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Belief System of Wahabi Doctrine in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT: One important and most overwhelming issue in Muslim community is the dominance of the Wahabi doctrine in Saudi Arabia, which had been considered as the main religious ideology and the backbone of the Bedouin Arabs' unification in helping the politico-religious movement led by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab and Al-Saud family to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. By using the historical methods and qualitative-descriptive approaches, this paper examines the Wahabi doctrine and its influence; or in more specific way, to define the concept of the Wahabi doctrine, and how far it helped in establishing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as influencing several Islamic movements in other Muslim territories. The findings show that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is generally regarded as one of the earliest initiators of the Islamic reformation from as early as the 18th and 19th centuries, through the "Wahabiyah" movement. Besides that, the Wahabi doctrine also created several Islamic legal decisions or "fatwa" that for a few Muslim countries are not content with, such as rejecting a "fatwa" by most of the Sunni scholars that the Prophet Muhammad, after he died, can still intercede or "tawassul" with his God; rebuffing all "ijma" or consensus of the religious scholars after the death of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad; declaring other Muslim communities who do not accept the Wahabi doctrine to be infidel; and launching war against all innovations or "bid'ah" in Islam, being anti-modernization, and others.

KEY WORD: Wahabi Doctrine; Politico-Religious Movement; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab; Al-Saud Family.

ABSTRAKSI: "Sistem Keyakinan Doktrin Wahabi di Kerajaan Arab Saudi". Satu isu penting dan paling memberangsangkan dalam komuniti Islam adalah dominasi doktrin Wahabi di Arab Saudi, yang dianggap sebagai ideologi keagamaan utama dan tulang belakang penyatuan orang Badui Arab dalam membantu pergerakan politik-agama yang diketuai oleh Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab dan keluarga Al-Saud dalam membentuk Kerajaan Arab Saudi. Dengan menggunakan kaedah sejarah dan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif, makalah ini mengkaji doktrin Wahabi dan pengaruhnya; atau dengan cara yang lebih spesifik, untuk mendefinisikan konsep doktrin Wahabi, dan sejauh mana ia membantu dalam mewujudkan kerajaan Arab Saudi serta mempengaruhi beberapa gerakan Islam di wilayah-wilayah Islam yang lain. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa Kerajaan Arab Saudi pada umumnya dianggap sebagai salah satu pemula awal reformasi Islam sejak awal abad ke-18 dan ke-19, melalui pergerakan "Wahabiyah". Selain itu, doktrin Wahabi juga membuat beberapa "fatwa" (keputusan undang-undang Islam) bagi sesetengah negara Islam yang tidak puas hati, seperti menolak "fatwa" oleh kebanyakan ulama Sunni bahawa Nabi Muhammad, setelah Baginda meninggal dunia, masih dapat memberi syafaat atau "tawassul" dengan Allahnya; menolak semua "ijma" (konsensus ulama-ulama agama Islam) setelah kematian para Sahabat Nabi Muhammad; mengumumkan masyarakat Muslim lain yang tidak menerima doktrin Wahabi sebagai kafir; serta melancarkan perang terhadap semua "bid'ah" (inovasi dalam Islam), sebagai anti-pemodenan, dan lain-lain.

KATA KUNCI: Doktrin Wahabi; Gerakan Politik-Keagamaan; Kerajaan Arab Saudi; Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab; Keluarga Al-Saud.

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INTRODUCTION

The Wahabi doctrine was commonly associated with the teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, who was born in Uyaynah, Najd, in 1703; and died in Dir'iyah in 1792. Some researchers, however, indicate different dates for the birth and the death of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, such as Jacques Benoist-Mechin (1958), who mentioned that the Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab was born in 1696 (and died in 1792); while Phoenix (1999) stated that he was born in 1691 and died in 1736; and John Obert Voll (1999) cited also distinctly the period of life of the Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab as being in the bracket (1703-1787) and (1703-1791) respectively. Nevertheless, most of the dates, the birth and the death of the Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, revolve around 1703-1792 (*cf* Benoist-Mechin, 1958:48; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1992, 12:451; al-Jazairi, 1999:7; Attar, 1999:84; Phoenix, 1999; Rentz, 1999:55 and 57-58; and Voll, 1999:517).

It is called "Wahabi" after the Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, who was considered as the initiator of the doctrine.¹ Several terms, however, appeared in an attempt to classify the teaching of the Wahabi doctrine and the identity of its followers within the Muslim counterparts, such as *Wahabiyyun* or the followers of the Wahabi doctrine; *Wahabiyyah* or the Doctrine itself; "Protestantism" or "Puritanism of the Mohammedans"; "reformed Muslims"; and "Mohammedan

Muslims". The Wahabi followers consider themselves as *Al-Muslimun*, which may refer to the early Muslims called *Salafiyyun*; and *Al-Muwahhidun* or "Unitarian", due to their emphasis on the absolute oneness of God (Burckhardt, 1830:88; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1992, 12:451; Corancez, 1995:xi; and al-Juhany, 2002:1).

It would be a huge task for this paper to elaborate upon the authentic teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab that had influenced most of the Bedouin Arab community, especially in Najd territory, and it later also became the most dominant religious ideology in the Arabian peninsula throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. However, among the main essence of the teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, or the Wahabi doctrine, was deliberately a call for the return of all Muslim communities, specifically to the Arab-Muslim populations in the Arabian peninsula, to the original principles of Islam based on the *Al-Qur'an* (holy book of Muslims) and *Al-Hadith* (words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad) with the strict interpretation of the Hanbalite School, and a repudiation of all innovations contrary to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) and the early generations of pious Muslims.²

This explanation probably could be linked to the basic principle of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab's call to

¹The name of the "Wahabi" might also be related to Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab's descendant, from the Tamim tribe called "El-Wahaba". See, for further information, John Lewis Burckhardt (1830:274-275); and John Obert Voll (1999:517).

²This explanation was given by George Rentz (1999:54), and with some additional statements by John S. Habib (1978:3), however, it generally finds no difference from some discussions by other researchers. See also, for instance, Jacques Benoist-Mechin (1958:48-49); *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1992, 12:451); Henry Munson, Jr. (1999:66); and Madawi al-Rasheed (2002:16).

the Bedouin Arab community,³ in Najd in the 18th century, where in his eyes, they were not practicing true Islam sufficiently in their lives, or they were ignorant of Islam (Burckhardt, 1830:277). Prior to the rising of the Wahabi movement in the Arabian peninsula, and since the central authority of Islam had been transferred from Mecca and Medina to Damascus (the Umayyad period), Baghdad (the Abbasid period), and Istanbul (Ottoman empire), the religious life of the Arab-Bedouins in Najd, particularly the nomads, at that particular time, was in a gloomy situation. It was pictured as full of superstitious beliefs, such as cults of tree and stone worship, the manifestations of innovations (*bid'ah*) like visiting holy men's tombs, sacrifices to holy men, and others; and also the people lived in chaotic condition with little respect towards each other (Habib, 1978:3; Attar, 1999:8-14; Rentz, 1999:55; and al-Rasheed, 2002:16-17).

Although most of them still believed in God and the Prophet Muhammad SAW, they neglected ritual traditions, abiding by the laws of *Al-Qur'an* and *Al-Hadith*, such as not having faith in the day of resurrection after death, not performing prayer, fasting, and *zakat* (alms giving), their women not being allowed their legal share of property left by deceased relatives, and others (al-Juhany, 2002:153).

In fact not merely in Najd, but also during Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab's visit to Hijaz, Syria, and Iraq, he noticed a lot of deviations and innovations (*bid'ah*) being practiced by the Muslim communities, particularly by those affiliated with the Turks-Sunni

³The Bedouin Arabs here are specifically referred to those living in Najd territory, and the nomads, who most of them ignorant of Islam or only practicing traditional and customary beliefs.

Muslims,⁴ and the Shi'ah,⁵ who have to be "rehabilitated" to the true teaching of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (al-Juhany, 2002:153).

In the case of Turks-Sunni Muslims, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab was less disposed towards the philosophy and the culture of the way they carried out their religious duties and ceremonies. For instance, he disapproved of the blind acceptance of *fatwa* (legal decisions) by the *ijma'* of *ulama* for whom the medieval systems of Islam had the last word in religious matters, and allowed no independent thinking (new *ijtihad*) after a *fatwa* was produced.⁶ They rejected the use of *qiyas* (analogical method of reasoning) by following the stance of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and recognized only two authorities for the sources of Islamic jurisprudence, *Al-Qur'an* and *Al-Hadith*, along with the precedents of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Rahman, 1979:197-198); and considered asking for money in return for religious services, judgement, and advice as a kind of bribe (al-Juhany, 2002:155; and

⁴The Turks-Sunni Muslims can be linked to the rulers and the people of the Ottoman empire that dominated most of the Middle Eastern areas, including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and others or the representative of the Ottoman empire, such as the family of Sheriff from the Hashemite tribe in Hejaz, the Mamluk in Egypt, and et cetera.

⁵The Shi'ah can be considered as one of the major denominations of Islam, along with the Sunni (the majority of the Muslim community), which is closely associated with the strong defender of Ali's descendants in regaining Muslim leadership. But, in this case, it refers specifically to those Shi'ah living in Al-Hasa, situated on the east coast of the Arabian peninsula, and near the ports of the Persian gulf, like Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, 'Uqayr, and Qatif. See, for further information, Madawi al-Rasheed (2002:34-37) and John S. Habib (1978:9). For further explanation on Shi'ah, see S. Husain M. Jafri (1979:1-2 and 13-16).

⁶However, since the *Al-Hadith* authoritatively collected in the 3rd AH (*Anno Hijriyah*) or 9th AD (*Anno Domini*), followers of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab later modified and accepted the *ijma'* of the first three centuries of Islam as binding. See, for example, Fazlur Rahman (1979:198).

al-Rasheed, 2002:57).

They were strongly against the excessive culture of visiting the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and the families of the Prophet's companions, and even destroyed several shrines and tombs, including the monument over the tomb of Zayd ibn al-Khattab (one of the Prophet's companions, and the brother of the second Sunni caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab), and prohibited decorating mosques and others.⁷

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab and his followers regarded the Shi'ah as a breeding ground for innovations (*bid'ah*) in Islam, and also viewed them as *rafida* or those who reject faith (al-Rasheed, 2002:21, 41 and 64).⁸ This is due to the Shi'ah's intoxication with the supreme authority of Ali and his descendants by claiming their legitimate leadership over the Muslim community, and exercising a few religious activities which were not parallel (or had not been done before) with the original teaching of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

⁷Even, the Wahabi scholars ordered the destruction of the domed tombs of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and the Caliphs in Medina in order to discourage later visits and veneration by Muslims, when Sa'ud ibn Abdel Aziz (1803-1814) managed to establish temporary Sa'udi hegemony over Medina in 1804 (also Taif in 1802 and Mecca in 1803). For more information on how the Wahabi questioned the practice of the Turks, especially in regard to their manner to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, after he died, and also to his companions who died in the battlefield reference can be made to the work of John Lewis Burckhardt (1830:279-282); and see also *The New Encyclopaedia of Britannica* (1992, 12:451); Abdul Qadeem Zalloom (1999:6-7); Uwaidah M. al-Juhany (2002:154); Madawi al-Rasheed (2002:21); and Natana J. Delong-Bas (2004:25 and 66-69).

⁸In another study, it was mentioned that although Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab was adamantly opposed to Shi'ah (Shiism), he specifically targeted only one particular extremist sect, called the "Rafidah", which was argued by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, the sect assigned greater authority to their leaders in understanding and interpreting *Al-Qur'an* and Islamic law than the Prophet Muhammad SAW. See, for example, Natana J. Delong-Bas (2004:22 and 85).

These included considering Karbala in Iraq as their holy city, the place where the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, Saidina Husayn, and his followers were killed by Umayyad forces; and also having the annual rites of mourning for Saidina Husayn in Karbala as a symbol of remembering the struggle (or the suffering) of Ali's descendants in the Muslim world.⁹ This is a blend of pre-Islamic beliefs, some new practices (*bid'ah*), and the issues of methodology in the Islamic jurisprudence that Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab attempted to rehabilitate and emphasize in his religious call to all Arab-Muslims in the Arabian peninsula during the 18th and 19th centuries (al-Juhany, 2002:153-154).

The fundamental teachings of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, with the political combination of Al-Saud family, had successfully united most of the Arab-Bedouin community in Najd to occupy most of the Arabian territories, including Hejaz, Hasa, 'Asir, and others, in order to create the first, the second, and the third Saudi states from 1747 to 1818, 1824-1891, and 1902 until the present respectively, despite being halted twice by the Egyptian Governor, Muhammad Ali, under Turkish command, in 1818, and the Al-Rashidi family in 1891 (al-Jazairi, 1999:2-12 and 13-24; and al-Rasheed, 2002:23-25).

His doctrine also was arguably claimed to spread out outside Najd territory to other Arabian peninsula areas, such as Hejaz, Hassa, 'Asir, Tuba, Kura, Qatif, and a few other Arab-Muslim territories,

⁹In 1801, the Wahabi followers destroyed the tomb of the Imam Husayn in Karbala. See, for example, P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton & Bernard Lewis eds. (1970:70-72); *The New Encyclopaedia of Britannica* (1992, 10:738-739); William L. Cleveland (1994:34); and Phoenix (1999:403).

including Syria, Iraq, and others (Attar, 1999:74). Not only that, the influence of the Wahabi doctrine was also associated with other Muslim movements or certain individual figures beyond the Arabian peninsula, such as Sanusism in Libya;¹⁰ Mahdism in Sudan;¹¹ Sheikh 'Uthman Dan Fodio, 1754-1817, in northern Nigeria (Choueiri, 1997:8); Haji 'Umar Tal, 1794-1865, in West Africa (Choueiri, 1997:9); Syed Ahmed al-Bareely in India;¹² Haji Shariat Allah in Bengal (Rahman, 1979:204); and Haji Miskin in West Sumatera, Indonesia (Majid, 1990:46-47) during the 18th and 19th centuries; and also the Islamic reform movements in the 20th century led by Hassan al-Banna and Rashid Ridha.¹³

This article, by using the historical methods and qualitative-descriptive approaches (McCullagh, 1984; Bhatt & Bhatt, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln eds., 2000; Howell & Prevenier,

2001; and Elliott & Timulak, 2005), tries to analysis on the belief system of Wahabi doctrine in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Analysis will be focused on the Wahabi doctrine and its implications to social, political, religious, and other matters, not only in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but also in Islamic *ummah* communities around the world.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are discussions by several scholars on the teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab. It is generally believed, however, that there is no single change of element brought by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab into the religion of Islam. He only emphasized the old classical teaching of Islam, of which most of the Muslim followers had been ignorant (Burckhardt, 1830:275; Benoist-Mechin, 1958:49; Corancez, 1995:13; Phoenix, 1999:402; and Rentz, 1999:56), as John Lewis Burckhardt (1830) put it, as follows:

[...] Ibn Wahab not purify the existing religion, but they made the Arabs strictly observe the positive precepts of one certain religion (Burckhardt, 1830:285).

Even, during a discussion held in Cairo, Egypt, in autumn 1815, under the order of Muhammad Ali Pasha, between two religious scholars of Wahabism and the congress of *Ulama*, the latter found the Wahabis' teachings and their written documents not contradictory to the principal teachings of Islam (Burckhardt, 1830:283; and Phoenix, 1999:402).

Nonetheless, as the Wahabi doctrine began to be known to other Muslim countries, either by direct or indirect contacts or visits or any effects through the dissemination of information about

¹⁰Sanusism movement was led by Muhamad Ali al-Sanusi (1787-1859). See, for further information, Youssef M. Choueiri (1997:10).

¹¹Sudanese Mahdism appeared in 1881-1898 and was initiated by Muhamad Ahmad Abdullah (1844-1885). See Youssef M. Choueiri (1997:10-11).

¹²The religious movement of Syed Ahmed al-Bareely (died in 1831) was commonly regarded as the Wahhabite of India. See, for example, Qeyamuddin Ahmad (1966:17-18). Nevertheless, the religious movement by Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1762) could be considered as the pioneer of Islamic reformation (claimed being influenced by the Wahabi doctrine) in India. See also R. Upadhyay (2001).

¹³Qeyamuddin Ahmad (1966); Fazlur Rahman (1979); and Youssef M. Choueiri (1997) do not indicate that the above movements, except Hassan al-Banna's teaching argued by Fazlur Rahman (1979), were influenced by the Wahabi doctrine. The researchers only quote some data on these Islamic movements given by these researchers. Among the past studies, however, that link these movements with the Wahabi doctrine were, for instance, Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal (1988:120-123); Ustaz Mohd Kamil Hj Abdul Majid (1990:46-47); Ahmad Abdol Ghafour Attar (1999:85-86); George Rentz (1999:66); and Mohamed Zayyan al-Jazairi (1999:11). For Fazlur Rahman's presumption on the link between the *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (Hassan al-Banna's movement) with the Wahabi doctrine, see Fazlur Rahman (1979:200).

the outcome of Arabian reformation, especially in Najd,¹⁴ and also due to the different Islamic legal schools and cultures being practised in those Muslim countries,¹⁵ the teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab still created some differences among the non-Wahabi Muslim communities, particularly the Sunni-Muslims, despite a conference.¹⁶

As has been mentioned before, there are some religious issues that lead these two parties, the Wahabi followers and non-Wahabi (Sunni-Muslims) to have a few discussions between them. Those issues are, for instance, the concept of *tawassul* (intercede) where most of the Sunni scholars believe that although the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) had died, but he can still intercede with God for his people. However, this *fatwa* is refuted by the Wahabi doctrine, arguing that the Muslims would not be allowed to intercede with the Prophet Muhammad SAW for he died as a mortal as all other mortals (an-Nawawi, 1403/1983:307; and Phoenix, 1999:410).

Besides that, there are a number of methodological questions raised, including the interpretation of some of the *Al-Qur'anic* verses called “anthropomorphic”

¹⁴The researchers rephrase the statement written by Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal (1988:120) in explaining how the Wahabi doctrine influenced other Islamic movements.

¹⁵It may also, as John Lewis Burckhardt (1830:277) argued, the Wahabi followers do not accustom with the Turks-Muslims, and other Arab cultures (like Syria and Egypt) inevitably lead to some quarrels.

¹⁶It does not mean that the Wahabi followers are not Sunni, this is only to relate them with the founder of the doctrine, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab. Nevertheless, there are some Muslim scholars like Sheikh Imam Muhammad Abu Zahrah who questioned whether the Wahabi can be considered as Sunni as they are the followers of the thought of Ibn Taimiyyah who was not bound to any Islamic theological school. See, for example, Zamihan Mat Zin al-Ghani (1996:132).

(*mutasyabihat*), where the Wahabists emulate Ibn Taimiyyah's explanation.¹⁷ They, for example, do not interpret (*ta'wil*), or arguably attempt to assimilate the word of *istawa* with the nature of God's creatures¹⁸ in this *Al-Qur'anic* verse, in *surah* (chapter) Thaha, verse 5: “The Most Gracious (Allah) rose over (*istawa*) the (Mighty) Throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty)”, but consider it as the (Mighty) Throne that is suitable to God.¹⁹

Sunni scholars, however, are not in favour of the Wahabi's approach as this will lead to God's assimilation with His creatures. They endeavour to avoid inferring that the nature of God, such as the word “Throne”, is similar to or allied with any of His creatures. They prefer to apply the word “Throne” as *Irtifa* (Arabic word), which means “high” or the indication of God's power and His commands to all creatures upon the universe.²⁰

Furthermore, the Wahabis also discouraged the Muslims from merely

¹⁷Or looks similar to the Ulama Salafi where they do not interpret those *Mutasyabihat* verses. A discussion, through a letter containing questions and answers, with Ustaz Haji Muchlis Sitanggang, *Ma'had Tahfiz Al-Qur'an wal-Qiraat*, State Mosque of Sabah, Malaysia, on February 26 – March 2, 2004.

¹⁸A discussion, through a letter containing questions and answers, with Ustaz A. Aero, a religious teacher at SMUI (*Sekolah Menengah Ugama Islam* or Islamic Religion Secondary School) Toh Puan Hajjah Rahmah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, on February 26 – March 2, 2004. See also Muhammad ibn Halifah at-Tamimi (1414/1994:87); and Sheikh Yusof ad-Dajwi (1401/1981:331).

¹⁹The translation of this *Al-Qur'anic* verse (from the Arabic language) is adopted from Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali & Muhammad Muhsin Khan (2000:414). This translation circuitously signifies the nature of the authors' interpretation to the Wahabi doctrine as it printed in the Kingdom. See also Al-'Allamah Muhammad Khalil Harras (2003:25-27).

²⁰See, for example, Mahmud Yunus (1973:448-449). See also the explanation of the verse in the footnote of Zamihan Mat Zin al-Ghani (1996:50); and also a discussion with Ustaz Rahim, Education Attache of Malaysian Student Department of London, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK (United Kingdom), 12.30 – 1.30 PM, on March 20, 2004.

depending on the authority of medieval schools, or *ijma'* by any *ulama'* who had the last word in Islamic jurisprudence,²¹ in which no independent thinking (*ijtihad*) was allowed. Instead they encouraged all Muslims to emphasize only the text of the two authoritative sources, *Al-Qur'an* (holy book of Muslim) and *Al-Hadith* (words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad), along with the precedents of the Prophet's companions, and urged them to exercise independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) rather than applying *qiyas* (analogical method of reasoning) in interpreting the legal sources or making any Islamic laws (Rahman, 1979:197-198).

The Wahabis' strict approach, however, was not shared by Fazlur Rahman (1979), because by only emphasizing the text of the two divine sources, it will, in some way, lead to ultra-conservatism and almost absolute literalism, and the intense use of independent reasoning (not covered by any divine text) rather than *qiyas* (as it has restrictive principles and a code of ethics developed by medieval legists) will generate more liberal forces to interpret the divine text further freely. In other words, Fazlur Rahman had said, as follows:

Although [...] the Wahabis were much more fundamentalists and literalists so far as the body of the text of the Scripture is concerned, their *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), in the long run, proved to be much less literalist and restrictive than the *qiyas* of the Ulama (Rahman, 1979:198-1999).

Moreover, most of the Sunni-Muslim scholars are not at ease with the strong *fatwa* of the Wahabis on several new religious practices performed by some Muslims, for the Wahabis considered

them as innovations (*bid'ah*). Those new practices include building shrines on the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him), and his companions, decorating mosques,²² dressing Ka'aba with any kinds of clothes,²³ and smoking tobacco (Phoenix, 1999:410). The same goes too for a few customs or ethics, such as considering asking for money in return for religious services (like judgement or advice) as a kind of bribe, prohibiting the marking of Muslim graves with any shrines (Corancez, 1995:14; and al-Rasheed, 2002:52 and 57), and also the attitude towards modern life including proclaiming (by some of the Wahabi zealous followers) the use of modern technological devices, including wireless telegraphy, telephones, television, and others as innovation or *bid'ah* (Rentz, 1999:64).

The Wahabis considered the doers of these practices not to be true Muslims, and in need of rehabilitation. If they refuse to accept the Wahabi doctrine, the Wahabis will view them as "infidel", and unavoidably war have to be declared against these infidel people (al-Ghani, 1996:133; and Zahrah, 1996:209). Yet, this *fatwa* was negated by the Sunni-Muslim scholars, as they believe that the doers of innovations (*bid'ah*) cannot be simply considered as infidel where a war against them can be justified. This is because those innovations have yet to fall within the idolator (*mushrik*) categories, which may not require harsh

²²Louis Alexandre Olivier de Corancez (1995:13) mentioned that no decorations are to be found inside their (the Wahabis) mosque.

²³For example, in 1806, Ibn Sa'ud asked the Egyptian and Syrian pilgrims to stop the tradition of the Holy Carpet (*Mahmal*) in which they annually dressed the Ka'aba with sumptuous gold-inscribed velvet hangings in an impressive ceremony. See, for further information, Mohamed Zayyan al-Jazairi (1999:14).

²¹However, their opinion of *ijma'* was changed later.

punishments like declaring a war upon the doers or killing them.²⁴

Besides, those arguments that asserted that the Wahabi doctrine influenced some Islamic movements in other Muslim countries were also questionable. For example, the movements of Haji Shari'at Allah in Bengal and Syed Ahmed al-Bareely in India were arguably not under the influence of the Wahabi doctrine. When Haji Shari'at Allah visited Mecca for pilgrimage in 1782-1802, Hejaz had yet to fall to the hands of Al-Sa'ud family (Mecca was only occupied a year later), while when Syed Ahmed al-Bareely stayed in Mecca in 1822 (also for pilgrimage), the Ottoman empire had already retaken Hejaz from the administration of the Al-Sa'ud family. On both occasions, it would be difficult for these leaders to receive the teachings of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab easily (Rahman, 1979:203-204).

While for other Islamic movements, such as Sanusism, Mahdism, and the Fulani Uthman Dan Fodio, although they resemble the Wahabis (emphasizing purification of faith and Islamic reformation), their method of struggle was a little different since the former (most of these movements) attempted to establish theocratic states, whereas the latter had not assumed political authority himself (he put more emphasis on religious reformation) but chosen to ally with the Al-Sa'ud family (Ahmad, 1966:21-22; and Rahman, 1979:210).

Along with that, several researchers believe that the Wahabi movement was mainly confined to peripheral areas such as Najd territories, and some other parts of the

Arabian peninsula (Choueiri, 1997:xi), only regarded as internal reformation against superstitious beliefs (Hiro, 1988:2), to rectify weaknesses (purify the faith) among local Muslim society (Esposito, 1984:32) or, at least, as Arab-Muslim awakening, or the solidarity (*'asabiyyah*) of the tribes, against the Sherif family in Hejaz and the dominance of the Ottoman empire, in the pursuit of power in the Arabian peninsula (Dekmejian, 1995:16), which seemed less convincingly inspired by Islamic movements in other Muslim territories.

It is of less doubt that the Wahabi doctrine invites some debate among researchers. However, it is not the focal point of this paper to further enhance those arguments for, as was said earlier, this study will give more attention to the possible influence of the Wahabi doctrine upon religious application in Malaysia based on its long religious relations with Saudi Arabia. Yet, it would be appropriate for the study to re-emphasize that most of the arguments (or the critiques) on the Wahabi doctrine were closely related to some of the fundamental teachings of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, and his rigid order upon the implementation of religious practices, including performing communal prayers, paying, *zakat* (alms giving), and avoiding a luxurious life that might lead to harsh punishment for those neglecting to carry out these duties (especially communal prayer and *zakat*), which to some extent also, was found to be avoided or inconvenient for other groups of Muslim communities (Burckhardt, 1830:59 and 282).²⁵

Making matters worse was the extreme

²⁴A discussion, through a letter contains of questions and answers, with Ustaz A. Aero, a religious teacher at SMUI (*Sekolah Menengah Ugama Islam* or Islamic Religion Secondary School) Toh Puan Hajjah Rahmah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, on February 26 – March 2, 2004.

²⁵Also a discussion with Ustaz Rahim, Education Attache of Malaysian Student Department of London, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK (United Kingdom), 12.30 – 1.30 PM, on March 20, 2004.

view held by some of the Wahabi followers on the prohibition of using modern technology in everyday life. In fact, this view was strictly upheld by the fanatical members of the Wahabis called the *Ikhwan*, commonly linked with Ibn Sa'ud's army to occupy some Arabian territories. Sometimes without former's command, the latter raided those Arab-Muslim people who did not accept the Wahabi doctrine as they believed that those raids could be considered as "holy war" upon infidels (el-Farra, 1999:155-156).

The zealous attitude of the *Ikhwan*, and especially their raids upon Ibn Sa'ud neighbouring territories like Kuwait, Transjordan, and Iraq (which also had been under the influence of the British government), forced Ibn Sa'ud to sign an agreement with Britain known as the *Al-Hada Agreement* on November 2, 1925, to determine the eastern and northern boundaries of Saudi Arabia (el-Farra, 1999:153), and eventually also to dissolve the group in 1929 to be replaced by the National Guard.²⁶ In other words, the major opposition of the Wahabi doctrine was not solely associated with the fundamental teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, but also with their extreme political activity and the frequent violent militarism pursued by the *Ikhwan*, which upset other Muslim

communities (Rahman, 1979:200; and Munson, Jr., 1999:67).²⁷

Despite the existence of some forms of rigidity in Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab's religious calls to the Arab-Muslim in the 19th century, there are several considerations that have to be taken into account. For instance, the nature of the Wahabi doctrine which stressed more on the purification of faith may found relevant to the religious situation in Najd in the 18th – 19th centuries, where the majority of the Arab-Bedouins were far from practicing the true principles of Islam. They become inebriated with the mystic life of traditional beliefs, which in some circumstances, led them to greatly admire certain objects or individual figures whom they believed had spiritual power and could be asked for any help (Abualrub, 2003; Commins, 2009; and Valentine, 2015).

There were also other factors which influenced the teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, for instance, since most of the Najdi *ulama* prior to the rise of the Wahabi movement went to Syria and Egypt to study under the Hanbalite school, which was well-known for its firmness in generating a *fatwa*,²⁸ until a Hanbali leading centre developed in Al-Hasa, it too might indirectly form some basis of religious rigidity application in Najd (al-Juhany, 2002:133).

²⁶The main source of the conflict was not only the *Ikhwan's* desire to spread the Wahabi doctrine to those territories, but also the effort of the British government to build the first of a series of police posts near the Najdi-Iraqi border. Ibn Saud protested claiming it violated the terms of the 1922 "Uqayr Protocols" that had established the border between the Najd and Iraq. In addition, the *Ikhwan* began to criticize Ibn Sa'ud's policies, including his diplomatic relations with Britain, the Islamic legitimacy of Ibn Sa'ud's personal conduct (his serial marriages with daughters of tribal *sheikhs* and slaves, and having luxurious life), and others. See, for further information, Henry Munson, Jr. (1999:68-69); Taha Osman el-Farra (1999:153 and 157); and Madawi Al-Rasheed (2002:66).

²⁷Also a discussion with Ustaz Hassan (a religious officer), Ministry of Islamic Endowments Call & Guidance Affairs, at 8.00–9.30 PM, on September 2, 2004, in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

²⁸This could be linked to Ibn Hanbal's (780-855 AD), the founder of the Hanbalite School, argument with the Khalif Al-Ma'mun (Abbasid period) about the nature of *Al-Qur'an*. The former believed that *Al-Qur'an* was God's uncreated word (*qadim*), while the latter followed the doctrine of Mu'tazilites, that *Al-Qur'an* was created. Ibn Hanbal's firm and orthodox belief led to his imprisonment. See, for further information, James Hastings ed. (1914:70).

Beside that, the impact of the theological thought of Ibn Taimiyyah²⁹ upon the founder of the Wahabi doctrine, in some ways, played a vital role in developing the attitude of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab towards Arab-Muslim communities in the Arabian peninsula (al-Ghani, 1996:132; Zahrah, 1996:208; and al-Juhany, 2002:157). This was compounded by the vague political situation, particularly in central Najd, which was based more on tribal confederations and without formal Ottoman presence, left a vacuum for Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab and the Al-Sa'ud family to freely "reform" the society according to his teaching as well as to form a kingdom to challenge the authority of the Ottoman empire (al-Rasheed, 2002:14).

Along with that, there were other views that might attempt to look at the Wahabi doctrine from other angles or rather in different ways, specifically on a few issues of innovations which were largely opposed by Sunni-Muslim scholars. For example, decorating mosques with luxurious ornaments could be regarded as an encouraging guidance for Muslims for not to be wasting their wealth without any restraint.³⁰ On one hand, the different

²⁹Ibn Taimiyya, or Taqi al-Din Abu-l-Abbas Ahmad bin Abdalhalim, a Muslim theologian of the 13 – 14th centuries, was familiar with his determined defendant of the old classical Islam. Beside that, his birthplace, Harran near Damascus, was regarded as a rigidly puritanical conception of religion and the strong representation of the Hanbalite school. Like Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, he also declared war against all innovations, and called upon his fellow Muslims to fall back upon the old traditional sources. Thus, it was often argued that Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab's teaching was merely a re-continuation of Ibn Taimiyya's movement. See, for further information, James Hastings ed. (1914:72); Zamihan Mat Zin al-Ghani (1996:132); and Mohd Radzi Othman (1996:11).

³⁰A discussion, through a letter containing questions and answers, with Ustaz Haji Muchlis Sitanggang, *Ma'had Tahfiz Al-Qur'an wal-Qiraat*, State Mosque of Sabah, Malaysia, on February 26 – March 2, 2004.

approach of the Wahabi doctrine, by emphasizing the Hanbalite school³¹ and the theology of Ibn Taimiyyah (in fact Ibn Hanbal was one of the disciples of Imam Asy-Syafe'i), may be found adaptable to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,³² owing to its culture and customs; and on the other hand, it might be a more difficult to apply in other Muslim countries. In other words, the variety of religious applications, especially in Islamic jurisprudence is unavoidable due to different cultures and customs of Muslim countries, and different Islamic legal schools may have their own understanding of what Imam As-Syafe'i had said on Ibn Hanbal: "I do not leave behind any one greater as a *faqih* or more pious and learned than Ahmad

³¹There are some arguments that in practice, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab turned the exercise of *ijtihad* into an almost literal imitation (*taqlid*) of the customs of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaibi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) and his companions as preserved in the scholarly legacy of the first two or three Islamic centuries. However, as was mentioned before, the Hanbalite school centre had been established prior to the emergence of the Wahabi doctrine, and even Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab went to Syria to learn this school. In other words, it was not unlikely that the legal thought of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab had not been influenced by the Hanbalite school. See, for further information, David Waines (2003:208).

³²In general, not only the Hanbalite school was being practised by Arab-Muslims in Saudi Arabia, but also other schools, especially the Hanafite school which still predominates in the Hejaz and part of the Eastern province. Nevertheless, the Hanbalite school forms the basis of *shari'ah* system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. See, for example, Farouk A. Sankari (1982:181); Ira G. Zepp, Jr. (1992:150); and Helmi Mohd Foad (2003). Also a discussion with Dr. Ahmed Y. al-Duraiwish, Associate Professor/College of Shari'a, Islamic Law Development, Imam Mohammed bin Saud, Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, at 1.00 – 1.45 PM, on September 1, 2004, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; and a discussion with Ustaz Hassan (a religious officer in the Ministry of Islamic Endowments Call & Guidance Affairs, Saudi Arabia) as the interpreter of the meeting, and informal discussions with a few Saudi Arabian students, such as Ayman al-Nasser (M.A. Student in Politics, on 5 February 2004, 3.00 – 4.00 PM, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK) and Omar Batarfi (Ph.D. Student in Computer Science, on 2 February 2004, 1.00 – 2.00 PM, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK), who were studying at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK (United Kingdom).

Ibn Hanbal” (cited in Hastings ed., 1914:70).³³

However, whatever the arguments on Wahabism, its firm emphasis on the absolute oneness of God (*tawheed*), the denial of all acts implying polytheism such as visiting tombs and venerating saints, and the advocacy of returning to the original teachings of Islam as incorporated in the *Al-Qur'an* and *Al-Hadith* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad SAW), with condemnation of all innovations or *bid'ah*,³⁴ helped the Al-Sa'ud families to build the Wahabi state, which later became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Delong-Bas, 2004; and Esposito ed., 2004).

After the dissolution of the *Ikhwan* in 1929, however, the Wahabi doctrine³⁵ was no longer as compelling in the kingdom as it was before. The *ulama* had only played rather limited role as Madawi al-Rasheed (2002) had stated, as follows:

[...] the *ulama* was confined to giving their opinions regarding the matters of Islamic ritual and technological innovations, of which the country would have no shortage in the coming years (al-Rasheed, 2002:68).

This limited role,³⁶ the subordination of religion to politics, however, was in line with the first alliance between Al-Sa'ud as the political *imam* and Sheikh

Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, who was responsible for spreading *da'wah* among the local population, and in contrast with certain leaders of the *Ikhwan* like Al-Duwaysh, Ibn Bijad, and Ibn Hithlays, who aspired to become the rulers in Najd, Hijaz, and Hasa (al-Rasheed, 2002:68-69).

CONCLUSION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is generally regarded as one of the earliest initiators of the Islamic reformation from as early as the 18th and 19th centuries, through the “Wahabiyah” movement. Through this doctrine also, as argued by some Arab researchers, it had stimulated the Arab awakening (especially the Arabs in the central Arabian peninsula, Najd territories) during the 19th century against foreign influence, for instance the Turks, as well as those local Arab rulers associated particularly with the Ottoman empire. It also triggered efforts to rise against some western powers, like France and Great Britain, which later perhaps indirectly also aroused several Islamic movements in other Muslim territories to participate in the calls for early Islamic re-awakening.

Besides that, the Wahabi doctrine also created several Islamic legal decisions or *fatwa* (legal decisions) that for a few Muslim countries are not content with, such as rejecting a *fatwa* by most of the Sunni scholars that the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him), after he died, can still intercede (*tawassul*) with his God; rebuffing all *ijma'* (consensus of the religious scholars) after the death of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW; declaring other Muslim communities who do not accept the Wahabi doctrine to be

³³Also a discussion, through a letter containing questions and answers, with Ustaz Haji Muchlis Sitanggang, *Ma'had Tahfiz Al-Qur'an wal-Qiraat*, State Mosque of Sabah, Malaysia, on February 26 – March 2, 2004.

³⁴See, for example, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1992, 12:451); and *Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia* (2002:1975).

³⁵This refers more to the period of the emergence of the *Ikhwan* until its disbanding in 1929, where the level of fanaticism was much higher. See, for example, John S. Habib (1978).

³⁶However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia still practises the teaching of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, which was based on the Hanbalite school and the theology of Ibn Taimiyyah.

infidel; and launching war against all innovations (*bid'ah*) in Islam, being anti-modernization, and others.³⁷

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The Wahabiyah Movement in Saudi Arabia

(Source: <http://www.sunnismo.com/historia>, 16/9/2016)

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