University for Political Reasons, after addressing a number of sensitive political issues in his lectures both on and off campus. Shortly after this, he was arrested, charged and sent to Al-Ha’er prison in Riyadh (al-Dakeel, 2011). He would remain in prison for five years, from 1994 until his release in 1999.

It seems clear from his later change in attitudes that during his imprisonment he underwent a radical transformation in outlook and beliefs. In conjunction with this, he also seems to have developed another set of jurisprudential and intellectual standards, which make his religious discourse perhaps the most unique and interesting as a topic of study, especially in his intellectual transformation from one of extremism to that of moderation (2001d).

Dr. Al-Odah later described his five years of imprisonment as “the outstanding stage” of his life, to which he felt that he owed his intellectual liberty (Alnogaidan, 2013). This stage was the most stable, and the most influential with regards to his

future intellectual decisions. He now calls it “the most beautiful” part of his intellectual journey. Surprisingly, his post-release lectures and articles reveal a longing for this period, in which he says that he spent a wonderful time reading the sources of books, gaining knowledge and practising science, particularly spending his time reading extensively. He read the books of Tahtawi, Manfaluti, and Al-Aqqad, which he claimed to find the most valuable, full of knowledge and culture. Additionally, he found philosophical books interesting (Alnogaidan, 2013). He was asked many times about his time in prison, and replied by saying: “I found something beautiful that I hope will never happen again” (IslamToday, 2014b).

4.4 Post-imprisonment period

This stage in Dr. Al-Odah’s life runs from 1999, when he was released from prison, to the beginning of the so-called “Arab Spring” in 2011. It is characterised by Dr. Al-Odah’s gradual and deliberate abandonment of intolerance in his thinking and speech, and by him ceasing to interfere in politics. Instead, during this period, he called for a moderate Islamic mindset and his views on a wide range of issues including religious, political, and intellectual became substantially more tolerant; he moved from adopting the discourse of political opposition and religious extremism, to one of inclusion, discussion and opinion sharing (al-Dakeel, 2011). This transformation exhibited two fundamental characteristics:

1. **A different style of argument.** The changes that can be seen in the way that Dr. Al-Odah discusses issues are partly to do with the way that he expresses himself. His intellectual transformation led him to understand that creating a dialogue between opponents was a much better means of persuasion than by castigating them and rejecting their opinions. Instead of attacking his religious and intellectual opponents, as he used to, he began to offer them respect, and listen to and critique their views in a thoughtful and impartial manner, without rejecting them out of hand. His style of approach in this manner has been praised for its wisdom, eloquence and simplicity (al-Dakeel, 2011). He says of his new rhetoric that “a man should think carefully about how to introduce his ideas and thoughts to others, in the sense that he should consider the manner, in which persuasion replaces manipulation, goodwill

replaces ill-will and the Islamic Call replaces offering judgments, accusations and reprimands” (Al-Odah, 2008).

- 2. Intellectual development of beliefs, ideas and methods for understanding rational and some religious issues.** The way Dr. Al-Odah dealt with social issues became more complex following his transformation. Beforehand, he interpreted texts according to their superficial meanings, through the interpretation of jurists who had influenced him. His war against secularists was characterised by inflexibility and, as he later admitted, had no clear overall vision. Among the changes in the development of his discourse, his attitudes towards Saudi liberals and those who called for a more modern society show a clear distinction between his teachings before and after his transformation (al-Dakeel, 2011). Since he was released from prison, he has called for reasoned negotiation between all religious and intellectual movements. This approach marks a major contrast between Dr. Al-Odah and other intellectual representatives of the Arab world in way of his methods and approach of calling for intellectual change frankly, and has gained him significant popularity (Dadoosh, 2010). He now stresses that a clear and spontaneous understanding of religion and faith should be employed for open communication, in a spirit of love and tolerance. At the same time, he emphasises the seriousness of the dangers of extremism and religious intolerance. He also often talks about his outlook, which now inclines towards taking a positive view of things, and he says that even failure has a positive side, and that through re trying one can achieve success (Break, 2011).

Although still describing himself as a Salafi, Dr. Al-Odah’s Salafism had undergone a startling change, as had his understanding of the legal basis of Shari’a. He said, “Islamic Shari’a is unchangeable, but *fiqh* is a matter of *ijtihad*. *Fiqh* is a choice between the four sources of Sunni law; it is recognised as the decision-making process in Islamic law through personal effort (*ijtihad*) that is completely independent of any school (*madhhab*) of jurisprudence. For this, Al-Shafi’i, the founder of the Shafi’i School, had two judgments on the same matter and the

students of Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Sunni Hanafi School, changed a third of the school of their Imam. Therefore, change is necessary and reform is the only thing that ensures continuity, since it is the response to change. No doubt each one of us is looking forward to more prosperity, progress, positiveness, development and fairness in society, a society which has more faithful, loving hearts and good conduct, a society with more ability to understand the current time and its needs” (Al-Odah, 2013a). From this, we can see his growing awareness that certain principles within the Islamic legal framework are not fixed, but are able to be interpreted in the light of the changing nature of society.

He established his personal stance regarding the practice of Islam, defining it in the following way: “it means choosing to express myself so that I endeavour not to be in conflict with anybody, because I see that conflict should take place only in cases of necessity. I try to have a good relationship with different Islamic currents; with the Muslim Brothers, Salafists, Sufis and those who adopt independent ideas and thought, whom I may like more than Sheikhs and religious scholars. I also choose a public and spontaneous audience and not one that belongs to a specific current or movement, because I find myself in sympathy with their spontaneous and distinct simplicity, more so than with mannered and affected stagy people. Belonging to a single current of thought would separate me from many people, just as belonging to a certain movement or party often leads to fanaticism, paralysing the movement of thought and restricting people to a certain heritage, which they remember in a rosy light. Accordingly, they find it difficult to play any part in the correction or revision of it. Therefore, I do appreciate people who have the ability to change and revise and liberate themselves from this tunnel” (al-Dakeel, 2011).

One of the strongest pieces of evidence of the intellectual transition of Dr. Al-Odah was in his attitude towards women driving¹⁸. As mentioned previously, he vigorously campaigned against this and treated criticism of his stance as a conspiracy against Islam (Al-Oadh, 2013b). However, since his release, he has been

¹⁸ Dr al-Odah delivered a number of speeches defending women's rights and freedom; and that earned him a great popularity among many women. ALHUSSEIN, M. & ALSUKRAN, R. 2008. Al-Odah: Women is a leader and does not stand in the back. *Alriyadh*.

careful to delete all lectures relating to his objection to women driving from his website's archive. He concluded that the issue of women driving was neither a religious case nor fell under religious jurisdiction; it is rather a case subject to the laws of the state and the traditions of society. The development of his vision of women in general has become apparent by his adoption of more moderate and flexible opinions on many social issues affecting women in Saudi Arabia (Ghaithi, 2010a). On a personal note, this became apparent from his constructive conversation during my visit to his house. He welcomed me, allowed me to talk to him directly, praised my topic and was keen to help me to fulfill my research objectives.

Dr. Al-Odah's views on the West and its ideologies and institutions also clearly show the transformation in his thought. In his previous intractable ideological conflict with the West, and the negative attitude he had towards Western countries as described previously, he used to describe certain modernising currents in Saudi Arabia as destructive and malicious attempts by the West which were intended to irrevocably damage Islam and Muslims. Thus, his grounds for banning women drivers were that they stemmed from a Western conspiracy against Islam and an encouragement for men and women to mix freely.

However, after his intellectual transformation, in a cultural symposium held in Jeddah on 25/04/2006, and attended by members of the cultural elite, and it is clear that there is a difference between the voice of history and the voice of reformation. Now, is their aim for seeking human rights a voice of the religion or a political voice? Al-'Odah emphasised that human rights is a responsibility shared between the ruler, the scholar, every individual and the society (AlOdah, 2005). Also, reformation or change can sometimes be difficult because some do not have the ability to change who they follow as they consider what they are on to be a part of the religion which does not accept reformation. In this connection, Dr. Al-Odah observes "we were attacked by ourselves, not by the West", before adding that "Islamic history is not infallible and it was not a decisive Islamic rule, but it had a great bright part. I see that our Sheikhs and clerics are not infallible, but capable of being both wrong and right and absolute obedience is just for Allah and the Prophet Mohammad" (Mahfouz, 2006).

He has also been claiming that “democracy may not be a perfect ruling system, but it is less harmful and it can be developed and adapted to the local needs and status quo”. Interestingly, this comment on the desirability of democracy recalls the famous dictum by Churchill, delivered in the House of Commons on November 11, 1947: “Democracy is the worst form of government; except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Aaron Y, 2012). The development of Dr. Al-Odah’s views on this topic and on relations with the West clearly shows his increased tendency towards not only moderation and discussion, but also the need to be pragmatic.

Another big shift in Dr. Al-Odah’s thought since his release from prison can be seen in his use of media. Following his release, he began to appear on popular TV programmes, of which the most prominent was *The Cornerstone* on MBC. This marked a huge change of direction for an individual who had previously accused such satellite channels of depravity, even condemning those whose houses contained satellites TVs. On these shows, he commented in simple and uncontroversial language on many important Islamic issues, Such as, Islamic fatwa, purposes of fasting, Religious discourse, Fate and destiny, and others (Islamtoday, 2009). The difference between him and other religious leaders in Saudi Arabia was plain: in contrast to the fixation on a single dogmatic approach, he set out to instill in people the idea that Islam as a religion is not restricted to one single “correct” perception or vision, and that people should not reject relationships with others who may have a different vision. By stressing such dialogue, he also emphasised the importance of a logical reading of one’s situation. He also introduced another programme, “Life is a Word”, which has now been popular on MBC for a number of years in a way of understanding contemporary reality in Saudi society, and discussing most important issues, including religious, intellectual, and social. As well as to follow the possible solutions to some of them. (Ahmed, 2010). When comparing the clear evidence of his intolerance and rigidity of thinking seen in his early lectures with the views he espouses on *The Cornerstone*, of which about 150 episodes have so far been broadcast, his intellectual shift towards moderation is starkly visible.

As well as his move to mainstream television, Dr. Al-Odah also began to engage with his followers on new media platforms. One of his major innovations was his

new and creative method of advocating Islam on his website *Islam Today*. On this site, he brought together a diverse group of Islamic scholars and educators, whose aim is to provide guidance on modern issues in the light of Islamic teachings and thought. The website also provides electronic resources for online Islamic education in a number of languages, making it extremely accessible to a range of potential users. As well as his website, Dr. Al-Odah has also embraced social media, and now has a considerable presence on both Facebook and Twitter. His Arabic followers on these platform number in the millions, giving him access to, and influence over, a huge swathe of Saudi society, particularly the young, who are more likely to be users of social media. As further evidence of his transformation, he even expresses his ideas on new topics via social media posts in English too.

His focus on dialogue and negotiation between groups, combined with his popularity in Saudi Arabia, also brought Dr. Al-Odah to the attention of some in the West during this period. The renowned theologian John Esposito, Professor of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University and the director of the al-Waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding listed Dr. Al-Odah in his book *The 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World*. It is worth mentioning that, in Esposito's book, Dr. Al-Odah was ranked as more influential than Kareem al-Husseni, the Imam of Ismailism (Esposito and Kalin, 2009). Esposito described Dr. Al-Odah's transformation in the following terms: "the prominent Saudi Islamic preacher, Salman al-Odah, who was an intolerant and strict preacher, is now calling for coexistence and he has had a profound influence on the Islamic world due to his initiatives that are published on his website *Islam Today*, as well as his continued support for the needs of the Islamic nation" (Esposito and Kalin, 2009, P 56).

Later, after the Arab Spring, the New York Times published a brief report about Dr. Al-Odah on 6th of April 2014, which concentrated on the paradigm shift in his thinking. Robert Worth, the New York Times Middle East Correspondent, said: "Sheikh Salman al-Odah passed through what seemed a transition during the 2011 revolutions and since that time he began to call for democracy and a civil state. Millions of people started to watch his recordings on YouTube, which created problems for the Saudi monarchy. Due to his dangerous speech, the Saudi government banned him from publishing, as well as travelling outside the country".

The correspondent mentioned that Dr. Al-Odah had previously been perceived as a conservative and fanatical activist and a personality that enjoyed great popularity in Saudi Arabia, but had now changed his opinions, even publishing a book, *The Questions about the Revolution*, in 2012, (Alodah, 2012). Although this was later banned in SA. In this book, Dr. Al-Odah cites Quranic verses in order to reach unconventional conclusions: democracy is the only legitimate form of government, and Islam does not accept tyrannies. Political power must be separated, and the most debased form of tyranny is one imposed in the name of religion (Arabi, 2014). Worth added that while such thoughts and a Western reader may view ideas as logical, but from within a system of clerics who have long legitimised an absolutist monarchical regime, they represent a radical break from the past. He points out that, although Dr. Al-Odah refers to Islamic *fiqh*, he also quotes many Western philosophers, such as Machiavelli and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in order to support his opinions and conclusions (Hournews, 2014).

In conclusion, this period of Dr. Al-Odah's life shows the effects of the radical transformation that his thinking underwent while in prison. He is the most prominent example of the phenomenon of paradigm shifts among religious leaders, and his shift was clear; he changed from being on the radical right in the early 1990s, when he was the most prominent of the "Awakening Sheikhs", towards a more moderate, or even slightly left-of-centre, stance by the end of the first decade of this century. Dr. Al-Odah's views during this period can be summed up in his call for the foundation of "a new, moderate and extrovert Islamic discourse that creates a harmony between the needs of life, Islamic law and intellectual openness" (al-Odah, 2011). Following his intellectual transition, he said, "I will neither turn back nor regret the past because it was merely an experience that I have learnt a lot from, with its falsehood and righteousness. I don't think I have to live in the past" (al-Odah, 2011). He described the dominance of extremism and radical Islam as "injustice when one social current dominates the situation, as if it were the only available option or the only unique representative of religion, values and religious commitment, whereas Shari'a involves diversity of thought". No doubt he was alluding here to the prevalence of extremism in Saudi Arabia (Al-Otaibi, 2013a).

This shift in thinking was characterised by a focus on dialogue between groups who disagree, a renewed emphasis on tolerance and practicality, a willingness to reassess long-held beliefs, particularly about such divisive topics as women and the West, and a new focus on individual thinking. On this last point, Dr. Al-Odah said “be yourself and don’t let anybody dominate your personality or cut away your independence, even if you admire them exceedingly”, a clear change from his earlier reliance on the opinions of others (Al-Odah, 2013a). His engagement with diverse opinions, through a range of media formats, has made him an extremely popular and influential figure.

4.5 The Arab Spring and the Renaissance Forum Project from 2010 until the present

The so-called “Arab Spring” was a revolutionary wave of political demonstrations and protests that began in Tunisia on 18 December 2010 and quickly spread to other parts of the Arab world. It was ultimately responsible for the overthrow of long-standing dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and triggered an ongoing civil war in Syria, as well as unrest in a number of other countries, such as Bahrain and Iraq (Alshayook, 2011).

Dr. Al-Odah stated that revolution is not a demand in itself, but may be necessary to achieve political reform and social justice, and as such sided with the demonstrators. When the Egyptian Army forced Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to stand down in 2012. Dr. Al-Odah announced his support for Mohammad Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, as presidential candidate (AlOmar, 2012).

At this time, the MBC Media Company decided to cancel “The Cornerstone”, Dr. Al-Odah’s TV programme, “without mentioning any reasons” Dr. Al-Odah said. It is, however, likely that this was a direct result of the topics of the last two series, which focused on the unfolding situation in Tunisia ‘and Egypt and expressed support for the demonstrators there and, by extension, for the implementation of democracy. Dr. Al-Odah said that “these coups might happen in any other country if the reasons were present”, which has been taken as acceptance of the legitimacy of political dissent and possibly even revolution, if it is necessary for social justice to be achieved. In response, Dr. Al-Odah claimed to be advocating “addressing seriously,

honestly and faithfully the reasons that may lead to coups and unrest” (IslamToday, 2014b)¹⁹.

Dr. Al-Odah has said that his programme was cancelled at the behest of the Saudi Ministry of Information. Although MBC, as the most viewed TV channel in the Arab world, is a wealthy organisation, he had no business contract with them, but had worked purely as a volunteer. He said: “I didn’t sign a business contract, nor did I ever receive any money from the channel; the most important thing to me was to deliver a message, nothing else” (IslamToday, 2014b).

Whether or not the Saudi government was responsible for taking Dr. Al-Odah off the air, he was not subjected to the same travel bans that had been put in place before his imprisonment, when he was still a radical cleric. During the Arab Spring period, the Saudi authorities allowed him freedom to travel, and largely let him pursue his agenda without overt state harassment.

In an effort to retain an audience despite the cancellation of his TV programme, Dr. Al-Odah increasingly turned to new media formats, as has been mentioned previously. The most popular media formats available to him in the period were the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, and Dr. Al-Odah became very active on these platforms and maintained a strong presence and a growing following. He had realised the importance of the Internet after being released from prison (Tayeb, 2012), but it now became the fundamental method of communicating his message to the world. The thinking of Salman Al-Odah also changed in step with cultural and technological developments, as he increasingly emphasised the need for people to interact with their society and its mindset in a critical but non-confrontational manner wherever possible (Al-Odah, 2012).

In order to promote moderate dialogue and communication between different factions, Dr. Al-Odah founded the Renaissance Forum Project in 2010, with the aim of bringing together people from a range of Gulf Arab states. This project is one of

¹⁹ Dr al-Odah's stance and indirect support of the Arab revolutions, as well as sympathising with the Muslim Brotherhood, had a negative effect on him. He was detained and prevented from travelling abroad several times. KHALAF, R. 2012. Saudi Arabia fears of success the Sheikh, "Salman alodah" in way of starting the revolution in Saudi Arabia. *Financial Times*.

the most important projects of its type, and has been the cause of significant controversy and disputes between supporters and opponents. The main concept of the forum was to establish a programme through which young people from Gulf nations could exchange ideas and meet thinkers and members of a wide range of different groups, with different religious, political and social interests, fostering dialogue. The main subjects that the forum was intended to address were the concepts of renaissance, culture and civilisation, through meetings involving thinkers from different disciplines (Al-Jasser et al., 2014).

The Renaissance Forum Project was set up as an annual intellectual gathering, supervised by Dr. Al-Odah. Its first session was held in Bahrain from 16 to 19 of April in 2010 and the second in Qatar from 8 to 12 of April in 2011, but its third session, which was supposed to have been held in Kuwait from 23 to 26 of April in 2012, was banned by a number of Muslim scholars such as Sheikh ‘Abd-Rahman al-Barrak, Sheikh Nasir al-Umar, Sheikh Ahmad al-Zahrani and others, they have emphasised that they are not against forums in general, rather they are against certain forums which have misguided ideas. The reason why they hold this stance is because this type of forum will create a big opportunity in infusing doubt with regards to the Islamic Sacred Law (AlTaaiefi, 2012).

Kuwait abolished the Renaissance Forum after they sought counsel from the Saudi Arabian scholars.

After coming across some aspects of this forum it is necessary to prevent such a forum being available because it contained matters that conflicted with the Sacred Law especially in the approach of the general head of the forum as well as his guests and within his dialogues.

1. The different approaches of the general head of the forum Dr. Mustafa al-Hasan are known to oppose the application of the Sacred Law and make mockery of the jurisprudence of the pious predecessors of this religious nation. His approach also attracts the youth. In some of statements he indicated to partial secularism and that there are some forms of secularism which do not oppose Islam (Al-Hazmi, 2010). Furthermore, he has been noted for his strong interest in allowing free mixing between young men and women such that he said in regards to the Renaissance Forum, “I was particularly concerned in having men and women in

one place to remove all the differences which make this impossible.” He also said, “There are some who find it difficult to have the forum in one hall wherein men and women will both be.” (AlTaaiefi, 2012).

2. The guests who have involvement in this forum vary from atheists, christians, rafidhites, orientalist, secularists and liberalists. From amongst the orientalist, there is Stéphane Lacroix, the author of ‘Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia’.The Shi’i Rafidhite Dr. Tawfiq as-Saif was also amongst them who is one of the preachers of al-Khomeini and he said in one of his remarks regarding al-Khomeini, “The political approach of al-Khomeini stands is an explanation on how the religion can rise.” It has also been mentioned that Dr. Tawfiq as-Saif had participated in secret activities against Saudi Arabia (Al-Qayedi, 2012). In addition, Hala al-Dosary was amongst the guests in this forum. She believes that religion should be segregated from general living such that she said in a program called ‘No Holds Barred’ which is aired on al hayat channel, “I don't hold back to say that the Sacred Law is what rules the general laws. Although I highly respect the texts of the Sacred Law and books that illustrate its concern for family life, I do however reject the human intellect being limited to only text.” Dr. Khalid al-Dakhil was also one of the guests of this forum. He said in one of his speeches titled ‘Why do we reject secularism?’, “I believe that secularism is the solution to many issues and there are many examples for this.” (AlTaaiefi, 2012).
3. For these reasons the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued the prohibition for this forum.
4. The religious scholars called those involved in this forum to have fear of God and to abstain from these matters, which assist in sin and enmity. God, Exalted is He, says, “And do not assist one another in sin and enmity.” [Al-Ma’idah: 2]

However, the objectives of the Forum were:

1. Building a renaissance model and thinking with a legal mentality, and to solve significant social and intellectual issues in the Arab world.
2. Giving participants the chance to meet the leaders of the renaissance movement who are from different schools of thought, such as Dr al Odah,

and this opportunity is important in way of having a multi thought and beliefs in one place.

3. Arranging meetings between the participants in forum and encouraging cooperative relationships between them, and this is a good chance to exchange ideas and intellectual experiences, and therefore warning from extreme thought and calling for moderate Islamic thought, also, opportunity to open the door for intellectual dialogue between different schools of thought. (Al-Namer, 2010).

The Forum's events included lectures and seminars, as well as the opportunity for conversations in a more informal setting. The most prominent issue that both Forums debated was the concept of intellectual transition, and the role of the individual in promoting beneficial social change. The Forum also served as an open space for ideas, programmes and projects to stimulate intellectual development (Forum, 08/08/2013).

Dr. Al-Odah has said to show the importance of the Forum that "Renaissance is the soul and the way of thinking that flows around inside the body in order to make it healthy, and when the body becomes healthy, minor problems will have no effect. We must first reform thought and the way people think, besides encouraging knowledge and practical initiatives. We are not about to establish a project for Islamic or Arab unity, but there are many projects that should be given the opportunity to emerge. The Arab Spring is the beginning and people may turn to old and forgotten programmes whose time has now come" (IslamToday, 2014b). Here we can see the hope Dr. Al-Odah expresses that the energies of the Arab Spring may be turned towards constructive development, if allowed to develop within the right framework.

However, the Forum was strongly criticised by many conventional Salafists. Sheikh Abdelaziz Al Asheikh said that "it is a dangerous association that stands against *tawhid* (monotheism) and the unity of the Islamic nation" (Forum, 08/08/2013). As Salafism is founded on the exclusion and rejection of other modes of thought, the Forum's focus on inclusiveness, moderation and inter-group dialogue was seen as extremely dangerous. The call for peaceful coexistence between different groups that

held differing beliefs was considered by many to undermine the basis of Salafist thinking. Critics of the Forum pointed to what they considered to be two fundamental defects:

- **Intellectual:** the ideas that this forum addresses were seen as simply reinforcing liberal attitudes within Gulf society that critics felt were dangerous in terms of both religion and social stability, and lacking religious legitimacy.
- **Systematic:** it has been suggested that all of the participants in the Forum held liberal views and that there was no attempt to represent the traditionalist perspective, meaning that the Forum made no attempt to represent the full range of relevant opinions.

However, the charge that the Forum lacked religious legitimacy does not carry much weight; its supervisor and the organisers are members of the religious community, and critics themselves were accused of labelling anyone they disagreed with as “liberals” under the cover of a supposed religious superiority (Al-Madani, 2013). With regards to the inclusion of participants who have liberal and Shi’ite beliefs, these are individuals who are already well-known figures within their respective movements, and are unlikely to be responsible for misleading individuals by disguising their motives; it is both a strength and a weakness of the Forum that it is open about its agenda; it is unlikely to attract the interest of those who do not already share moderate or liberal beliefs, but at the same time, its openness confers a certain legitimacy. One participant said about the Forum that “it is just an intellectual activity supervised by a group of young people who have various thoughts and ideas, and who belong to different intellectual currents. Moreover, the events of this forum are carried out in public; there is nothing to hide. All the lectures and activities are written up and published on the Internet via Twitter and Facebook” (AlHusayen, 2014).

In fact, the criticisms directed against the Forum only served to increase its popularity. The forum was characterized by negotiations between different intellectual and religious movements and sects and its openness to other parts of the social spectrum, offering an example of religious tolerance and a rejection of

sectarianism according to liberal and contemporary standards. Through his role in the Forum, Dr. Al-Odah succeeded in showing the difference between himself and other religious leaders. The Forum provided a platform for the tolerance of his outlook, and showed how much closer he was than other leaders to the views of young people in particular. It also showed the development of his religious discourse, which kept up with the intellectual shifts in Saudi Arabia, as well as his ability to interact with and comprehend people across the whole social spectrum (Al-Ebrahem, 2012).

4.6 Argument about the intellectual transformation of Al-Odah

While the intellectual transformation of Dr. Al-Odah occurred during his imprisonment in the middle of the 1990s, the change was only observable after he was released from jail. His intellectual change was welcomed by those who were looking forward to more moderate speech in Saudi Arabia: people from different schools of thought who are suffering from extremism and fanatical thinking (Dadoosh, 2010) . However, due to the radical nature of his transformation and his effect on public opinion, due to his media presence on television and the Internet, Dr. Al-Odah became one of the most controversial figures in Saudi society.

Dr. Al-Odah's new religious discourse – new in both style and content – did not please his former associates. They considered it a rebellion against the principles he once held dear. For this reason, a number of his former colleagues boycotted his media appearances, even though the administrative team that ran them diligently observed the intellectual and jurisprudential rules and regulations those Saudi Salafist scholars had agreed (Dadoosh, 2010).

His considerable experience and public standing invites analysis, criticism and sometimes flattery, as can be seen with his programme “The Cornerstone” and with the media interviews that he gives, as well as his jurisprudential, intellectual and political statements. Some Saudi thinkers, such as Ahmad Al-Arfaj, believes Dr. Al-Odah to be intellectually inconsistent, in the sense that he changes his opinions and attitudes according to changes in social or political realities. Ahmad Al-Arfaj even incited Dr. Al-Odah's followers to attack him. He also released a video on YouTube about Dr. Al-Odah's changes in attitude towards certain politicians. One example of

this is Dr. Al-Odah's attitude towards Saif El-Islam, the son of the former Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi, whom he had praised before the Libyan revolution. However, once the Libyan revolution brought about the fall of the Libyan president and his son, he blessed and defended the revolution (al-Balawi, 2012).

Another example of criticism of Dr. Al-Odah came from Yousif Aleiiri, a leader in the Al-Qaeda organisation. Aleiiri, as has already been mentioned, had previously written to thank Dr. Al-Odah for his intellectual role in supporting extremism. Aleiiri was responsible for killings in armed confrontations with the Saudi security forces in 2003. Before this, in August 2000, he sent a letter to Salman Al-Odah in which he said "you are the one who told the ruling authority 'imprison us, but reform the situation in the country'. Indeed, you were imprisoned, but nothing changed. On the contrary, things got worse; when you were released from jail you saw how much worse they were. Our hearts were eager to meet you, to enjoy talking with you. Unfortunately, after meeting you, your opinions came as a disappointment" (Mahal, 2000).

In response to his critics, Dr. Al-Odah released a video on YouTube entitled "Yes, I am changed". In the video, he states, "Why should I not change? Change enables us to keep up with new developments and liberates us from depending on imitation. The universe is changing, though religion is constant; but human opinion is changeable. For instance, the circumstances in Mecca were different from those in Medina. The era of the Prophet Muhammad is not the same as the era of the caliphs. The Shafi'i School in Egypt is different from the Shafi'i School in Iraq, order replaces negation in Islamic law, mercy prevails over punishment, and persuasion prevails over intimidation. I often tend to watch myself more than watching others, identifying my flaws before searching for those of others. Everything changes; the sky changes its clouds, the river changes its water and the earth changes its crust. If I stand still while everything around me moves, this means that one day I will find myself alone. Five years in prison took me far from the influence of the crowd, gave me liberty, transformed my vision from poor to clear and enabled me to see the positive side of others. When I was released from jail, I found that some people had turned to violence and I had to be clear with them, even if that led to losing them. My liberty is the most important thing to me and I will keep going even if I stumble;

yes, I stumble, but I try to stand up again quickly. I followed my virtuous Sheikhs in forbidding photography, and then I realized that reality imposes needs and requirements that cannot be ignored and it is hard now to find anyone who forbids photography. Thus, the courageous jurist is the one who turns to address negotiable issues and the one who opens doors, instead of waiting for others to break them down. Yes, I changed, because if I repeated what I was saying when I was twenty, it would mean that 20 years of my life had passed in vain” (Al-Odah, 2012).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen from this chapter that Dr. Salman Al-Odah is considered a prime example of an individual who has undergone a profound personal transformation in outlook and attitudes. However, his image is also of a man, who remains true to deep-rooted principles, causing much debate about the validity of his thoughts and pronouncements now that he has made his controversial transition (Alarab, 2014). Given current social and political realities, it is safe to conclude that the intellectual transformation of Dr. Al-Odah should be seen positively, since he not only opens the way for discussions and negotiations that cross the great intellectual and religious divides in Saudi society, but also appears to genuinely search for truth, rather than clinging to any opinion based on a lack of knowledge (al-Balawi, 2012). No doubt, his influence on the Saudi society and beyond cannot be denied. Although grounded in Islamic heritage, Salman is ever aware of the changing realities in his society because of globalisation and multiculturalism and the forces that accompany them.

CHAPTER FIVE: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED SALMAN'S THOUGHT

Introduction

In Saudi Arabia, there is a new generation of scholars that is looking to create change and reform at the intellectual and political levels through negotiation rather than revolution. I mean by “revolution” the use of physical power, violent means, or armed conflict to confront the government or change it. Peter Calvert defines revolution from the perspective of the physical power that is used to topple a government or regime (Calvert, 1970). This is seen through the rule of Islamic Sunni jurisprudence in general, and legal political jurisprudence in particular (as toppling the government of the day or the present ruler is called “mutiny against the ruler”), as these two represent two main factors in forming the thinking of Salman Al-Odah and other scholars, such as Safar Al-Hawali and Nasir al-Umar, and also their approaches to politics.

The preacher Salman Al-Odah is considered one of the most important scholars of the new generation, whose approach to politics and religious speech sheds light on major issues, not least those that relate to change and the call for intellectual and political reform in Saudi Arabia. He follows an academic approach, operating within an Islamic Sunni framework. He studied in Islamic schools that are known in Saudi Arabia as “Scientific Institutions”, he obtained his university degree, and then completed his higher studies in Saudi Islamic universities. Al-Odah developed this thinking in his speeches in the 1980s, which gave him a prominent and influential role. In terms of his organisational thought, he refers to the political Islamic Sunni struggle that he adopted and which contributed to the development of the organisational foundation of his speeches in the 1980s and 1990s, giving him a prominent and influential role in the process of intellectual change and development in Saudi Arabia (al-Odah, 2011a).

As Salman Al-Odah's reformative speeches were developing and becoming more popular in universities, mosques, and public places, some important regional events took place. For example, in August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, so the Saudi king

decided to allow foreign forces, that are mainly American and Western allied forces, to confront the Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia. Salman Al-Odah and other scholars and academics openly and severely criticised the Iraqi invasion and the king's decision to seek the help of American forces. Al-Odah's discourse about those events was unique and had a big impact on Saudi society, as recordings of several of his lectures became available to people. His demands for change and reform at the political, social, and, more importantly, intellectual levels represented a distinguished scientific foundation among the new generation of scholars of the Islamic movement in the country.

In this chapter, I will discuss in more detail the most important factors that influenced Salman Al-Odah's intellectual transformations, and the main stations that made him reorganise his thought differently.

There are many factors that have substantially influenced Salman al-Odah's thought, but four have had the greatest impact on his life and views:

1. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990, and the war that followed.
2. His imprisonment from 1994 to 1999.
3. The 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA.
4. The Arab Spring uprisings, which began in 2010.

5.1 Main factors of Salman's transformation

5.1.1 The Invasion of Kuwait

Saudi Arabia's decision to seek the help of American troops to liberate Kuwait in 1990 led to different reactions from various Islamic and intellectual/academic groups within the Kingdom, who mainly focused on its impact on the prestige of the Saudi regime, such as, Sheikh Abdullah al-Jibreen, Safar al-Hawali, Ibrahim al-Ahmari, Salman al-Odah, Abdulaziz al-Qasim, and Saad al-Faqih and others (Al-Khudr, 2011). These groups submitted petitions, demands, and offers of counsel to the King to influence his stance on the war.

Mufti sheikh ibn Baz, ibn Uthaymeen, and sheikh Saleh al-Fawzan, and others have labelled the decision by the late Saudi King Fahd to seek American help as a brave, necessary and decisive decision that was necessary to solve the problems in Kuwait

(al-Fahad, 2003), but with this decision, he shocked a large section of the society, including intellectuals and some clergy for whom the perspective that this decision was important in order to solve this crisis in accordance with international law was overpowered by their religious ideology. This was clearly demonstrated by the common question “how can we seek the help of infidels to fight Muslims?” In this context, they relied on a tradition of the Prophet that says: “Drive out the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula” (al-Saif, 2010). Osama bin Laden (who was popular at the time due to the success of his “jihad” against the Russians in Afghanistan) met the Saudi Defence Minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, in 1991, and suggested the use of Afghans to fight the forces of Saddam Hussein and liberate Kuwait. Prince Sultan gave a very clear, simple and seemingly logical answer, that Osama bin Laden and his companions’ experience of fighting in Afghanistan would be useless in Kuwait due to the nature of the land, as Afghanistan is a mountainous land dotted with caves, whereas Kuwait consists of flat, even plains. Prince Sultan then asked him, “What would you do when the Iraqis’ mortars, with their chemicals, fall on your head?” Bin Laden replied by saying, “We will fight with our faith”(Adnan, 2010a).

The decision to seek the help of American troops, on the other hand, faced huge opposition from a variety of Islamic and intellectual/academic groups such as Salman al-Odah, Safar al-Hawali and Nasir al-Umar in Saudi Arabia who feared the impact of the presence of American military forces on Saudi soil, and the possibility that this may lead to American influence over political and economic decisions in Saudi Arabia (al-Sibai, 2013).

The Saudi regime responded to this issue with official statements through the media that the blessings of peace and tranquillity are best achieved through the stability of Saudi Arabia, but that this stability had become fundamentally threatened by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Thus, the help of the Americans was sought to ensure both the security and the stability of Saudi Arabia.

The journalist Jamal Khasqaji said “We felt insulted at that time because our country was depending on infidels to protect it, and some were asking, ‘if the armed forces are incapable of protecting the country, why are we then spending money on them?’”

In the same vein, a lawyer, Abdulaziz Qasim, said “Everyone was stunned during the first weeks of the attack, because of the enormous weaknesses in the army, security and media, and because of the collapse of national dignity in front of the large groups of American male and female soldiers in the country. The increasing resettlement of Kuwaitis in every part of the Kingdom was a significant indicator of the kind of risks that threatened the nation because of the policy that the country followed” (al-Haidh, 2015). There was a national sense of pride and anger at what was perceived as a national and cultural humiliation. These sentiments were expressed by different sections of Saudi society at that time (Adnan, 2010b). After the invasion of Kuwait and the King’s decision to seek the help of American troops, The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta, headed by the Mufti Sheikh ibn Baz, issued a religious decree approving of the help of the Americans, in a statement almost free of any supportive argument from the Qur’an or Hadith of the Prophet (Baz, 2012).

The Saudi journalist and a leader of al-Watan newspaper Jamal Khasqaji clearly stated this issue “Asking America for help”: “The religious decree authorizing the use of these forces was against the Sheikh ibn Baz beliefs [...] he was caught between two options: either to choose the public or the state, and he chose the state” (Adnan, 2010a). He was considered right to seek outside help such as “America” to achieve the public duty of safeguarding the citizens in “Saudi Arabia” from external threats “Iraq” and protecting the interests of the country to avoid any Saudi bloodshed (Baz, 2006). The decision proved to be correct, in that it maintained the stability and security of the state (Al-Zubaidi, 2011).

In this important time, some Saudi reformers, liberals, nationalists, dignitaries and former officials such as Salman al-Odah, Safar al-Hawali, Sa'ad al-Faqih, Mohsen al - Awaji and others submitted a petition in 1991 to king Fahd, in which they pointed out the importance of moving ahead with the full implementation of Sharia in matters related to achieving justice and equality and promoting reform. They believed this can be accomplished by creating a legal framework for developing religious decrees, the formation of a Shura council, reviving municipal councils, re-examining the judiciary, regulating the freedom of the media, and the radical and

comprehensive reform of education and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. This petition was known as the civil memorandum, which the Islamists from the official Salafist institution in Saudi Arabia, and the senior scholars such as Sheikh ibn Baz and ibn Uthaymeen considered to be unacceptable because it contains political and religious changes in Saudi Arabia, in way of drastic and comprehensive reform of education, and of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, also, promote the role of women in public life which can demands a lot of changes in Saudi rules (Adnan, 2010a).

Al-Odah's stance support this petition was clear during the war in Kuwait. He surprised everyone by fiercely rejecting the decision to seek the help of the USA in the war, challenging the political authority represented by the leadership of King Fahd and the religious institutes represented by the leadership of Abd al-Aziz bin Baz. He presented a new political vision based on religious principles, and he received popular support for his proposal very quickly, receiving the support of thousands in a few months. Due to this, he became the leader of awakening and a new Salafism in Saudi Arabia, which consisted of young people, technocrats, university professors and intellectuals. The focus of this group changed from being exclusively concerned with the war in Kuwait, to presenting a reformist agenda that discussed internal issues, demanded general reforms that reduced political corruption and called for greater observation of Sharia. This reformist Salafist movement soon spread beyond Saudi Arabia and developed a wide base of support in many countries (al-Tamimi, 2008).

The Egyptian newspaper al-Misriyun mentioned on 20/05/2005 that the Egyptian authority considered Dr al-Odah to be a political threat because his tapes flooded the Egyptian market and influenced many young Egyptians. Jordan was similar to Egypt; new Salafist movements, inspired by the ideas of Dr. al-Odah and his companions, were established, such as the Holy Book and the Prophetic Tradition Reformist Society, which was founded in 1994. Many of the states in the Gulf, Yemen and the states of that Maghreb region were affected by this movement (Rumman, 2005).

Dr. al-Odah and Sheikh Safar al-Hawali took on the responsibility for the political, ideological and religious indoctrination of young Muslims, while Nasir al-Umar took on the responsibility for the educational and ethical guidance of young men. Aid al-Qarni and Ali al-Qarni were in charge of spiritual and psychological aspects, through the dissemination of many lectures. In this way, Saudi Arabia witnessed a new reform movement that presented a totally different and new school of thought, but soon this movement clashed with the political elite, a clash that ended with the arrests of Salman al-Odah, Safar al-Hawali and Mohsen al-Awaji in 1994. They were released at the end of the 1990s, and they went on to develop different schools of thought (Hijazi, 2014).

It is worth mentioning that the American researcher and expert from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Anthony H. Cordesman, allocated part of his research on Saudi Arabia to Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Odah, especially when they objected to allowing American troops to enter Saudi Arabia in the First Gulf War in 1990, showing the impact of these two sheikhs on Saudi society (Rumman, 2005). Many people from different religious and ideological backgrounds, and of different ages, were influenced by the views of Dr. al-Odah, due to his rhetorical eloquence and improvised lectures, as well as his wide knowledge and awareness of different scientific fields. He was accepted by some members of Saudi society who supported his thinking (2001). His speech at that time was condemnatory towards secularisation, politics, the USA and the Saudi security forces, making his views unusual at the time. Dr. al-Odah talked of making changes to the current situation, which, according to him, did not contain anything, positive; he encouraged young people to demonstrate, call for change and reject the authoritative way they were treated by the Saudi state.

He frequently criticised and opposed government policies, and strongly opposed the decision to seek the help of the USA. He saw this as a vast conspiracy to introduce secularism and modernity to Muslim countries, which, in his opinion, was unacceptable. As an example of this opposition, he gave a lecture during the occupation of Kuwait that was called “To Liberate the Land or to Liberate Men”. This lecture focused on the importance of liberating man as the foundation for

liberating land, and that this cannot happen except by rejecting servitude to any worldly power and emphasising the need to be liberated from fear. This included liberating Muslim lands from the infidels, to which end he sought to prevent American troops from entering Saudi Arabia. He also emphasised the need to gain achievements through which Saudis could reassert their independence (Al-Odah, 1990).

At the end of the first side of this tape, he said: “We find that Muslim land has been stolen by hypocrites who have occupied it without any weapons”. Here he referred to those who have controlled the Muslim world, sometimes under the name of secularism, sometimes under the name of national unity and sometimes under the name of historical rights, which may have meant the historical rights of rulers in Saudi Arabia. He also recited some verses of poetry in a lecture called “O People of the Holy Places” in 1991, in conjunction with the occupation of Kuwait, in which he said:

By Allah, leave the servants of sands

and their direction of prayer, sister of Columbus

In every day there is a new place to visit and a house

From the Arabian Sea to the Atlantic Ocean

But the Old House is our direction of prayer

Which we protect with ourselves and the most valuable things

(1993).

By “sister of Columbus”, al-Odah referred to America. With these verses, he showed his opposition to the use of American troops to solve an Arab crisis, especially in the land where the “Old House” is located, expressing in the poem a willingness to countenance personal sacrifice and his perception of the American troops as an occupying force.

These examples show the extent of religious intolerance and strong political attitude, also ideological inflexibility that characterised the thinking of Salman al-Odah during this period, as well as his language of extremism and how he openly expressed his opinions in his lectures, which led to his arrest and imprisonment (al-Jazairi, 2008). There is another example in which Dr. al-Odah called for violence in a lecture he gave to women, in a tape called “Concerns of a Woman Adhering to her Faith” on 3 December 1991, in which he stressed the importance of complaining by saying that “Good people should use all that they can to achieve their personal convictions, and we should not underestimate complaint as a means, though it is considered one of the weakest means, especially when there is not any other means”. He then called clearly for people to reject their ruler, saying:

I believe that the time for complaining has ended or is about to end; I mean the role of good men and women should not stop at just raising complaints with the relevant authority by saying this and that have happened, as there is nothing that can stop the winds of change (Alodah, 1991).

Dr. Abd al-Malik al-Jazairi in his book *Madarik al-Nazar fi al-Siyasah (Wise Judgment in Reviewing Politics)*, replied to Salman al-Odah as follows:

What do you want, O Salman, from this incitement? It is an open call to go against the ruler, as complaining with one’s tongue is not enough, and if change cannot be achieved by one’s tongue, then there is no other way but one’s hand, as is known by whoever weighs his words with the scale of jurisprudence. If you are one of those described by Ibn Taymiyyah as being without knowledge of Islamic law and sound mind, as Islamic law prohibits going against a Muslim Sultan, irrespective of how unjust is he. The texts are quite clear in this regard and no one goes against that except the Khawarij and the like, while the mind prohibits its owner from spreading this kind of incitement among the most vulnerable creatures, women (al-Jazairi, 2008)P,375.

However, the statement of Salman is ambiguous, and might be understood in different ways according to the mindset of the listener. Apart from complaining, there are many other ways to raise one's concerns, such as writing, responding to certain issues, demonstrating, up to calls for a coup or violence of some sort, especially as Dr. al-Odah said that "there is nothing that can stop the winds of change". Due to these statement, which included calls for extremism in religion and thought, and for political reasons. Salman al-Odah was sent to al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh in 1994 (JEHL, 2001).

The war in Kuwait affected the thinking of Salman al-Odah. This stage represented the real beginning of the period in which Salman al-Odah declared his hardline approach and extremist ideology, showing political and religious fanaticism, by continuously objecting to the decision of the Saudi government to seek the help of American troops. Al-Odah, at this stage, opposed other religious scholars and clearly supported, through his cassettes, an extremist ideology, which can be seen in the terms that he used. This was the final stage of al-Odah's thinking before his transformation, when he realised the disadvantages of his intellectual radicalism.

5.1.2 Imprisonment

The second stage that affected Salman al-Odah's thought is the time that he spent in prison from 1994 to 1999. This is considered the period in which Salman al-Odah achieved intellectual maturity, and the seeds of his transformation started to appear during this stage. Al-Odah affirmed that the five years he spent in prison contributed to the refinement of his personality and the development of his earlier views, including radical changes to some of these. During these years, he was held accountable for every previous public statement; this led him to re-examine his views and decisions (Roth, 2014).

One of the reasons that led to his arrest was his criticism of mainstream Saudi religious opinion, believing that it needed reorientation because it was focused mainly on local issues and ignored the issues of the one billion Muslims abroad. Furthermore, al-Odah came to believe that the main thing that the religious authorities in Saudi Arabia needed to do was to awaken young people and teach them to accept a doctrine of the acceptability of disagreement and a culture of

differences of opinion; no-one should think that their opinion is that of Allah and take for themselves the role of Allah's spokesman. Al-Odah believed that this kind of thinking was popular within the Saudi religious establishment (Alarabiya, 2004).

This period of absence and confinement for five years developed al-Odah's thinking and softened his language; even al-Odah admitted that he did not express during this time all of the opinions that he used to reveal, taking into consideration the nature of Saudi society, which does not accept change easily. He spent time during his imprisonment reading extensively, and this experience gave him a unique perspective that the thousands of similar sheikhs and thinkers around him do not have (Admin, 2009). Al-Odah says the following about the impact of that period on developing his personality and thought:

1. He owes to those days the impact of knowledge gained from the thorough reading of different types of topics and sources, old and modern, juristic, linguistic, literary, historical and intellectual, which helped him to be open to new interests, ideas and concepts, also rethink about his extreme thought (al-Odah, 2011a).
2. It gave him new values and ethics which he learned when he came face to face with reality, away from the analysis, gestures and pressure of others, as he became totally dependent on himself in reading about things, processing them and developing an understanding of them.
3. Al-Odah did not go beyond the legitimate framework of the Salafi school that he grew up in, but this experience lessened the influence of his teachers over him, and allowed his personal abilities to develop and take an active part in building his moral, intellectual and cognitive personality. He possessed knowledge of himself and the people surrounding him, and he gained more courage to talk about his own vision and personal endeavour to express himself, whether right or wrong, successful or unsuccessful, strong or weak (Mokhtar, 2008).

He does not consider himself to be possessor of an intellectual school or a particular method; he considers himself to be a reader who is trying to understand and reach the truth, who corrects himself before correcting others. Thus al-Odah found in this

period the opportunity to reconsider the fundamental concepts that underpinned his ideas. He later encouraged others, who may need to rid themselves of a stern, scholastic style or incumbent social pressures, to express themselves and live within their personalities, expressing their capabilities and innate tendencies, and believes that they should not express the opinions of others or talk through other voices. This happened to al-Odah during his imprisonment; this period offered a suitable environment for him to express his own way of thinking, away from religious and social pressures (Alarabiya, 2004).

In his reading, he combined books of religion and philosophy, reading al-Ghazali, ibn Taymiyyah, al-Manfaluti and al-Aqqad. He also read the philosophy of Plato and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He developed an intellectual and philosophical mentality that refuses slavish imitation and seeks to stimulate the mind. He said: “Whatever you say should not be a copy of what others say, it is enough that you say what you think”, and quoted the words of Allah: “Neither speak your prayer aloud, nor speak it in a low tone, but seek a middle course between” (Qur’an, 17:110). With that, he calls for moderation and to stay away from extremism and blind fellowship (Admin, 2009).

Among the most obvious issues that show his transformation during the period of imprisonment is his stance on Shiism. In the 1990s, his stance on the Shia sect was extreme; he considered most Shiites to be infidels publicly condemned their actions and religious beliefs and stated that the disagreement between Shia and Sunni was originally political, with some religious and juristic differences, and that the political differences were the main causes of hostility between the two parties. But after his intellectual transformation, his stance towards Shiites became moderate. According to the programme “*al-Hayat Kalimah*” (“Life is a Word”), on which he is a weekly guest and which is broadcast on MBC, and his website “*al-Islam al-Yawm*” (“Islam Today”). Al-Odah bases his ruling on Shiite ideology using supporting arguments that are considered a fundamental feature of his new intellectual and juristic approach:

1. An emphasis that being different is one of the ways of Allah that He imposed on His servants; it is human nature and there is no way to remove all these differences.
2. A rejection of accusing an entire group of being infidels, as the people of the Qiblah are Muslims, except those who definitively left Islam.
3. A rejection of issuing religious rulings that cover an entire group, especially in complicated matters, and following the principle that knowing historical, political and social contexts and dimensions is an important tool that every jurist cannot do without when he examines any religious decree or legal judgment.

Based on these principles, al-Odah's new stance towards Shiites is as follows:

1. There are different groups of Shiites; among them are extremists who say that the Qur'an has been modified, or say that Jibril made a mistake in delivering the message to Prophet Muhammad instead of Ali, or those who speak ill of Aishah. Undoubtedly, those are out of the circle of Islam and they are infidels. But other scholars see in Shiism a love of the family of the Prophet, some differences in practises of worship, or a rejection of some of the Companions; therefore, the best course of action is to pray for them, teach them and show them the truth, but not to accuse them of being infidels.
2. The dispute between Sunnis and Shiites is fundamental, goes deep into beliefs and doctrines and cannot be resolved. It is not a dispute in the branches of jurisprudence, as with the four Sunni juristic schools. Al-Odah says that the beginning of the dispute was political, precisely concerning the issue of *Imamah*, but it later developed to cover religious issues related to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and some basic principles, such as their position on some of the *Sahabah*.
3. Al-Odah emphasises the importance of coexistence between Sunnis and Shiites, that Shiites should have equal rights as citizens, and that efforts should be made to create a state of constructive discussion, understanding

and coexistence between the two groups, so that differences do not develop into hatred, violence and civil war.

4. There are many common worldly interests that can be agreed on between Sunnis and Shiites. No-one should ask the other to abandon their doctrine, and sectarianism should not overcome the sense of piety, faith and public interest; true devoutness is the opposite of narrow sectarianism.
5. It is worth mentioning that al-Odah follows the critical Shiite reformation movement, which does not agree with many of the insults that traditional Shiite books have levelled against Sunnis and some of the Companions, and seeks to scrutinise them using a unique and accurate method. However, this movement continues to represent a minority, and faces strong opposition from traditionalists. Thus al-Odah believes that the reformation movement should have stronger and clearer voice.

Dr al-Odah kept his position on Shiism within the framework of Salafist thinking, but set himself apart by distinguishing between juristic adaptation and the rights of Shiites as citizens. Al-Odah's speech contains none of the mistrust or suspicion that some Salafi books have for Shiites, and he has a positive view of the Shiite reformation movement (Ayat, 2010).

The imprisonment period had a significant impact on Al-Odah's thinking due to the extensive reading he did in prison. Al-Odah found in prison a suitable environment for reading and concentration, away from external factors and the intellectual effects of others. He dedicated his time to reading books regarding different ideologies and methodologies. This made him reconsider many of his views and study the negative impacts of intellectual intolerance. This was the stage that formed Al-Odah's new thinking and his call to moderation.

5.1.3 11 September, 2001

When it emerged that of the nineteen men involved in attacking the world superpower that is the USA on 11 September 2001, fifteen were Saudi, many questions were raised, conferences and seminars were held, also security capabilities were used to study the social and religious environment that led to these acts. As a

result of that conclusion it was alleged that the extreme Salafi school was to blame, especially its scholastic and intellectual source in Saudi Arabia, which was responsible for producing and disseminating Salafist ideas (Al-Huwayreeni, 2012).

Salafists began to feel the pressure of constant criticism; anti-Salafism would not be satisfied simply with the rejection and renunciation of the ideology of violent terrorism and its actions. In fact, more comprehensive demands were also made to tackle the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism.

There was renewed interest in the need to renew Salafi thought, and to work on showing a positive image to the world, especially through the work of Dr. al-Odah due to the worldwide interest that his ideas had generated, and his impact on Saudis and others. When his religious decrees and speeches against the USA during the 1990s are taken into account, it is easy to see why he was considered the main source of inspiration for the terrorists, especially when Said al-Ghamdi, one of the accused in the events of September 11, praised both Salman al-Odah and his friend Safar al-Hawali in a video cassette recording in December 2000. This shows the political and ideological impact of al-Odah on those who committed terrorist acts. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) helped to spread the message of al-Odah in the USA and published his books in Arabic, as well as publishing his religious decrees that glorified suicide bombings and called for the downfall of the West, and put all of this material on ISNA's website (Stakelbeck, 2003).

There is no doubt that Salman al-Odah was one of those who preached incitements to violence and sedition, accusing others of blasphemy, and what we see today in terms of demonstrations and revolutions is nothing but the result of the lectures and religious decrees that he delivered in the 1990s. His lecture "The Death Industry", which he delivered on 16 August 1993, encouraged martyrdom for the sake of Allah and fighting the enemies of Islam, and the language that he used was full of violent and extremist imagery, which not surprisingly influenced many young people and helped drive them to commit acts such as the 11 September attacks (Elashry, 1993).

One of the most important pieces of evidence for the effect of al-Odah's thought on jihadists is the statement of Osama bin Laden's driver, Nasser al-Bahri, who died on

26 December 2015, when he said in an interview, “Whatever I have done was nothing but the result of reactions to the words of scholars and their advice to us. I followed their religious decrees.” He clearly stated the influence that “The Death Industry” lecture of al-Odah had on him. Al-Bahri even asked al-Odah why he had backed away from his previous message, after influencing so many people ((media), 2013).

It seemed obvious to many that Salman al-Odah, after being released from prison, was less productive in his writing and in social media, and that the substance of his transformation was not yet clearly obvious, but what was obvious was that he used common language in his speech to emphasise general Islamic principles rather than going into minor details. The soft tone of his language became his main feature and distinguished his speech from his former extremism (Ibrahim, 2009a). When the September 11 attack took place, al-Odah voiced his objections clearly and criticised the attacks, saying:

1. We cannot blame anyone with confidence, as it cannot be proven whom to blame for this kind of act. It is forbidden for Muslims to commit these heinous acts.
2. This kind of act is not permissible according to Sharia ((media), 2013).
3. This act would damage Islamic *dawah* (missionary work) and Islamic charities all over the world, so we must stand against this kind of extreme act and offer guidance and an awareness of its dangers (Ibrahim, 2009a).

In the face of al-Odah’s new position, Saudi society split into two groups, in support of and against him. Those against him fiercely criticised him and accused him of weakness and holding contradictory opinions. Among the strongest critics of al-Odah was Yusef al-Ayeri, who wrote a letter to al-Odah in which he said:

Dear Sheikh, we believe that the new approach that you came up with after getting out of prison is the result of being influenced by two factors; the first factor is that it became clear to you during your stay in prison and after leaving it that it is difficult for preachers to change reality into the desired ideal because they do

not have the means and capabilities of achieving it. So they have to follow a new approach, which is based on complete submission to circumstance, describing the circumstances but not being a part of making them. The second factor is that when you realised that you were not having any effect in the Arabian Peninsula anymore and that the way would not be open for you officially, as it was before, you thought of being known globally and breaking out of regionalism in whatever way possible. Globalism requires you to be general in nature in the issues that you raise, and show leniency so that you might be accepted globally, the way al-Ghazali and al-Qaradawi were accepted. So you announced what you have announced concerning openness and tolerance. For these two reasons, we believe that your approach has clearly been influenced, and it has been rejected not only by your students who were affected by your previous arguments, but even by those who stood against you in the past, because they cannot accept the contradictions in your doctrine. If you want to address global issues, then you have to be careful not to let the global issues that you address affect your achievements and the achievements of other regional preachers, as the achievements of regional preachers are the achievements of all (al-Ayeri, 2007).

Another example of the kind of criticism that al-Odah faced was that of Tariq al-Hamid, a writer for the al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper and its former editor, who said:

The first and most important stage to stop at with al-Odah is the first line of one of his speeches where he said, 'Your friend is one who is truthful to you, and a wise person is one who values a sincere word irrespective of its source.' These are nice words, but in the case of al-Odah, which friend should we believe, one whose views if listened to in the nineties during Iraq's occupation of Kuwait could have led Saddam's troops to enter Saudi Arabia and would have resulted in dire consequences, or his views cautioning

people against watching satellite channels when he himself is now considered a media star, or his views on terrorism after al-Qaeda revealed that it has used some of his literature and views that he left behind in the nineties? (al-Harbi, 2014).

In this way, he demonstrated that the opinions of al-Odah contain many contradictions and intellectual inconsistencies that undermine belief in him.

Al-Odah felt legally, ethically and morally obligated towards the thousands he mobilised in the 1990s to explain his intellectual transformation to them. He therefore presented the evidence that influenced him to embrace this moderate line of thought in clips on YouTube, as well as in his articles and books (Aseel, 2010). At an event on the nature of Islamic *dawah*, al-Odah stressed that September 11 served as a catalyst for him to re-examine the concept of Islamic *dawah*, and he also stressed the importance of distinguishing between religious text and human act of analysis. The religious text contains what might be conclusive or hypothetical in its meaning and continuity, while human acts of analysing the text take different shapes, based on the authenticity of the text, and the derivation of the meaning of the text or deductive analogy (*qiyas*). Then after the development of *dawah*, all of these levels are mixed together to find out what is sacred, what is of human nature and what is based on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), which may be right or wrong (Al-Rashed, 2008).

Al-Odah responded to his critics by saying:

Yes, I need to change, and we must accommodate each other and absorb the ideas of those who agree with us and work with them in different fields. But this is not the real success; the real success is to deal with those we disagree with partially or even totally (Omar, 2016).

It is clear that thinking concerning *dawah* requires change, because the needs of future generations are changing according to changes in circumstances and society. *Dawah* thinking should relate to the concerns of people and the reality of their lives.

It is therefore dangerous to adopt a rigid methodology, in which all of our positions and opinions are fixed by a single approach that never changes. Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, and closing the doors of *ijtihad* has been seen as a huge political mistake, as it is not possible to perpetually confine people to the use of opinions that are not suitable for their time (Attajdid, 2006). The reason that al-Odah has both turned into a phenomenon far beyond Saudi Arabia, throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds, and has been attacked by various groups, including extremist, liberal groups and even some Shiites, is because of his new way of thinking and new views on Salafist ideology.

The Saudi authorities welcomed al-Odah's new project and considered it to be pumping new blood into religious institutions, through the presence of a charismatic Sheikh from Najd who addressed people with simplicity and did not clash with government policies; al-Odah was more concerned with talking about life, customs, traditions and daily events in society. He continued his activities and increased his global presence; he is currently in 2016 Vice President of the International Support Organization, the Secretary General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars and a member of the European Council for Fatwas and Research.(Ali, 2015b).

Al-Odah started his institute "*al-Islam al-Yawm*" ("Islam Today"), on 24/06/2000, which is a religious, informative, educational and charitable institute that has many activities and branches, such as the "Islam Today" website and magazine, and the *Dalil* and *al-Islam al-Yawm* satellite channels, as well as many scientific articles and books on jurisprudence and arab culture (Alarab, 2014).

One of the best examples of the positive changes to al-Odah's ideology was shown on his programme "*Hajr al-Zawiyah*" ("The Cornerstone"), which was broadcast daily in Ramadan between 2004 and 2009. On this programme, he commented on many topics in a calm manner, to articulate in clear, simple language some of the differences in issues of Islamic thought that exist in Saudi Arabia. Among the most important observations he made here are the following:

1. Islam is capable of accepting different perceptions and means of understanding.

2. We should reconsider the kind of relationship we have with one of different vision and opinions.
3. An emphasis on being practical when discussing complex matters, in a way that accepts differences when debating ideas (Jameil, 2010).

The events of September 11, 2001 are considered to be the confirmation of the decision that Al-Odah had reached due to his intensive reading, which led to his call for moderate thinking in Islam after leaving prison. He realised on a practical level the negative impacts of intellectual intolerance, as many of those who participated in the September 11, 2001 attacks were influenced by his strict Salafi thinking, which was not linked in any way to Islam, as Islam is not a religion of terrorism and fanaticism; Islam is a religion of moderation and love. Some fanatics admitted that they were highly influenced by al-Odah's cassettes, in which he called for jihad. When al-Odah realised the danger of this fanaticism, he re-examined his views and became sure that fanaticism brings nothing but danger. It reaffirmed his belief that intellectual openness and religious moderation was the right decision²⁰.

5.1.4 The Arab Spring

After being released from prison, al-Odah's relationship with Saudi officialdom improved, and he was allowed to host a programme on the MBC channel, up until he announced that the revolutions occurring in certain Arab countries during the Arab Spring period were legitimate (Khalaf, 2012).

Towards the end of 2010, and when the Tunisian uprising took place, Salman al-Odah began to support the idea of revolutions, and when the Egyptian army removed President Mohamed Morsi in 2012, al-Odah announced that he was standing with Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood (Alarab, 2014), MBC decided to cancel his programme. Al-Odah said about this:

²⁰ Al-Odah also opposed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although he advised young Saudi men not to go to Iraq for jihad, he called for helping Iraqis to defend their country. AL-ODAH, S. 2012a. *Al-Odah: I do not belong to the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and everyone knows that I have refused to travel to Iraq and Afghanistan* [Online]. Akbaar 24.

I was informed of the decision to cancel the programme without being given any reasons. It could be about what I said in the last episodes about Egypt and Tunisia. If these causes appear elsewhere, then it can happen in any other country. My call to address the causes was out of truthfulness and sincerity. It [the decision to cancel the programme] could also be about what I said about the floods in Jeddah and my call for reform [...] The decision is with the Ministry of Information and I have been informed [of their decision] to stop the program from being broadcast on the channel (Alodah, 2011).

His work with the most-viewed channel in the Arab world was not contractual; he was working as a volunteer. He said, “There was no contract and I did not receive anything from the channel. What is important to me is the message and nothing else” (al-Maliki, 2011).

Al-Odah was one of the Saudi scholars who welcomed the Arab revolutions in 2010-12; he even wrote a book called *Asilat al-Thawarh (Questions about the Revolution)* in 2012, but it was banned in Saudi Arabia, although it has spread widely over the Internet (Al-sheikh, 2014). He began this book with a dedication in which he says, “To the spirits of those who died as martyrs in the revolution, and to all of those who are waiting for their turn to join the forces of justice and achieve the dreams of the revolutionaries” (Alodah, 2012). With this dedication, he indirectly indicated his belief in the need for revolution. The book contains many questions and answers concerning the need for revolution to achieve change. In one passage, he says:

A revolution is not arranged or planned for by people; it breaks out suddenly when all of the paths to reform are blocked, justice ceases to exist, and injustice is widely practiced. Sincere reforms, on the other hand, deserve sacrifice and not just loss, and the best way to struggle is with revolution Questions (Alodah, 2012)P,G11.

For these reasons, the book was banned in Saudi Arabia, but al-Odah defended his book and believes that a revolution is not an aim in itself, but is a spirit of reform,

and that there are many countries, that became highly advanced and developed a just system without revolutions, such as Canada (Alarab, 2014).

A revolution, in al-Odah's opinion, means changes to fixed concepts²¹ and becoming open-minded towards new achievements that benefit humanity. It means a call for reform and self-criticism, with the aim of moving on to a better state. The book derives from Islamic texts and history. The book was written in an easy-to-understand style, using worldly views to some extent, and quoting from both Islamic legal philosophy and the philosophy of Western individuals such as Machiavelli and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Alodah, 2012).

The book caused many debates, with some people who are seeing the book as an ideological attempt by Salman al-Odah to abandon traditional Salafist thought and the Salafist movement and embrace a new perspective that believes in the principles upon which liberalism is built, such as democracy and other principles of liberal politics. But Salman al-Odah suggested that the reason behind the banning of the book was that those who read the title of the book *Questions about the Revolution*, and knew about its author's political history, judged it without properly reading its contents, since the book is a balanced, scientific, juristic and careful study that raises more questions about revolution than answers. In other words, the book did not try to adopt any particular opinion and force the reader to accept it; rather it tried to clarify certain issues and leave the matter open for discussion (Almodifer, 2012). Al-Odah said about the Arab Spring revolutions, "More than any other time in my life, this era is an era of surprises. You can expect anything in the coming years" (Roth, 2014).

The events of the Arab Spring influenced Al-Odah's thinking and ignited in him a new desire to change. He spoke in some of his books of the importance and necessity of revolution. But his demands at this stage were different to those of the first stage. He supported calls for democratic governance, believing it would lead to the positive

²¹ Al-Odah explained that he did not support the Arab revolutions so that Islamists would take over. He argued that Islamists, like others, may succeed or fail. He hailed the revolutions against injustice so that people could choose their leaders. AL-ODAH, S. 2014. Dr Al-Odah: My joy in the Arab revolutions is not for the victory of the Islamists, but for the people to respond to it.

development of Arab countries and provide people with civil rights, rather than pandering to intolerance and religious fanaticism. Al-Odah is still one of the main supporters of moderation in Islamic thought, with a great desire to embark on extensive intellectual and political change. Therefore, it would not be surprising if this controversial personality inspires new practices in the future, as he is a man who believes in change²².

5.2 Salman's speech and views towards some issues

At the first stage, which was from the beginning of his rise in the 1980s until he was sent to prison in 1994, the speech of al-Odah was characterized by extremism and intolerance. For example, he attacked modern literature, which was popular at that time, and also attacked secular symbols in Saudi Arabia. He was against the employment of women and their involvement in public life. This was the era of audiocassettes, and he was the first star in the world of cassettes. He had tremendous success and a huge following among different levels of Saudi society. The two fiercest lectures that he gave were "We are not stupid enough" and "The merits and demerits of Islamic cassettes". In "We are not stupid enough" in November 1990, he fiercely attacked Saudi women for driving cars in Riyadh, as well as other topics. The lecture followed a demonstration by 47 Saudi women on 6th November 1990 in the capital Riyadh, and was delivered by Salman al-Odah in the Buraidah mosque (al-Jazairi, 2008). After his transformation and rejection of extremism, al-Odah removed these and other similarly fierce lectures from his online archive. He believes that these lectures were associated with a particular era, which is no longer relevant, and therefore should be removed. Referring to dealing with specific events that happened in the past and are no longer of importance, al-Odah says, "I do not turn back, I do not regret what happened in the past because it was an experience that

²² Al-Odah was detained in September 2017 for expressing sympathy towards Qatar, seen by Saudi Arabia as a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. As most Saudis who worked in Qatar left their jobs in solidarity with their home country, al-Odah remained a member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (based in Qatar). He also tweeted calling for reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, also seen as a Qatari wish. ARABIC, B. 2017. Saudi Arabia arrests Salman al-Odah and Awad al - Qarni.

I learned so much from in terms of right and wrong. I do not believe I should live in the past” (al-Odah, 2011b).

Al-Odah at that time was the leader in charge of reformation. He held sway over crowds with his eloquent voice, delivery of lectures without prior preparation, and knowledge of what was happening to Muslims before the information revolution. He believed that training women to carry guns was more important than training them to be nurses. This shows how fanatical he was in refusing to allow women to work; yet he called for jihad and the carrying of guns. He also banned photography, music, arts, and learning medicine, as well as banning women from particular professions. This mixture of social customs and religious verdicts in the lectures of al-Odah made them sound more powerful and meaningful than they actually are. He scared his audience and his views did not give any consideration to the boundaries between religion, logic, and common interests. It appears that the old lectures of al-Odah were full of terms and phrases that reflected the scale of the conflicts at that time. For example, in his lectures and cassettes he used terms such as “shame”, “corruption”, “permitting [that which is prohibited]”, “adultery”, “immorality”, “adulterer”, “a woman of low morals”, “stupid”. This clearly shows the harshness of the language he used to use in his lectures. His speech during this period contained a lot of criticism; he criticised women for working, and made fun of those who learned English literature as he claimed, is full of immoral stories and indecent words. He was against female education and women working in factories, on the grounds that they provided an opportunity to freely mix with men, which he claimed was a conspiracy against Islam (alHussain, 2007).

There are many examples that clearly show the style of al-Odah’s old lectures and the way that he thought. These examples reveal the content and the essence of the thinking of al-Odah in his early stage, as well as the rough language and offensive terms that he used. His lecture “A message to my brother, the security guard, from behind bars” clearly shows the content and style of al-Odah’s preaching at this stage.

In 1992, al-Odah delivered a lecture in Jeddah called “The reality of extremism”, in which he explained the linguistic and idiomatic meaning of extremism and fanaticism, and how they have been used by some Western countries to destroy

Islam. He attacked the West and called on his audience to fight Western ideas. He said that both terms, extremism and fanaticism, are wrong and are used for the wrong purposes. He also stated that the Zionist state of Israel is the essence and core of terrorism and that we should avoid modern secularism as it is the cause of corruption. From what al-Odah mentioned in his lectures, we can see his harsh style of speech and vehement attacks on secularism. Therefore, al-Odah at that stage was intellectually radical and closed-minded, and this lecture is one of the best examples of what constituted al-Odah's thought before his transformation. There are many examples that represent al-Odah's pre-transformation views, but for my research I have chosen those that show how extreme he was in his speech so that I can compare it with his new, open, modern, and moderate views.

In 1994, al-Odah was sent to prison for five years, about which he said:

Being in prison is a beautiful memory that I wish will never come back. Another cassette was released while I was behind bars, made after I found out that my arrest warrant had been issued, as if I was saying the final thing before being prevented from saying anything (al-Odah, 2011a) Pg545 .

In these five years, al-Odah dedicated himself to careful reading. He re-read his writings and went back over his ideas. He regretted the style that he had used and reconsidered many issues about which he had previously been sure of his extreme views. Did his surroundings in al-Qasim where he grew up play any role in shaping his religious and intellectual views? Did he rush into making judgements, just like other religious scholars who are strictly against modernism and progressiveness? When he found the chance to thoroughly and sincerely rethink his beliefs, and to look for evidence to support his claims, he found out that he was wrong about some of his ideas, and that Islam is a religion of simplicity and forgiveness, not hardship and extremism. Al-Odah emerged from prison a different person²³, who had attained a high degree of openness and comprehension. From the fierce lectures of previous years, and today's softer approach, al-Odah changed intellectually in a way that

²³ Analysts disagreed on al-Odah's motives for intellectual transition. Some consider it a hidden agenda or political evasion. AL-TAABI, K. 1993. *Westernization of the Third World -Critical Study in Sociology of Development*, Cairo, Dar Al Ma'arif.

sparked debate within the Saudi cultural milieu. In his post-prison speech he started prioritising invitation rather than intimidation. About this, he said “A man thinks of the best way to present to people what he has, by considering the approach that he follows, and gives priority to invitation over intimidation”. He gives priority to calling others to do the right thing and giving them positive advice, rather than rebuking people and questioning them.

With his new style, al-Odah has taken the approach of tolerance towards those from other groups who oppose him. He started writing books, which provide the best way to understand his thinking and learn about the intellectual and cultural issues that he talks about. Among his most important books that have been published, some of which have been translated into English, are:

- *The Ethics of Debate*
- *Some of Our Mistakes in Education*
- *The Reality of Extremism*
- *The Objective of Young Muslims in Life*
- *Interventions in Violence*
- *Enemies, Thank You*
- *One Nation*
- *They Are Still Different*
- *How We Disagree*

It is worth mentioning that the first book written by al-Odah was *Muslims between Inflexibility and Flexibility*, published by the Buraidah charity in 1986. It was a 56-page book, but its impact was bigger than its size. Al-Odah’s first book contained criticism of real issues such as social isolation, the harsh treatment of women, the prohibition against attending government schools, excessive focus on trivial issues, the intrusion of religion into unrelated matters, and accusing those with different opinions of being infidels, such as those who accused others who believe that the earth is spheroid and rotates. With this approach he voiced a unique opinion that

provides evidence with which he can test people and categorise them as right or wrong in general issues that do not require specialised or scientific knowledge (al-Odah, 1986).

The spirit of tolerance in religion fascinated al-Odah, and he seeks to keep it as is without any changes, in line with what Islamic creed have agreed upon. He sought to identify what is purely religious, sayings or creeds, and what were actually personal opinions or regional customs. Al-Odah criticised those who deal with these three types of issues in the same manner, as if they were of the same importance. He mentioned in his book that the second and third types might receive greater attention, driven by society's customs and what is familiar, and the application of control and guardianship without the use of common sense.

Al-Odah was looking to form a new society, not necessarily exactly as he thought it should be. He was looking to remove the differences between theory and practice and create some kind of standard that others could refer to. Al-Odah's first book contained many practical examples of the society of Medina, a natural society where the Prophet, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to race with his wife Aishah, listen to slave girls singing and playing the tambourine in Aishah's house, and invite Aishah to watch the Abyssinians playing in the Mosque of the Prophet on the Day of Eid.

This book is considered to be a sincere reflection of the hopes hidden inside many people, those who read the book and were affected by its contents. However, they were incapable of revealing and expressing what they believe in, as they feared confronting a traditional society that denounces change. This book was a cause of relief for them and they treated it as a declaration of their principles. Despite the simplicity of this book it needed, according to some people, a few touch to become an Islamic thesis capable of transcending regional boundaries. Other readers from different backgrounds attacked the book, both its fundamental principles and the ideas it contained.

Religious study circles, private study circles, sermons in mosques, and speeches at Friday prayer criticised the book and cautioned people against al-Odah's views as represented by *Muslims between Inflexibility and Flexibility*. One response came

from a book that was distributed as a memorandum. This book, *The Wise Criticism of the One Who Claims Inflexibility* was written by al-Sheikh Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Dawish. His criticism was based on denying al-Odah's arguments concerning inflexibility, on the pretext that all of these social issues and customs are based on the reality of Saudi society, which is in turn based on nothing but the legitimate religious text, and al-Odah has no right to accuse religion of being a source of inflexibility (al-Khair, 2008).

Despite being close to the highly respected head judge of the al-Qasim court, Sheikh Salih al-Kharisi, supporters of al-Odah failed in their attempt to obtain a decree in their favour. They also failed to gain the approval of Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, to approve of, or even allow the publication of "*Muslims between Inflexibility and Flexibility*".

Muslims between Inflexibility and Flexibility remained a topic of fierce debate for a number of years, as al-Odah mentioned in his book *Childhood Heart*. The book's call for tolerance and the abandonment of the intolerance imposed by laws and social customs, and even the book's title, were targets of criticism. The attacks on al-Odah's book were so harsh that clashes erupted between his supporters and critics. However, the harshness of the criticism gave al-Odah mental strength that grew over time; he did not weaken in the face of this harsh criticism, stop offering his thoughts, chastise himself, or lose confidence and withdraw from public life. Al-Odah's response to those who opposed him was:

It is normal, and in line with the Sunnah for a society to be diverse in all its sects, trends, states of mind, and intellectual tendencies. It is not odd or abnormal to have those who are strict and tolerant in the same society. Historically speaking, inflexibility existed in all human societies from West to East, and its existence is part of human nature, which may be used in support of conservatism or moderation, as it creates some sort of balance with excessiveness (al-Odah, 2011a).

Al-Odah adds it is not common to let inflexibility control the thinking or behaviour of society, as was the case with the prevention of the publication of *Muslims between Inflexibility and Flexibility*. Among the most important books that reflect

the transformation of al-Odah's thinking was *Exploring Violence*, which was published in 2005 and clearly showed this transformation in thinking, style, and the contents of his intellectual message. He dedicated one whole chapter, under the title "Debate or Clash", to arguing that the nature of the relationship between people should be examined, and the nature of relationship between East and West should be examined as well, especially after the September 11 attacks. He also claims that the nature of the relationship between different groups and sects within Muslim society should be examined too.

In *Exploring Violence*, al-Odah reiterated that Islam calls for peaceful coexistence between different groups, even those who differ in their beliefs, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) lived peacefully with Jews and hypocrites in Medina. Life is not based on denouncing the rights of others, but by ensuring both our rights and the equal rights of others. He also described the intellectual scene in Islamic societies, using Saudi society as an example, as potential arenas for clashes that may turn them into fields of large-scale internal conflict. This would hinder the journey towards reform, *dawa* and development, which should be a source of sadness and concern for all who care for the future of their nation and religion ring (al-Odah, 2005a).

In his speech about intellectual conflicts in Saudi Arabia, al-Odah adds that Saudi society is set for continued clashes if no proper channels of sincere dialogue are set up, due to the existence of different intellectual schools and religious groups. Al-Odah emphasised the need to work on a variety of solutions to solve this intellectual issue. He says that the impact of intellectual extremism should be reduced and the call for moderation and virtue should be increased, a stand that Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim all agree on. It is what the Holy Qur'an emphasises when Allah, the High and Glorified, says, "Thus have we made of you a nation justly balanced" (Qur'an, 2:143).

Al-Odah provides his view about moderation thought that reflects his philosophy and mentality: he said if someone label his/herself a moderate person, then they are identifying the positions of others accordingly; and gives themselves the right to evaluate others, for example, this one to the left and that one to the right, further left

and further right, this one is extreme and that one is not. According to al-Odah, this is itself not a moderate attitude, as it is an attempt to claim for oneself a higher moral position than others and the ability to judge them. It is still an attempt to control how other people should think, denying them the option to do so themselves.

Who would ever have believed that this would al-Odah's outlook after undergoing his intellectual transformation? He has reconciled the views of scholars on one hand with the views of philosophers and Western thinkers on the other. Where before he attacked Western secularism and modernity, he now embraces a philosophy that combines reason and religion (al-Odah, 2005a).

By looking at al-Odah's book *Articles on Approaches*, which was published in 2005, some of the ideas that reflect his thinking become clearer and show the extent of the development of his methodology and his intellectual and conceptual approaches. The thinking of Salman al-Odah has gone through different stages and transformations. Perhaps the first stage in the formation of his views can be viewed as his inability to break free from the grip of radical thinking, where his stance can be clearly seen in extreme doctrinal practices, the fear of any new approach, poor and inflexible dialogue with intellectuals, and the predominance of a group mentality. Added to this was the absence of understanding concerning the concept of citizenship, the abandonment of scientific methodology, and the mobilisation of crowds through his speeches without any consideration of the consequences.

As well as these characteristics, which show how difficult it was for al-Odah to free himself from hardline Salafi thinking, his views at this stage had some elements that can be considered to be the prerequisites of the post-transformation stage. Among these elements are the intellectual ability required to completely understand Islam, the call to be innovative in different fields, and the belief in the existence of disagreement.

After his transformation, al-Odah moved from making speeches to producing written work. He moved from an idealistic and self-imposed political isolation, which led to him spending five years in prison, to a reconciliation with politics where he believes in direct contact with politicians in order to bringing about reforms and a renaissance (David B.Ottaway, 2011).

Among the main features of the speech of Salman al-Odah at this stage are establishing the origin of spontaneity in religion; improving people's understanding by introducing new terms or freeing oneself from blind imitation in Salafism; recognising problems with current terminology; maintaining a balance between the needs of the country and those of the Muslim Ummah; a call for open, but regulated, access to modern science and technology; an emphasis on the importance of freedom in Islam; and a call to deal practically with issues of the modern world and improve the rights of women.

In 2010, a 365-page book was released under the title *Enemies, Thank You* in which al-Odah outlines his life experience in the field of *dawa* and how to deal with those who identify themselves as enemies. The book is a collection of different articles written over several years, many of which deal with intellectual conflicts. In the introduction to the book, he says, "I have discovered that the sense of the battle is the magical key that can activate the system of thought and action for most people". He also says that at times you are forced to be clear and open, and at times you have to reveal to others what they need to know, and a long list of sentences that reflect the sense of cruelty deep inside us. He proceeds by clarifying the main concept that he wants to share with others that it is unfair to classify people as either friends or enemies, and that tolerance and goodwill should be upheld. He elaborates on this by saying:

One feels sad dying in a battle that ends without victory or defeat, he also feels sad if he dies in a battle that ends with a defeat, or one which ends with him defeating his brother. The real battle is the battle against one's own soul (al-Odah, 2012b).

As the Holy Qur'an says, "And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls, they are the ones that achieve prosperity" (Qur'an, 59:9).

Going through this wonderful book, I realized the remarkable change in the style and thinking of al-Odah, which can be seen from the terms that he used, such as "love", "tolerance", "intimacy" and "sincerity", rejecting violence and intellectual manipulation and calling for an intellectual dialogue. Al-Odah says, "If you do not have peace, it means that you are the one who has caused that, and not because someone else took it away from you". He calls for peace in one's mind and soul.

Among the outstanding statements that he made calling for intellectual tolerance of those with different ideas is, “I saw nations fighting (one another) like monsters, then I saw them after the battle as gentle as a lamb, as man does not have one state only”. This is an acknowledgment that man changes according to his surroundings, and the changes and developments in his intellectual standards caused by reading and learning. This book is one of the clearest examples of the change in the thinking of al-Odah, as he moved away from violence, intellectual harshness and the use of terms of violence and cruelty, towards tolerance, gentleness and intellectual openness, while at the same time adhering to Sharia.

Different opinions and visions do not cause a problem for the mindset of a Muslim except at times of mental laxity and blind imitation. The state of weakness that Muslims experienced during those times have created a severe resistance towards any attempt at reformation or to review what exists, while times of strength and growth are characterised by the consistent generation of new ideas. The diversity of visions is an important factor in the development of society. In his book *They Are Still Different*, al-Odah continues to lay the foundation of his project, which some consider to be the new stage of an “Islamic renaissance”, although al-Odah emphasised in his project the laying of foundations to bring about a comprehensive awakening of the Muslim nation, on the basis that the renaissance has achieved its mission by reconnecting the Muslim nation with its eternal Sharia. It is necessary to make this connection stronger and support its foundations, so the Muslim nation can ascend to its true rank among other nations and civilisations (Iacroix, 2012).

What is that dialogue that al-Odah used to connect to these different groups in the Saudi arena?

5.3 Salman Al-Odah’s call to intellectual change and reformation

Al-Odah is an Islamic leader who has become active in using the media, in particular after the transformation through which he underwent. This gave him the opportunity to talk about issues that relate to Saudi, regional, and international policies, and issues that relate to Islamic movements and their performance. Additionally, Al-Odah developed a most important discourse, which was social, juristic,

psychological, and educational. In 2006, Al-Odah achieved great popularity, as people admired the moderate thinking he was calling for. Al-Odah's position as a leading Islamic thinker of the future became more established, as he continued at the same time his endeavour to establish scholarly Islamic alliances with some Islamic reformative powers in the Middle East (Shamsi, 2016).

Al-Odah wanted to push the Islamic and intellectual movements towards increased participation in all walks of public life, considering the importance of reducing the tension between those movements and Saudi society. Al-Odah opened a dialogue with ideological and sectarian factions in Saudi society such as the Shias, liberals, Muslim Brotherhood, and others. For instance, Al-Odah created the "Shaikh's Movement", liked by many liberals and secularists, with a flexible style, instead of leading people towards an organisational structure that has strict principles and rules. Al-Odah was greatly interested in intellectual reform and change, so he started advocating policies that were specific to him, in which he avoided all of the internal conflicts and disagreements that developed among the various currents in Saudi Arabia (al-Dakeel, 2011).

Additionally, he called for an opening of intellectual dialogue to reduce tension between various groups in the Saudi arena.

Al-Odah presented suggestions for introducing change and reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He referred to the rights that must be upheld according to Shari'a. He also stressed that reform and change must reflect Shari'a and be compatible with it, as he stated:

There may be some dangers that the country faces, which could affect its stability. At the same time, we don't want to make these dangers the reasons for starting the process of change and reform, as if we are forced into it. These dangers and other factors that affect the country are variables, challenges, and change points, so we have to deal with them by relying on the true religion. The fact that the Saudi people are a religious people must be the foundation of change and reform. In this case, the constants of Shari'a and immutable facts of the Qur'an and Prophetic Sunna must be the forces that lead to change and reform (al-Snaidi, 2011).

After his time in prison, in 2001 Salman Al-Odah conducted a study entitled “Towards a new space for proselytisation” in which he explained the importance of using Islamic proselytisation as a vehicle to reduce the crisis of dogmatic conflicts between various intellectual currents and schools of thought in Saudi Arabia. This study dealt with important issues, the most important of which are the following:

Intellectual debate

The focus is on the priorities of Islamic issues, such as Qur’anic studies, Prophetic traditions, juristic differences, creed, morality, social justice and its relation to security in society, women’s issues, the unity of Muslims, social reform, and freedom based on Islamic Shari’a (Al-Odah, 2001b) .

Relationships with other Islamic groups

Al-Odah stressed the importance of these relationships and the fact that they must be built on collaboration, tolerance, and exchanging opinions, instead of intellectual conflicts, and any things can increases tension between groups and moves them away from the goal of cultural pluralism in Saudi Arabia should be unacceptable (Qasim, 2008).

Writing

The proselytiser must consider this as a strategic method in enforcing the work of Islamic proselytisation.

Digital TV

The proselytiser must use this medium in order to deliver information to people.

Fatwas

These must be based on clear juristic methods, be aligned with the requirements of the present, and developed within a Salafi framework.

Political discourse

This is one of the important items on the agenda of any Muslim proselytiser. Al-Odah thinks this must be dealt with carefully within Islamic juristic constraints and must not threaten the security or stability of society, or even the general order. It is also important to open the door to communication and dialogue with the government (Alodah, 2012).

Lectures and lessons

Al-Odah thinks these are still very important methods for proselytisation and bringing the various schools and currents in Saudi Arabia closer to each other. They are an easy and effective method to resolve intellectual conflicts between various currents in Saudi Arabia (Abdo, 2016).

Globalisation

Al-Odah states that there are steps that must be taken to confront globalisation and use it in spreading the correct Islamic creed, through articulating an international Islamic message, demanding civil rights that are based on Shari'a, and facing up to the negative impacts of globalisation on Islamic societies, while making use of its positive effects (Naseer, 2005).

Thus, the thinking of Al-Odah shifted toward calling for change and reform. He started giving lessons and lectures in which he called people to his new thinking and position after coming out of prison. He reflected in these the extent of his desire to go back to the middle way in Islamic thought, and making a bridge between different school of thoughts, also resolving the crisis of intellectual conflicts between Saudi currents, as the door to moderate dialogue is open for all.

Al-Odah discussed the importance of optimism and initiatives in proselytising and social work. He showed keenness on bringing different religious and intellectual schools in Saudi Arabia closer to each other. He also stressed that an Islamic proselytiser must not only give people the message of reform, but he must also continue to communicate with them and maintain a good relationship with them (Al-Odah, 2001a).

He continued this approach when he gave various interviews to local and international newspapers and magazines, such as the New York Times in December 2001, the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Ra'i Al-'Am in January 2002, and Al-Da'wa in Saudi Arabia in June 2002. He stressed in these interviews the importance of spreading Islamic knowledge in the world, and he expressed his concern about some of the cultural problems in Saudi Arabia, such as the absence of a language for dialogue between the various currents in Saudi Arabia, while suggesting some solutions, stressing the importance of solving the conflicts that result from ideological and intellectual differences. He encouraged Islamic movements to accept internal criticism and make their members more tolerant and accommodating. At the

same time, he advised liberal movements to align their views with basic Islamic tenets and not to form them outside the framework of religion, while allowing for keeping up with civilisational development and the requirements of modern society (Basmol, 2013). In one of these interviews, Al-Odah was asked about the most important difficulties that Saudi society faces, while referring to solutions to these crises. In his reply, he emphasised the importance and necessity of policies of gradual change and reform, whether intellectual, social, or political. He said:

“The salvation of the nation begins with reforming the individual, meaning reforming the mind, behaviour, and self. After that, reform of the institutions, country, and then nation starts. Therefore, a phase of change is inevitable.” (Al-Odah, 2005b).

This shows the keenness of Al-Odah to open the door to intellectual dialogue between the various movements. On 10/03/2003, Bahraini TV invited Salman Al-Odah for a discussion on its programme; *Hiwarat Fikriyya* (Intellectual Dialogues), in which he discussed the conditions of dialogue, and how to deal with changing positions. He also explained how to preserve the cornerstones of Islam when we open dialogue with others, not least those from other movements with whom we differ intellectually and ideologically (Shamsi, 2016).

Al-Odah continued to call for intellectual tolerance, and change and reform, until 2003, at which point he gained more opportunity to call for religious and intellectual moderation in Saudi Arabia (Shamsi, 2016).

On 7th May 2003, Al-Odah received official permission from the Saudi authorities to continue his activities in giving public lessons and lectures. On the 29th of the same month, he delivered, in Buraydah, his first public lecture, which was attended by 20,000 people. It was titled “The message of the era”, and was split into three parts. The first covered the conditions at the time, dealing with the circumstances of the Muslim nation, and mentioning the intellectual situation in Saudi Arabia. He stressed the importance of society paying attention to scientific thought, achieve a good life in this world and a reward in the afterlife. The second part focused on the importance of human resources in increasing productivity in various fields. The third part stressed the work that must be done, and that this work must be based on the correct faith. It is necessary that people know the correct faith, do good works, and

encourage each other to be moderate in life. Saudi TV recorded this lecture and broadcast it on 30th May 2003 (al-Odah, 2003).

These are some examples that show the keenness of Salam Al-Odah on calling for change and reform in Saudi society. They also show Al-Odah's Sunni renewal thinking, and the renaissance movement that he calls for. Al-Odah's discourse represents a "renewal Salafism" and peaceful relations between denominations. He is keen to engage with the challenges of reality, in doing these blending references to Salafi analysis from the Qur'an, Sunna, and predecessors with rational reflection that is based on the objectives and priorities of Shari'a (Ayat, 2009).

5.4 The impact and influence of Salman al-Odah on Saudi society

Al-Odah has played a crucial and influential role in Saudi society at every stage of his thought and through his transformational stages, especially among young, educated and intellectual groups who live in socially and civically developed regions and who are ready to move from a traditional environment to a new intellectual environment characterized by some sort of moderation, and suitable in a limited way to different aspects of liberal thought (al-Dakeel, 2011). He has dedicated several modern proposals to young people and women, in which he discussed their issues and interests. His impact is due to the strength of his proposals, the style and approach of presentation, their accordance with the current conditions and the use of modern technology. Media channels, such as TV, cassettes, websites, modern communication, media networks and new phones with apps, such as the iPhone, are a new gateway to convey his thoughts. In fact, this effect has spanned Saudi society towards the entire Islamic society.

Al-Odah occupied the top spot among the list of the most highly influential Arab personalities on Twitter, by scoring a Klout Score of 82 in 2012. Klout is a website that does not measure the number of followers only, but also measures the impact of the person on people through social media using 35 different types of measuring tool, such as by using Facebook and Twitter to measure the interaction of the followers with that person either by listening to what they say or by interacting with their posts or retweeting their tweets, or using emoticons to express admiration for what a particular person has tweeted and commenting on everything that has been

said. It also produces an internet score, which indicates the impact of the participant on their followers; then it evaluates all of that to give the user an evaluation score out of a possible 100 points (Hameed, 2012).

It is amazing for Al-Odah, who does not get any payment for his tweets and has nothing to do with the world of marketing companies, to be ranked so highly on Klout compared to world-famous personalities. According to what was published on Newsday in March of 2011, Joe Fernandez, the founder Klout, says the average Klout level of a person is normally around twenty, and a score of thirty means the person has an impact on people. This impact has clearly had an effect on the young generation because they are more interested in social media channels, which rely on quickly and directly providing simple information without using extra words or lengthy text, as the case with traditional media (Al-Tamimi, 2012).

Al-Odah has a large presence on the social media websites Facebook and Twitter. He has about seven and a half million Facebook friends, and around fourteen million Twitter followers from all over the world. He shares his ideas, giving his followers the opportunity to comment on, agree with, or criticise them. He is considered one of the pioneering Saudi Shaykhs who have called for peaceful coexistence. His influence is growing because of his innovative way of preaching to the Islamic world through his website. This is also due to his continuous efforts in addressing the needs of the universal Islamic nation and calling for making love and mercy, instead of violence, permanent values in the daily lives of Muslims.

Salafis follow a traditional method, but Al-Odah has achieved prominence because he is one of the pioneers in the Salafi movement who has spread new ideas within Salafism, which has gained influence because of his use of a variety of educational means, such as the Internet, multimedia, and printed publications. His internet websites gather a wide variety of Muslim scholars and intellectuals whose objective is giving guidance on Islamic thought (Nemer, 2012).

Al-Odah's effort in supervising what is published on IslamToday, which provides electronic resources for Islamic education on the internet in various languages, has played a big role in spreading his ideas in a modern way. He expanded into discussing religions until he became the reference scholar for both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors to IslamToday. Visitors to IslamToday can see Islamic educational

content in English, Arabic, French, and Chinese (Chlafan, 2004). At the beginning, Al-Odah's influence was local, but his weekly lectures at his mosque in Buraidah earned him many followers. The new generation of students and intellectuals propagated his thoughts on cassette, thus spreading his influence from Buraidah to the rest of Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf states. His program, "Cornerstone", on the satellite channel MBC was influential because he discussed many Islamic issues in a modern way. One indication of his focus on modernising the way young people think is his supervision of and participation in many conferences for young people, such as "Multaqā al-Nahdha al-Shababi", which is an annual intellectual gathering for young people in the Gulf. It was first held in 2010 in Bahrain, and then in 2011 in Qatar. The third conference was supposed to take place in Kuwait, but it attracted controversy and ended up being cancelled one day before it started. The reason is that these conferences targeted change and created controversy and disagreement due to the participation of Islamic modernist and liberals. The motto of the first gathering was "Change: horizons and concepts", and the motto of the second was "The lifting power of thoughts" (Mutairi, 2012).

According to a study prepared by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in Jordan in cooperation with Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, Al-Odah has been the 16th most highly influential personality in the Muslim world. The study that has been conducted yearly since 2009 showed the progress of the impact of Sheikh Salman al-Odah. It showed that the rank of Al-Odah was 25 in 2010, 19 in 2011, 16 in 2013, 2014 and 2015, 17 in 2016 and 19 in 2017, despite the restrictions that Al-Odah has been subjected to since the beginning of the Arab Uprising in 2010 and until today. He has been banned from travelling, and his satellite programs were stopped, and some of his books, such as *Asilah al-Thawrah (The Questions of Revolution)*, and *Zinzanah (Cell)*, which was shared through smartphone apps, were banned from publication (IslamToday, 2014a).

5.5 The future of Saudi intellectualism (Salman Al-Odah's vision)

The future of Saudi intellectualism is one of modernisation and renewal. Some written works have addressed the process of intellectual modernisation in Saudi

Arabia, For example, Fatina Amin Shaker, “Modernisation of developing nations: A case study of Saudi Arabia”(PhD Dissertation, Purdue University, 1972)

Khaled Al Sharideh, “Modernisation and Socio-Cultural Transformation in Saudi Arabia: An Evaluation,”(PhD, Dissertation, Kansas University, 1999)

Muhammed Saad Al Salem, “The Interplay of Tradition and Modernity: A Field Study of Saudi Policy and Educational Development,” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1981)

And Santa Barbara, in: Tim Niblock, ed., *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982).

Perhaps “intellectual modernisation” is meant to be a contrast to “tradition”, as these two are taken to oppose each other. Intellectual modernisation would either replace tradition or be resisted by it. Nevertheless, some discussions have suggested that it is possible to combine and reconcile them. Accordingly, although modernisation is present in Saudi society, we can say that the core religious teachings have remained intact, as in Islamic institutions, laws, traditions, and customs, despite the emergence of Islamic reformative movements (Yamani, 2010). It is not necessary to look at intellectual modernisation as being in opposition to tradition and religion, as the process of modernisation can be selective. Islamic juristic and intellectual traditions that are supported by reformists have succeeded in offering some Islamic reformative policies in a context of renewal dominated by Islam. In this case, modernisation loses the undesirable attributes of liberalism and secularism, and modernisation in Saudi intellectualism becomes a process of reform and renewal that does not conflict with the Islamic framework, or even weaken it (Shamsi, 2016).

It has been said that, “those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it”,(Clairmont, 2012). which is why the new generation should carefully and reflectively read the history of Saudi intellectual exchanges. This is not to repeat that history or be proud of it, but to learn from it, understand the starting points of its characters, and benefit from their experiences. These intellectual exchanges are the outcome of the efforts of generations of knowledgeable scholars, creative thinkers, and intelligent youths, and others with less knowledge and intellectual capability. Saudis urgently need to unite, have one voice in preserving the cultural identity of their society and be prepared for the dangers to their security and country. This

requires from all, without exception, a wide horizon and space for accommodating various opinions and views in the juristic and judicial system of the country (al-Huwayreeni, 2016).

Conclusion

The conclusion is that the transformation of Salman al-Odah serves as an example that may open new horizons for discussion, research and communication between different ideological movements, which produce fierce debates in the media in Saudi Arabia (Jameil, 2010). Salman al-Odah represents a phenomenon that has spread throughout Saudi Arabia out into the wider world. Despite his difficulty in freeing himself from his extremist roots, he has become the image of a liberal scholar, which has caused many controversies in a life full of activity, ups and downs, but he still holds firmly to the idea of a Sheikh from Najd who knows when it is necessary to change his opinions. Al-Odah has consistently questioned talk of an American, European or Iranian agenda by wondering whether there will ever be an Arabian agenda. And if this agenda exists, would it be positive, economically and politically? (AlBarqawi, 2015). Shaikh Al-Odah has been both influential and controversial. He went through a big transformation in his intellectual and political life. He was believed to be extreme in his juristic and political views in the 80s and 1990s. Following his imprisonment and engagement with wider scholarship of Islam and western thought on good governance and freedom, he changed many of his earlier ideological beliefs. He is seen to be more flexible at the moment and open to divergent views on Islam.

CHAPTER SIX: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN GROUPS

Introduction

Saudi Arabia can be one of the most scientifically and economically advanced nations in the world. It has progressed in the last ten years, and is developing most of its economic, political and intellectual institutions. The country has seen more intellectual conflict between different movements and groups than the other Gulf countries. Although the intellectual conflicts between different movements in Saudi society was between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, but the first open and clear intellectual clash between different Saudi sects was after the September 11 attacks, ; the reason for this could be a decrease in the authority of Salafi institutions, especially the more hardline among them. This gave other groups a greater space to grow and become apparent (Khcavh, 2015)²⁴.

This caused Saudi Arabia to be considered the supreme Gulf country in terms of intellectual movements. The intellectual diversity of these different groups had a great impact on Saudi society; their differences in beliefs and ideologies are one of the most important issues that has affected Saudi Arabia, and led to intellectual conflict between the groups. I have mentioned in previous chapters about the intellectual nature of Saudi Arabia; how Salafi thought prevailed, before other groups appeared, which led to intellectual conflict between these different groups. This could be due to the absence of constructive discourse between them. The most successful solution to reduce the intensity of conflict between these different groups is by finding an intellectual approach that rejects extremism and approaches other opinions with neutrality. This is what Salman al-Odah has been calling for. In the 1990s, he was a radical and was sent to prison for four years for political reasons,

²⁴ Advocating Jihad as an integral part of Salafism led some Saudi Salafists to join al-Qaeda and carry out a number of terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia. To counter a surge in extremism, scholarships to study in the West were encouraged, where some considered this move as a deliberate attempt to Westernise a new generation of scholars. AL-OTAIBI, A. 2014b. Salman al-Odah;The Political Faqih. *Alittihad*.

where he read many books that helped him to become open-minded and encouraged him to reshape his thinking. He returned to Saudi society with a different personality, calling for toleration, moderation, and the rejection narrow-mindedness.

I have traced in chapter Four, the life of Salman al-Odah; his beginnings, where he studied, and the impact of Salafi thought on him at the outset. I have also mentioned his narrow-minded and extremist thinking, and I have divided his development into three stages: his thinking before, during, and after his transformation. I have mentioned the reasons behind this transformation. I have mentioned the objectives of his plan and the ideas of those who stood both with against it, as the discussion of this important plan created intellectual turmoil.

The reason for this discussion is to point out the importance of moderate thought in Islam, and what happened to Salman is strong evidence of the importance of rejecting one-sided thinking and accepting the existence of opposing views. He is one who builds bridges in order to reduce the conflicts between different groups, by calling to moderation. The evidence for this is his change from extremism to moderation, as seen in his writings and articles in which he calls for moderation and the acceptance of intellectual differences.

It is important to discuss the future of relations between the different intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia: is it a future of conflict or dialogue? Perhaps the future of intellectual and religious movements in Saudi Arabia is nothing but continuous conflict and an aversion to intellectual discussion. These groups' loss of a great number of their supporters and followers, such as has been the case with the Salafis, has led them to review their earlier teachings and try to spread new and modern ideas among their members. The liberal movement, on the other hand, seeks greater democracy, which may be unrealistic, and its preoccupation with political issues may mean it loses the ability to achieve fundamental changes. Sufis on the other hand will make use of the criticism directed towards Salafis to expand and confront other Islamic groups.

Liberalism will face strong attacks from both conservative Saudi societies, which adheres to its traditions, on one side, and from the formal religious institutions on the other. It will find it difficult to establish its intellectual basis. Dr Muammad Barrish

believes that the future will not be a product of the different religious and intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia, but of the existence of a clear methodology and solid ground for Muslims to stand on in order to build a comprehensive and civilised long-term project. The established way of Allah, clearly seen in the diversity of different nations, calls for the awakening of intellectualism and knowledge-seeking, and the serious consideration of opening the door to dialogue between different groups in order to engage them in the future of civilisation. Perhaps change, evolution and transformation are among the fundamentals of both the universe and of human life, including religion, spirituality and thinkers. The methodological and intellectual transformation that Salman al-Odah underwent has sparked many debates about the reasons for his change, therefore it is important to understand his personality and intellectual transformation, and what he has achieved in reducing the severity of the intellectual conflicts between the different Saudi intellectual movements (Barrish, 2014).

6.1 The Future of relations and conflict between movements

The future of relations between the different Saudi movements can be clearly seen by looking at the future plans of Salman al-Odah. He is expected to be one of the most influential Islamic personalities over the next few decades, and to be a leading figure with a great impact on Islamic thought, whose influence will not be restricted to the Arabian Peninsula.

Among the future aims of Salman al-Odah is:

- To remove the fear of reform and expand its scope, especially since al-Odah is familiar with Islamic law.
- To present a deeper and better reading of cultural issues and to deal more effectively with their problems.
- To emphasise the importance of the reformation of Islamic thought.
- To close the gap between worldly issues and religious issues (Kapiszewski, 2006).

- To establish the difference between the divinities regarding the religious text, the human understanding of the text, and putting this understanding into practice by moving away from historical tendency towards future tendency.
- To encourage a culture of debate and coexistence between followers of different religions and religious movements.
- To emphasise the common factors shared by all the reformative groups, including government institutions (Ghazi, 2011).

Can we say that this surprising transformation in the thought of Salman al-Odah is a sign that he has moved away from traditional Salafism?

The intellectual conflict that Saudi Arabia is currently experiencing requires a great deal of sincerity and clarity, without putting the blame on others or being irresponsible. It requires hard and sincere work to identify the problems and how to deal with them. The crisis of the intellectual struggle between the different Saudi movements is not a matter that should be overlooked or denied. In fact, a light should be shed on the best measures to implement, in order to reduce the impact of this crisis (al-Arees, 2011).

The fact that an Islamic figure has managed to gain acceptance by a great number of both Islamists and liberals at the same time is a promising development. It is the outcome of collaborative debate between intellectual movements, rather than conflict. This is what Salman al-Odah successfully achieved in the previous decade through his acceptance by prominent intellectual figures such as Dr Ghazi al-Qusabi and Dr Abdullah al-Ghadhami, besides a high number of Islamists. Listening to the ideas of the other side and not clashing with them is what al-Odah calls for (al-Dakeel, 2011).

On the future of thought in Saudi Arabia, it is possible to say that the situation in Saudi Arabia has changed intellectually and politically and even socially. The French researcher and thinker Mathieu Guidère, in his book *Etat du Monde Arabe*, confirms that Saudi Arabia has changed intellectually, politically, and socially. He says:

Between the strictness of ISIS and the hostility of the West and Zionism to ISIS, Saudi Arabia finds itself on the way to change, as it is no longer as it used to be politically, regionally, socially, and intellectually. For example, the Kingdom has abandoned its closed policy with the appointment of the first Saudi Defence Minister younger than thirty, a crown prince who is in his forties, and by sending more than 40,000 students abroad since 2010. Certainly, Saudi Arabia is still regarded as a guardian of Sunni beliefs in the face of Shia Iran, but it has witnessed dramatic intellectual developments (Guidere, 2015).

The view of Guidère on the intellectual situation in Saudi society contains a great many facts, especially when referring to the intellectual changes that Saudi Arabia is witnessing. The legislative and political researcher Dr Saad Abd al-Qadir al-Quwayi said that Saudi Arabia has managed to create a modern atmosphere through making religious views capable of coping with modern issues. He also emphasised the principle of coexistence by accepting others and refusing to reject them.

As al-Quwayi has shown, a successful strategy for confronting extremism should be comprehensive and based on supporting the principles of moderation, tolerance, peaceful coexistence between different groups, dialogue between different cultures and the need to confront extremism (al-Sultany, 2015). This is what Saudi Arabia has managed to apply on the ground. The transition that Saudi Arabia has gone through in political, economic, and intellectual terms will open other countries to Saudi Arabia in a positive, gradual and effective way. These changes reflect the positive image that Saudi Arabia has (al-Arees, 2011). Al-Odah has succeeded in his unique intellectual contributions such as writing books, participating in social activities, and addressing the intellectual and social issues that concern the Saudi state. His intellectual contribution is one of great achievements. Before discussing in detail the intellectual contributions of al-Odah, it is necessary to refer to the fundamental structures that each author and jurist depends on. The fundamental structure used by each author depends on three main pillars: possession of juristic knowledge, being aware of the social reality and understanding its inherent complicated relationships, and finally applying Sharia in reality. All three of these have been shown in al-Odah's writings; he has covered all aspects of the current social reality, so that his writings express the true state of affairs and are therefore

closer to solving modern problems, and are closer to readers as they are realistic. He has therefore acquired a large number of readers.

In the midst of all the intellectual disputes in Saudi Arabia, al-Odah has always been in the front rank of preachers calling for intellectual reform. He has been associated with the call for new Islamic reforms. Al-Odah, managed to reach into the hearts of millions of Muslims, as he has the ability to establish a constructive dialogue. He is capable to delivering his message in a polite manner, as his approach to religion is one of openness and acceptance (al-Odah, 2011a).

In this chapter, the study will focus on his major achievements and intellectual contributions, as well as his role in containing and reducing the intensity of the intellectual conflicts between the different groups in Saudi Arabia.

6.2 Dialogue and intellectual enlightenment

The use of dialogue is a Quranic approach. This is the dialogue of Allah with His angles, “Behold your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth’. They said ‘Will thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?’” (Qur’an, 2:30). There is also dialogue between Allah and humanity through addresses to His messengers: “And behold! Allah will say ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Did you say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?’” (Qur’an, 5:116). There is even a dialogue between Allah and Iblis: “(Allah) said: ‘what prevented you from bowing down when I commanded thee?’ He said: ‘I am better than he: You did create me from fire, and him from clay’” (Qur’an, 7:12).

The Holy Qur’an is rich with the dialogues between messengers and their people: “Their messengers said: ‘Is there a doubt about Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?’” (Qur’an, 14:10). The Qur’an mentions a story of a dialogue between the Prophet, may Allah send peace and blessings upon him, and a woman:

Allah has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to Allah: and Allah (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you, for Allah hears and sees (all things). (*Qur’an, 58:1*)

The Islamic civilisation, throughout history, has been a civilisation of dialogue. Muslim scholars have debated with people of different religions, races, and backgrounds, using the Qur'anic approach and calling them to Islam (Dachan, 2002).

The intellectual dialogue in any society is a “team thinking out loud” (Fadel, 2005) which is a real indication of the civilised standards that this or that society enjoys. It reflects an honest desire to fix social problems and lay the foundations of positive values for members of the society, through technology that strengthens the dialogue and spreads the culture of others, especially thorough the Internet.

The Internet has seen a proliferation of Saudi intellectual dialogue between society and intellectuals. This matter has influenced media channels and social circles in general, and laid the foundations of the value of dialogue and refined social logic.

Dialogue is the right solution to narrow the gap between different groups, and solve the intellectual conflicts between different religious and intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia. It is an assertion of the need to open communication between different civilisations and bring different cultures closer together. It is proof that the society is willing to engage in debate and listen to other sides (al-Maayta, 2015).

Taking part in dialogue between different groups is what is actually required of each group. It should be a starting point, based on the views of Rashid Rida, who said, “We become happy with whatever we agree on, and excuse each other for what we disagree on” (Alkanaan, 2010). The promotion of dialogue and the acknowledgment of others' different opinions is the first step towards the improvement of society and the creation of peaceful engagement with different ways of thinking. The interest of people requires the existence of moderate approach that they agree on and defend. The life of people and their interests will not be improved, but through moderation, although we need to bear in mind people's need for reform as times change. Moderation is a way of thinking, dealing with others and looking at things from a different perspective. A statement of general meaning in the context of moderation is based on two things:

1. A perfect religious text, so there is no room for manipulation and personal needs.

2. The nature of the psychological and mental state of the individual.

Having debates with others, irrespective of their beliefs, sex and culture, is required for human coexistence and is a natural human tendency. Society needs to form a stable and normal network of human relationships, which cannot be achieved except through dialogue and mutual understanding between the members of this network (al-Kaddosy, 2008).

Debate is a necessity for peaceful coexistence between individuals, groups and societies. The alternative to it is nothing but conflicts and wars between different groups. Disagreements and differences are human nature, whether cultural, ethnic, doctrinal or religious. These differences cannot be dealt with by ignoring and neglecting them, but by bringing people closer in order to understand them, accept them and respect their existence. It is a way of life, and we have to acknowledge that there are disagreements and differences between people, religions and ideologies. Dialogue actually requires this human diversity of religion, culture and society (al-Kassem, 2007). The different interests and objectives of people are endless, as are potential solutions to issues, and forcing society to accept the interests and objectives of a certain group is an unwise decision and impossible to achieve. The right solution, according to al-Odah, is to be ready to understand others of different opinions; debate with them calmly and with wisdom; agree on the right to disagree, within the boundaries of juristic authority; agree to protect the common interests of the county and the people; and be clear in dealing with others, without hidden agendas and tricks.

Al-Odah raises another question in his book, *Interventions in Violence*:

Why do we not deal with known and unknown religious groups in the same manner, admitting that it is a reality? Why do not we work to establish diversity and different opinions, and make objective and nonjudgmental dialogue the way to understand each other? Why do all parties not work towards spreading the values of tolerance, forgiveness, thinking good of others, overlooking others' faults and recovering from our self-inflicted diseases, instead of attacking each other by conflicting ideas. (al-Odah, 2005a) Pg. 27.

Some researchers, such as Lutfi Abd al-Latif, consider al-Odah to be the Arab model for constructive dialogue, relying on al-Odah, who is the head of the Islam Today foundation, to emphasise the importance of engaging in constructive dialogue with others. Al-Odah said, “We have to learn how to live peacefully with others, even when they disagree with us in thought and beliefs, and open the door of intellectual dialogue for all” (al-Latif, 2010).

He pointed out the meaning of living peacefully with others is to accept the importance of dialogue with them, and opening the door to intellectual discussion between different groups. He also said that the success of intellectual coexistence depends on the voice of wise people, who represent the language of peaceful and constructive dialogue that achieves the desired result without any intellectual conflict. The failure of this kind of dialogue is because of those who recognise nothing but their own interests, as they rely to a great extent on the language of strength and violence when dealing with those who oppose them from different groups (al-Latif, 2010).

He also pointed out that Islam was not revealed to exacerbate conflicts between people, but to control and regulate the relationships between them, and make earth a better place to live in: “It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein” (Qur’an, 11:61). He called for taking public interest into account and warding off evil, as peaceful dialogue and coexistence is of lasting benefit (al-Kassem, 2007).

When talking about the importance of dialogue to prevent intellectual conflicts between different groups in Saudi Arabia, al-Odah said:

We believe that dialogue is an important option to achieve our higher goals for the benefit of humanity. In principle, dialogue should not be a matter of conflict, and should be widely used among family members, at schools, mosques, workplaces, in media channels and politics. The reason for this dialogue is not to force one of the participants to change their beliefs and principles, and move to the other side, although that could happen as a result of listening to others and accepting their arguments and logic. The main goal should be to come to terms with each other,

sharing common interests and avoiding conflicts as much as possible (al-Odah, 2011a) Pg. 67.

According to al-Odah, Saudi society is doctrinally diverse; there are Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis and others. It also consists of the followers of the four Islamic schools of jurisprudence, and intellectually there are different Islamic groups, liberal groups and other movements.

To reduce the intensity of intellectual conflict and jurisprudential confusion between these different groups, the door to discussion between them should be opened. Al-Odah has set principles that should be recognised and worked on to establish a constructive and objective dialogue to close the door on intellectual conflict:

1. A legitimate authority to refer to should be agreed on, which is the Qur'an and the Sunna. This offers a realistic and truthful representation for official institutions to use to regulate the path and protect the society from collapse.
2. A peaceful approach to dealing with issues, and a denial of sudden and complete changes in opinions, as al-Odah experienced in the past, because it intensifies problems and does not solve them (al-Odah, 2005a).

6.3 No place for conflict

Islam states that differences are human nature and it deals with this in the following way: "To each among you have we prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues" (Qur'an, 5:48).

The existence of difference is a factual matter that has divine wisdom behind it, and should be lived with in peace (al-Sohaym, 2013). The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs for Publication and Scientific Research, Dr Musaid bin Ibrahim al-Hadithi, emphasised the importance of dialogue with others for the sake of peaceful coexistence, as there is no place for intellectual conflicts and we need to engage in dialogue with others to find out about their ideas. He said:

Unfortunately, when we abandoned dialogues with ourselves and with other thinkers and followers of different groups than ours, we suffered from what is called 'cultural disease', which others are suffering from as well. Even terms such as 'dialogue' and

'moderation' have become strange to us at this time, where we are in desperate need of having and encouraging intellectual dialogue between different groups (al-Latif, 2010).

The former deputy head of the Shura Council, Dr Abdullah bin Umar bin Nasif, sees dialogue as very important in solving the intellectual conflicts between different groups in Saudi Arabia. It is a distinctive quality of Islam and one of its wise ways of delivering its message and introducing its noble objectives to all mankind. It is a religious and moral conduct. The approach of the Holy Qur'an encourages a culture of dialogue and consolidates its structure in the educational and behavioural foundations of society. Dr Nasif says, "If dialogue today has become a necessity and bound to happen with people, irrespective of their rank, it is due to various concerns and differences, whether ideological or intellectual"(al-Latif, 2010).

Dr Majid bin Muhammad al-Majid, a professor at King Saud University, specifies the rules of dialogue with others. He said:

Dialogue means mercy, justice and respecting the freedom of others. It does not necessarily mean being satisfied with their beliefs or approving of them. The aim of dialogue is not only to prevent the conflicts between different opinions or to keep one party apart from another; its main aim is to enrich mutual understanding and to firmly establish the values of cooperation between human beings. It is a tool to solve the crisis of the current intellectual conflict between different groups in Saudi Arabia. Dissimilarities in any society are a normal outcome; it is a healthy phenomenon that reflects how active that society is. But some fanatics of certain groups are not in favour of diversity in opinions, thought, and ideological and intellectual visions (al-Majid, 2012).

Conversely, there are some of extremists from different schools of thought in Saudi Arabia are part of an old and forgotten cultural heritage, which is not suitable for this modern era, and they cannot adapt to the requirements of modernity. They also have failed to realise that diversity and plurality create a state of intellectual wealth and superiority for advanced societies, because of their closed minds and their religious and intellectual extremism, which may lead to a state of intellectual aggravation and division (al-Latif, 2010).

6.4 Building bridges between different movements

Intellectual diversity between different groups should not be a cause of fear; on the contrary, it should be firmly established in the behaviour of all groups, including elites, in society. But differences between intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia have caused so many problems and so much intellectual fanaticism. That is because intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia have been just like isolated islands, with each group under the influence of its own thinkers. This fostered a spirit of hostility, enmity and fear among the people of these intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia.

So the problem is not the diversity of opinions, thoughts or beliefs, but in the way to handle diversity and difference. Modern Western countries managed to make their diversity a source of unity, as they realised after centuries of war and conflict that basic human nature refuses to submit to one opinion and school of thought. These societies realised that their strength lay in their diversity, so they formed from this diversity this wonderful and advanced Western civilisation that we clearly see now. At the same time, Arab societies were busy with imaginary conflicts and deliberate crises, which caused them to be left behind, even though they have been fortunate with their human and material resources. Since we are members of one Islamic and conservative society and belong to the same nation, then is this how we should disagree? (al-Omani, 2012).

Dr Salman al-Odah stressed that the best choice for any society is to actively engage in the process of change and keep pace with the people's continuously evolving needs, to ensure the continuation of peace. In his opinion, it is necessary to accept pluralism and diversity as an indispensable prerequisite for the formation of a balanced social bond that reconciles people who have different concerns and interests, and protects the rights of everyone equally in terms of cultural participation and managing the affairs of the country (Alodah, 2012).

It is a mutual agreement between two or more groups, as Allah says: "By mutual agreement between you" (Qur'an, 4:29). Al-Odah reminds us that Saudi society for a long time embracing different groups, some of which have grown larger, more negative and intellectually isolated, and others have grown positively, by reducing dependency on identification through creed and moving towards a more open

society, and therefore a sincere and open dialogue involving the people of Saudi Arabia is the best approach to reach to the best solution. However, Al-Odah mentions that Sectarianism and intellectual racism are the biggest barriers to change (Alodah, 2012).

In an episode of his TV programme Cornerstone that was broadcast on 15th August 2010 under the title “Resistance to Change”, al-Odah used the words “intellectual racism”, suggesting that there are different groups and sects in both Islamic and Arab society that resemble inherited sectarian groups, but with some differences between them and intellectual groups.

Al-Odah said that in any one society, there are different, contradictory opinions, right and left, conservative and liberal, referring to his hope that “Whoever is not with me is against me” can change to “Whoever in not against me is with me” and stressing the positive impact of such a change.

Salman al-Odah also asserts that conflict between these groups and sects is not the desired outcome, pointing out that it is true to say about the contemporary Arabian thinking that it is “confined within two prisons”, history and tradition:

1. History: man always tends to run towards history, live in it and find peace in it, but he is looking for stories that have ceased to exist. It is very important not to make reality subject to this kind of dependency.
2. Tradition: in general man tries to imitate others in an attempt to reproduce the modern Western model and Western styles, ignoring that fact that this type of civilisation grew up in special circumstances and for special societies, and cannot be applied to or replicated in a completely different society, such as Arab society. Al-Odah’s role is to reduce the impact of intellectual conflicts between different groups in Saudi Arabia (al-Salem, 2010).

Salam al-Odah emphasised the existence of different intellectual groups in Saudi society that may lack access to a common language of debate between them. This may result in fanaticism and intellectual conflict. He also emphasised the importance of removing the arena for conflicts between these groups, and the need to remove barriers and differences and bring about dialogue between different groups. He

stressed that there should be a role for authority and intellectuals in reducing the impact of these conflicts. Referring to the necessity and importance of change for the better, he said, “Is it going to be sufficient for us to keep things as they are, without having any ambition to change for the better?” Therefore, there should be a strong intellectual movement that reduces extremism and calls for moderate thinking.

Al-Odah says that man by nature is often haunted by fear and resistance to change with regards to the out of the ordinary, irrespective of the nature of that change. He also says that there is a theory, called “60/40/18”, which is about the reaction of people towards changes that they may experience. This theory suggests that a young man or woman at the age of 18 years old becomes worried with what people might say about him/her and what he/she wears, eats, moves, and behaves and even his/her job. At the age of 40, he/she loses interest in whether people talk about him/her and what people say. Al-Odah adds, “When a man reaches the age of sixty, he realises that people do not know about him; they are busy with themselves and have no interest whatsoever in him” (Break, 2010).

The development of a language of dialogue and the recognition of another’s opinion is the first step in the creation of intellectual cohesion, which leads to harmony on every issue and contributes to the positive development of society. It is indisputable that the language of dialogue and tolerance is one of the civilised values of any ideology, regardless of the fundamentals of this ideology. There is no doubt that every man who holds an ideological view and is regulated by rules of justice and freedom must call for a language of dialogue and tolerance, which is something positive. But the nature of the culture that will host this kind of dialogue is important.

In a culture as conservative as Saudi Arabia, will conservative Salafi thinkers accept an opening of the door to cultural debate, and agree to listen to the refined liberal with an open mind? Will Sufi thinkers debate with Shiite scholars despite the huge differences between their beliefs? What about the attitudes of the Muslim Brotherhood? Will it successfully apply these in Saudi culture, despite its political nature? What about the other religious and intellectual groups that exist in Saudi

Arabia? Will this kind of dialogue be the most appropriate way to solve the existing intellectual conflict in Saudi Arabia? If so, when will it happen?

In a country like Saudi Arabia, we need to promote the language of dialogue, a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, liberality and an acknowledgment of the existence of others with different beliefs, whilst standing firmly against groups that promote extremism and violence (Fajri, 2012).

Erroneous or misunderstood terminology should be amended, concepts should be corrected and juristic terminology should be reviewed and clarified, in order to replace erroneous and suspicious terminology and preserve our own cultural and intellectual identity.

The experience of South Korea and Japan is the best example for us. When these two countries were overtaken by extremism, violence and extreme partisanship and sectarianism, they were doomed to destruction, loss, poverty and hunger. But when they moved towards the language of dialogue, a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, and abandoned the ideology of extremism, they became major economic powers in the world. What we are looking for is to turn this conflict and intellectual crisis between these different groups in Saudi Arabia towards a path of intellectual development and cultural openness, and for Saudi Arabia to become among the most intellectually and scientifically advanced states, and move away from intellectual conflicts and intellectual inflexibility.

The bottom line is there is no other way to go than to open the door to dialogue, implement a culture of moderation and tolerance, and acknowledge the existence of different schools of thought. This is the only way of ensuring intellectual development and achieving intellectual and social progress (Al-Hasan, 2011).

Due to the intellectual divisions in Saudi Arabia, the language of dialogue between intellectual groups disappeared, and so did any calls that had the ability to bring back stability to the critical cultural situation in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, a semi-estrangement between the intellectual and the thinker within the same state took place. Each group or school of thought sought to reject their opponents' opinions, instead of debating with them. When the culture of rejection between intellectual

movements prevails, dialogue despairs, elites become corrupt, demagoguery prevails and no one listens to anyone else. So who will save the Saudi intellectual elite from their imaginary battles and the language of personal interest, which has ruined everything?

What happened to the renowned thinker Salman al-Odah in his ideological transformation created controversy in Saudi ideological circles. This event caused some to re-examine their ideological beliefs and they moved from extremism, racism and intellectual rigidity to moderation and openness. This is the reality of Islam, a religion that calls for moderation in thought and avoidance of extremism and religious intolerance. As Allah Almighty says, “Thus have we made of you a moderate nation that you might be witnesses over the nations” (Qur’an, 2:143) (Jweideh, 2010).

A more precise expression that defines the thinking of al-Odah after this transformation is that al-Odah succeeded in detaching himself from the control of the hardline Salafi mindset. Now he is carrying out a conscious renewal, using sound mental processes and techniques that enable him to achieve intellectual balance and religious moderation. The transformation of the speech of al-Odah over more than two decades points to a gentle, yet deep, approach to reformation, rather than a sudden and deep-rooted transformation. This is the importance of the difficult balance that al-Odah managed to achieve, as he continued to expand on his reformative ideas, whilst at the same time retaining his position within general Salafi thought. This impact has increased in recent years, so his relationship with Salafi shaikhs and Salafi followers has not been broken.

The new speech of al-Odah represents a “new Salafism”, more than an attempt to break away from Salafi thought altogether. He is keen on continuous engagement with developments imposed by modernity, mixing the Salafi approach to analysis using the Qur’an, Sunnah and the biography of early Muslims, with intellectual observation based on understanding the objectives of Sharia and its established principles (Ayat, 2009).

6.5 Salman and Moderate Islamic thought

Al-Odah calls for the formation of a moderate group. Members of this moderate group often confine their aims to the establishment of a lenient model and a lenient approach towards calling others to Islam through writing and speaking, through dialogue with other groups in a serious attempt to understand the nature of civilisation and accommodate the participation of other groups.

The knowledge within this group is diverse and not limited to inherited tradition, but reflects a serious attempt to understand history and modern works, to produce an Islamic viewpoint using Islamic knowledge techniques, which is suitable for modern life. This moderate group does not brush others aside, and deals with modern sciences as a modern outcome that has both advantages and drawbacks. It seeks to engage in a sincere debate with all Islamic and non-Islamic groups, using a new method, which is completely removed from describing others unscientifically, and works to point out areas of disagreement and be a part of the solution. This group adheres to the principle of describing things the way they are, as much as possible.

For members of this group, the gates of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) are open; in fact, it is a duty of those who are knowledgeable in this field. The predecessors left a great heritage that reflected their time in a perfect manner. It is time for modern Muslims to search for what might benefit the *ummah* in terms of new solutions, regulated by religious text and objectives, using information from predecessors without any mental restrictions, acknowledging the right of modern *mujtahid* to freely engage in *ijtihad*, and recognising their juristic right to hold different opinions.

It is important to reform process should be carried out gradually, through a mechanism that adheres to the religious text, understands it and establishes the origin of a more realistic view. All of this is in order to establish a real understanding of the higher objectives of Sharia, because this group gives due importance to independent thinking, whilst paying due care to accommodate the spirit of history and original sources without neglecting intellectual movements in society.

In this group, it is necessary to distinguish between two things. The first matter is the distinction between what is unchangeable and what is changeable in Islamic thought. What is unchangeable is all divine inspiration, irrespective of time, place and people.

This means that change is inevitable due to new issues in the modern age. The text is unchangeable, as it reached us intact from our predecessors, but some modern issues time do not fall under the rule of a particular text; therefore it is permissible to look for a solution by using independent thinking to give a legal opinion. These solutions should be in line with the requirements of modern life, as reformation and independent thinking are required, and not in any way contrary to Sharia.

Secondly, reformative thought is, in its essence, futuristic thought that seeks to deal with the reality of life and build an Islamic society based on the fundamentals of Sharia (Quamar, 2015).

Dawah in the thought of al-Odah can be defined as “The creation of new Islamic speech that makes Islamic principles its foundation, with the gates to intellectual *ijtihad* opened in line with progress in civilisation and technology”. The call to moderation in thought has generated many positive issues:

1. An emphasis on the distinctive Islamic identity of the nation, which has been embodied in its history over the centuries.
2. Conformity with the modern age through finding new juristic solutions to newly emerging issues.
3. It opened the door to intellectual *ijtihad*, thus revealing the drawbacks inherent in intolerance and religious fanaticism. The reality of Islamic identity is that it is moderate and tolerant, calls for peace and fights against all types of intolerance and fanaticism, whether religious or intellectual, including fanaticism in the practice and representation of Islam.

Perhaps one of the most positive aspects of moderation is that the moderate group has become the best solution to intellectual conflict between different Islamic and non-Islamic groups in Saudi Arabia. This is due to the joining Salafi calls for adherence to and protection of religious heritage and texts, with intellectual *ijtihad* and the use of reason to find juristic solutions that are compatible with modern life, which is what modern liberal groups have been calling for. The moderate group, led by al-Odah after his transformation, calls for achieving an outcome by bringing together both heritage and reason — that is to say, Salafi thought and modern

thought — within the framework of Sharia as the slogan of this group makes clear: “Heritage is the shade of democracy and globalisation” (Ibrahim, 2001).

Al-Odah realised that intolerance and religious extremism will lead to a complete separation from the modern world, which is itself a sign of backsliding and intellectual failure. He also realised that Islam calls for tolerance of others, even when they think differently, and called for moderation and the abandonment of extremism. This was his slogan after his controversial transformation, which affected his thinking and methods as I have shown in previous chapters.

The Islamist movement, as I have mentioned, seeks to be totally separated from the modern world, as the Islamist thinking of Salafists who stick to the religious text is based on a retreat from modernity. It sees modern civilization as ignorant and to be avoided, as it changes what the early predecessors brought and may lead to the corruption of the religious text; therefore, Islam should be separated from it.

The modernist viewpoint, and by that I mean liberal thinking, calls for the abandonment of heritage, as it is, in their opinion, something that fulfilled its role in the past, but now that role has come to an end and it should therefore be bypassed and abandoned. This created a sense of cultural alienation from their culture and heritage among members of the modernist group, which led to a reduction of their role in the society because Saudi society strongly adheres to its heritage.

We used to say it is too difficult for any thinker to break through the barriers between the two groups (liberal and Islamist) until al-Odah appeared after his intellectual transformation, when he showed that the best solution for each group was to reject extremism in thought and religion.

After his intellectual transformation, al-Odah highlighted, through his articles and his website, the importance of rereading heritage and Islamic history, and of uncovering the human role in recording history. This has helped to counteract the trend towards holiness when looking at Islamic history and Muslim personalities, apart from messengers and prophets, peace be upon them. This in turn fostered a spirit of critical examination, supported a culture of questioning and prioritized the use of independent thinking to investigate the structures of Islamic thought in Saudi

Arabia. It also created a spirit of reconciliation with modern thinking, in order to make use of the products of that thinking to understand reality, and investigate heritage, history and other schools of thought.

The impact that al-Odah has had on the development of intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia is considered unique, something that no other Arab thinker has achieved. The reason for this may be that this intellectual and stylistic transformation has had a great impact on Saudi society. They were the right answers to hardliners and extremists in thought and religion. Al-Odah thought deeply and read extensively, using different types source material, to bring together what Allah and His Messenger said, and the views of Marx, Fanon and Popper, which clearly shown in his writing, style of speech and expression, and in his attitude and ideas towards some issues (Al-Khail, 2017).

Al-Odah is a distinguished Islamic intellectual, who earlier adopted violence as a means to change society, and his preaching methods involved intellectual and religious extremism. But later he changed into a moderate and open-minded scholar, who chose preaching and a gentle approach over violent speech and extreme thought, and became the voice of moderation. Saudi TV channels began to invite him onto many debate programmes that bring together Sharia and social theory, until al-Odah developed a large group of followers, whose numbers are increasing day after day. He followed moderation as a way of life, using it instead of intellectual extremism. His views are considered a form of medicine for many of the social and intellectual diseases have arisen as a result of intellectual extremism in Saudi Arabia (al-Rasheed, 2013).

In dealing with intellectual differences in Saudi Arabia, Dr Sam Bousso Abd al-Rahman who is a head teaching team of Philosophy, religion department at the Toulouse – Jean Jaures university in France, and he has a view about intellectual movements in Saudi Arabia showing the importance of tolerance and dialogue between schools of thought, he said;

1. Tolerating and acknowledging the other's right to disagree, and believing that this difference has a great impact on the life of people and their behavior, by

developing cognitive skills through exchange ideas and learn from other different schools.

2. Being subjective, and moving away from racism and the extreme thought.
3. Strengthening religious fundamentals that call for close ties between different ideologies in Saudi society.
4. Protecting members of society from extreme ideas, and opening the door for intellectual dialogue between different groups (Bouso, 2013).

Dealing with the issue of different intellectual groups in Saudi Arabia and the type of intellectual conflicts between them should be handled very carefully. Racism is often the reason behind so many social problems and intellectual contradictions in Saudi Arabia, in addition to some political problems. Al-Odah established his role in solving these issues, which are what people continually face in Saudi Arabia. This role has four main aims, which are:

1. To prove the right of all groups in Saudi Arabia to voice their opinions and principles, to be neutral and to avoid racism and intellectual extremism.
2. To avoid and warn of the dangers of dictatorship, and to call for the opening of dialogue between different groups in order to understand and comprehend the principles of each group, even if their methodology is not accepted. Freedom lies in the right to express one's opinion and develop a constructive dialogue devoid of racism.
3. To prevent the country from falling into chaos and instability due to conflict and rivalries between different groups, and to emphasise the importance of peace and security through a call to moderation in Islamic thought.
4. To renew religious discourse and national development, which should motivate all parties, and in which all different groups should participate. A constructive and effective dialogue does not necessarily require pluralism, but should not be unilateral or racist. The views expressed should be representative of different viewpoints and approaches, as theoretical frameworks multiply in accordance with intellectual trends. However, a national program to achieve renewal can be agreed on (Alodah, 2012).

6.6 The Center for National Dialogue

Saudi Arabia has led the way in this, and has been very keen to curb intellectual conflict between members of different groups. It has encouraged the opening of intellectual dialogue between members of different groups. All of this is due to the Saudi government's belief in the value of dialogue, moderation in attitudes and rejection and willingness to combat intellectual extremism, and extremism of all kinds (Al-Jabri et al., 2010). Thus a specific academy for this purpose has been established: the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

The King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue is a national organisation working to spread a culture of dialogue, and make it a general behavioural trend in Saudi society at all levels. The Center was established on 4th August 2003 by order of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz,. The initial work started shortly afterwards, and specialised committees were formed; the creation of formal regulations and the regulatory framework of the Center and its management were set. The late King Abdullah, expressed his hope that this organisation becomes a channel for objective and constructive dialogue, and that it becomes an effective institution for spreading the noble values of justices, freedom, equality and tolerance, as well as calling people to abandon intellectual disagreement that lead to conflict, which in turn may lead to discrimination and lagging behind intellectually (al-Ddin, 2014).

The main objective of the Center is to strive to provide a proper and permanent culture of national dialogue among male and female members of society, which works in the national interest and protects the unity of the nation, and is built on Islamic principles with the following goals:

1. To lay the foundation of national unity within the framework of Islamic beliefs and to make this foundation deeper through intellectual dialogue.
2. To participate in creating the proper Islamic speech and develop it through intellectual dialogue.
3. To address intellectual, social, cultural, economic and educational issues, and present them through channels of intellectual dialogue.

4. To establish the concept and attitude of dialogue in society, as a way of life and an approach to dealing with different issues.
5. To expand the participation of different members of society in intellectual dialogue, and to support the role of social institutions to achieve justice, equality and freedom of expression within the framework of Sharia.
6. To foster intellectual discourse, in coordination with intellectual institutions, which calls for dialogue as a solution to solving different intellectual conflicts?
7. To support communication channels and intellectual dialogue with institutions and individuals abroad, and to participate in the development of thinking by enabling the participation of different intellectual and religious groups and social institutions, through the mechanism of intellectual debate.
8. To develop a strategic insight into the national dialogue and to ensure the implementation of its conclusions (Muammar, 2014).

Perhaps one of the most important goals of the Center is to fight intellectual extremism and the divisions that have spread throughout Saudi Arabia, which may lead to intellectual decline and for the nation to lag behind others in terms of development. Saudi Arabia has tried its best to solve this crisis by fighting intellectual extremism, calling for moderation and opening the door to moderate intellectual debate for the different groups that exist in Saudi Arabia (al-Abdullah, 2005).

The administration of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue consists of:

- Head of Center: Shaikh Salih bin Abd al-Rahman al-Hasyin
- Center Secretary General: Shaikh Faisal bin Abd al-Rahman al-Muammir
- Deputy Secretary General: Dr Fahd bin Sultan al-Sultan (al-Abdullah, 2005).

This dialogue has achieved many successes, which can be seen with regards to both individuals and society in Saudi Arabia.

The religion of Islam acknowledges that differences are part of human nature, and deals with the matter accordingly. As Allah Almighty says:

To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues (Qur'an, 5:48).

Although, Salman al-Odah have not any function on this center directly²⁵, but it is very important to mention about the center, with all its great impacts on the Saudi thinking and on the society as well and show how Saudi society has been changed positively, by calling for intellectual dialogue.

Salman al-Odah is one of the wisest men in the country; he is a man of learned thought and a distinguished cultural approach, and he has been successful in terms of both his thinking and his style of argument. The intellectual transformation that he underwent was the main event that paved the way for dialogue and the call to intellectual moderation.

There are a lot of intellectuals, journalists and even scholars who fought against the views of al-Odah and attacked him, especially before his transformation, when he was ideologically extreme. At this time, he played a big role in spreading the message of extremism and was one of the supporters of the views of Osama bin Laden. He wrote often against women, to marginalise them and suppress their will. He was against allowing women the right even to drive. There are so many examples of his views on women, but I am going to mention one incident that is well known and had a great impact in social and intellectual circles. Through these, the criticism and strong opposition that al-Odah faced because of his intellectual transformation become clear. It is the intellectual battle between Salman al-Odah and the host and journalist Dawood al-Sherian.

²⁵ Dr Salman al-Odeh argues that dialogue in Saudi Arabia is a must, more than ever. The internal pressures mounted in the aftermath of the terrorist attack/explosion in Riyadh and Khobar, together with earlier problems which may have led to the explosion/attack. External pressures, no doubt, also have a negative effect in Saudi Arabia. AL-ODAH, S. 2004. *Sheikh Salman advocated participation in the national dialogue* [Online]. Al Jazeera.

Dawood al-Sherian was born in Riyadh in 1954. His first journalistic role was with the Al Jazeera newspaper in 1976. He joined the magazine Al-Yamamh in 1977, and became chief editor, contributing to its development. In 1989, he became the first reporter for the Associated Press in Saudi Arabia.

He travelled to the United States in 1985 to undertake a course on English language and journalism, and in 1987 he founded a company called al-Tawthiq wa al-Malumat, and became its managing director (Al-Turki, 2016).

In 1989, he became head of the al-Muslimun al-Duwaliyah newspaper and an active member of the board of directors of al-Sharikah al-Sudiyah lilabhath.

In 1993, he became editor and managing director of the al-Hayah newspaper in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and a member of the board of directors of Dar al-Hayah, a position he held until 2003 (mbc.net, 2016).

He was the first journalist chosen to teach in Saudi universities and institutes. One of his programmes, *Eight o'clock with Dawood*, is currently being broadcast daily on the MBC channel. This programme has had great social and intellectual success because it deals with social issues and the concerns of the average Saudi citizen, and finds solutions to these problems. The programme has had a big role in expanding freedom of expression, discusses social problems in Saudi Arabia publicly. In one of the episodes, Dawood al-Sherian attacked a number of scholars who motivated Saudi youth to participate in jihad in Afghanistan or Syria. He mentioned al-Odah's name among those whom he accused. According to al-Sherian, this was a heinous act and a great sin, which al-Odah deserves to be punished for because of the impact on the families of the young people who were influenced by the words of al-Odah. Addressing al-Odah and other extremists, Dawood said, "You are the people of innovation, you are the people of sedition. We will never be calm". Al-Odah rejected this accusation, and asked al-Sherian to prove it by producing anything of al-Odah's to support his claim. Al-Odah also wrote on his Twitter site about the safety of the homeland, saying "Young men of this good country should avoid the paths of extremism, which may lead them to bad ends, and families should look after the life of their sons and protect them from these dangerous places". After this, al-Sherian said to al-Odah, "Give me your hand to shake" (hasanews, 2015).

The personality of al-Odah, and both his old and new thinking, was and still it open to public debate in Saudi Arabia, but the most important thing is his call for intellectual peace and opening the door to civilised dialogue between different religious and intellectual groups, which the Saudi intellectual arena is currently witnessing (Radi, 2006) . Dialogue is central to the discourse of Al-Odah. He believes with dialogue, divergent views within the Saudi society can be embraced. Without dialogue, entrenched ideologies will be created to may make the gulf between the different intellectual currents even wider.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this research, I have critically examined the historical, political, and social developments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in order to understand, in depth, the Saudi situation before the advent of religious and intellectual diversity of thought. I have also looked into the Kingdom regarding the dominance of one school of thought, namely Salafism, and how it was therefore difficult for other movements to emerge and be a part of the society.

Furthermore, I have looked into the emergence of other currents in the Saudi society after a long period of virtual intellectual standstill. I have particularly focused on the factors that led to their emergence.

Moreover, I have highlighted the growth of the most important and active movements in Saudi Arabia, including their rules, ideas and formation, focusing on the main differences between these movements and groups. Perhaps the major aim of this current study is to show the main differences between different schools of thought in Saudi Arabia, outlining a basis for a potential intellectual conflict between them. This led me to undertake and suggest some possible and important solutions to reduce the gap between the different movements, as I strongly believe that moderate Islamic thought and open dialogue can be the best solution.

I have also pointed out that Salman al-Odah's intellectual transformation is indicative of how important to be in the middle, far away from extremist thought. Therefore, I started to illustrate his life and thought before his transformation, pointing out to some of his ideas and vision and the causes of his intellectual transformation. I have also highlighted al-Odah's new approach following his transformation, including his views on some contemporary issues, and how he is able to make a bridge between different schools of thought in Saudi Arabia.

This study emphasises the importance of moderation as an approach that can put an end to conflicts between different religious groups in the Saudi society²⁶.

²⁶ The existence of strict rules and laws is very important to control possible conflicts. This will guarantee prevention of possible attacks or repression, where the

7.1 Conclusion

This study has shed light on the development and diversity of cultural and religious thought in Saudi Arabia. It has shown that Saudi Arabia is not a country of one religious doctrine; in fact, it is a country that influences and is influenced by all intellectual and religious groups and all Islamic doctrines. In the future, it will be bound to make use of the intellectual differences between different groups in the development of Saudi Arabia through intellectual diversity.

This study has demonstrated to a great extent the intellectual thought of the religious groups in Saudi Arabia. It has systematically classified these groups in Saudi Arabia into three groups: religious, politico-religious and liberal, as well as classified the subdivisions of each of these groups.

This classification has taken into consideration the historical background of the development of Saudi society. This study has described, through a systematic approach, the evolution and adaptation of the intellectual discourses of the Saudi elites, in response to the Saudi environment in terms of society, economic, politics, and especially ideology. Furthermore, the study has investigated Saudi public opinion in order to contribute to future studies that will observe the intellectual future of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This study has reflected on the initiation of and support for the concept of moderation in Islamic thought. It has revealed values and social practices that are in line with the requirements of modernisation. At the same time, it has been inspired by the roots of Arab and Islamic heritage and their sublime essence by studying the ideological transformation of the Saudi thinker Dr Salman al-Odah.

The process of ideological transformation in the Kingdom requires moving forward with the adaptation of a policy of social and cultural openness. This includes greater public freedom and laying the foundation of human rights, irrespective of one's views and the ideological school that one belongs to. It also includes strengthening the role of women, and giving a greater role and independence to civil institutes.

rule of law is decisive to resolve conflicts and prevent injustices. CHENG, C.-J. 1990. *Basic Documents on International Trade Law*, London, Martinus Nuhoff Publishers.

This will serve as to create a policy of free thought that is not under the command and control of any particular group, or against any others. It is very important that all of these intellectual groups are socially equal, without any racism and intellectual intolerance.

It is widely acknowledged that the stability and flow of the process of intellectual modernisation needs to be founded on a broad and moderate social and cultural arena that serves as the basis of intellectual compatibility.

Enlarging and strengthening the intellectual environment will prepare the social structure for democratic transformation and will enhance its chances of success, which will maintain the religious and intellectual stability of the Kingdom.

The current study has discussed the culture of rationalisation and moderation, establishing the pillars of modern religious speech and enlarging modern, moderate groups. All of this will increase the profile of modern and moderate groups, while reducing religious and intellectual extremism.

I conclude from this that the intellectual stability of the Kingdom requires a modern, multifaceted policy. On the cultural side, it requires the implementation of a strategy that supports intellectual and cultural diversity, and it also requires the development of the concept of intellectual diversity with the existence of different schools of thought. On the legislative side, it requires a developmental strategy that expands and strengthens the rights of free thought, by protecting these rights with clear and effective laws. On the political side, a modernising mechanism should be established and taken seriously, in order to promote the concept of moderation, and to extend it to the industrial and knowledge-based sectors.

Therefore, this study calls for the development of the elites in the Kingdom, based on the fundamentals and contents of the process of intellectual modernisation. This will pave the way for different groups to agree on a road map that produces an intellectual and developed modernisation programme capable of accommodating different intellectual cultures and encouraging diversity and intellectual pluralism.

There is no doubt that this agreement is the responsibility of all effective Saudi cultural groups, and of all intellectual and religious groups in the Kingdom. Each of these groups has some part of the truth, interests and concerns out of which the agreement should be formed. Saudi modernists are responsible for assuring others

from different groups that their studies and modernist projects take into consideration Islamic principles, and that these remain a firm cornerstone of a national reconciliation programme within the tenets of Islam. Traditional religious groups, on the other hand, should take responsibility for reconciling with the modern era and rebuilding their religious speech in accordance with a modern, intellectual, but distinctly Saudi pattern that combines religious tradition and the demands of the modern age.

On the other hand, Islamic activists are required to end their deliberate alienation from modernity, and fall in line with the demands of the Arab people, which have been clearly represented in the Arab Spring. This does not mean abandoning Islamic principles in the literal sense, but ideological extremism is a temporary phenomenon ruled by special circumstances that are inevitably temporal. The historical development of human societies is based on what builds these societies and not destroys them; there is therefore a need to support the freedom and dignity of man and not to waste energy on projects that lead to collision with other civilisations with different beliefs.

King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, gave a speech in which he said, “[The government] will not allow anyone to stand in the face of reforms by calling for sluggishness or to jump into darkness in a reckless adventure” (al-Kareef, 2011). In this official speech, determination to proceed with a gradual reformist approach can be seen.

It is quite clear that religious thought in the Kingdom, with all of its divisions, is one of the elements of strength in Saudi society. The liberal trend, on the other hand, is in line with the strategies of development and progress, as it expresses the importance of these strategies in the modern world. The modernists play a role in communicating with their counterparts in the rest of the world, in accordance with their future plans. Despite the obvious differences and intellectual conflict between groups of Saudi elites, these intellectual interactions and cultural discussions may reflect the sluggishness of Saudi society and its readiness to enter a new era of its nation’s history.

The current study has investigated the Saudi cultural scene and has critically examined its intellectual movement. The intellectual growth of different movements in Saudi Arabia is still happening, albeit feebly, and it may support social unity,

establish the concept of diversity and increase the chances of success for the modernisation project. This study has pointed out that intellectual discourse between different groups and positive interactions between individuals who belong to different sects of the Saudi elite are becoming reality during the development of intellectual openness. The Kingdom is witnessing a remarkable intellectual and informational transformation in which a constructive, moderate and critical discussion is being carried out between groups. This discussion should be considered in relation to all intellectual and religious groups in Saudi Arabia. It should be acknowledged that none of these groups has a monopoly on truth, and that each one of them has part of it. Therefore, the chance of agreeing on a common approach is increasing, which may lead to everyone accepting the reality of being different and addressing issues under one roof, the roof of unity and national and cultural interest. This study consisted of seven chapters, and each chapter was divided into several sections. It has traced the intellectual history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since establishment of the Kingdom. The study shows the characteristics of each of these stages, as well as a complete explanation of the schools of thought and intellectual groups in the Saudi arena. It also shows the reasons for the emergence of each of these groups and a detailed explanation of the intellectual and religious differences between them, because of which intellectual conflicts were born. These conflicts have caused an intellectual crisis and civilisational decline in Saudi society, and prompted a search for available solutions to this crisis.

This study has traced the life of Salman al-Odah from his beginnings in Najd, what religious sciences he studied and the Sheikhs who influenced him. It was a Hanbali, traditional Salafi environment, but the young Salman al-Odah, unlike his Sheikhs, did not confine himself to Salafism; he soon discovered the Muslim Brotherhood by reading the books of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Qutb. Perhaps the tension in his youth was due to the following two factors: strict Salafism and the authenticity of the Muslim Brotherhood. A third factor led him to clash with liberal and modernist Saudis in the second half of the 1980s. These clashes were the result of reading the thought of the Muslim Brotherhood and observing the rapid changes that happened to Saudi society, changes that Saudi youth who were brought up with a strict, traditional Salafi identity found it difficult to accept.

Additionally, this study has focused on the debate concerning Salman al-Odah's imprisonment and his intellectual transformation by examining his strict Salafi thinking before imprisonment, supported by several examples. Then, the study detailed the period of his imprisonment and the intensive reading that he undertook in prison. As has been mentioned earlier, this reading of books by philosophers and thinkers prompted him to convert to a moderate religious school of thought, and to emerge from prison a man with a different character, whose thinking has created a lot of debate in Saudi society. The study has referred to the important factors that influenced Dr al-Odah and helped him to change, and summarises the most important intellectual topics through which the new thinking of Salman al-Odah has emerged.

By examining the character of al-Odah the thinker, it has become apparent that there is a kind of advanced intellectual movement in Saudi Arabia and within the Islamic vision. This man addresses all subjects, whether political Islam has dealt with them or has not, and subjects that are addressed by either traditional and reformist satellite channels. He has founded ways to jurisprudentially renew different subjects in the Saudi arena. His beginnings were jurisprudential but his current position is intellectual, philosophical, cultural and civilisational, in accordance with his cultural and education methodology and his long and harsh experience.

The study has traced the changes in the thinking of Salman al-Odah as strong proof of the importance of moderation as an approach that can put an end to conflicts between different groups in the Saudi arena. It has been emphasized that rationalisation and modernisation are not inimical to Islamic discourse. The centrality of dialogue, engagement and diversity has been stressed in the study with special reference to the works of Salman Al-Odah and his transformation from an extremist preacher to one of socio-religious and political critic. As such, Saudi Arabia is not immune to reform due to the forces of globalisation where the world has become like a village. Thus, the Kingdom has created centers in order to foster dialogue and understanding across different intellectual groups. Diversity is a source of strength and not weakness.

Saudi society has been subject to several cultural changes, which were the reason behind intellectual changes in large sections of its population. Saudi society is still in

the process of changing, but it has not developed socially to the extent of having a specific intellectual discourse as the most common and widely intellectually transformational discourse, apart from the traditional religious discourse. There are some who utilise this discourse, but not enough to form an influential cultural discourse (Ghaithi, 2010b).

As for jihadists and extremists, the battle has moved from external fighting to internal fighting, and therefore the Islamic Awakening discourse has to change from a discourse of extremism to a discourse of tolerance or moderation, especially considering that this moderation was adapted few years before the September 11th attacks. In these circumstances, the call to moderation by some of the Awakening Shaikhs emerged (Ghaithi, 2010b). The intellectual arena in Saudi Arabia also witnessed a complete month of heated debate about several issues related to political reforms. The subject of the state started this debate. It was the mirror that clearly reflected the hidden intellectual and political struggle between the different reformist movements in the Kingdom. As the struggle intensified, the debate changed course to the liberal and Islamic beliefs about issues such as freedom in the Kingdom, the predominance of religion, the need for civil society institutes and women's rights. It went beyond that to a conflict about the historical interpretation of the establishment of the Kingdom, which led some considering that the liberal trend was the first to discuss these issues (Qader, 2008).

In addition, several writings emerged at the end of 2010s calling for diversity, common human values, values of enlightenment and freedom and civil society, and ethics, through a common philosophical ground with some of the enlightened young people. These writings established their existence through changes in the previous ten years that introduced new visions that tried to bring into focus their essence among all these changes, considering philosophical thought "as critical discourse for all kinds of intellectual and non-intellectual knowledge" (al-Mahmood, 2013).

All these changes and intellectual interactions in Saudi cultural discourse, both Islamic and non-Islamic, have created change in the Saudi social movement. These changes came down from the intellectuals and elites, the religious and cultural, to the street, so that Saudi society could go through its first electoral process in its history,

despite many electoral imbalances that happened and the victory of Islamists in this election in 2005 (Benarji, 2011).

Saudi society has started to consolidate many humanitarian rights with these changes in values, but it is still in the process of formation and transformation. Moving toward moderation and accepting differences of opinion is one of the most important aims of the different trends, and is considered the main reason behind their peaceful coexistence. This emerged in the meeting that was held by the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in which he gathered journalists and Saudi personalities of different affiliations when launching Saudi Vision 2030. Mohamad al-Arefe, who is considered by some as “the outcome of the Awakening movement”, and Hamad al-Atiq, who is classified by some as a Jami, can be considered as a clear example of the struggle between the old and the new trends in the Saudi arena, and they both attended the meeting. In what might be considered an indirect message to all Saudi movements, the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman gathered Saudi personalities of different affiliations to deliver a clear message to all that “the new Saudi Arabia can accommodate and be built by all” (Habtoor, 2016).

In addition to the journalists who attended the news conference where Prince Mohammad bin Salman answered questions, personalities of different and even opposing opinions, movements and visions were sitting under the same roof. What the Crown Prince has done represents a message to all of those who attended the meeting and others that building the nation and the success of implementing his vision of taking the state towards the status of developed countries requires uniting the different voices in the country, and for them to stand together with tolerance of different opinions in an intellectual, realistic and logical manner.

The Crown Prince intends to deliver a message to all, saying, “We are facing a new era of change that requires the existence of a state of discussion and unity. All the various movements must serve the national transition plan. We need a phase of calm and to avoid arguments because the country cannot bear arguments between different movements and parties.” (Habtoor, 2016)

The vision of moderation that the program of national transition intends requires the religious movements to know that there are several issues that the country has to face in the future, as long as they do not relate to the main Islamic principles that no one

disagrees on. “We need to get close to each other with a clear mind, and we will realize that there is nothing to disagree upon as long as we agree on the essence and disagree on minor details.”

The King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue has a positive role in clarifying concepts and discussing differences that have resulted, to some extent, in bringing closer some opposing views, which has acknowledged the doctrinal and intellectual diversity of intellectuals, researchers and thinkers. It has brought greater visibility to tolerance, harmony and respect to differences in faith (al-Kareef, 2011).

There is no doubt that starting the dialogue from a national base has resulted in forming sound social relations, which are characterized by openness and acquaintances between the different social groups in the country, which happened during successive rounds of dialogue. The dialogue successfully accomplished a lot on the national level, and with active elites of different intellectual and doctrinal backgrounds. It created a suitable environment to conduct meetings and open and frank discussions that shaped the national and common relations. It produced a recommendation aimed at reducing the impact of conflicts between different movements in the nation.

The rejection of different kinds of discrimination among citizens on doctrinal, regional and tribal grounds requires a national project aimed at strengthening the national identity and solidarity with strict punishment laws in cases of aggression and verbal abuse. This will strengthen the national identity and play an effective role in dealing with the outstanding problems in conflicts between different groups by introducing laws and regulations that criminalize such practices.

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