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"From territorial conquest to global calling. The roots and transformations of the Saudi-Wahhabi *daʿwa*"

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Introduction

At least since the attacks of 9/11, the issue of Saudi Arabian proselytising activities regularly resurfaces as a hot topic in Western media and policy-making circles. To give but one example, the German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel recently accused the Saudi government of "funding Islamic extremism in the West" and announced that "the time of looking away is over" (Henderson 2015). These comments came shortly after King Salman had offered to build 200 mosques for newly arrived refugees in Germany. In other cases, existing Saudi educational and religious institutions have become the object of decades of court proceedings and closure attempts (Berndt and Senyurt, 2005). In all of this, the precise nature of the Saudi commitment to missionary activity or Islamic 'calling' (*daʿwa*) generally goes unexamined. The following pages offer some observations in this regard by examining the rootedness of transnational *daʿwa* in the fabric of the Saudi state as an idea and a practice, and by scrutinising the impact of this missionary activity both within Saudi Arabia and abroad.

Providing crucial historical background, the first section will delve into origins of the Najdi *wahhabiyya*,[1] characterising it as the doctrine of a profoundly local and territorial process of state-building. As a consequence – and contrary to much of received wisdom – the classical *wahhabiyya* and its scholars were ill-equipped for a global and hence inherently deterritorialised missionary endeavour. Section two then describes how, in spite of this initial handicap, domestic political motives propelled the Saudi state and the Wahhabi *ulama* to pursue a policy of global *daʿwa*. Yet, as section three highlights, in order to build the institutions and networks necessary for the global mission, the *wahhabiyya* had to rely on a diverse array of 'imported' religious forces of Islamic revivalism that went on to staff the newly created *daʿwa* bureaucracies; a fact that made the Kingdom itself the first 'victim' of its new global missionary activity. Finally, section four weighs the (limited) results of Saudi proselytisation abroad. While Saudi institutions and largesse have contributed to shifting the understanding of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the sought-after hegemony over the global Islamic sphere has remained elusive.

The historical importance of the Wahhabiyya as a doctrine of *Landnahme*

In a number of journalistic and scholarly publications, Saudi Arabia is presented as an actor that is inherently 'global' in nature. In this narrative, a straightforward line is drawn from the *wahhabiyya*'s doctrinal tenets and the beginning of its rise in 18th-century Najd to the spread of a Salafi-tinged Islamicality in many locales the world over today. In fact, this development is perceived and explained as a

[1] Labelling the movement of religious renewal that developed out of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's preaching activities in 18th-century central Arabia is fraught with difficulties. The notions of 'Wahhabism' and 'Wahhabi' have their roots in the Ottoman propaganda against the Najdi movement, with the members of this movement preferring to refer to themselves by other, more prestigious labels such as 'Salafi'. This essay nevertheless retains the terminology of *wahhabiyya*, given its widespread usage in scholarship and given the need to distinguish the religious current that originated in what is contemporary Saudi Arabia from other, distinct Islamic revivalist movements.

single dynamic of Saudi-Wahhabi expansion from the local to the global (see e.g. Algar 2002, Gold 2004: 1-16, Shehabi 2008). Thanks to its Wahhabi heritage, Saudi Arabia is thus seen as operating as a 'kingdom without borders' from the very moment of its genesis. This makes the country and its religious movement players that are ontologically hostile to an international system based on the notion of separate territorial units and on a clear demarcation of borders between 'inside' and 'outside'.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage in depth with the writings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab himself; writings which, as many commentators (as well as 'Abd al-Wahhab's detractors) over the centuries have noted, are striking above all due to their comparatively limited scholarly sophistication. What is certain, however, is that his teachings were profoundly rooted in the particular features and local concerns of 18th-century central Arabia. This, coincidentally, serves as one of the major markers that distinguish the *wahhabiyya* from modern 'Salafi' currents that first developed in late 19th-century Egypt. Salafis such as Sayyid al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, and their followers developed their vision of an Islamic renewal against the backdrop of European encroachment and global imperial domination (Haddad 1994, Keddie 1994). To be sure, the more conservative interpretations of the *salafiyya* might have an elective affinity with the *wahhabiyya*, due to their concern with moral degeneracy and Islamic renewal, with theological purity, and with a principled rejection of *taqlid* in matters of *fiqh* (Haykel 2009).[2] By the 1920s, this elective affinity enabled a confluence of the Saudi-Wahhabi current and the pan-Islamic-Salafi current in the persona of Rashid Rida (Commins 2006: 137-143). Nevertheless, Rida, like Al-Afghani and 'Abduh before him –and like his student Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood later on – remained part of a tradition that was fundamentally marked by the engagement with the European coloniser and that was in important ways *global* in its political outlook.

By contrast, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab does not appear to have travelled beyond Basra; and he did not engage with transregional political or intellectual currents (ibid.: 10-19). Rather than battling the European colonisers, he directed his religious zeal and ire at local causes, most notably at the saint-worship and other 'innovations' (*bid'a*) prevailing in his environment. 'Abd al-Wahhab deemed his contemporaries to be engaged in quasi-polytheistic 'associationism' (*shirk*) and thus to have become apostates (*murtadd*). In sharp contrast to the more political *salafiyya*, his doctrine was, in and of itself, bereft of politics; and 'Abd al-Wahhab contented himself with restating the classically Hanbali dogma of obedience to the ruler (Mouline 2011: 91). Nevertheless, his project of theological renewal required a local political partner in order to be enforced. 'Abd al-Wahhab found this partner in 1744 in the figure of Muhammad bin Sa'ud, ruler of the small oasis town of Dir'iyya: their pact "provided the spark still animating the Saudi state" (Piscatori 1980: 123). Unlike the pan-Islamic *salafiyya*'s quest to unite the *umma* and overcome the territorial division of Muslim lands, the *wahhabiyya* was therefore from its very outset affiliated to a project of state-building and a project of territorialisation in a particular locale (central Arabia). Abdulaziz Al-Fahad's (2004: 487) assertion that the *wahhabiyya* "was born in a

[2] Although for an upright Salafi, the Wahhabi tendency to follow the tenets of Hanbalism already veers dangerously close to an embrace of *taqlid*. (Lacroix 2011: 11)

stateless society with the explicit purpose of forming a state" is somewhat problematic for its functionalism: Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's thought did not explicitly seek to form a state; in fact, in contrast to much of 20th century Islamism he was unconcerned with the notion of an (Islamic) state. Yet Al-Fahad's statement correctly highlights the crucial dimension of the *wahhabiyya* as giving rise to a territorialised polity in the lands of the Najd.

To be sure, the *wahhabiyya* emerged as a 'counter-religion', radical in its cleaving apart of 'true' and 'false' religion (Assmann 2003) and thus revolutionary in its rejection of the prevailing theological status quo in 18th-century Arabia. This revolutionary edge does not, however, detract from the movement's territorialising aspect – quite to the contrary. The charismatic authority of a revolutionary religious leader has long been identified as one of the roots of power underlying a coercive territorial social formation (Weber 1947: 140 ff.). Pierre Clastres noted that the prolonged struggle of tribal societies against the imposition of central, state-like structures is lost once the figure of the religious or religiously-legitimated leader appears: "In the discourse of the prophets there may lie the seeds of the discourse of power, and beneath the exalted features of the [prophetic] mover of men, the one who tells them of their desire, the silent figure of the Despot may be hiding" (Clastres 1989: 218). As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it, prophetic discourse drives forward the process of the formation of the *Urstaat*. During this process, the prophetic or divinely-legitimated despot

> challenges the lateral alliances [marriages] and the extended filiations [blood-based kinship] of the old community. He imposes a new alliance system and places himself in direct filiation with the deity: the people must follow. A leap into a new alliance, a break with the ancient filiation—this is expressed in a strange machine, or rather a machine of the strange [the *Urstaat*] whose locus is the desert, imposing the harshest and the most barren of ordeals, and attesting to the resistance of an old order as well as to the validation of the new order. (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 192 f.)

Indeed, from its desert base in Dir'iyya, the coalition between Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad bin Sa'ud broke with the prevailing social ordering of central Arabia: the Al-Sa'ud did not possess a strong tribal pedigree, which reduced them to outsiders in the pre-Wahhabi political game on the Peninsula (Al-Rasheed 2010: 14-17). 'Abd al-Wahhab's teachings disparaged these same nomadic tribes as "ignorant barbarians in need of religious instruction" (Commins 2006: 2). Against this old order, the Saudi-Wahhabi pact provided a new alliance grounded in a religious message of purity. This new alliance managed for the first time to transcend the antagonisms of segmentary tribal politics and to unify Arabia in a stable and enduring socio-political order. The fact that 'Abd al-Wahhab's prophetic speech is therefore "the beginning of the State in the Word" on the Peninsula (Clastres 1989: 218) highlights that it is fundamentally mistaken to see the *wahhabiyya* as global or deterritorialising from its outset. In its original instantiation, the movement rather exhibits the opposite dynamic; a dynamic of

territorialisation and of the building of political structures through the drawing of clear boundaries. While the Wahhabi counter-religion suspended ancient alliances and filiations, it simultaneously served to inscribe a new political order on a certain territory, pitting a Saudi-Wahhabi *inside* – a realm of true religion – against an apostatised *outside*.

This process of territorial inscription is discussed by Carl Schmitt in his work *The Nomos of the Earth*. Schmitt points to the constitution of a political formation through a process of *Landnahme*; a term signifying 'land-appropriation' in its literal translation but evoking broader notions of colonisation, settlement, and submission of an anarchic environment to political authority in its original German. This process of *Landnahme*, Schmitt argues, represents the coming together of political order (*Ordnung*) and spatial ordering (*Ortung*): through *Landnahme*, the political order is grounded in a specific territorial space, making *Landnahme* the constitutive process of all subsequent legal, political, and social structures (Schmitt 2011: 17 ff., 48-51). The establishment of such a unity of *Ordnung* and *Ortung* was absolutely key for the Najdi *ulama*: in their view, only a territorially grounded political order could ensure that theological purity would be upheld: anchoring the religious mission in a fixed territorial space under the rule of a political leader was the precondition for the enforcement of orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Mouline 2011).

In its subsequent history, the Saudi *ulama* establishment sought to buttress this unity of *Ordnung* and *Ortung*, political order and territorial space, with great zeal. Until well into the 20th century, this meant sealing the borders of the Wahhabi realm of purity and preventing polluting contact with the outside. In this regard, the 19th-century doctrine of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, commonly translated into English as 'allegiance and rupture', is instructive. After the misfortune of Egyptian-Ottoman conquest of the Peninsula that shattered the politico-religious Saudi-Wahhabi project, 'Abd al-Wahhab's grandson Sulayman sought to sharpen the boundaries between true and false religion by demanding allegiance to the (small circle of) true believers and radical separation from the world of unbelief. Today, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* as a concept has proved valuable for jihadist currents in their quest to globalise the fight against *kufr* (Wagemakers 2009). Yet the doctrine of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* is a double-edged sword in this regard, since its exclusivism does not necessarily bring about global expansion but can also yield the opposite reaction, namely an isolationist retreat to the local community. The *wahhabiyya* had from the start perceived itself as the lone upholder of Truth in a debased environment; and the exclusivist turn of the 19th century radicalised this sentiment: building on the *hadith* "whoever associates with the idolater and lives with him is like him", the *wahhabiyya* 'ruptured' with the outside. As a result, the movement strengthened its absolute territorial linkage with the Najd. Even the intellectual and scholarly connections with the outside world were broken: while in previous times aspiring *ulama* from central Arabia had travelled to study in Islam's major centres of learning (most notably Cairo and Damascus), they now stayed at home (Commins 2006: 30).

It is often argued that this exclusivism was embraced by an *ulama* class reeling from the shock of the demise of the first and second Saudi states and that, once stability returned, the *ulama* adopted a

more inclusivist stance (see e.g. Al-Fahad 2004). Whilst containing an element of truth, this perspective underestimates the profound distrust of the outside world and its polluting influence that has remained ingrained to the *wahhabiyya* well into the 20th century and up to this day. Only in the 1950s did the classically Wahhabi *ulama* began to engage with non-Wahhabi (conservative) Islamic intellectual production in a sustained way (Mouline 2011: 64). Concomitantly, they continued to reject the introduction of the telegraph or the addition of foreign languages to school curricula. Fearing the intrusion of 'false' religion from the Kingdom's outside, they also remained sceptical about contacts with foreigners abroad as well as about the presence of foreigners within Saudi Arabia (Commins 2006: 96-101). Some communities within the country also continued to practice an isolationist exclusivism in their daily lives, separating themselves from an environment they deemed impious (Lacroix 2011: 103-109).

All of this means that, when the Saudi state turned towards global *daʿwa* in the early 1960s, its *ulama* were in many ways ill-placed and ill-equipped to take up this mission. With the *wahhabiyya* having served as an inherently territorialising doctrine of *Landnahme*, the establishment scholars were wedded to a distinctly Najdi project of religiosity that united political *Ordnung* and territorial *Ortung* in the quest to create and buttress the Saudi-Wahhabi state. For much of its existence, the *wahhabiyya* had sought to insulate itself from an outside world that was perceived as impure and as a threat to the fledgling religio-political order of the Peninsula. Contact with this hostile world was only possible through jihad; and thus did not extend beyond the battlefields at the borders of the Saudi-Wahhabi realm. Conversely, outside observers perceived the movement as an Arabian oddity that was barbarian at best and heretical at worst (Mouline 2011: 143); a rejection that only served to enhance the *wahhabiyya*'s territorial linkage to the soil of Arabia, since it foreclosed any spread beyond the boundaries of the Saudi realm. Against this backdrop of localism, what explains the Saudi turn towards global *daʿwa* and what role did the Najdi scholars assume in it? The following section will seek to elucidate this question.

The turn towards global missionary activity

When the third Saudi state was consolidated by 'Abd al-Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Saʿud in the first half of the 20th century, the old pact between the *ulama* and the Saudi political leadership was revived. With the realm emerging as a new state in an international system composed of territorially delimited entities, Saudi religious leaders had to recognise the bordered nature of the nascent Kingdom, which also meant recognising "the symbolic, cultural, and geographical boundaries of the True religion" (Mouline 2011: 133). Once more the *ulama* displayed their weddedness to a territorial project of *Landnahme* rather than global missionary spread: when, in the late 1920s, the Bedouin *Ikhwan* militias rejected the territorial limitations imposed on the Saudi-Wahhabi project and pushed for raiding and conquering British-administered Kuwait and Iraq, the *ulama* issued no less than 17 *fatwa*s between December 1928 and January 1930 reprimanding the *Ikhwan* (ibid.: 141 f.). Within the frontiers of this project, the *ulama* quickly resumed their control of the social realm, exercising juridico-religious functions and enforcing the *wahhabiyya*'s public morality. In this context, the *ulama* embarked upon an ambitious

course of homogenisation of the populations under their control that was to ensure the endurance of the Saudi-Wahhabi political order. The *ulama* – and in particular the family of the Al al-Shaykh – thus emerged not just as an important societal elite but as an integral part of the state apparatus and as one of the two heads of the duocephalous Saudi regime (Lacroix 2011: 8 ff.).

As Nabil Mouline (2011) shows, the state-building enterprise necessitated an *ethics of responsibility* on the part of the establishment *ulama*: they had to do whatever it took to ensure the well-being of the Saudi-Wahhabi realm; a lesson that the painful 19th-century history of *fitna* had driven home very clearly (Steinberg 2005). After the *wahhabiyya* had finally completed its project of *Landnahme* by attaining dominance on the Peninsula and integrating into the international arena, the most important threat to the cohesion and indeed the very survival of the Saudi-Wahhabi political *Ordnung* and territorial *Ortung* appeared to come from the abroad: the currents of pan-Arabism, socialism, and republicanism, dominant in the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s, sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Saudi-Wahhabi entity. Successive waves of strikes disrupted oil production in the Eastern Province, symbolising the arrival of previously unknown modes of dissent. Pan-Arabist officers attempted a military coup. Through the *Sawt al-ʻArab* radio station, Nasserist propaganda openly called for the toppling of the rulers of Arabia (Al-Rasheed 2010: 102-129). The various mergers of states in the Arab world – most notably the Egyptian-Syrian formation of the United Arab Republic – put into question the stability of the territorially-grounded political order in the region. In line with their *ethics of responsibility*, the *ulama* thus had to act.

In the context of the 'Arab Cold War' against Egypt and pan-Arabism, Saudi Arabia—and its American ally—were in desperate need of a counter-ideology. They found it in the Kingdom's ability to have recourse to an Islamic idiom, forging an image of Saudi-Arabia as the benefactor of Islamic causes the world over and creating the requisite institutions to back up this image. This highlights that the decision to develop a more global Islamic discourse sprang not so much from the ingrained globalism of the Saudi *wahhabiyya*; rather, as Michael Farquhar points out, it "was driven, enabled and administered by nationally-situated dynastic actors and interests" (Farquhar 2013: 47). Against pan-Arabist propaganda, it was designed to buttress the beleaguered Saudi state internationally as well as domestically. In both arenas, the embattled Saudi-Wahhabi project was to be cast in a new light of Islamic solidarity (*al-tadamun al-Islami*) and pious leadership (ibid.: 111-120).[3]

Yet the nascent policy of global *daʿwa* also served to reinforce the pact between the *ulama* and the Al-Saud. The processes of Saudi state-building were profoundly transformative and thus did not

[3] In this context, it is worth noting that the Saudi-Wahhabi elites were not alone in seeking to mobilise Islamic sentiment for their own national political agenda. Pakistan began sponsoring Islamic conferences in the late 1940s in order to enhance its international clout. Similarly, the Egyptian Free Officers created the Islamic Conference in 1954. Gamal Abdel Nasser secured the participation of King Saʿud in this organisation by asserting that the idea for it had come to him upon the occasion of Ibn Saʿud's burial (Schulze 1990: 109-122). Through the 1961 nationalisation of Al-Azhar, the Egyptian regime developed its own capabilities to project an Islamic discourse abroad (ibid.: 151-158); a development that send shivers down the spines of Saudi Arabia's Western allies (Farquhar 2011: 112 f.), who were reassured to witness the foundation of the Saudi-dominated Islamic University of Medina later that year.

always proceed in a consensual fashion. While the *ulama* were willing participants in this endeavour, they regularly critiqued the precise features it took. Already Ibn Saʿud had embarked on a campaign of modernisation that put the *ulama* ill at ease because of its impact on social mores (Steinberg 2005: 24). Faysal, the ostentatiously 'Islamic' monarch, pursued an even more rapid trajectory of technological and social change; a fact that could hardly be concealed by his recourse to conservative Islamic rhetoric (Al-Rasheed 2010: 116-124). The clash between *ulama* and the political powers over the introduction of codified law and the requisite courts epitomised the *ulama*'s fear that the state they had helped to build would slip beyond their control and be governed exclusively by the secular law of the Al-Saud (Feldman 2008: 92-102). The creation of the secular University of Riyadh in 1957 was a particular thorn in the side of the *ulama* class since it threatened their position of dominance in the educational sector (Schulze 1990: 159). As a consequence, re-emphasising the Islamicality of the Kingdom and its policies, as well as projecting this image globally, offered renewed prestige as well as new institutional strongholds to an *ulama* caste that was keen to preserve its position on the Saudi politico-religious scene. At the same time, no Saudi dynastic actor could afford to antagonise the *ulama* if he sought to attain and conserve his power. This meant that both Saʿud and Faysal, who were engaged in a struggle for dominance in the late 1950s and early 1960s, had every incentive to bring the scholars to their side (Farquhar 2013: 113 ff.)

The result was the creation in quick succession of a range of institutions designed to propagate a Saudi-approved version of Islam in the world. In 1961, the Islamic University of Medina (IUM) was inaugurated. From the very start, it aimed to for a share of at least 75 per cent internationals among its student body (Commins 2006: 112). The Saudi state offered generous full scholarships to the attendees of this institution in order to enable them to study its conservative curriculum. After a slow start, by 2011 the University catered to 13,000 students from 160 countries (Farquhar 2015: 25 ff.). Many of the IUM's graduates then return to their countries of origin in order to spread the Saudi *daʿwa*. To this end, the Muslim World League (MWL) has proved important: created in 1962, the MWL was to provide a supra-national forum bringing together leading scholars and intellectuals from throughout the Muslim world under a Saudi-Wahhabi dominated roof (Schulze 1990). The MWL subsequently has sought to foster the global learning of the Arabic language, has funnelled generous financial aid to mosques and Islamic institutions across the globe, and has sent MWL emissaries – often graduates of the IUM – to Muslim communities. It has also sought to coordinate with a wealth of other Islamic organisations, to develop united positions on matters of *fiqh*, to create an 'Islamic' press landscape and to foster Islamic social work (ibid.: 266-313).

Other organisations followed, such as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) formed in 1972. Through them, the Saudi *wahhabiyya*, the 18th-century doctrine of *Landnahme* that had always insisted on the unity of a political *Ordnung* with a distinctly territorialised *Ortung*, went global. While its globalisation was primarily driven by the wish to shore up its embattled position at home and in its

immediate neighbourhood, the *wahhabiyya*'s global turn nevertheless brought new problems on its Saudi home turf. It is to these problems that the essay now turns.

Erosion of the Wahhabi unity of *Ordnung* and *Ortung* at home

As was highlighted in the previous section, the *ulama* supported the expansion of the Wahhabi *daʿwa* and benefited from it, insofar as it reinforced their position in the Saudi domestic field. Yet at the same time, right up until this globalising moment, the Saudi clerical establishment had remained exclusivist and inward-looking, in line with their historical role as the gatekeepers of a Najdi process of territorial *Landnahme* with distinctly xenophobic overtones. On these grounds, Farquhar notes that the IUM's success in attracting international students "presents something of an empirical puzzle" (Farquhar 2015: 27). This puzzle is epitomised by Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh: towering figure of the Wahhabi religious establishment until his death in 1969, he supported the creation of the IUM and of the other institutions of the global *daʿwa*. Yet when it came to his own teaching activities, he followed the traditional patterns of teacher-student relations, only giving lessons at a mosque near his home in Riyadh and eschewing any Western-style, mass-based educational techniques (Commins 2006: 124). Similarly, the classical *wahhabiyya* only began using the printed materials as a way of communicating with the public in the 1950s. It refused to use pictures in these printed products until 1972 (Schulze 1990: 253 f.). Engaging in global proselytisation was, therefore, a tall order: as Lacroix puts it, while they were broadly supportive of a global turn in order to combat Nasserist propaganda, "the very traditional Wahhabi ulema were quite incapable of engaging in a political debate of this magnitude" (Lacroix 2011: 41).

As a result, the classical *wahhabiyya* did not emerge as the dominant current in the new institutions dedicated to the global calling. In the IUM – as in the entire expanding educational sector of the Kingdom at the time – only the top echelons were staffed by members of the Najdi *wahhabiyya*, with the future Grand Mufti Ibn Baz playing an important role in the institution's early years. Yet the IUM's Advisory Council was already significantly more international; and the university's teaching staff was majoritarily non-Saudi and was affiliated with a range of Islamist and Salafist movements (Farquhar 2013: 136-158). Of particular importance were Muslim Brotherhood activists – especially those of a Qutbist orientation – that flocked to Saudi Arabia against the backdrop of the Nasserist crackdown on the movement in Egypt. Educational staff remained heavily foreign and often marked by an outlook close to the Muslim Brotherhood until the 1990s. By then, the Saudi authorities strove to cleanse the university of elements it deemed too politicised or subversive. Yet while university personnel was replaced by quietist Salafi strands respectful of the Saudi rulers, university curricula continued to bear the marks of intellectual influences that went far beyond what the core Najdi *wahhabiyya* considered 'orthodox' (ibid.: 189-222). Thus, "any description of the university as a Wahhabi institution must be considerably qualified" (Farquhar 2015: 30).

Similarly, the MWL was ostentatiously headed by the Wahhabi establishment. Yet its ranks were filled by individuals whose theology and politics did not necessarily reflect Najdi orthodoxy.

Schulze observes that, beyond than the Najdi *wahhabiyya*, three other intellectual currents have been at work in the MWL: the Hijazi neo-*wahhabiyya* with its strong embeddedness in the educational and press landscapes the Western edge of the Arabian Peninsula; a classically *salafi* faction with a strong focus on matters of *fiqh*; and the Muslim Brotherhood-style neo-*salafiyya* that was much closer to the Hijazis than the Najdis in its more cosmopolitan and more politicised worldview (Schulze 146 ff.). The *wahhabiyya* managed to supply, broadly speaking, the theological framework within which the MWL operated; yet the classical Wahhabi scholars were always a minority at the League: already at the founding conference in 1962, they were far outnumbered by neo-Wahhabi, Salafi, and neo-Salafi scholars, joined by a smattering of notables and other scholars (ibid.: 199-209).

Importantly, none of these groups shared the history of the *wahhabiyya* as the upholders of a distinctly (central) Arabian ethos of *Landnahme*. They were, rather, much more transnational in their outlook: the neo-*wahhabiyya* could draw on the long cosmopolitan history of the Hijaz, crossroads of pilgrims and civilisations; the *salafiyya* had developed as a self-consciously supra-national because pan-Islamic response to European encroachment; and those affiliated with the neo-*salafiyya* had their own vision of the world, marked by the cross-fertilisation of religion and politics and shaped by their biographies of migration. This made them the ideal partners for the *wahhabiyya* to develop the structures necessary for a global *daʿwa*; yet it also rendered them suspicious in the eyes of the Najdi scholars: these exogenous traditions were not party to the original Saudi pact of political *Ordnung* and spatial *Ortung*; in fact, their deterritorialised nature held the potential of destabilising the very fundamentals of *Ordnung* and *Ortung* the Saudi state rested upon. The arrival of these new currents of thought signified the erosion of the 'rupture' that classical Wahhabi scholars had sought to uphold between themselves and the outside world.

Wahhabi suspicion was frequently on ample display. When Ibn Saʿud allowed the establishment of schools linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1940s, the *ulama* were appalled and managed to sabotage the new institutions by discouraging Najdi elites from sending their children there and by sidelining the school's graduates (Mouline 2011: 147 ff.) When the IUM was established one and a half decades later, many members of the *wahhabiyya* quickly came to fear it as a stronghold of doctrinal impurity and religious unorthodoxy. For instance, in the aftermath of the siege of the Great Mosque in Mecca by the group surrounding Juhayman al-'Utaybi in 1979, "the IUM was viewed in some quarters as part of the problem, its very project of drawing in foreigners for missionary purposes seen as being inherently bound up with the potential for religious and political corruption" (Farquhar 2013: 131). A Riyadh-based Imam stated that "[a]n atmosphere favourable to heresy existed [in Medina] because of the presence of large numbers of foreign students" (ibid.: 131, footnote 131). Especially the free-wheeling interpretations of neo-Salafi thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb or Abul Aʿla Mawdudi were anathema to the classical *wahhabiyya*. Yet if the IUM was to attract foreign students, it also had to offer curricula that went beyond the arcana of Najdi Wahhabi theological debates (Farquhar 2013: 189-222). The same applied to the WAMY, whose publication list features Muslim Brotherhood works rather than classical

Wahhabi texts (Cummins 2006: 153), and whose structures are dominated by the Brotherhood's Hijazi networks (Lacroix 2011: 66 f.).

The Saudi embrace of global *daʿwa* thus did not lead to a straightforward projection of Najdi doctrines on to a receptive outside world. In fact, the initial consequence was the contrary: the very creation of the structures necessary for building the transnational missionary enterprise was based on a reversal of intellectual flows, with Saudi Arabia receiving large numbers of Salafi and neo-Salafi scholars and intellectuals staffing the newly created *daʿwa* institutions. As a result, the walls of separation that the Najdi ulama had built to protect their territorially inscribed realm of purity from polluting outside forces were submerged by the waves of global Islamic activism. This influx of doctrines that the classical Wahhabis would label as 'heterodox' came to full fruition in the early 1990s: at that moment, the first generation of Saudis schooled in neo-Salafi educational establishments and socialised in youth organisations affiliated with Muslim Brotherhood networks mounted the most formidable opposition force the Kingdom had seen. The so-called *Sahwa* movement managed to break the classical *ulama*'s monopoly on religious discourse and – for a brief moment – to shatter the barriers that insulate different sectors of Saudi society from one another, forming a cross-cutting Islamically-grounded social movement (Lacroix 2011).

The choice on the part of the ruling groups to make Saudi Arabia a hub of global *daʿwa* also led to a ballooning of private sector Islamic activism on a global scale. Missionary zeal has not been contained in the state-created and state-controlled organisations of IUM or WML only. In fact, given the ability of e.g. Muslim Brotherhood networks to carve out a niche for themselves in these state institutions, the very boundary between public and private Islamic activism becomes somewhat blurry. Initially, the establishment welcomed private religious initiatives (Mouline 2011: 183-187). Yet after the *Sahwa* uprising, authorities sought to re-regulate the sphere of private religious activism, closing down various informal neighbourhood NGOs and prohibiting the collection of donations for Islamic causes outside official channels (ibid.: 210). Yet apparently this crackdown proved inconclusive, since Saudi Arabia proceeded to introduce further measures for regulating private *daʿwa* activities and financial flows after jihadist attacks on its home soil from 2003 onwards (Murphy 2011). A leaked cable by the US State Department nevertheless complained subsequently that while Saudi Arabia was keen to curb those charities and funding flows that it deemed dangerous to its own domestic stability, private donors were still free to contribute to almost any Sunni group worldwide (WikiLeaks 2009).

The committee of Wahhabi ulama affirmed in a 2010 *fatwa* that all forms of terrorism financing were forbidden, and surveillance of the financial sector was further increased (Mouline 2011: 323). Yet doubts remain as to whether the genie can be put back into the bottle. Even if the domestic Saudi space for private charitable activities beyond the purview of state-sanctioned institutions should be further limited, Saudi donors can still operate via neighbouring Gulf countries with exceedingly lax regulations, most notably Kuwait (Dickinson 2013). This inability to control the private sector further demonstrates

the extent to which the pursuit of *daʿwa* beyond the territories submitted to the Saudi-Wahhabi *Landnahme* has resulted in the erosion of the previously aligned dimensions of political *Ordnung* and spatial *Ortung*: as the Saudi religious mission has become deterritorialised, local and global forces have become intertwined in complex ways. Transnational forces have penetrated the domestic Saudi religious realm, hybridising and further globalising it in the process. Against this backdrop, the following section will discuss the impact the Saudi *daʿwa* has had abroad: to what extent has the Saudi establishment been compensated for the challenges to its domestic ordering project by a gain in global clout?

The impact of the Wahhabi *daʿwa* abroad

The assumption is widespread that the extension of Saudi-funded missionary activities – and/ or of missionary activities of a diffusely 'Salafi' or 'Wahhabi' nature (whatever is meant by these terms in particular) – have translated into Saudi hegemony over the Sunni Muslim world. Gilles Kepel argues, for instance, that with the onset of the first oil boom (*al-tafra*), "Saudi Arabia obtained unlimited means to realise its ancient ambition of hegemony over the meaning of Islam at the level of the *umma*" (Kepel 2003: 118). Beyond the fact that here we find again the assumption – questioned above – that the *wahhabiyya* was an inherently global actor from its very start, Kepel asserts that the results of the Saudi *daʿwa* of the second half of the 20th century have been truly remarkable: "For the first time in 14 centuries of the history of the Muslim world, from one end of the *umma* to the other one can find the same books, the same cassettes, which come from the same circuits of diffusion" (ibid.: 122). In other words, the outcome of Saudi *daʿwa* has been an unprecedented homogenisation of Islam across borders; a homogenisation that has supposedly occurred on Saudi terms and on the basis of the *wahhabiyya*'s notions of Islamic religiosity.

These observations touch upon an important kernel of truth. It is undeniable that generous Saudi funding of preachers, mosques, and of conservative intellectual production has succeeded in pushing a certain form of Islamicality into the limelight. This peculiar religious form has to a certain extent managed to present its own understanding of orthodoxy and orthopraxy as the one true version of the faith; a development that has been referred to as the 'Salafisation' of Sunni Islam (Cesari 2013: 129-139). At the same time, however, a clear-eyed appreciation of the precise dynamics of these processes is necessary. More particularly, it must be recognised that generous Saudi spending on *daʿwa*, channelled through the MWL and related bodies, does not necessarily translate into straightforward Saudi control. At times, Saudi sponsors appear to have engaged in their funding activities by following a scattergun approach without inquiring too much about the nature and the loyalty of the recipients of their largesse (Roy 1994: 120). At other times, the Saudi quest to establish itself as the preeminent backer of Islamist movements against all other players vying for their allegiance has resulted in a "bidding war" that left considerable "margin of autonomy" to the movements in question (ibid.: 108). Thus, Kepel himself recognises that financial generosity has brought the Kingdom "a support at times more self-interested than sincere" (Kepel 2003: 124): while Islamic actors have been eager to obtain funding and have, for

this purpose, also shifted their doctrinal stance to some extent in order to fit Saudi predilections, they have been reticent to back the political agendas of the Saudi state.

A similar dynamic can be observed with respect to the individuals trained in Saudi Arabia's *daʿwa* institutions, first and foremost the IUM. Quite aside from the hybridisation of the IUM curricula noted in the previous section, Michael Farquhar also points out that "at least some students have exercised their own judgement of the worth of the religious knowledge and competencies made available at the IUM", finding ways of "negotiating desired outcomes without necessarily assenting to the central tenets of its Wahhabi-influenced mission" (Farquhar 2013: 49 f.). As a result, (former) students have exercised "considerable autonomy with respect to the university itself and the broader Saudi religious establishment" (ibid.: 50). To give but one example, Nina Wiedl describes how the leading figures of the German Salafi movement – a significant number of which are graduates of Saudi institutions such as IUM – have constructed patchwork ideologies in order to address their own distinctive needs. One of the scene's most prominent figures, Pierre Vogel, has asserted that in the German context it is legitimate and desirable for women to have a prominent role as public speakers at gender-mixed Salafi events. According to Vogel, *haja* ('necessity') in this case nullifies the prohibition on gender-mixing imposed by the doctrine of *sadd al-dhara'i'* ('blocking of the means') (Wiedl 2014). This represents a striking doctrinal innovation that would certainly be regarded with a high degree of suspicion by Saudi scholars.

This points to the need to conceptualise the rise of 'Salafism' in its diverse forms and instantiations as a phenomenon that exists independently of the Saudi turn to global *daʿwa*. As Roel Meijer (2009: 29) points out, "neither states, nor in fact Salafist schools themselves, are able to control the general flow of people, goods, and information, and even the different currents of Salafism – due to the diversity of books, videos, tapes, let alone what television has to offer in the form of shows." Without denying the enabling role played by Saudi public and private actors in fostering Salafism through *daʿwa*, the complexity of the phenomenon belies any attempt to reduce the rise of this religious movement to the mere flow of Saudi petro-dollars. Authors such as Meijer (2009), Eickelman and Piscatori (2004), or Roy (2004) discuss – from different and at times clashing perspectives – broader dynamics that render a certain Salafi habitus and theology appealing at the current historical juncture. According to Haykel, this appeal rests fundamentally on the notions that "religious knowledge can be acquired easily; [that] to become a scholar is not an impossible feat; and [that] Muslims are endowed with agency, and indeed are duty bound, to acquire this knowledge for themselves through a personal effort" (Haykel 2009: 45). This emphasises the fundamentally ambivalent, multifaceted, and uncontrollable nature of the religiosity that Saudi religious institutions – overseen by the Najdi *wahhabiyya* but staffed by a range of Wahhabi and Salafi currents – have helped to propagate. Global *daʿwa* has not brought global hegemony.

Conclusion

This essay has followed the evolution of the Saudi *wahhabiyya*'s missionary potential. Far from being an inherently global or globalising ideology, the movement emerged as a distinctly Najdi phenomenon

and served, until the mid-20th century, to create a bounded territorial state in Arabia: the *wahhabiyya* was, at its heart, a doctrine of *Landnahme* that propagated and enacted a particular unity of political order and spatially limited ordering on the Peninsula (section one). This very same political calculus, intent on upholding and buttressing the Saudi-Wahhabi territorial state, also explains the unlikely turn of the *wahhabiyya* to global missionary activity in the 1960s (section two). Yet the requirements of this transnational, deterritorialised *daʿwa* first of all had a dramatic impact on the domestic Wahhabi project, disrupting the unity of *Ordnung* and *Ortung* by exposing the previously insulated desert kingdom to the global forces of Islamic revivalism (section 3). This partial globalisation of the Saudi domestic sphere is matched by a partial Saudisation of global Islam, as Saudi-backed institutions have contributed to spreading a particular vision of Islamicality. Yet for the defenders of the classical *wahhabiyya* this victory must be somewhat pyrrhic, given the domestic loss of doctrinal purity, and given the fact that the multivocality of global Salafism ensures that it defies any quest for hegemony (section 4).

All of this might lead to the following question: if global *daʿwa* has been so problematic for Saudi actors, why is it still being pursued? Why continue an enterprise that is so treacherous? Two reasons for the continued centrality of *daʿwa* to Saudi policy may be adduced briefly. First, the *ulama* stand to lose much from a reduction of the commitment to proselytisation, in spite of the doctrinal impurities imported into the Kingdom by its exposure to global religious flows. The creation of missionary institutions was in part a means of redressing the balance in the relationship between political rulers and *ulama*. Any cutbacks would endanger a core fief of the scholars and threaten an open confrontation between political and clerical establishment. In fact, such a clash would be all the more inevitable today, since after the *Sahwa* uprising the ranks of the religious institutions have undergone thorough 'Saudisation'. This is a confrontation that presumably neither the scholars nor the Al-Saud are willing to engage in. Secondly, more than fifty years after the inauguration of the 'Islamic' foreign policy by King Faysal, the political leadership also still stands to benefit from religious initiatives. While the degree of straightforward 'control' over the religious field through institutions such as the MWL or the graduates of the IUM might be limited, these channels nevertheless enable Saudi Arabia to exercise some measure of influence over Islamic actors throughout the world. At the very least, these channels can be used to prevent Islamic organisations from aligning all too closely with Saudi enemies. While the days of the rivalry with Nasser's Egypt are long gone, the containment of Iran's appeal will be high on the Saudi agenda in this regard.

In the end, after Vice Chancellor Gabriel's comments mentioned in the introduction, Saudi Arabia did not build 200 mosques for refugees in Germany. What is more, in 2016 it was announced that controversial Saudi educational institutions would be closed in the following year (Breitenbach 2016). Allegedly, Deputy Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, the Kingdom's brash new strongman, was behind the decision. In breathless press reports, his plans were said to include "stop[ping] all activities that serve Wahhabism" (Donaghy 2016). The same sources also claimed that he would "complete the mission of becoming king before the end of the year [2016]" (ibid.). So far both of these developments

– ending the Kingdom's policy of *daʿwa* and a *de facto* putsch on the part of Muhammad bin Salman – have yet to materialise. Either move is a tall order; yet the former might be even harder to accomplish than the latter.

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