The Awakening of a Sunni Street

A study of causes and consequences of Sunni Muslim street mobilization in Bahrain

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Abstract

Following the Shia-dominated February 14th uprising in Bahrain, groups of Sunni Muslims counter-mobilized in the streets. In reaction to the uprising and the state's failed attempts at containing it, they voiced demands for political reform. This was something new to the political dynamics of the country. Traditionally Sunni Muslim groups in general have been loyal to the Sunni government, whereas the Shia Muslims, which constitute the majority of the population, have dominated the opposition.

This thesis discusses the causes of the Sunni Muslim mobilization and how it serves to complicate rentier rule in Bahrain. It argues that Sunni Muslims who mobilized saw the situation going from unfortunate to unbearable as the violent clashes between state and opposition escalated. By casting themselves as the real victims of the conflict the Sunni Muslims felt an urgent need to act to counter the development. Their negative sentiments towards the Shia Muslim opposition resonated with the government narrative that the uprising was an expression of Iranian expansionism. This contributed both to mobilization and victimization, and illustrates how ethno-religious lines shape Bahraini politics.

This thesis identifies three elements of the Sunni Muslim mobilization that may complicate the Bahraini government's ability to co-opt group formation. These are the ethno-religious dimension in Bahrain, the tension between hard-liners and moderates and the emergence of leaderless movements.

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Contents

1 Introduction

1.1   The Arab Spring in Bahrain

A few days after the fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt in the early spring of 2011, street demonstrations erupted in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. Shouting "Not Shia, not Sunni, just Bahraini", thousands gathered at the Pearl roundabout in the financial district of the capital, calling for constitutional change. Regardless of their non-sectarian message and the presence of demonstrators from both Shia and Sunni sects, the government labelled it yet another Shia Muslim uprising in the small island kingdom. According to the dominant government narrative, Iranian forces were working behind the scenes to topple the Bahraini regime. The fact that the majority of the demonstrators were Shia Muslims, the messages of support from the Iranian government and the vocal participation of the dominant Shia Muslim political society al-Wifaq fed into the same narrative. The uprising soon escalated into violent street clashes and several demonstrators and security personnel were killed. The uprising intensified until Saudi Arabian military forces entered the country in March 2011.

In reaction to the demonstrations new anti-uprising groups formed. On February 21st 2011 a "National Unity Gathering" drew tens of thousands to al-Fateh, the biggest Sunni Muslim mosque in Bahrain. From then on, the mosque became a focal point for the activities of the dominantly Sunni groups that were labelled, slightly misleading, as Sunni "pro-government" or "alternative opposition" groups. Most prominent amongst these were National Unity Gathering (NUG), led by the Sunni cleric Dr Abdelatif al-Mahmoud. NUG soon became an umbrella movement for a number of Sunni political groups, such as Salafi *al-Asalah* and the Muslim Brotherhood-associated *al-Minbar,* as well as some secularists. In addition to being vocally critic of the February 14th uprising for being violent, sectarian and pro-Iranian, the groups criticized the government for not providing security for its loyal citizens and for giving too many concessions to the protesters.

As 2011 came to an end, the anti-opposition demonstrations had calmed down. By then NUG had transformed into a political society, the Bahraini equivalent of a political party, rather than an umbrella for different Sunni Muslim groups. That cleared

the stage for a new movement of Sunni Muslims. Emerging from what had essentially been discussions and activities in online social media forums, they took their criticisms to the street in December 2011. What was later to be called *Sahwat al-Fateh* (The al-Fateh Awakening) came about as Sunni Muslim youths of both political and non-political background wanted to voice the demands of what they claimed to be the *ordinary* Sunni Muslims in the country. By aiming their activities both at the Shia protesters and the government they became both an ally and a concern for the political establishment. In addition to criticizing the uprising, they also voiced demands of a parliamentary reform, an independent judiciary body and denounced government corruption. Furthermore, they attempted to block any attempts at state-opposition dialogue being conducted. Indeed, they are still doing so to this date.

The street mobilization of the Sunni Muslims was a novelty in Bahraini politics, as the regime traditionally had been able to rally most of the Sunni Muslim minority against the Shia-led opposition. My argument is that the emergence of a Sunni street movement represents a new challenge to Bahrain's rentier system of government, by which political demands have effectively been co-opted by public spending and employment. Traditionally is has been the Shia Muslim majority that has proven difficult to co-opt. Their allegiance to the state has been questioned for fear of Iranian influence and they have been refused access to positions in the military, police or security services. The Sunni Muslim minority however has to a little extent mobilized politically and have mainly trusted the Sunni Muslim King Hamad to represent its interests. As this group has recently voiced political demands, identifying the interest of the Sunni Muslim street as being something different from the interests of the Sunni Muslim government, the rules of the Bahraini political game may change.

1.2   Explaining Sunni mobilization: Objectives and argument

This thesis aims to answer what caused the Sunni Muslim street mobilization in a Sunni-dominated rentier state like Bahrain, and identify implications of the mobilization for Bahrain's rentier rule. My analysis centres around three points of interest, covered in one chapter each. Firstly, I discuss why young Sunni Muslims in Bahrain come out in the streets to protest. By using the social movement theory of *framing* I outline the perspectives of the mobilized youths on the political situation in

Bahrain and why they chose to take to the street. I argue that fear was central in their mobilization because it contributed to redefine their framework for understanding the world around them. Their fear was mainly caused by the February 14th uprising and served to mobilize groups that formerly had seen political action as unnecessary. I also assess how political opportunities contributed to their mobilization.

Secondly, I discuss the organization of Sahwat al-Fateh, assessing how it drew boundaries between itself and the Sunni Muslim political establishment as part of their self-identification. I also discuss the movement's argument that it is anti-government, and argue that this is only valid for its tactical approach to containing the uprising.

Thirdly, I discuss how the rise of Sunni street politics has influenced the Bahrain's ability to co-opt social forces by identifying three factors complicating rentier rule. I argue that the Sunni Muslim mobilization underscores how ethno-religious dynamics in Bahrain shape group formation in the country. I also identify how the tension between hard-liners and moderates limit the political space of the Bahraini government. Finally, I assess how new leaderless movements in the region complicate the co-option of independent social forces through material welfare that the rentier theory proposes.

Before analyzing the subject matter, a theoretical, methodological and historical framework is in order. In the first chapter I discuss rentier state theory and social movement theory as a background for the discussions in chapters three to five. The first chapter also outlines my methodological approach and assesses the use of case studies, and provides an introduction to the sources this thesis is based on. It also contains a discussion of some important ethical questions in relation to my fieldwork in Bahrain. The second chapter gives an historical background for today's conflict. It outlines the relation between state and opposition in Bahrain since the 1920s, and discusses the split in the Bahraini opposition that occurred after the Iranian revolution. It also gives a brief outline of the political events in Bahrain following the February 14th uprising. The last three chapters present and analyse my findings, along the lines of the three points of interest outlined above.

1.3   The rentier state theory and political mobilization

The research question in this thesis identifies Bahrain as a Sunni-dominated rentier state. According to the rentier state theory street politics should be an easily contained phenomenon in such a state. The main assumption of the theory is that states that derive a large fraction of their revenues from external rents, as with petroleum-rich states in the Middle East, are able to buy off political dissent. Hence, these states are less prone to democracy. In this perspective, economic well being is the primary variable, influencing both popular political interest and expectations of participation in decision-making. Through the use of rent revenues a wealthy government is able to prevent the formation of social groups that operate independent of the state and that may be inclined to demand political rights.[1]

Ever since it was the first of the Gulf states to have a commercial oil well on stream in 1932, Bahrain has been heavily reliant on the income from this natural resource. There is no income tax in the country and today it retrieves 70-80 per cent of its revenue from oil. That is well within the requirement of the rentier theory that holds that a rentier state should retrieve 40 per cent of its income from rent. The bulk of Bahrain's oil production comes from the offshore field Abu Safah, which it shares with Saudi Arabia. The royal family owns the majority of land in Bahrain and distributes land and rent revenue both to reward supporters and for personal economic gain. The government's attempts at co-opting its citizens was according to Fred Lawson already visible in the 1950s when it began building strong links with the trading class in the country through giving them economic benefits.[2] In recent times the government's attempts at co-option have more often come as donations to forestall the development of political requirements. Like when the present King, right after he had taken over the rule of the country, granted all citizens a month's extra salary, gave free electricity to 10 000 families and gave financial donations to single parents and orphans.[3] The political and economic model the country runs on seems to square well with the assumptions of

[1] Ross, Michael (2009): *Oil and democracy revisited,* Mimeo, UCLA, p. 19-21
Gengler, Justin (2011): *Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf,* Ph.D. dissertation. The University of Michigan, available at: http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.no/p/selected-works.html, p.16
[2] Lawson, Fred (1989): *The Modernization of Autocracy,* HarperCollins Canada, Westview
[3] Wright, Steven (2008): *Fixing the Kingdom: Political evolutions and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain*, Centre for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University, Occasional Paper No. 3

the rentier state theory.[4]

Despite Bahrain's resource wealth, the political climate in the country has been unstable in the decades since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1971. The political buy-off that the rentier theory proposes has in fact not been readily available to co-opt the organized opposition and ensure political passivity. The American researcher Justin Gengler argues that the theory is unable to explain why the individual level-link between material contentment and political apathy is not applicable in Bahrain because the theory fails to operate on the individual level. It does not acknowledge factors beyond material contentment that explains why citizens may mobilize politically. In Bahrain, he finds this factor is the ethno-religious dimension. Gengler looks at why the popular relieve mechanisms of rentier states, such as high public employment and non-taxation, have failed to contain Shia Muslim political mobilization. The structural exclusion from the instruments and positions of power, in addition to a dissatisfaction with their collective share of the nation's oil revenues, have made the Shia Muslims unwilling to "take the bargain".[5] This thesis takes the argument further looking at how the ethno-religious dimension in Bahraini politics has been important in shaping the Sunni Muslim political mobilization after the February 14th uprisings. I hold that political participation is not a linear function of material well being in Bahrain. Rather it is also connected to other factors, such as religious identification and regional power struggles. A growing political awareness following the February 14th revolt shaped a new understanding of political priorities amongst some of the Sunni Muslims in Bahrain. These priorities were not necessarily in line with those of the government.

1.4 Framing, opportunities and resources: Social movement theory

Social movement theory (SMT) attempts to explain why individuals mobilize, how social movements occur and how they manifest themselves. There are several competing frameworks within SMT research emphasizing different factors when explaining

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[4] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): *Bahrain: Beyond the impasse,* online article published at Chatham House, available at: http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/183983
p. vi + 19, 22, 23.
Graz, Liesl (1990): *The Turbulent Gulf,* I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, London
Burke, Edward (2008): *Bahrain: Reaching a Threshold- Project on Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa*, FRIDE, Working paper 62, p.4
[5] Gengler, Justin (2011) : p. 2,3,4 / 36-37/ 41

mobilization. The most central are the concepts of framing, political opportunities and resource mobilization. The following is a basic outline of the basic features of the three concepts that will serve as a basis for my analysis of the Sunni Muslim street mobilization in Bahrain in chapter three.

Firstly, the concept of framing has been used to explain mobilization. Framing can loosely be defined as information that conveys differing perspectives on some event or issue.[6] In terms of social movement theory framing refers more specifically to the process of denoting a "schema of interpretation", according to Benford and Snow. That means a schema, or a frame, that individuals can use to perceive, identify and interpret the world around them. The frame that is created gives meaning to events and occurrences and can mobilize action, by for instance changing what was before seen as simply unfortunate to something unjust and unbearable. The frame that a movement develops is called a *collective action frame*. It is constructed as movement adherents negotiate a shared diagnosis of some problematic condition or situation and identify a need to change it. They then make attributions regarding who or what is to blame for the problem. After having articulated an alternative solution, they urge others to act together with them to create change. Potential adherents are convinced to participate by pulling them into the collective understanding of the situation, hence the collective action frames.[7]

Secondly, political opportunities theory is a structural perspective whereby activists` prospects for voicing demands and mobilizing supporters are context-dependent. When one attempts to explain why a social movement occurs then, the goals, strategies and tactics are not analysed in a vacuum. Rather, the theory emphasizes that the political context in which the social movement takes place, influences the mobilization. If a political opportunity opens up, there are greater chances of mobilization. The American sociologist Doug McAdam has articulated four such political opportunities that he argues increase chances for social movements to occur: An increasing popular access to the political system, divisions within the elite, the availability of elite allies and diminishing state repression. According to Charles Tilly, the doyen of social movement theory, these windows of opportunity are the most

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[6] Schaffner, Brian F. and Sellers, Patrick J. (2009): *Winning with words - The origins and impact of political framing*, Routledge, New York, p.X

[7] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): *Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment*, Annual Review of Sociology 2000. 26:611–39.
A further outline of framing is given in chapter 3.

important factors in sparking contentious episodes that may develop into social movements. However, that demands the opportunity is visible to potential challengers and perceived as a realistic opportunity. The structural opening itself does not lead to mobilization, but the activists taking advantage of it does.[8]

Thirdly, the resource mobilization theory proposes that access to resources plays a major role when social movements occur. Jenkins argues that "mobilization is the process by which a group secures collective control over the resources needed for collective action." Here, the term resources refers to anything from socioeconomic resources, such as jobs and savings, to nonmaterial resources, such as authority and skills. The major issues for a social movement are the extent of resources controlled by their group prior to mobilization efforts. If the group can gather their resources and direct them towards social change, mobilization is more likely to occur. The chances are further enhanced if the group can also pull resources from outsiders.[9] From this perspective movement actions are rational and actors will adapt their activities in response to the costs and rewards of different types of action.[10]

1.5 Explaining Sunni mobilization: Methodological approach

1.5.1 Fieldwork in Manama

The thesis is based on a qualitative case study that has retrieved the bulk of its analysis material from fieldwork conducted in Bahrain in March 2012. I have chosen a qualitative approach for two reasons. Firstly, the area I am studying is at the moment unmapped and understudied. To retrieve more information a qualitative approach must be used to gather the first line of evidence. Secondly, as Østerud emphasises, the actors I am studying are constructing their own identity. As a researcher it is difficult to understand this process without a flexible and comprehensive approach, which the

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[8] Beinin, Joel and Vairel, Frédéric (ed) (2011): *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, p. 5
 Meyer, David S. (2004): *Protest and Political Opportunities*, Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 30, (2004), pp. 125-145, published by Annual Reviews , available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/29737688
McAdam, Doug, Tarrow, Sidney and Tilly, Charles (2001): *Dynamics of contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 43
[9] Jenkins , J. Craig (2008): *Resource mobilization theory and the study of social movements,* in "Social Movements - A reader", edited by Vincenzo Ruggieri and Nicola Montagna, Routledge, London, p. 121
[10] Jenkins (2008): p. 119

qualitative method is.[11]

According to John Gerring, a renowned American political scientist, a case

> ... connotes a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. It compromises the type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain.[12]

By a case study he means "an intensive study of a single case with an aim to generalize across a larger set of cases of the same general type".[13] I chose a case study as the basis of my research because of its natural advantage in research of an exploratory nature since my object of study, Sunni Muslim street mobilization, is a somewhat new phenomenon in the Bahraini context. While a cross-case study may map out the occurrence or non-occurrence of a phenomenon, a case study can also explain specific features of an event and outline why, when and how it occurred.[14] Through the intense study of a case, I hope to gain a better understanding of the whole aspect of Sunni Muslim street mobilization by focusing on a key part, Sahwat al-Fateh.

I chose to study Sahwat al-Fateh because it represents the new wave of politically active Sunni Muslims in Bahrain after the February 14th uprising. In my opinion the group constitutes what Gerring defines as a "typical case" of the newly mobilized Sunni Muslim movements. That means a case that exemplifies what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon.[15] This is obviously difficult to establish before the research is conducted and a few conclusions are drawn. However, I argue Sahwat al-Fateh is a good case since it carries many similarities with other newly mobilized Sunni Muslim movements in the country. Combining social media and street activism, the group is made up of both former politically active youths as well as former inactive citizens. Their primary focus is on countering what they perceive as foreign influence in their country.

An implication for case studies is that the unit under special focus is not perfectly representative of the population. This is also the case in my study. Sahwat al-Fateh does not contain all the peculiarities of Sunni movements in Bahrain. However, even though my sample may not be perfectly representative of all newly mobilized Sunni Muslims,

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[11] Østerud, Øyvind ed. (1997): *Statsvitenskapelig leksikon*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, p. 134-135
[12] Gerring, John (2007): *Case Study Research - Principles and Practices*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 19
[13] Gerring, John (2007): p. 65
[14] Gerring , John (2007): p. 49
[15] Gerring , John (2007): p. 91

Sahwat al-Fateh still provides sufficient basis for the researcher to draw at least some general conclusions. A case study can be used on two levels simultaneously, the case itself and some broader class of cases. In this sense they are both particularizing and generalizing. According to Gerring it is the very fuzziness of case studies that grants them an advantage in research at an exploratory stage, because "the single-case study allows one to test a multitude of hypotheses in a rough-and-ready" way.[16] And even though I may not be able to establish clear-cut causal mechanism, this approach allows me to locate the intermediate factors between some structural cause and its purported effect. [17]

1.5.2 Sahwat al-Fateh: Interviews and statement as sources

I retrieved information about my case mainly through interviews with representatives of the 25-member Shura council[18] of Sahwat al-Fateh in Bahrain in March 2012. As Sahwat al-Fateh is a new and unstudied movement, conducting a fieldwork was in my view absolute precondition for writing my thesis. Interviewing them was essential to map how they view the world around them.

I used unstructured interviews since the main purpose was to learn the importance and emphasis my sources lay on the subjects covered. The aim was to collect empirical evidence by mapping the perspectives of my sources, meaning their cognitive and emotional understanding of the situation in Bahrain in the recent years.[19] In my interviews I used a list of broadly defined points I wanted to discuss and listen to the sources´ views on, rather than specific, pre-formulated questions. The sources were encouraged to elaborate on any part that seemed important to them. According to the Danish psychologist Jette Fog, the qualitative interview is the ideal method for mapping dynamic connections in a person or in a system. As my interest lies in the complex interplay between the political system of Bahrain and the individuals within the system, interviews that discover how the members of Sahwat al-Fateh's Shura council feel, think

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[16] Gerring, John (2007): p. 20, 29, 41, 79

[17] Gerring, John (2007): p. 42, 44

[18] Shura translates to consultative in English. The concept is part of an Islamic tradition whereby leadership is conducted through consultation.

[19] Fog, Jette (2004): *Med samtalen som utgangspunkt - Det kvalitative forskningsinterview*, 2.opplag, Akademisk forlag, København, p. 10-11

and act are highly relevant.[20] For the purpose of my research learning their own views of whether they are able to influence the politics of Bahrain and whether they feel autonomous is just as important as establishing whether they actually are. Certainly, conducting research based on qualitative interviews leaves a lot of space for the researcher's own interpretations. Given that these may be inaccurate, this could hamper the validity of the research. According to Gerring however, this is unavoidable in any technique of evidence gathering. He argues that all collection of evidence is interpretive in some way, and that social science is of necessity an interpretive act.[21]

Before I travelled to Manama I had established contact with the movement through e-mail and arranged for a first meeting. The interviews were conducted in the lobby of the hotel I was staying in and in cafes. They all ranged between one and two hours. Two of the interviews were with one person only, whereas in one I spoke to two at the same time and in one three. In total I interviewed seven people, all of whom I considered to be valuable and informative sources. Two of these were not members of the Sahwat al-Fateh's Shura council, but were active in another Sunni Muslim youth organization, al-Fateh Youth. They were sympathetic to most of Sahwat al-Fateh's message and actions. The interviews with these two, even though they do not necessarily give me an insight into the inner life of Sahwat al-Fateh, give valuable information about where the movement potentially can reap support and how they are viewed by sympathetic outsiders. These particular interviews are used for background information only and are not directly quoted in the thesis.

Of my five sources in the Shura council of Sahwat al-Fateh three were women and two men. They were all between 25 and 32 years old. Two of them, source A and B, where married and lived together in a town outside of Manama. They had a son together who was four years of age. Source A worked in the banking industry. He had formerly been engaged with al-Fateh Youth, a workshop-based movement loosely aligned as with NUG as a youth-filial. Source B had not been politically active before she decided to engage in Sahwat al-Fateh. Source C was a working mother of two kids who said she still participated in al-Fateh Youth alongside her commitments in Sahwat al-Fateh. Her husband was not active in the movement. Source D was an unmarried man who had recently finished his master studies at a university in the United Kingdom. He

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[20] Fog, Jette (2004): p. 38
[21] Gerring, John (2007): p. 69, 70

was looking for a job at the time of the interview. He had been living abroad when the February 14th uprising began. Source E was an unmarried woman who had not been actively engaged in any political movements prior to Sahwat al-Fateh and who had not known any of my other sources prior to her time in the movement. The five participated in weekly meetings of the Shura council and in rallies and demonstrations.

One of my sources also served as my contact person into the movement. He arranged interviews with the other members for me. This had both pros and cons. He went to great lengths to help me get in contact with people. At the same time I cannot be certain he did not choose my sources contact according to his own personal interest. Even though I gave him criteria for what kind of sources I was interested in talking to, and the ones he put me in contact seemed to fit those criteria, I had to be observant when considering their external validity and whether they as sources where representative of what I was trying to explore.

The interviews were conducted in English, as my sources' command of English was better than mine of Arabic. This had been decided in advance and the sources all seemed comfortable with it. I was given the impression that all the members of the Shura council spoke England and that language considerations were not important when my contact put me in touch with people. Several of my sources had spent periods abroad and expressed themselves well in English. However, there is always the possibility of meaning and emphases getting lost in translation when a conversation is conducted in one's second language. When transcribing the interviews I have written things exactly as they were said.

In January 2012 Sahwat al-Fateh issued a statement, about 2,5 pages long, which outlined their views on a wide array of issues. According to my sources this statement was expressions of the Shura Council's views and was issued before a rally to set the stage and message of the event. It was spread through social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and, according to one of my sources, also sent to a range of media institutions. This statement has also been used as a source.[22]

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[22] The statement is appended in the back of this thesis.

1.5.3 Problems related to my fieldwork

Before and during my fieldwork I was faced with two practical problems. One being getting access to Bahrain as the government was reluctant to issue visas for journalists and researchers at the time. The second was getting in contact with a sufficient amount of sources while I was in Bahrain.

Before I travelled to Manama it was difficult to get a clear picture of whether I would be turned away at the airport if I had given the officials the full outline of my research on arrival. In the months before my fieldwork several academics and journalists had been refused visas to the country and my contacts at the Norwegian embassy in Abu Dhabi and the consulate in Manama warned that entry could not be guaranteed, citing the continuously changing politics of the airport officials. When I arrived at the airport I presented myself as a tourist following the advice from one of my Bahraini contacts. Ideally I would have liked to have been given entrance to the country based on a full disclosure of my intentions there, however, with the ongoing political tension, the Formula 1 Grand Prix just weeks away and the number of international journalists and researchers denied access to the country, I considered the tourist route to be my best option. Fortunately I was given a tourist visa for two weeks, with no questions asked.

Although I had a contact person who put me in contact with members of Sahwat al-Fateh, a separate problem was gaining access to sufficient sources. I got the distinct impression that the members were more than willing to talk to me and answer my questions. Getting them to prioritize me and find time for an interview in a busy every day schedule with family and work, was more complicated. Fridays were difficult because of family obligations, the same with Saturdays, I was told, and weekdays were difficult due to job obligations. But although it required a large amount of contact and rescheduling, the interviews were eventually conducted in calm surroundings.

1.5.4 Ethical questions

Bahrain has experienced political turmoil in the recent years, and was in a state of great tension at the time of my fieldwork. Upon arrival, I was therefore unsure how openly

my sources would be willing to talk to me and whether they risked any problems as a
result of us meeting. This was a particular concern since I had not stated the intentions
of my research on arrival. They did however not express any reluctance to talk to me,
and assured me that they were free to say whatever they wanted. I was dedicated to
communicating the aims and scope of my investigation, so as to not create any
misunderstandings on how the interviews I conducted would be used and interpreted.
They all agreed to let me interview them after I had laid out the details of my research.
Neither of them objected to my use of a digital recorder during the interview. At the
beginning of every interview I informed my sources that they would retain their
anonymity. I made this decision prior to the fieldwork, and it was not made following
any requests from the sources. They have all had their names written in Bahraini
newspapers in relation to the movement and did not seemed concerned with remaining
anonymous. Regardless, I keep them anonymous, as I do not feel comfortable circulating
their names in a situation where political circumstances in Bahrain may change rapidly.
Importantly, their identity openly is not crucial to the validity of my thesis.[23]

1.6   Former research

There has been very limited research on Sunni Muslim political mobilization in Bahrain.
However, there are several important articles about political mobilization amongst Shia
Muslims. Several of these enlist the dynamic between the Sunni and Shia Muslims in the
country as an important factor in shaping the country's politics. Fred Lawson (2004)
assesses the 1990-uprising using social movement theory, looking into the tools of
dissent used by the protesters in "Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain".
He identifies mass protest as the dominant form of popular contention amongst Shia
Muslim protesters in the 1990s. [24] Louay Bahry (2000) writes in "The Socioeconomic
Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain" about how socioeconomic factors
contributed to shape and divide the opposition in Bahrain.[25] Steven Wright (2008)

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[23] I used *Forskningsetiske retningslinjer for samfunnsvitenskap, humaniora, juss og teologi,* adopted by Den nasjonale
forskningsetiske komite for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora 2006, as a guideline when I approached these ethical
questions. Available at: http://www.etikkom.no/Forskningsetikk/Etiske-retningslinjer/Samfunnsvitenskap-jus-og-
humaniora/
[24] Lawson, Fred: (2004) *Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain* in "Islamic Activism - A Social Movement
Theory Approach", edited by Quintan Wiktorowicz, Indiana University press, Indiana
[25] Bahry, Louay (2000): *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain*, published in
Mediterranean Quarterly, Summer 2000

discusses some of the same issues eight years later in his article "Fixing the Kingdom: Political evolutions and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain".[26] Katja Niethammer's (2008) "Opposition Groups in Bahrain" discusses avenues for political participation in Bahrain.[27] In "Bahrain: Reaching a threshold" Edward Burke argues that the Bahraini government has reached an impasse in its political reforms.[28] Laurence Louër, in her book "Transnational Shia Politics", gives an analysis of the historical origins and present situation of militant Shia transnational networks in the Gulf.[29] A more recent publication about the political dynamics of Bahrain is Justin Gengler's "Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf" (2011)[30]. This Ph. D thesis is based on the results of the first-ever mass political survey of Bahraini citizens and concludes that the ethnic-religious challenges the prevailing rentier state interpretation of political life in the Arab Gulf. Jane Kinninmont discusses in her recent article "Bahrain: Beyond the impasse" national and regional consequences of the February 14th uprising. She also discusses the Sunni Muslim counter-mobilization. [31] A very recent publication on the Gulf and its political dynamic is Christopher M. Davidson's "After the Sheiks - The coming collapse of the Gulf Monarchies". Here he suggests that, as the title implies, that the Gulf monarchies soon will fall. By looking at internal and external pressure challenging the rentier rulers he calls that it is no longer a question of it, but when, the Gulf states will collapse.[32] There have also recently been several publications on social movement in the Middle East calling for a nuanced view of political mobilization and change in the region. Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (2011) discuss in "Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa" how the Middle East challenges the sociological imagination because mobilization occurs in other shapes, avenues and contexts than it does other places in the world. [33] Asef Bayat (2009) argues in his recent publication "Life as Politics" that the static way that social movement in the Middle East often is presented fails to recognize

[26] Wright, Steven (2008)

[27] Niethammer, Katja (2008): *Opposition Groups in Bahrain* in "Political Participation in the Middle East"*, edited by Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London

[28] Burke, Edward (2008)

[29] Louër, Laurence (2008): *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political networks in the Gulf*, Hurst Publishers Ltd, London

[30] Gengler, Justin (2011)

[31] Kinninmont, Jane (2012)

[32] Davidson, Christopher M. (2012): After the Sheiks - The coming collapse of the Gulf Monarchies, Hurst & Company, London

[33] Beinin, Joel and Vairel, Frédéric (ed.) (2011)

the way millions of people across the Middle East are discovering or creating new social

spaces within which to make their claims heard. [34]

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[34] Bayat, Asef (2009): *Life as Politics - how ordinary people change the Middle East*, Stanford University Press, Stanford

2 History and context

2.1   State and opposition in Bahrain

Bahrain has twice since gaining independence introduced a parliamentary system. However, these measures have resulted in influential avenues of political participation for its citizens. The importance of formal political institutions in the authoritarian states in the Middle East should not be overstated. According to Holger Albrecht, associate professor of the American University in Cairo, the majority of citizens in the Middle East do not express themselves politically through such channels. The institutions are essentially seen as channels of participation for the already politicised parts of society.[35] He argues that informal venues of political participation, such as *wasta* mechanisms or brokers[36], have worked to undermine the formal institutions of participation. Central to this line of reasoning is that the more informal the nature of political participation is, the more it may be assumed to be rooted within society.[37] However, since the institutions have and are been present in Bahrain, an overview of how they have worked to shape state-opposition dynamics is necessary.

In recent decades, the opposition in Bahrain has consisted mainly of discontent Shia Muslims. However, historically the opposition in the country has been far more complex and cross sectarian. Bahrain has since the 1920s seen popular demands for reform in the form of petitions, strikes and street demonstrations. Traditionally both Sunnis and Shiites have participated in these efforts together, calling for the establishment of a parliament, the election of municipal councils and the right to form

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[35] Albrecht, Holger (2008): *The Nature of Political Participation*, in "Political Participation in The Middle East", edited by Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, Lynne Rienner Publications, Boulder.
Albrecht mentions the urban and educated middle classes and upper middle classes, as examples of these politicised parts.
[36] Brokerage refers to the hierarchical relationship between the citizens and the centralized and authoritarian regime where brokers function as middlemen to both convey demands from the people to the state and distribute resources and goods from the regime to the people. Hertog argues this has sometimes worked as a substitute for collective interest representation and formal access to the state and has led to atomization of state-society relations. Gulf ruling families, such as the Al Khalifa regime in Bahrain, have discouraged or sanctioned collective action in their societies while encouraging nationals to present petitions to pursue their individual interests on a case-by-case basis, which can result in generous payoffs. This has contributed to sometimes limiting collective street action, especially amongst the Sunni Muslims in Bahrain.
Hertog, Steffen (2010) *The sociology of the Gulf rentier systems: societies of intermediaries.* Comparative studies in society and history, *52 (*2). pp. 282-318, p. 314
[37] Holger, Albrecht (2008), p. 21, 22

labour unions.[38] The unequal distribution of power along sectarian lines lamented by today's demonstrators was not an issue. Importantly, the Sunni and Shiite populations of the early 1950s were more evenly divided, with a slight Shiite majority. Due to traditional practices of early marriage and polygamy as well as the importance of a large, extended family for economic and social survival, the Shia Muslim part of the population has since then outgrown the Sunni Muslim part.[39] Until the Islamic revolution in 1979, it was the secular opposition, mainly leftists, Nasserites and Bathists, which led the drive for political reform. In the years leading up to the Islamic revolution Shia Muslim movements were seen as a counterweight to secular Arab nationalist opposition movements. According to the Iraqi political scientist Louay Bahry, this changed with the success of the revolution in Iran. Since then religious symbols have been increasingly used as political tools. In addition, regional sectarian tensions have contributed to polarized tensions between the Sunni and Shia communities in Bahrain.[40] It is important to note that this is a simplification. There have always been Shia Bahrainis supporting the government and Sunni Bahrainis opposing it. Moreover, the Bahraini political elite is not strictly Sunni Muslim. Al Khalifa's allies include prominent tribal and merchant families from Sunni and Shia, Arab and Persian communities. However, political fault lines have generally corresponded with these ethno-religious lines.[41]

When Bahrain gained independence from Great Britain in 1971, Emir Isa was formally given control of the island. He desired constitutional reforms similar to those implemented in neighbouring Kuwait. Already the following year a general election was held for a constitutional assembly, which drafted the constitution that came into effect in December 1973. Elections were held for thirty seats in a forty-four-member national assembly, with government appointees occupying the remaining fourteen seats. Relations between the national assembly and the Emir soon became contentious. The assembly wanted to exercise full legislative powers while the government wanted it to remain weak and easily controlled. When in 1975 the assembly refused to ratify a government-sponsored State Security Bill allowing, the detention and arrest of people for until three years without trial, the Emir dissolved the assembly. All articles in the

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[38] Bahry, Louay (2000)
[39] Bahry, Louay (2000): p. 131-132
[40] Bahry, Louay (2000): p. 130-131, Kinninmont, Jane (2012) p. 2
[41] Kinninmont, Jane (2012) p. 9, 14

constitution dealing with the legislative powers of the assembly were also suspended. The State Security Bill was brought into effect by decree. [42]

Four year after the dissolution, the first signs of a clear-cut Shia opposition surfaced. Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, violent Shia-demonstrations erupted, prompting sharp government repression. December 1981 saw the failure of a major coup d'état, leading to the arrest of 81 people, most of them Bahrainis. Another coup was thwarted six years later, when Shia Muslim radicals were plotting to take command of central government positions on December 26th while the Emir was away at a Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Riyadh. During the 1980s the state increased the political and structural discrimination of Bahraini Shia Muslims, justified by the fear that transnational ties made them disloyal to the nation-state. In addition to the general political and economical repression that the Bahrainis faced, Shia Muslims now faced increasing pressure, including exclusion from jobs in the security services, military and police. The hard line taken from the government helps explain why there have been more-Shia led political demonstrations in the last 30 years in Bahrain. This is in line with John Lofland's argument that social inequality and change contribute to political mobilization.[43] Lofland, an American sociologist, argues that when a group sees itself as victim to unequal distribution of the valued and necessary things in life mobilization is more easily triggered. Especially is this valid if they also lack access to power to influence economic and political affairs. The exclusion from elite government positions has served to amalgamate a stronger collective Shia-identity, making mobilization along sectarian lines more likely. In the 1980s, the fledgling Shia identity became evident as Shiite *matams*[44] and charity funds grew in number. These two avenues provided meeting places, and helped the Shiites financially.[45]

Between 1994 and 1996 protesters led a massive Shiite uprising in Bahrain. Despite several of its demands being secular, Bahry argues the mid-90s uprising to be the first where Shia Muslims emerged as unified political force. In addition to being led by a new populist movement that at is core was Shia Muslim in composition and inspiration, the movement also voiced different demands from the secular opposition. The new movement went further than the former demands for constitutional reform,

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[42] Bahry, Louay (2000): p. 130

[43] Lofland, John (1996): *Social Movement Organization - Guide to research on insurgent realities,* Aldine de Gruyter, New York

[44] Traditional religious meeting places. They often take the form of a religious gathering at someone's house.

[45] Graz, Liezl (1990): p.165, Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 14-15, Lofland, John (1996): p. 180,186

and addressed social and economic concerns that were particularly relevant for the Shiite Bahrainis.[46] The protests were met with strong military force by the regime and many of the politically active Shia Muslims ended up in prison or as political exiles. In addition, the regime cracked down on other avenues of political participation for Shia Muslims. An example is the charity funds that were limited by government regulations in 1998. The renowned political scientist Gregory Gause demonstrates how the Emir was careful to frame the political dissent in sectarian term.[47] The harsh government suppression led to radicalization of the protester and violence and bombs become parts of the repertoire of contention for the protesters during the uprising.[48]

When Emir Hamad succeeded his father in 1999, political change seemed imminent. Desiring to stall the unrest that had dominated the country in the previous two centuries, he launched a comprehensive liberalization of the political system. This process of political reform was carried out in a top-down manner. Hamad cancelled the State Security Bill that had led to the dissolution of the national assembly in the 1970s, released political prisoners and gave amnesty to opposition exiles. On November 23rd 2000 he established a Supreme National Committee to draft a document called the National Action Charter (NAC). The document was to outline the future structure and principles of government in the country. The Committee proposed the introduction of a constitutional monarchy with a two-chamber assembly. One of the chambers, *Majlis an-Nuwab,* would consist of elected representatives and would be given legislative attributes. The second chamber, *Majlis ash-Shura*, would be appointed by the King and serve an advisory role. The NAC received a nearly unison appraisal when put to a vote in February 2001. The electoral turnout was 89 per cent, with 98,4 per cent voting in favour of the NAC.[49] In addition, several Shia Muslim clerics voiced their approval of the charter.[50] The reforms introduced by Emir Hamad put a temporary lid on several of the issues of the 1990s revolt by opening avenues for political participation. Al-Wifaq was

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[46] Bahry, Louay (2000): p. 129, 131, Lawson, Fred (2006): p. 90

[47] Bahry , Louay (2000): p. 135,
Gause, Gregory (1997): *The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth and Political Stability in the GCC States,* The Washington Quarterly, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1997, p. 151

[48] Wictoriwicz, Quintan (ed) (2004): *Islamic Activism - A social movement theory approach,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 20

[49] Ulrichsen, Christian Coates (2012): Bahrain's aborted revolution, LSE IDEAS, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK, available at:
http://www2.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/Experts/profile.aspx?KeyValue=k.coates-ulrichsen@lse.ac.uk

[50] Wright, Steven (2008): p. 3, 4,
Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 145
Gengler, Justin (2011): p. 60

established as a political society based in the Shia Muslim charity funds, the former protesters, returned exiles and a number of clerics. The society aimed to mobilize and represent the Shia Muslim voice in the forthcoming parliamentary system.[51]

In 2002 the new constitution was released. Notably, the King and his government had taken several liberties making amendments through royal decrees. The Majlis ash-Shura, which was proposed to have advisory duties only, was given a legislative capacity. The President of Majlis ash-Shura would also have the casting vote in the event of a political deadlock. Failing to provide the democratically elected legislature he had promised, the King provoked the opposition. Further compounding the issue was article 120 of the constitution, which stipulated that no constitutional amendment was permissible by the parliament. The changes were there to stay.[52]

To protest the legislative functions of the appointed Majlis ash-Shura, the dominating opposition group, Al-Wifaq National Islamic Society, the Arab Nationalist Democratic Society, the Secular National Democratic Action Society, and the Islamic Action Society boycotted the parliamentary elections of 2002.[53] The Shia opposition instead used different venues to express their political views[54]. One was the "traditional" route of petitions. The Shia petitioned the King asking for constitutional change and were able to secure 50 000 signatures. This was difficult for the King to respond to, since it would require him invalidating his own reforms because of article 120. The government, growing increasingly nervous, arrested seventeen signature collectors in April 2004 to prevent the embarrassment of the petitioners collecting more signatures then there were voters in the election.[55] The Shia Muslim opposition further mobilized through blogs and forums on the Internet, most notably Bahrain Online. These platforms became important avenues for political communication and worked as predecessors to the current mobilization online through Twitter and other social media. In 2005, three editors of Bahrain Online were arrested, marking the beginning of online censorship and surveillance. The Shia opposition also mobilized in street demonstrations when attempting to influence fundamental political decision-making. The establishment of The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights in 2002 was also

[51] Bahry, Louay (2000): p. 141, Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 155
[52] Wright, Steven (2008): p. 5
[53] Al-Wifaq did however participate in the muncipal elections and received a majority of the votes.
Wright , Steven (2008): p. 6
[54] Wright, Steven (2008): p. 4
[55] Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 156, 157

closely linked to the traditional Shia Muslim opposition. [56]

According to Gulf researcher Katja Niethammer, the split between parliamentarians and boycotters, created a vicious cycle. While al-Wifaq and its allies boycotted, societies such as al-Asalah and al-Minbar participated. Refusing to recognize the parliament, the extra-parliamentary opposition would not talk to the parliamentarians except in the final hour. In return the parliamentarians saw no reason to cooperate with the boycotters since they otherwise ignored them. The feeling was exacerbated by the basic distrust between the Sunni Islamists in parliament and the Shiite groups outside it.[57] This meant that the political groups found it difficult to establish common ground even amid common interests. This could be seen as the result of a successful co-opt strategy from the state, as it had provided avenues of political participation without having to face unison demands and calls in return. Still, the political vacuum and general turbulence following the main opposition party's refusal to participate was considered such a toll that the government took legal steps to secure al-Wifaq and the other boycotters participation in the elections of 2006. This came after violent demonstrations in 2005, when al-Wifaq and other boycotters abandoned all dialogue with the government, taking instead to the streets to protest the weak parliamentary system.

By introducing the Political Societies Law No. 2, outlawing all election boycott, the government convinced al-Wifaq and the other boycotting societies to run for elections in 2006. This was despite the Bandar report[58], which had been released just a month prior to the election. The law tightened the government's grip on political societies, requiring them to register under the new law to maintain their legal status and participate in elections. Even though the law explicitly forbade political activity for the societies, it gave them an opportunity to function as de facto political parties, though without legal security. [59] The violent demonstrations of the previous year, which led to clashes between youths and the police, also probably contributed to al-Wifaq's

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[56] Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 147, 154
[57] Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 153
[58] The Bandergate scandal refers to revelations published by a British-Sudanese advisor to the Bahraini Government, Salah al-Bandar, who published a report saying that the government had established a task force headed by the Minister of Cabinet Affaairs, Sheikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah al Khalifa, to undermine the Shia community in addition to increasing naturalisation of Sunnis from other communities. Wright , Steven (2008): p. 4
[59] Wright, Steven (2008): p. 7-8, Niethammer, Katja (2008): 147, 158
Fractions within Al-Wifaq that opposed submitting to the registration and procedural requirements of the new law broke away and formed the Haaq movement, headed by Hasan Mushaim, the former Vice Chairman and co-founder of Al Wifaq

participation. To al-Wifaq, this illustrated the dangers of the street demonstration-strategy, since violent street clashes and sectarian conflict seemed like unavoidable consequences.[60] In addition the King, as a reaction to the domestic and international controversy that followed the Bandar report, made some conciliatory gestures such as appointing a Shia Muslim, Jawad Al-Arayyed, a former leading figure in al-Wifaq, as Deputy Prime Minister. [61] In the election Al-Wifaq secured 17 out of 18 of the candidates fielded, which translated to a 42,5 per cent share of the seats in the parliament.[62]

However, participation did not happen without controversy, leading finally to a split in al-Wifaq. Led by Hasan Mushaim, the former Vice Chairman and co-founder of al-Wifaq, fractions that opposed submitting to the Political Societies Law No. 2 broke away and formed the al-Haqq-movement. Whereas al-Wifaq chose to operate within the system, al-Haqq continued using illegal street demonstrations as their main form of expression. In the years following 2006 violent confrontations between security forces and street protesters increased in number, as did reliable reports of mistreatment and torture of political activists arrested for their association with al-Haqq and other underground movements. Despite the political unrest, al-Wifaq chose to participate in the 2010 elections, gaining 18 seats in the 40-member house. They did however pull out of the Majlis al-nuwab following the violent suppression of the February 14th uprising by the regime in the spring of 2011.[63]

2.2   Sunni Muslim counter-mobilization

While Shia Muslims have taken the role as the government's main opposition following the Islamic revolution, the few occurrences of Sunni mobilization have mainly taken the form of counter-mobilization to Shia demonstrations. In addition, the form of expression of Sunni political views and demand has normally been petitions rather than street demonstrations. This restraint is at least to some extent due to three successful containment strategies devised by the regime. Firstly, through rhetoric and policies the

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[60] Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 157
[61] Wright, Steven (2008): p. 4
[62] Wright, Steven (2008): p. 8
    [63] Freedom House (2012): *Countries at the crossroads: Bahrain*, human rights report, available at:
http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2012/bahrain
Kinninmont, Jane (2012)

state has contributed to the fear that the Shia Muslims after the Iranian revolution represent forces of Iranian expansionism. By portraying themselves as the only safeguard against the Shia-Iranian threat, the government has been able to rally the Sunni Muslims in support of the royal family. Secondly, the state has actively encouraged the tradition of brokerage amongst its citizens to achieve political aims. This strategy has been effective in making Sunni Muslims approach the state through petitions rather than mass mobilization, something that has worked as substitutes for collective action. Thirdly, in Bahrain strong state reactions towards Shia street demonstrations may also have served to encourage petition-based activism amongst the Sunni Muslim parts of the population. Highly repressive reactions to protest can discourage mobilization amongst other groups because of the potential high price of participating.[64]

An example of petition-based activism came in November 1992, when a collective petition known as the "Elite petition" was handed to the ruler. It was drafted by amongst others Abdelatif al-Mahmoud, the Sunni religious scholar and University professor who now leads NUG. The petition called for elections to a restored parliament, release of political prisoners and permission for dissident exiles to return. Those who had signed the petition represented the full spectrum of active political challengers to the regime, both Sunni and Shia. When the petitions failed to provide results, Shia demonstrators turned to the street and faced hard repercussions from the regime, whereas the Sunni petitioners more or less fell quiet.[65]

When the Majlis ash-shura and Majlis an-nuwab were introduced in 2002 the Sunni Muslim political societies al-Minbar and al-Asalah, participated in the elections. Like al-Wifaq they had strong links with the different religious groupings in Bahrain. To counter the strong religious tone in the political engagement in the Majlis an-Nuwab, the King appointed liberal and secular allies to the positions in the Majlis ash-Shura.[66] The split between the boycotters and the participators pushed the Sunni Muslims closer to the regime. Al-Wifaq's refusal to participate in the general elections in 2002 and its boycott of dialogue prior to the 2006 elections led to large Sunni counter-demonstrations in 2005. Whereas the Shia Muslims in their demonstrations called for

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[64] Hertog, Steffen (2010): p. 314
Lawson, Fred (2004): p. 95
[65] Lawson, Fred (2004): p. 96
[66] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 17

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"Constitutional reform first", the Sunni Muslims countered with "Bahrain first", questioning the loyalty of the Shia Muslims. These mass demonstrations rallied the economic elite and the Sunni population around the government, effectively balancing out the pressure put on the government by the Shia.[67] After the February 14th uprising in 2011 some of the same anti-opposition sentiments amongst the Sunni Muslims occurred, but they ended being on a much larger scale and with a much broader agenda.

2.3   The February 14th revolt and the Sunni Muslim counter-mobilization

February 14th 2011 marked the ten-year anniversary of the 2001 referendum on a "democratic constitutional monarchy". On that day mass protests erupted. Calling for constitutional reform, the protesters demanded the removal of the prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa. In 2001 98,4 per cent of voters had approved the plan; ten years on it was never fully implemented. The conflict between the ruling family and opposition was growing as the half-elected and gerrymandered parliament did not satisfy the demands of the opposition. After several high-profile leaders of the Haqq-movement had been imprisoned in 2010, tensions rose. And in the early months of 2011, as demonstrations successfully toppled the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, protesters took to the street of Manama in Bahrain and called for constitutional reforms. The number of protesters soared after February 14th as a reaction to the heavy-handed police response that resulted in six deaths in the first week of protests. On February 22nd an estimated 150 000 people joined a march to the Pearl roundabout to commemorate the martyrs of the first few days.[68]

    Initially the demonstrators, led by youth activists from a variety of different backgrounds and with differing viewpoints, called for constitutional reforms and for the removal of the prime minister. The demonstrations were organized by several small circles of youth who coordinated independently through social media and on popular Bahraini web forums, notably Bahrain Online. The decentralized and leaderless organization soon began using the label "Coalition of February 14th Youth" for their activities. As the protest escalated the coalition began calling for regime change instead of just a transformation into a "real" constitutional monarchy. They were supported by

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[67] Niethammer, Katja (2008): p. 156-157
[68] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 3. Estimates cited by the Bahrain independent Comission of Inquiery (BICI)

a minority of the opposition groups, al-Haqq, the Bahrain Freedom Movement and Al-Wafa, which operated under the umbrella "The Coalition for a Republic"[69]. "The Coalition of February 14th Youth" was more anti-Western in its rhetoric than other protesters such as al-Wifaq, criticizing British and American involvement in the region. The adherents of the coalition were also more inclined to violence against the security forces than the other demonstrators, justifying it as self-defence. In the beginning, the coalition portrayed itself as broadly based youth movement that rejected sectarian or ideological divisions. As the protests proceeded however, the group adopted a more religious vocabulary, using terms such as "sacred defence". This served as confirmation of the argument made by the regime and its adherents that the revolt in Bahrain was an Iranian-led attempt to seize power. As the protests escalated in February and March 2011 35 people, mostly civilians, died. Five of them were tortured to death in custody. Nearly 3000 people were arrested and 4539 people were fired from their jobs. [70]

Nearly a month after 150 000 people gathered at the Pearl roundabout on February 22nd, an anti-oppositional reaction arose. On March 21st, tens of thousand of people gathered at the al-Fateh mosque in Juffar in Manama taking part in a rally called "The National Unity Gathering" (NUG). The key speaker was dr. Abdelatif al-Mahmoud, who would eventually become the leader of a political coalition also bearing the name NUG. First NUG, which was initially welcomed by the Government, operated as an umbrella movement. Compromising a number of Sunni Muslim political groups, including al-Asalah and al-Minbar and some secularists, NUG united the disparate groups around their shared criticisms of al-Wifaq and February 14th. They saw the uprising as violent, sectarian and pro-Iranian. They held rallies in support of the security services and called for al-Wifaq to apologize for acts of violence committed by protestors as a precursor to any political dialogue. However, the shape of the movement and the government's support for it changed as the months went on. There have been indications that the ruling establishment through the parliamentarians from al-Asalah and al-Minbar participating in NUG tried to prevent the movement from becoming an independent political force. The government was increasingly worried as NUG started voicing demands for a stronger parliament, a more independent judiciary and less corruption, in addition to criticising the uprising. This lead to a range of internal

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[69] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 3, 4, 6, 7
[70] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 7

rivalries, mainly about what form the movement should take. Al-Asalah and al-Minbar members active in the movement argued NUG should be a registered charity. However, Abdelatif al-Mahmoud and his followers prevailed by turning NUG into a political society. When just a few members of al-Asalah and al-Minbar were elected to the Central Committee, a range of Salafists and Muslim brethren withdrew from NUG. By this the position the movement had held as a possible potent alliance of different Sunni political position groups withered.[71] It was in this political environment, in December 2011, that Sahwat al-Fateh rose.

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[71] Hasan, Tariq al-Hasan (2012): *Too big to succeed: The Case of Sunni Politics in Bahrain*, Open Democraccy, online article publsihed at Open Democarcy, available at: http://www.opendemocracy.net/hasan-tariq-al-hasan/%E2%80%98toobig-to-succeed%E2%80%99-case-of-sunni-politics-in-bahrain
Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 8

3 The mobilization of Sunni Muslims

3.1   The emergence of Sahwat al-Fateh

In December 2011, following the split in NUG, a new movement entered the streets of Bahrain. It was called Sahwat al-Fateh and comprised a loose network of youths. Using the social media platform of Twitter, the group agreed their first meeting at a cafe at the corniche in Manama. According to the group itself, between 200 and 300 people turned up. Some argued for the establishment of a Sunni street movement to unite the Sunni Muslim voice and to counter that of the opposition. From the group of several hundreds, 25 people formed the Shura council of the yet unnamed movement. The 25 Shura members were not an existing political entity prior to the meeting, according to their own account. Rather, they were compromised of youths with no political background, representatives of political societies (al-Asalah and al-Minbar), in addition to some with background from al-Fateh Youth, a youth organization loosely aligned with NUG. One third of the Shura members were said to be Islamists, whereas the rest represented different political and religious ideologies. Several of them described themselves as liberals.[72] In the interviews they portrayed their mobilization as a reaction to roughly two things: The opposition that took to the streets on February 14th, and to the lack of a government response to the uprising and its aftermath. They expressed fear of what would happen if they did not react and made their voices heard.

Jack Goldstone and Charles Tilly argue that the nature and extent of concrete threats that confront actual and potential challengers at any time matters more than rising opportunities or decline in resources when mobilization occurs.[73] They are supported by Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel who argue that people frequently mobilize in reaction to threats. They say people mobilize not only because they can, but also and probably even more readily when they are compelled to do so. They mobilize...

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[72] Interviews in Manama, March 2012

[73] Goldstone, Jack A. and Tilly, Charles (2001): *Threat (and opportunity): Popular Action and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Politics,* in "Silence and voice in the study of Contentious Politics", edited by Ronald R. Aminzade et al. Cambridge University Press, quoted in Lawson, Fred (2004): p. 106

... when they feel their sense of justice or morals, their basic rights or the possibility of offering decent living conditions to their children are being attacked.[74]

Therefore, they argue, it is more fruitful to discuss the launching of collective action not from the point of view of opportunities, but rather of threats perceived by contentious actors. This chapter will look at how the members themselves see the threat from the traditional opposition and how they went from seeing mobilization as unnecessary to necessary. By using framing the process of mobilization will be sectioned according to Benford and Snow's three steps of framing. Instead of seeing framing only as a strategic tool of movement leaders, this chapter will expand the concept to include the dynamic construction of collective action frames amongst activists by outlining the members' personal experiences in their justification of mobilization. Further, this chapter will discuss how political opportunities contributed in the framing process of Sahwat al-Fateh.

3.2   Framing: changing threat perceptions

The theory of framing views mobilization as a reaction to shifting frames of interpretation. By creating collective action frames actors generate interpretive frames that differ or even contest existing ones. By this they conceptualize themselves as a collective working towards restoring or changing some problematic condition or situation, and they decide to act. Benford and Snow identify three steps in a framing process leading to mobilization: *diagnostic* framing, *prognostic* framing and *motivational* framing.[75]

Diagnostic framing refers to the process whereby a problem or an unbearable situation is identified and the blame for it is attributed. Since the object of a social movement is to remedy a problematic situation or issue, it needs to identify a source of blame that their actions can be directed at. Often an element of injustice is tied to the diagnostic stage identifying someone or something the victim of the problem. This is especially valid in movements advocating some form of political or economic change.[76]

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[74] Beinin, Joel and Vairel, Frédéric (ed.) (2011): p, 21, 32, Bayat, Asef (2009): p. 23
[75] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): p. 614
[76] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): p. 616,
Gamson, William, Fireman, Bruce and Rytina, Steven (1982): *Encounters with Unjust Authority,* Homewood, IL, Dorsey

Further, prognostic framing refers to the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem or at least some strategy of countering the effects of it. Benford argues that there is a strong correspondence between the diagnostic and prognostic framing in a social movement meaning that the identification of a specific problem constrains the range of possible solution or strategies to contain it. Since the link between the blame and the solution is so tight, the prognostic framing activity of a social movement typically includes refutations of the logic or efficacy of solutions proposed by opponents, as well as rationales for its own remedies. This has been referred to as *counter framing.*[77]

The final step, motivational framing, provides the rational for engaging in collective action. This means the shift from *consensus* mobilization, where one agrees with the diagnostic and prognostic framing, but is still not actively advocating it, to *active* mobilization. The former fosters or facilitates agreement whereas the latter fosters mobilization and action. The process between them is, according to Benford, motivated by a vocabulary of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety, which provide adherents with compelling accounts for engaging in collective action. [78]

3.2.1 Finding fear: the diagnostic framing of Sahwat al-Fateh

The threat of the opposition

The members of Sahwat al-Fateh's Shura Council argued that the Shia Muslim opposition represented a threat to both their own security and to the political stability of the country. The physical expression of the protests the members merely referred to as "the burning of the streets". Shia Muslim protesters burning tires have been a common sight in parts of Bahrain for years, according to my sources. But complemented by Molotov cocktails, burning cars and violent clashes between protesters and police the streets of Manama had become a rather sinister and unfamiliar place, they felt.

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[77] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): p. 616, 617,
Benford, Robert (1987): *Framing activity, meaning and social movement participation: the nuclear disarmment movement,* PhD Thesis, University of Texas, Austin
[78] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): p. 617
Benford, Robert (1993): *You could be the hundreth monkey - Collective action frames and vocabularies of motive within the nuclear disarmament movement*, Sociology Quarterly, 34, 195-216

Source D[79] specifically referred to the street when asked what made them form Sahwat al-Fateh:

> What is happening in the street is very bad. We as a youth have to do something. After what happened on 14th of February, we feel that still Bahrain is threatened.[80]

The clashes between frustrated youths and police that had been happening for the last years had been seen as minor incidents that the security personnel were able to absorb and contain. What was happening now was something altogether different, I was told. Source C said:

> Because I was living in Budeya, over the last 4 years before that they weekly burned tires and they still do it. I would see it every week because it was their training for them. So it never really stopped, but after this year it has been too much, even for the people in the villages. People in the villages go out and fight with them and ask them to stop it. People cannot get to their homes in the villages. So they are getting fed up.[81]

Source A took me on a drive one night to a mainly Shia neighbourhood in central Manama and showed the amount of police cars parked on the pavement and said they were ready to act if there were any disturbances. He complained about the resources required for all these kids running the streets and thought it was a waste. Source D said these Shia-dominated areas were not safe at the moment:

> When you go to Sunni areas, that's fine. Everything is peaceful. Everything is fine. But if you go to a place where the majority is Shia, I cannot guarantee that someone will not throw a Molotov on you.[82]

Both source D and other members expressed regret with the situation, saying it was better before, when everyone was on friendlier terms and relations between Bahrainis were not as marked by ethno-religious fault lines.

Source C said that she did not see those who caused disturbances in the streets as dedicated demonstrators, but rather young kids acting for money. She said:

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[79] See section on methodology in chapter 1 for introduction of the sources interviewed.
[80] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[81] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[82] Interview in Manama, March 2012

A whole group that went out in thousands became a group of kids who had nothing better to do and some of them said give me 10 dinars and I'll burn some tires.[83]

She argued this illustrated that the protest was not the result of the individual demonstrators own personal will, but rather political and religious coercion and a fear of what not contributing to the demonstrations would mean. She said:

And the only reason they showed up for their last rally was because of political coercion. They had their leader saying this is your religious duty. You have to come, and if your husband says no you still have to come. Bring your family and everyone. You have to come. So people do not go out because they want to. A lot of people are fed up. If you speak out against them and you are Shia, they burn your house and they burn your car. Basically, you are x. Nothing.[84]

 She hence argued that most of those protesting were not doing it by free will, but rather out of fear of the repercussions if they did not.

This relates to another supposedly threat posed by the Shia Muslim opposition, that of an Iranian takeover. Even though source C meant that most of the demonstrators were paid off, source A said that 99 per cent of the demonstrators knew that Iranian forces were behind the whole thing and wanted an Islamic state in Bahrain. Several of the sources said that they initially had been open to the demands of the opposition and said that they agreed to their calls for end of corruption and improved political accountability. However, they meant this drowned in the sectarian message of the opposition. Source E said:

At the beginning they raised demands that was like the shared demands between us and the other side. But later on we found there was something behind those demands, which is against the government and the prime minister. We are not together on those demands.[85]

Source D, who was not in the country when the protests began, said that his family made their way to the Pearl roundabout in the initial days of the demonstrations curious to see what was going on. However, according to him what they found was not an all-inclusive call for change, but rather a sectarian message where Sunni voices were

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[83] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[84] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[85] Interview in Manama, March 2012

not welcomed. Accordingly, in their statement Sahwat al-Fateh explicitly say that the protesters are calling for an "Islamic republic".[86]

What they found particularly frightening with the sectarianism of the Shiite message is the idea that it all stems from one man, Isa Qassim. He is a Shia Ayatollah who has studied both in Najaf and Qum. He participated in the establishment of al-Wifaq and now functions as its unofficial spiritual leader. Source D said that if you were to understand the Shia Muslims in Bahrain, you have to understand Qassim. All Shia Muslims in Bahrain will act according to his demands, he said:

This is the mentality. When he says something everyone will listen to him. And this is the problem actually, if you are controlling Shias, it is very dangerous.[87]

He especially mentioned that Qassim's position allowed him to dictate how the Shia Muslims would vote in elections. He mentioned further a Shiite friend of him who did not agree with Qassim, but who still voted according to his recommendations. He said:

My friends, I talk to them and I see that they have different political views than Isa Qassim, but when he says something they say they have to listen to him. They say this is our leader. This is the mentality.[88]

The members argued the threat from the opposition was also linked to their power of definition. This power, they argued, the Shia Muslim leadership had obtained by working relentlessly for several decades to gain influence and power internationally. This meant that they are able to define how things are presented through international media and human rights organizations. Source C said that Shia Muslim opposition politicians who had been living in exile had used the years abroad to garner international support and trust in their case. This support they now could put to use to influence the international media and community. She said:

The protesters have arranged for this a long time back, for the people who are exiled. They lived in places where they developed relationships with human rights organizations and media. So if I met you 20 years ago and I keep on telling you my government is so bad and I get arrested I built a relationship with you. So in 10 years time if I came and said yesterday this girl I know got raped, you would believe

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[86] Interview in Manama, March 2012, Statement from Sahwat al-Fateh, January 13th 2012. See Appendix.
[87] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[88] Interview in Manama, March 2012.

me. So this is what has happened. A lot of the exiled people, who were exiled for political reasons, developed their relations. They prepared themselves for the future, and when the future, which was last year, came, they had people in the media and they had people in the human rights organizations.[89]

She argued the Shia Muslims were not afraid to use their contacts and resources from the recent decade and that this gave them an advantage when propagating their message.

Source C further lamented how the opposition used their supposed power of definition to spread the wrong picture of what was going on in Bahrain. She claimed that their demands for better wages and social equality were not based on pressing needs in Bahrain at the moment. Rather, she said:

The thing is, we talk about the people who went out to the roundabout in their Porsches and BMWs and their Louis Vuitton shoes and belts and Chanel bags and Rolex watches. People like that going to the rally at the roundabout saying we need better wages. We need jobs. The way that Bahrainis are living, I am not saying we are all like that. I am not like that. According to one of the UN reports there are no Bahrainis living beneath the poverty line, which is like 3 dollars a day. Bahrainis have homes, fine there are some that do not have great standards, but there is no lack of fresh drinking water.[90]

She hence argued that the opposition's claims of financial grievances did not reflect the actual situation in the country. In fact, she claimed many of the protesters had higher living standards than many other Bahrainis. Their calls for greater social justice and economic equality were then invalidated, she argued. This was something international journalists who came to Bahrain discovered, she said.

So there is nothing news worthy and whatever their message is, it is lost because people come and see that its not here. They try to create events. Like the story of the boy that was raped. There was a 14-year-old boy that was found half naked and he had stab wounds on his body and they kept him for 2-3 hours before reporting it to the police. They claimed that the police raped him and attacked him and basically stabbed him. When they investigated they found it was self inflicted and there was no rape. And to this day they are insisting the police raped him.[91]

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[89] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[90] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[91] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Her argument was that the opposition made efforts to fabricate assaults from the security forces to demonize the government. By using their contacts in international media and human rights organization they were able to spread this fabricated truth to the world, she said.

Finding a problem, placing the blame

The statements of the members of Sahwat al-Fateh indicate a shift in their view of the opposition and its actions. Their fear of the opposition had escalated after 14th February 2011 and the subsequent street clashes. In their view the streets were unsafe, the Shia Muslims were working to destabilize the country and the international media portrayed the conflict wrongly to the world. Lofland argues that incidents like violent clashes can serve to dramatize, heighten or focus otherwise unfocused or diffuse discontent and hence contribute to create collective action frames.[92] Smelser describes this as precipitating factors, i.e. events that provide a concrete setting that collective action can be a reaction to. The violence and vandalizing may have served as such a precipitating factor because of the concrete physical threat it was regarded as, by the Sunni Muslims.[93] The fact that the members were just as worried about the ideology of the protesters as their violent methods only worked to strengthen their fear. Gamson et al emphasize the importance of development and articulation of injustice frames in diagnostic framing. By identifying the victim of a given injustice and amplifying their victimization, mobilization occurs more easily.[94] In the case of Sahwat al-Fateh they argue they, as the representatives of ordinary Sunni Muslims, are the victims of the protesters actions. Source C said:

> Because these people who you are letting out in the street, are going on the streets again, burning our streets again. Blocking our roads. We cannot go to school. We cannot leave our kids at home. We cannot do anything because we are worried because these people are out on the streets.[95]

This victimization is especially visible in their approach to state-initiated dialogue between the opposition and the state. They argue the opposition is dictating the terms

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[92] Lofland, John (1996) : p. 190
[93] Smelser, Neil J. (1962): *Theory of collective Behavior*, Free Press, New York, p.138, quoted in Lofland, John (1996): p. 190
[94] Gamson, William, Fireman, Bruce and Rytina, Steven (1982)
[95] Interview in Manama, March 2012.

of the potential dialogue and demanding the exclusion of ordinary Sunni voices around the negotiation table.

The criticism of dialogue between the state and the opposition relates closely with where Sahwat al-Fateh attribute the blame for the problematic situation in the country. Even though it is the violent protesters who are identified as the problem, the government is also given its share of the blame. Sahwat al-Fateh's Shura members say that they are disappointed by the official reaction to the uprising. They argue the state put appeasement with the demonstrators before the security and well being of their other citizens. They failed to offer their police and security personnel sufficient weapons and material for stopping "the burning of the streets" and they ignored a lot of the breaches the rebels committed on the Bahraini law. Source C said that the punishment the demonstrators received for their criminal offences was too light, and they felt a need to pressure the government to give them harder punishment. She said:

A guy who attacks and burns tires and closes roads and attacks expats gets out of jail. Whereas a person who steals a credit card goes to jail for 3 years for credit card fraud. To me credit card fraud will not hurt me. It will probably hurt 5 people, but the one on the street, burning the street, are hurting more people than the credit card fraud.[96]

She argued that the government had to be convinced that they needed to punish the protesters more harshly.

Source D said he had stopped going to protest areas because he felt afraid, and he was getting tired of listening to the government's assurance that it would handle the situation. When asked if he would go to visit friends in Shia-dominated areas, he answered:

Actually, I cannot go. I want to go, I have friends, we go out to each other, but when I come to this place I know it is dangerous. I know for sure. This should be stopped. You got me. It should be secure like before.[97]

He further said that the state was so focused on creating a dialogue with the demonstrators that they failed to provide a secure country:

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[96] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[97] Interview in Manama, March 2012

And what you hear, even through the newspaper the government will take care of it, always we listen to the government. Its fine, we will start something, a dialogue or something. This is wrong. To start a dialogue is to start a new Bahrain situation. This is wrong. You should apply a secure country for the citizens then you go for a dialogue with the opposition. You know, when you go in a dialogue and the other party have like a winning card and this card is the people, the riots, going out burning the tires. [98]

He criticised the government's efforts at dialogue, and said it was irrelevant before security and stability was brought back to the streets. If the opposition was given the possibility of dialogue without giving up their protests first, he meant it would be like giving them the upper hand.

In its statement Sahwat al-Fateh imply that parts of the political establishment, the "big people", are far more concerned with personal gains than Bahrain. Rather than working for the good of the people and the country, they are protecting their own interests. The statement says:

Justice, equality and the enforcement of law are our demands. We care not for personal gains, external pressure or wealth in Western banks that our "big" people are worried about.[99]

Accordingly, they are implying that there are concerns beyond that of the country that makes the political establishment fail to act against the uprising. This is especially linked to their views on the American involvement in the conflict. The US has their fifth fleet based outside of Manama and is interested in the stability of Bahrain. They made efforts in late 2011 and early 2012 to conduct dialogue with al-Wifaq representing the opposition. The fact that the Americans did not take initiative to talk to Sunni Muslim movements in the same efforts provoked Sahwat al-Fateh's Shura members. Source A said: "We wish they would talk to us too".[100] When the state did not protest the American involvement, it appeared to Sahwat al-Fateh that they were more concerned with appeasing their Western contacts than their citizens. Earlier the blame was normally just attributed to the opposition. However, now the blame is also placed on the government for failing to contain the opposition by not having a strong enough judicial system and not providing the security forces with sufficient means. The way that

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[98] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[99] Statement from Sahwat al-Fateh, January 13th 2012. See Appendix.
[100] Interview in Manama, March 2012

separates the movement's voice from that of the government opens up for further blame and responsibility being placed on the government in the demonstrations. From just voicing criticism of the government for failing to secure the streets they also criticise them for being corrupt and not representing their interests as citizens of the country. The way they describe themselves as the voice of the street helps establish themselves and their political stand as something different from the government and the political establishment even though many of them have strong connections to the political life already through the political societies. They are fearful of what would happen if the protesters were able to empower themselves and they are fearful of what concessions given from the state would in return mean for them as citizens.[101]

3.2.2 One Voice: The prognostic framing of Sahwat al-Fateh

Sahwat al-Fateh called that both the Shia Muslim opposition and the government was to blame for the problematic situation in Bahrain. Accordingly, their counter-strategy is directed both ways. First, they said they wanted to counter the power of definition that the Shia opposition held of the present situation in Bahrain by showing the world that they are wrong. Source E said that they trying to improve the image of Bahrain:

> Or not even try to improve, just to show the real image of Bahrain. You are here, do you see anything happening. Aside from burning tires, which we are getting used to by now. Its okay, unless you go into their villages, but that is another story. They are going to call you in and show you their son who fell of his bike and say the police attacked him.[102]

Whereas they hoped this strategy "of showing the real Bahrain" would contain the opposition's power of definition, it would not offer a solution to the physical and ideological threat the opposition represent. Therefore they also wanted to influence the state to restore security and not give concessions to the protesters. Source C said:

> So we go out and say do not release them. So we are pressuring the government on the other side not to release them. Because the government when it is getting pressure from one side, eventually it will

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[101] Snow, David and Benford, Robert (1988): *Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization,* International Social Movement Research, Vol. 1, pages 197-217, p. 198.
[102] Interview in Manama, March 2012

have to do something. And we on the other side are pressuring them just to maintain the balance, not to give more concessions on our behalf.[103]

To be able to influence the government source B said they had to create a powerful movement because the established political forces were failing to defend their interests. She said:

The pace of the political societies and how it was going was a bit to slow for the street. Not just for us, for the street. People were waiting for things to happen and it was taking too long to happen.[104]

They further said that on "the other side" of the conflict the political establishment was acting faster, and they were missing an equal reaction on "their" side. Source C said that it would be no point in going to the political societies if one were not already a member, because then nobody would listen. Sahwat al-Fateh on the other hand would voice the concerns of those not politically organized:

You have the other side, which is doing things very fast, and it was no equal reaction on the other side of society. So the idea about this came about basically to voice what the street wants. The demands of the people. Because as an average person nobody will listen to me if I go to the political societies. Because I am not part of that existing organizations.[105]

She further said that power struggles between the political societies were damaging and rather helping the demonstrators create more chaos. She said:

And we have seen that a lot of the political societies were getting into power struggles that were not helping the people. It was just helping the rioting. We are not uniting. We are just having internal political struggles. So when the Sahwat came about, we tried to avoid the mistakes that were done. Power struggles within the organizations, listening to the people. Because with the political societies there is no way to say no. To say: no, I need to do this.[106]

The task of keeping Sunni Muslims united had according to source D become more difficult after NUG had transformed into a political society. He said NUG then lost its

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[103] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[104] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[105] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[106] Interview in Manama, March 2012

function as an overarching umbrella for all Sunni Muslims that could work to unite them and speak in one voice:

The national unity gathering was like an umbrella in the beginning for all the Sunnis from different political societies. Religious, Salafi, liberal. Because the mission was not a thought of something special, no, it was the country, to protect the country. Everyone was together holding each other's hands wanting to protect the country. They are afraid that they will loose the country and their condition, and it was an umbrella. After that Abdelatif al-Mahmoud said that this National Unity Gathering, it will be a political party, a political society. So the umbrella has gone, you got me, and they have become like a party in the political societies, so that is why they become like different parties now. And we are back to square one.[107]

Source C said that they realised that if they were to have their voices heard they had to take to the streets. Since February 2011 the opposition had been on the streets demonstrating and source C meant this had given them great influence of the government. She said:

They are going out in the street saying that they are peaceful. All the media are seeing them saying they are peaceful. They are saying to the government do something, and they are pressuring our government. And the government, because of the pressure, has to concede at some point or a certain level. And these concessions are hurting us.[108]

According to her, this made them realise that the street was the most effective avenue for expressing political discontent. She said:

We realised in Bahrain every time someone goes out on the street their voices are heard. And the ones who are sitting there just saying yes, okay, the government knows what they are doing, they are the ones who are not getting any of their demands, and they are the ones getting stepped over Sahwat. One of the purposes of the Sahwat is getting these voices heard, we go on the street and we demonstrate. Of course, we do it in the proper peaceful manner, meaning not peaceful like in "Molotov-peaceful".[109]

Sahwat al-Fateh argued the way they used the street as an arena of contention was fundamentally different from how the Shia opposition used it. Most of the time they went out with approval from the ministry of interior, saying that they wanted to do it

[107] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[108] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[109] Interview in Manama, March 2012.

"the right way". Still there had been occasions that they were not granted approvals. Then they had gone out anyway. Source C said she taught the times they were not given approval where times when the government did not want them to "push the street". She said:

> The government doesn't want us to push the street because its just causing problems. And sometimes it is the problems that need to happen for the government to do something. We try to be the pressure in the street for the government, because if we don't pressure the government, the other side that is doing so well in pressuring the government. They are asking for people to get, lets say they are going out saying you should release all the prisoners.[110]

Thus she emphasized how Sahwat al-Fateh needed to show the government that they could also provide pressure to counter that of the opposition.

To achieve sufficient criminal punishment Sahwat al-Fateh calls for a more independent judiciary system. Source D explained this call as a response to the government and the King being "too kind". He said:

> There is an Arabic thing, whoever is sure there is no punishment, will continue misbehaving. Therefore they must be punished.

He further compared the protesters to misbehaving children who had to be punished if they did something wrong, because if not they would never learn what was right. An example that several members mentioned of the state being too soft was their intention to follow up the recommendation from the BICI-report[111] of giving those protesters who had been fired their job back.[112]

According to Charles Tilly there is at any given time in a society a limited number of ways to have one's voice heard, consisting of a rather small number of alternative ways to act collectively. [113] Therefore when Sahwat al-Fateh chose its repertoire of contention and its strategy in countering the Shia Muslim opposition, the options

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[110] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[111] BICI, Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, was a committee initiated by the Bahraini King in the summer of 2011. Their task was to investigate and report on the events that took place in Bahrain from February 2011, and the consequences of those events. Their report was presented on November 23rd 2011 and listed several breaches of human rights violations by the state since the February 14th uprising began. Amongst one of its recommandations for restoring stability in the country was that those who had been fired from their jobs as a result of protesting, would be rehired. The report is available at: http://www.bici.org.bh/
[112] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[113] Tilly, Charles (1995): *Contentious Repetoires 1758-1834,* in "Repetoires and cycles of collective action", edited by Mark Traugott, 15-42, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, quoted in Beinin, Joel and Vairel, Frédéric (2011): p.13

available to them were limited. In Bahrain everything from petitions to mass mobilization to bombs have been used as tools of dissent in the last three centuries, but Sunni Muslims have rarely taken it beyond street protest. When Sahwat al-Fateh chose the same instrument of contention as its opponents, this illustrates Beinin and Vairel's point that the practice of contention is strongly related to how actors define the political situation, and that struggles are an important part of activist groups´ processes of identity-formation. Different tools are used to solve different problems and to mobilize different parts of the population.[114]

Using the same arena as the established opposition, Sahwat al-Fateh counter-framed the opposition's efforts. By counter-framing is meant refutations of the logic or efficacy of the solutions and strategies of the opponents. For example did one of the members argue that they use the street in a fundamentally different way from the opposition. They actually used it peacefully, whereas the opposition used it "Molotov-peacefully". According to Benford and Snow such counter-framing can affect a movement's framings by forcing it to either put activists on the defensive or elaborate their message more than otherwise might have been the case. In Sahwat al-Fateh's case this is visible in their approach to both the opposition and the government. Because while they are careful to criticise the opposition for their religious and political stances they also argue that they agree with some of their calls for reform. Source D said that:

Maybe 70 per cent of what we are saying is similar to what they are saying in their statements. Stop the corruption, stop this kind of thing, stop a lot of things, we do agree with each other, but because we are Sunni they are criticising us in this way.[115]

However, balancing the complexity of both criticising the opposition and agreeing with 70 per cent of their message proved difficult. Rather than communicating their mutual ground Sahwat al-Fateh is more concerned with presenting explicit criticism of the opposition, and arguing them to be representatives of Iran. This also affects the movement's relationship with the government since the members both want to criticise their strategy and use of force in containing the uprising, but still want to convey that they have some common political ground with the opposition. Their ambivalent

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[114] Beinin, Joel and Vairel, Frédéric (2011): p. 14
[115] Interview in Manama, March 2012

message is visible in the way the movement address both the state and the opposition in their statement:

> We have learned our lesson. So thank you protesters and thank you government. The lesson we have learnt is that those with the louder voice get their demands met. We will not accept loosing our rights and have our pride stepped on and the law get humiliated for suspicious deals to please criminals and wrong doers. And if you need us to get down into the streets to do so, then be it! We will go out onto the streets peacefully and civilly but we will not hesitate to defend our rights and will not accept humiliation in our nation.[116]

Here they place the blame on both the government and the opposition and say that they will take lessons from both. Now they will raise their voice to be heard, as others have done before them, hopeful that both camps will hear them.

3.2.3 A sense of urgency: The motivational framing of Sahwat al-Fateh

When the future members of Sahwat al-Fateh met at a cafe on the corniche in Manama in December 2012 and decided to form a street movement, it constituted a new chapter in the life of many of the adherents: participation in a political activity. Some of the youths had been participating in NUG activities and some were associated with political societies, but for several of the members Sahwat al-Fateh was the first thing they ever engaged politically in. They said that they earlier had seen no reason to mobilize or criticise the government.

What made the members take the final step from just agreeing with the fact that the Shia Muslim opposition was acting out of control and that the state was not working sufficiently to contain them, was according to themselves a sense of urgency and a need for something to happen. Source D said he experienced the call to mobilize as an awakening. He said he realised he was not contributing by just going to rallies arranged by others and by expressing his opinions on Twitter. As a part of the young generations of Bahrain he felt he had an obligation to go out and do something to restore the balance of power in his country. He said:

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[116] Statement from Sahwat al-Fateh, January 13th 2012

It should be our mission, or it is not our mission, we have to do something. We cannot stand and just criticise the opposition or people who are behind this in the Twitter. And all our issue was handled by the political societies. We as a youth we did not do anything. Honestly. We just, you know, when tajammu al-wahda (NUG) said we will gather her, we used to go there. To make support and to hear what they are saying. But if you ask anyone what you have done, as a youth, I mean, he will say to you directly that I do write on the Twitter, I do read the news, but if he want to do something, go down to the street, there is nothing, no one to contain him.[117]

The awakening source D felt also resonates in the name of the movement. Sahwat, which in English means awakening, was according to the Shura members not something they chose themselves. Rather they had been given the name because the public saw their mobilization as the awakening of a sleeping political force in Bahrain. Source D said:

We did not decide for this name. People called us this name because we are youth. You know what happened last year, even the opposition they were shocked. To be honest. Sunnis do not gather a lot for the political. We know that there is corruption, we know that a lot of things are in bad conditions, pricing, everything. We know that, but we are not interested in politics. And we are not going out in the street, you know, protesting. But what happened in Bahrain made us all union together in one place. (...) When we came out the people called us al-Sahwat, the awakening, why? Because this street, the people who came out this time last year, they slept. Like everything was relaxing, and they were thinking things were all right for them. But then we came out and they were thinking, now they awake. Not the political societies, the youth. So people called us the Sahwat. [118]

Source D implied that the transformation of NUG had led to it falling asleep. Sahwat al-Fateh was the re-awakening of the Sunni opposition, he felt. His impression was that the experience he had was shared by many of those present at the funding meeting. He said the turnout was beyond anyone's expectations and that those present found a common ground to mobilize around. He said:

He who took the initiative, he was one, how can I put it, he just wrote it on Twitter. And when people came he was shocked about the number, yeah. I talked to him like I recall after three days. He said: I was shocked when I saw this number of people. We thought only 12-15, maximum 50. There were 300 - 350 - 400 - 500 people. Imagine! Just from twitter.[119]

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[117] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[118] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[119] Interview in Manama, March 2012

The first time they met they went to a mosque to pray and then they gathered at a cafe at the corniche in Manama. When people started discussing issues amongst themselves, source D said that there were a lot of things they agreed on. He said:

> We said, if you are against what is happening and you want to deliver your voice to the government or to the royal family or to who are interested, if you want come to this place. And in this place, I think from 300 to 500 people gathered. So we like, after a lot of talking between each other, we have now a Shura council, 25 people, I mean both women and men, are now in al-Fateh Shura council. This is the way we began in the beginning.[120]

When asked what was the process for choosing the Shura council and how she ended up with a seat at it source B replied:

> There was no process. There was just like a few people, and whoever, most of us did not know each other. We met there. It was like 2-3 of us from al-Fateh Youth, but most people just got together. It was just ok, we are in a meeting with people, it just happened like that. We just showed up.[121]

After the movement was formed, getting people mobilized for their rallies was according to source C easier than anyone would have expected. She said:

> Every time more people come out. And more people come out to talk. More people can stand up now. Take the mic and say what they are thinking freely, without worrying, without anything.[122]

This steadily increasing number of demonstrators the Shura council members said were people who came because they identified with the movement and its message. Source C explained:

> There are some who help us and there are some who come because they like the movement. They like the vision. And there are people who come because of Bahrain. There are people who came yesterday who we never say before because they were concerned about the Omar issue. There are people who went last event because they were concerned about that issue. Sometimes, because of the numbers we don't know who show up.[123]

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[120] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[121] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[122] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[123] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Source D emphasized how the adherents who came to rallies and demonstrations did not come because of Sahwat al-Fateh and the people within it, but rather because of the message they were propagating. He said:

> Because people are not coming for al-Sahwat, you know for us, they are coming the cause. For the message. You got me.[124]

He further said that when people heard of the themes of their rallies they decided instantly that they wanted to participate. He said:

> We say that we are out at al-Fateh on a Friday after the prayer to deliver a message about a topic. So people heard, you know about this topic, directly they want to come.[125]

Cultural resonance as a facilitator for mobilization

The message that source D is talking about, that Sahwat al-Fateh are voicing through their rallies, did not come out of thin air. When the adherents went from consensus mobilization to active mobilization the process was facilitated with the way their collective action frame resonated with parts of their already existing cultural and political understanding of the situation in the country. According to Benford and Snow the mobilizing potency of a frame is increased if it resonates with the already existing attitudes among the potential adherents. This is called the *cultural resonance* of a collective action frame.[126]

In the case of the Sunni Muslims of Bahrain, the fear of the Shia Muslim opposition was something that had been latent for several decades, nurtured by the government narrative of their transnational allegiances and the regional fault lines between Sunni and Shia Islam. Since the Iranian revolution in 1979 a political and religious power struggle between Iran and Saudi-Arabia has served to shape the dynamics between the two sects. There have been several reconciliatory periods since the revolution, but in the recent decade there has been an increasingly Shia-negative rhetoric from Sunni Muslim Arab leaders. Since the Jordanian King Abdullah in 2004

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[124] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[125] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[126] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): p. 619, 622,

warned about the Shia crescent of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon the idea of a revived Shia Islam has created a fear of how the American occupation of Iraq, toppling the Sunni government, would drastically change the old Arab order with dominant Sunni governments. Driven by Iran and Saudi-Arabia as leaders for their separate camps, sectarian tensions have increasingly shaped and intensified regional conflicts. In 2006 the former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak said in an interview with al-Arabiyya that "Shias are mostly loyal to Iran, not the country where they live".[127] Statements such as these fed into the narrative of the Shia Muslims as deviant and disloyal citizens of the Arab countries.[128]

Bahrain is one of the countries where the anti-Shia rhetoric has been most visible. The regime has systematically presented itself to the Sunni Muslim constituents as their best defence against the "Iran-supported Shias". This has contributed to bringing both the Muslim Brotherhood (politically organized in al-Minbar) and the Salafists (politically organized in al-Asalah) in as regime supporters. According to Kinninmont what is probably a far larger portion of Bahrain's Sunnis distrust the Shia-led opposition and do not believe it will protect their interests if they are able to take power of the country. Fear of what the opposition represents in terms of foreign forces is then not something specific to Sahwat al-Fateh adherents in Bahrain, but rather symptomatic of attitudes among larger parts of the Sunni population in the country. Kinninmont argues this probably have less to do with the political statements of opposition leaders than with the fear that they secretly represent Iran or that they will prove to be as violent and sectarian as the post-Saddam political groupings in Iraq. [129] This underlined the urgency of acting for Sahwat al-Fateh adherents and worked as a facilitator for taking the mobilization from consensus mobilization to active mobilization.

[127] Quoted in Pelham, Nicholas (2008): A New Muslim order: The Shia and the Middle East Sectarian Crisis, I.B. Tauris, London, p. 217

[128] Haji-Yousefi, Amir M. (2009): Whose Agenda Is Served by the Idea of a Shia Crescent?, published in Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2009

[129] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 10

Louër, Laurence (2012): Houses Divided: the Splintering of Bahrain's Political Camps, online article published at Carnegie Endowment, available at: http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2012/04/04/houses-divided-splintering-of-bahrain-s-political-camps/a6ej

3.1 Political opportunities and framing

When analysing collective framing processes the structural opportunities available to the activists are important, because they influence both the possibility and the shape of mobilization. Though fear initiated and motivated the mobilization of Sahwat al-Fateh, the structural framework surrounding the mobilization provided the activists with an understanding of the political space available to manoeuvre in. Gamson and Meyer have argued that framing of a political opportunity is a central component of collective action. That means that a opportunity's potential is influenced by whether it is perceived as an opportunity or not. They even argue that if movement activists emphasize opportunity rather than constraint when interpreting political space, they may stimulate actions that change opportunity, making it a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is not to say that political opportunities are purely socially constructed, but that the potential political space they create is partly contingent on how they are framed by potential actors.[130] At the time of their mobilization, the members of Sahwat al-Fateh saw an opportunity for change or a political space they could operate in. This was probably formed both by the opposition's already existing political mobilization and the government allowing Sahwat al-Fateh space because they saw them as beneficial in countering the Shia Muslim opposition.

The first point refers to how the traditional opposition can have worked as an inspiration creating a *citizen surge synergy.* This is a term used by John Lofland to argue that social movements tend to form in spurts or surges. This means that when a movement mobilizes already existing movements can have encouraged them or functioned as models for their formation.[131] I would argue that both phenomena are visible in the mobilization of Sahwat al-Fateh. Firstly, Sahwat al-Fateh was encouraged to mobilize in reaction to the fear created by the Shia Muslim opposition. The way the Sahwat al-Fateh members speak of a need for an equal reaction from their side to what is happening on the Shia side expresses an attitude of "if they can do it, so can we". This can have contributed to the activists understanding of there being an opportunity to change politics, implying that their mobilization feed on former mobilization. Secondly,

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[130] Benford, Robert and Snow, David (2000): p. 631,
Gamson, William and Meyer, David (1996): *The framing of political opportunity,* in "Comparative perspectives on Social Movement Opportunities, Mobilizing structures and Framing," edited by McAdam, David et al, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
[131] Lofland, John (1996): p.191

the Shia Muslim opposition worked as a model for their mobilization. The movement has both structural and organizational similarities with the February 14th movement. Operating through street movements, having no established leadership and using social media both to mobilize and spread statements and pictures from events are all common features of Sahwat al-Fateh and the February 14th movement.

The second point refers to the state potentially giving Sunni Muslim movements more space to move in a normally strict landscape because they hope they can draw benefits from it. Firstly, by creating popular support for a strong reaction against the Shia Muslims, something that could be used both nationally and internationally to justify a strong crackdown. Secondly, by trying to control the discontent Sunni Muslims by allowing them to let off steam at a time when they would not be encouraged to challenge the state directly. Since the adherents of Sahwat al-Fateh clearly state that empowering the rebellious Shia Muslims would lead to an Iran-inspired state in Bahrain, they are careful not to threaten the stability of the present government. They would not like to be associated with the Shia Muslim opposition and so they would be careful to keep their distance to them. That could make the political space they operate within more easily controlled by the state, since they now there are boundaries the movement probably will not cross. This is not to say that the state seems to accept whatever from the Sunni Muslims as long as they also criticise the Shia Muslim opposition. However, it may seem that allowing them to protest a bit could be a calculated risk the state is willing to take.[132]

If so, this corresponds with Albrecht Holger argument that autonomous participation in the Middle East occurs only when political elites make efforts to involve masses of the population in politics. By that he means that participation independent of state control, only can occur if it is either actively encouraged or permitted by the state or if the state is unable or unwilling to suppress it. In any case the state becomes the structural facilitator to any kind of autonomous mobilization.[133] If we apply this to the Bahraini setting the state will influence the structural opportunity both the Sunni and the Shia opposition face when mobilizing. In the case of the Shia Muslims the state has seemed *unable* to suppress it without external help from their GCC partners. However,

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[132] Gengler, Justin (2012a): *Sunni Islamists Testing Political Boundaries Altered (Or Not) by the Uprising*, blogpost published at bahrainipolitics.blogspot.no, available at:
http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.no/2012/08/sunni-islamists-testing-political.html
[133] Albrecht, Holger (2008): p. 20

its attitude towards the Sunni mobilization has taken a different shape. It seemed to have gone from *encouraging* it when NUG first came out, seeing it as a useful counter-movement, to *permitting* it or being *unwilling* to suppress it as Sahwat al-Fateh voice political demands. Sahwat al-Fateh's members have probably been able to calculate that the state's reaction to their mobilization would not be the same as to the Shia Muslim opposition's mobilization, taking the political context into consideration. This could further shape both how Sahwat al-Fateh frames the opportunity of political change and how they chose their strategy.

Lawson, who has analysed tools of discontent used by the Shia Muslim opposition in Bahrain in the 1990s, argues that efforts by the authority to contain, suppress or counter social movements contribute to shape their character and their forms of expression. Police response to popular protest can by raising the cost of political commitment and mobilization reconfigure ways of participation. Lawson writes that during the uprising in Bahrain between 1994 and 1998 the state responded repressive, diffuse and soft. The more brutal or selective the repression was, the more diminished was the public support amongst discontent inhabitants for using violence as a tool of dissent because of the high cost. [134]By the same logic, the cost of discontent probably shapes the way Sahwat al-Fateh choose to express their discontent. As they has experienced, the state reacts negatively to the Shia Muslim opposition. From that the movement's members can resonate that their mobilization is something not inherently negative in the government's view, since it is a reaction to the Shia mobilization. This they can use to calculate that the potential risk of their mobilization is substantially lower than for the traditional opposition.

An example of how the state has seemed to accept more from the Sunni opposition is their manoeuvring in the legal system. By Bahraini law it is not allowed to operate as a movement and it is not allowed for any form of group to be involved in political activities. This rule of political participation is overlooked when it comes to political societies, and as far as the members of Sahwat al-Fateh experienced, also when it came to movements. At least *their* movement. They did not worry about legal implications of mobilizing and said they were not planning on becoming legalized as a group, hence registering under the law of political societies. Source C said: "We don't

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[134] Lawson, Fred (2008): p. 95, 107, Beinin, Joel and Vairel, Frédéric (2011): p. 33:

need to, we are just a movement"[135]. Source B said it was "acceptable" for them to be a movement, even if they were not formally legalized.[136] Source C meant that there was no one who was going to stop them. She said:

> There is nothing that requires us to be an entity, an authorised entity. There is nothing stopping us from being a movement. We are just a group of individuals meeting and discussing, going out rallying.[137]

Hence they seem to calculate that their political gatherings do not run the risk of governmental repercussions and there is a political opening for them to mobilize.

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[135] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[136] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[137] Interview in Manama, March 2012.

4 The organization and boundary framing of Sahwat al-Fateh

4.1 Creating identity through boundaries

When Sahwat al-Fateh activists mobilized and organized as a street movement, they also set about the process of constructing a collective identity. By denoting who they are and who they are not, they created boundaries between themselves and other political forces in Bahrain. Boundaries mark the social territories of group relations by underlining the moral or behavioural difference between social movement participants and everyone else. The process of defining oneself away from others is referred to as *boundary* framing, and contributes to both create a collective self and a collective other.[138] When Sahwat al-Fateh created their collective action frames, the boundaries they drew between themselves and the Shia Muslim opposition was an important part of the process. Through their framing they identified themselves as a counter-movement to the February 14th coalition. However, this was not the only group that they defined themselves away from. This chapter discusses the organization and identity of Sahwat al-Fateh by looking at how they drew boundaries between themselves and the political societies and the Bahraini government in their process of defining themselves. These boundaries were based on both organizational and political factors. Finally this chapter asks whether these boundaries also were expressions of actual political differences and discuss which resources were available to Sahwat al-Fateh when it mobilized.

4.1.1 The organization of Sahwat al-Fateh

When Sahwat al-Fateh mobilized, it organized as a street movement. Its main activities were rallies and demonstrations open to anyone interested in participating. To organize and shape its activities, Sahwat al-Fateh has a Shura council as its highest authority. The 25-member council organized its events and rallies, as well as coordinate all its contact

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[138] Benford, Robert and Hunt, Scott (2004): *Collective identity, Solidarity and Commitment*, in "The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements", edited by Snow, David, Soule, Sarah and Kriesi, Hanspeter, Blackwell publishing, Oxford, p. 442/43.

with other groups and movements. In the beginning the Shura members had meetings every day, but eventually they had delegated the responsibility amongst themselves sufficiently to reduce it to meetings once or twice a week. According to source C they chose a Shura council because they wanted consensus to be their ruling principle. She said:

> The purpose of the Shura is for us all to agree. And its not agreement through voting, like democracy. It is more on consensus. So if you say no to a certain event or suggestion, we want you to tell us why no, and we will try to convince you to say yes. So that is how it came about. If we are not in agreement for an event or a stance or whatever, we discuss it. We resolve it. And we get our input basically from the average people on the street.[139]

By being contacted by friends, family, neighbours and other acquaintances the members said they were given an impression of what people in the street were concerned about. They then organized rallies and street demonstrations to voice these concerns. When asked what their demands are, source C in the Shura council of Sahwat al-Fateh immediately said: "They are not our demands, they are the street's".[140] This insistence on being representatives of regular Sunni Bahrainis served both to gather support for their movement, because people felt that they could identify with their message, and to make them identify strongly with the street. Here the street is taken to mean both an expression of the life of ordinary Sunni Muslims as opposed to those in privileged positions and an arena for voicing political concerns. This served as the first boundary that Sahwat al-Fateh drew between itself and "the others": they would operate as a movement, and not be turned into another political society.

4.1.2 "We are a movement, not a political society"

The first Sunni Muslim street movement that emerged after the February 14th uprising, NUG, had turned into a political society. According to the Shura members of Sahwat al-Fateh this was not an option they were considering. Source C said:

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[139] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[140] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Sahwat is not a society. It is not anything. We are just a bunch of kids. We are not looking to become a political society. We are just us. We are not any ideology. We are just your average Bahraini Muslims.[141]

By claiming to be just average people, they clearly separate themselves and their movement from other segments of Bahrain, and particularly from NUG.

Their justification for their mode of operation was not just linked to their identity as a voice of the average people. It was also linked to the political space they meant their organization gave them. Source D said that being a movement rather than a political society, gave them more freedom. He said:

To be in a political society, you have to be very diplomatic. But you cannot say whatever you want to say because you have an audience. We as a youth movement we do not have anything to loose. We are not a political society. If we want to say something against the government, we are going to say it. There is no one to control us.

Instead they want to influence the political societies and make them hear the concerns of the citizens, mainly through rallies. According to source D the political establishment will sometimes listen to them. He said:

I think the members of parliament are starting to listen to the streets. They are actually, not all of them, but some of them are taking up issues on the street.[142]

Source E mentioned that some members of the political societies are also participating in their rallies. These are in addition to those members of the Shura council who are combining their activism in Sahwat al-Fateh with membership in political societies. She said:

Many of us, lets say a third, belong to an existing political societies and they are still active members in their political societies. We are trying to encompass all the voices of Bahrain. You know what I mean, that is why we try to get all. When there are issues that require political societies involvement, we try to speak to them through our members.[143]

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[141] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[142] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[143] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Source B said that even though they are working some with the political societies, she still felt that it was easier to cooperate with other street movements, rather than with the political societies.

As part of their boundary framing, Sahwat al-Fateh insists that it is not formally affiliated with any political society, but say that they rather work with them to try to "unite the Sunni Muslim voice". Jane Kinninmont writes that the movement is loosely aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, but more youth-oriented. Others have claimed that they are linked with regional Salafist movements, following the speeches of Kuwaiti Salafists at a big rally they held in February 2012.[144] The members themselves refuse any such affiliation and underline instead the ideological and political diversity of the movement. One of my sources was responsible for holding talks with al-Asalah and al-Minbar on behalf of Sahwat al-Fateh. He said they merely had cooperated with them on one occasion, when planning the rally marking the one-year anniversary of the first gathering at al-Fateh mosque. He said:

We do have meetings with them. But how can I say it, we do not have activities together. We rather call for these political societies to come to our activity.[145]

When Sahwat al-Fateh held rallies those who came who were membership in political societies came as individuals, not as representatives of their society, he said.[146] Because they are concerned with creating boundaries between themselves and the political societies, the members did not want to identify themselves as competitors for them. However, several described a growing weariness on behalf of the political societies. Source B said that some of them were with them, but not all. She explained:

You know when you get into someone's territory they get a bit weary of you.[147]

She hence indicated that there had been some reactions from the political societies, but would not exaggerate on what they were.

It was not only the political societies Sahwat al-Fateh was concerned to distance

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[144] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 8-9
Gengler, Justin (2012a)
[145] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[146] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[147] Interview in Manama, March 2012

itself from. Another important part of their self-identification was the boundaries they drew between themselves and the government.

4.1.3 Boundaries and interactions with the government

The members of Sahwat al-Fateh used the term anti-government to describe themselves when I interviewed them. They said they falsely had been given the label as pro-government by the opposition to make them look politically weak. Source D held that the similarity between their message and the opposition's message clearly illustrated how they were anti-government, but the opposition still tried to portray them as pro-government to damage them. He said:

> And this is what they do, I don't know, I think, they are trying to build this message to the media that the government gave us the money to go out. To make us weak.[148]

Source C said that the opposition attempted to portray their movement as pro-government through international media. She said:

> Those who have labelled us pro-government are the anti-government. The demonstrators and the protesters. Because we are nothing close to being pro-government, we are pro-Bahrain. So this labelling and the power that the anti-government has is the influence and power in the media they have worked on for years. So anything that is anti anti-government is labelled pro-government. You can say we are anti-government, but we are from the other side.[149]

Both source C and others I talked to carefully pointed out things the movement had done that could not be viewed as pro-government actions. Most importantly that they were strongly against any dialogue between the government and the opposition without them having a seat at the table:

> Simply that we are against dialogue, shows that we are anti-government. For us to ask for, for us to oppose corruption in the government, shows that we are not pro-government. For us a number of times, we have been asked not to go out, and going out, shows that we are not pro-government. And it is not going out because we want to oppose the government. You said we could not go out, so we will go out.

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148 Interview in Manama, March 2012
149 Interview in Manama, March 2012

Because the people on the street need to go out. Like yesterday, the people needed to go out because of the Omar case[150]. So we are nothing close to being pro-government. We are labelling ourselves pro-Bahrain. So whatever works Bahrain, works for us.[151]

By underlining how they do not always act according to the rules and regulations of the government, Sahwat al-Fateh underline the boundaries they argue exist between themselves and the government.

4.1.4 Boundaries with the political and economic elite

Sahwat al-Fateh also tried to create boundaries between itself and the political establishment through their forms of expression. The concept of the street is central in its self-identification. It illustrates how they in their framing identify themselves away from the established political elite. The members argue the political establishment operates according to its own interests and concern for personal position rather than for the grievances of ordinary people. Asef Bayat describes politics in the street as something fundamentally different from politics through other channels. It influences the identity of the politics since it is associated with the street as an arena of the people. Also, it makes the participants more visible because they by extending their protest to the street express themselves on a potentially larger arena than before.

The way the members of Sahwat al-Fateh operate in the street is a potential challenge to the regime because their demonstrations then are operating on an arena visible to anyone. Attempts at cover up or disguise its presence therefore becomes difficult for the state. Street presence also serves to distance Sahwat al-Fateh from other established Sunni Muslim political organizations. When NUG registered and become a political society, its street efforts diminished and the arena opened up for Sahwat al-Fateh to occupy. The choice illustrates how the movement builds its identity on differentiating themselves from the already established political societies.

Whether these boundaries also represent political differences, and not just an identification process for Sahwat al-Fateh, is a rather different question. The label

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[150] The Omar case was about a young Sunni muslim boy who allegedly had been forced to kiss his Shia Muslim teachers feet as punishment for something wrong he had done in school. Sahwat al-Fateh meant the punishment the teacher received for the rough treatment of the young boy, which they meant was motivated by sectarianism, was to light, and they demonstrated outside the ministry of education and eventually the ministry chose to fire the teacher from her job.
[151] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Sahwat al-Fateh claims as anti-government becomes problematic when paired with some of the interactions it has had in the recent year. At the anniversary of the first Gathering of National Unity at al-Fateh in February 2012, Khalid al Bloashi, one of the Shura members of Sahwat al-Fateh pledged support to the King in his speech. Afterwards the movement received a cable of thanks from the King for organizing the rally, which drew several hundred thousands to the al-Fateh mosque.[152] Even though the cable did not condole all the actions taken by the movement, it was a clear signal of partial support from the monarch. Even if the movement labels itself as anti-government, the government does not necessarily view them as an oppositional movement. On a direct question about how they think the government views Sahwat al-Fateh, source C answered: "I think they have to control us to use us."[153] She further said that the government in the beginning probably thought they were harmless. She said:

> In the beginning, they probably thought we were a bunch of kids, and I do not know what they think now.[154]

The members themselves argue that their organization is preferable because it makes them more difficult to contain by the government. By trying to create boundaries between themselves and the government they try to maintain their momentum and their autonomy.

Their standing as anti-government is also challenged by the fact that their demands in essence do not conflict with the objects of the politics of the government. The difference is rather a question of tactics. The overall strategy of both Sahwat al-Fateh and the government is the same: to contain the Shia-led uprising and create stability within the frameworks of the existing political system. Accordingly their political differences are not as absolute as Sahwat al-Fateh argues. They disagree however whether the hard approach of a military reaction to the uprising should be coupled with a dialogue. Aside from insisting on no dialogue without its own participation being secured, Sahwat al-Fateh has not demonstrated a willingness or desire to challenge the state directly on any matter of policy.[155] Acknowledging that the

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[152] Kinninmont, Jane (2012): p. 9
[153] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[154] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[155] Gengler, Justin (2012a)

present government is their only guarantee against an Iranian take-over, Sahwat al-Fateh seems unwilling to participate in efforts that potentially could challenge its stability. Coupled with the fact that some of the members of Sahwat al-Fateh's Shura Council are members of existing political societies supporting the government, the movement does not appear as anti-government that they like to argue themselves.

4.1.5 Resources available to Sahwat al-Fateh

The dynamics between the political elite and Sahwat al-Fateh are also relevant when analysing what resources the movement is able to make use of in their mobilization. According to the resource mobilization theory a movement's mobilization is dependent on the resources the activists have prior to the mobilization and those that they are able to pull in to support their case during the mobilization. Here a movement and its actors are seen as rational actors trying to organize the most effective reaction to an identifiable threat. By pulling in all possible resources, one tries to outweigh the resources available to what one is mobilizing against. Often then a movement merges with other pre-existing and highly organized blocs of individuals who lend the movement resources and support. Just like political opportunities access to resources facilitates mobilization.

My sources argued that they did not have access to political resources. Being a newly mobilized movement, they meant they did not have substantial political experiences or networks to draw on. However, several of their members were already engaged in the work of the political societies and some of them contributed to the establishment of NUG just prior to the mobilization of Sahwat al-Fateh. This gave them organizational experience and ties and networks with the political establishment in the country. The sources I interviewed acknowledged that some of their members are also members of political societies. They did however argue that this was not their source of power. Instead they claimed it came from the street, in the sense that the opinions they voiced in street where those of the ordinary Sunni Muslims instead of the Sunni Muslim political establishment. The potential of this more abstract resource of being the voice of a victimized minority, have contributed to the framing process in the mobilization of Sahwat al-Fateh. The injustice frame it used to portray itself as the real victims of the Bahraini conflict, prospers by it identifying itself as an expression of the street `s

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attitudes and discontent. In addition, they were able to pull in regional resources since countering Shia Muslim influence is an issue central to several political and religious groupings across the Arab gulf. When Sahwat al-Fateh organized the rally on February 21st 2012, several Kuwaiti Salafists came to offer support to and recognition of their mobilization and struggle.[156]

Except from their standing as a street movement, the Sahwat al-Fateh members claimed that they did not have any resources available. Rather they said that the traditional opposition are the ones able to pull in resources to strengthen their force. The most effective resource of the opposition is media access, according to my sources. The access to international media gave the opposition full coverage of their side of the story, while Sahwat al-Fateh struggled to get its version across. The national press failed to cover either side. Especially was their dissatisfaction linked to how the media covered Sahwat al-Fateh's demonstrations and rallies. "Poorly", source E answered when asked about how the local media had reacted to their activities. She said: "Newspapers covered our rallies, but the TV did not."[157] Source C claimed that the media was asleep in Bahrain and said: "They are not covering what is happening in the street."[158] She taught the government had given instructions to the media not to give the demonstrations too much attention, as it would increase the media hype:

Not to cover is just not to increase the media hype that is happening around Bahrain. It is orders from the government. [159]

Source D on the other hand said that he felt the regional TV channels, such as al-Arabiyya and al-Jazeera, had given them a reasonably good coverage. He meant it was through their rallies being televised and spread that they had the potential of influencing the political elite.[160]

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[156] Kinninmont, Jane (2012)
[157] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[158] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[159] Interview in Manama, March 2012
[160] Interview in Manama, March 2012

5 The influence of Sunni Muslim mobilization on Bahraini politics

5.1 Challenges to Bahrain's rentier rule

The political mobilization of groups of the Sunni population in Bahrain indicates an awakening political consciousness amongst new parts of the population in the country. Going from initially aiming only to halt the anti-government demonstrations, they have now invoked their own platforms expressing wider political demands. This chapter will assess how this has altered the political space of the Bahraini government. The rentier theory suggests that the petroleum rich countries in the Gulf are able to buy stability with the income their oilfield provide them with. The wealth has provided them with sufficient means to quell political requirements by providing material welfare, and they can act as they please. However, the political mobilization of Sunni Muslims challenges this assumption. This chapter looks at how the rentier state theory predicts that a rentier state can stall or co-opt group formation. It then challenges this assumption by identifying three elements of the Sunni Muslim mobilization that complicate the Bahraini government's rentier domination. These are the ethno-religious dimension in Bahrain, the tension between hard-liners and moderates and the emergence of leaderless movements.

5.1.1 Group formation in a rentier state

The rentier theory holds that a rentier state is able to hinder the development of independent organizations working towards political reform and change through co-option. Michael Ross calls this a *group formation effect* or *civil society effect.* Through macro analysis he has identified a correlation between high rentier income and a weak society, suggesting that statistically a country with high rentier income can quell political demands. High public spending, the replacement of independent organizations with state-funded ones and low taxation work to stall political requirements by filling

material and economic needs of the population, according to the rentier theory.[161] High public spending allows the government to buy the support and allegiance of citizens and potential political challengers. The rentier theory holds that this makes the government able to forestall the formation of independent social organizations by keeping citizens content with their economic and material situation. The allocated resources then serve to pacify political aspirations.

Also, interfering in independent organizations allows a government to subtly thwart attempts at creating a civil society. Instead of collective action, the rentier system encourages individual efforts to secure access to material benefits. The theory suggests that this hinders independent group formation. In Bahrain this dynamic has been visible when the King has encouraged brokerage and petitions on case-to-case basis. The lack of taxes hinders the evolvement of social groups, such as the taxpaying middle class, that may join together to push for political or economic reform.[162]

Despite the theory's assumptions, the government in Bahrain has not been able to buy off all civil society activity with their rentier income. Sahwat al-Fateh's mobilization illustrates why rentier domination is becoming increasingly difficult in Bahrain.

5.1.2 The ethno-religious dimension

The first factor that complicates the rentier assumption is that the ethno-religious lines in Bahrain makes the citizens' aspirations for political empowerment something more than an effect of economic contentment. The concern over the relative strength of one's group in relation to other groups in society contributes to shape political priorities. Justin Gengler argues that ethno-religious fault lines create circumstances where everyday citizens of rent-dependent states will be motivated politically by something other than material welfare.[163] Rather, the fear of ethnic domination by another group is a motivating force for the acquisition of power. Horowitz argues that "conflicts over needs and interests are subordinated to conflicts over group status and over the rules to

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[161] Ross, Michael (2009): p. 20, 21
Davidson, Christopher M. (2012): p. 6, 7
Crystal, Jill (1995): *Oil and politics in the Gulf - Rulers and merchants in Kuwait and Qatar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
Beblawi, Hazem and Luciani, Giacomo (ed.) (1987): *The Rentier State,* Croom Helm, London
[162] Ross, Michael (2009): p. 20, 21, 22
[163] Gengler, Justin (2011): p. 113

govern conflict".[164] If so, this can make the different camps in Bahrain difficult to control and co-opt for a state relying on the supply of economic and material welfare as a survival strategy.

This has in several years been illustrated by Shia Muslim mobilization in reaction to their political and structural exclusion from instruments and positions of power. Now the Sunni Muslim mobilization also shows how fear of what potential empowerment of the other group in society can lead to mobilization, and hence challenge some of the rentier assumptions. The Shia Muslims have become the ethnic "out-group" in Bahrain and have been structurally and politically excluded, whereas the Sunni Muslims have served as the "in-group". The out-group has found inspiration for political mobilization by seeing that the defining fault line in society is not economic. Rather they view their economic situation as the effect of their political marginalization. This contributes to shape political opinion and spur political action. However, it also works to shape political actions amongst the members of the "in-group", as it has with the Sunni Muslims in Bahrain. Firstly, by rallying support for the government, and secondly, by drawing them into the ethnic dichotomy and shaping their political opinions to correspond with ethno-religious lines. Despite a general comfortable economic and material situation, the mobilized Sunni Muslims are demanding political reform.[165]

I hold that the ethno-religious dimension in Bahraini politics shaped Sahwat al-Fateh. The basic assumptions amongst the members are that the Shia Muslims have a transnational agenda aiming to disempower Sunni Muslims. According to them the potential empowerment of the February 14th coalition and other segments of the Shia society would be at their cost, and would be the end of Bahrain "as they know it". The escalating violence and clashes in the street since the uprising began, have served to mobilize the Sunni Muslims in reaction. This could potentially have been like the prior counter-mobilization efforts in Bahrain, where the Sunni Muslims have rallied behind the government. But as the state failed to contain the uprising in a manner satisfactory to Sahwat al-Fateh, they also started making calls for political reform and change. The new political awareness and formulation of political interests have worked to challenge the government's standing as the voice of the Sunni Muslim interest. It has also lead to Sunni Muslims asking whether the present system, uprising or not, serves their interest.

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[164] Horowitz, Donald (1985): *Ethnic groups in conflict,* University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 187
[165] Gengler, Justin (2011): p. 40, 41

The fact that the "in-group" is openly discontent with the political situation and rallying against the provider of rentier wealth shows how the rentier assumption of passivity in return for welfare is challenged.

The Sunni Muslims feel stuck in a political system that does not reward them sufficiently for their political support. Rather they feel that they have to take the consequences of the state's inability to contain the Shia Muslims - once again. Instead of their political demands being heard and reacted to, they feel that a large bulk of the state's politics and financial resources are used to answer similar Shia demands. They acknowledge that large parts of their reform calls are similar to those the Shia Muslim opposition voice. Bahrain's financial and political situation is not lost on them and they see that the corruption and speculation fuelling high oil prices and the housing shortage do not serve them. The economy is weak in the country and the strong influx of expatriates has caused friction. Sunni Muslims have complained that they are the victims when foreign workforce is imported. The expats take up jobs in the security forces and live in areas predominantly Sunni.[166] If this is the status quo that the rulers want to preserve, the dissatisfied Sunni Muslims want political reform. Discontent with their relative share of welfare and power the Sunni movements mobilize to voice their requirements. Then their satisfaction is not just a function of their share of rent revenues, but their share relative to the other group in society.

The identification of similar grievances with the Shia Muslim opposition does not result in cooperation. Mutual distrust, serves to discourage formal recognition of mutual objects and interests. This shows how the ethno-religious lines in Bahrain influence and shape political fault lines. The conflicts between discontent groups in society make them from one perspective easier to contain for the Bahraini state because it does not face unison and coordinated calls for change and reform. As long as political factions exist along sectarian lines, they will expend a vast amount of their energy fighting each other rather than working together to resolve shared grievances. This eliminates potential sources of cross-societal mobilization. However, the balancing act that having a split opposition requires from the state is complicated. Any appeasement with one of the

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[166] Gengler, Justin (2012b): *Bahrain´s other silent majority,* blogpost at bahrainipolitics.blogspot.no, available at http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.no/2011/12/bahrains-other-silent-majority.html
Al-Shehabi, Omar (2012): *Demography and Bahrain´s unrest,* online article at Carnegie Endowment. Available at: http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/index.cfm?fa=show&article=43079&solr_hilite=

groups would imply that the state at the same time creates a dissonance with the other group.

5.1.3 Hard-liners vs. moderates

Another challenge for the state's ability to co-opt social forces in Bahrain is the tensions between the hard-liners on each side of the conflict advocating the use of strong force, and the moderates hoping to solve the conflict through reconciliatory measures. Since the uprising began, every failed attempt at dialogue and reconciliation has seemed to strengthen radical splinter groups appearing on both sides of the conflict, making the groups the government has to co-opt more complex. On the Sunni side Sahwat al-Fateh has proved to be one of the hard-liners. Formerly, dialogue between the government and leaders of political opposition groups have worked to solve political differences and calm political discontent. Through having negotiations with and appeasing key persons with authority amongst opposition forces the government has been able to quell unrest. However, if forces on both sides lose faith in negotiated solutions, discarding the compromises they necessarily include, such dialogue will no longer be an effective tactic. This means that reconciliatory measures as an arena for concessions and appeasement to co-opt political forces is insufficient. This limits the government's political space in handling the political mobilization.

This became apparent already in March 2011 when the crown prince, a representative of the "soft-power" fraction in the ruling family, was given the King's approval of initiating a dialogue with al-Wifaq to calm the unrest. Al-Wifaq, as a legalized political society, has been more moderate than other demonstrators, such as the February 14th coalition, in its demands. It has called for parliamentary reform rather than the fall of the regime, and has been less anti-Western in its rhetoric. Through negotiating with al-Wifaq the government hoped to reach a substantial part of those demonstrating in the street. Al-Wifaq, well aware of the radicalisation amongst some of the protesters, said that it would not enter unless the government agreed to the election of a new constitutional assembly. The leadership in al-Wifaq knew that anything less would not be accepted in the street. The government was not willing to give such a political concession in return for appeasement and the dialogue crashed. This made the government turn to a hard security approach to stall the unrest. Two

days later the King called a three-month "state of national safety", which gave the military almost unlimited powers in stalling the uprising. Soon after, forces from Saudi-Arabia and UAE joined them.

When new dialogue initiatives came in the summer of 2011, they were aborted when al-Wifaq pulled out. They were frustrated that the government was not willing to give sufficient political concessions. Again, those in favour of dialogue on both sides took a hit and lost support from groups advocating stronger responses. The initiative was interpreted by Sunni Muslim political groups as if those guilty of creating chaos in the country were misusing their chance at dialogue by making too big demands. Since the Shia opposition was the one who pulled out, it is to blame for the failure of the dialogue. Radical Shia Muslims discarded dialogue as a naive approach that would not lead to substantial political change. Again the government failed in their reconciliatory measures trying to co-opt the opposition. Another reconciliatory measure, the BICI-report published in November 2011, also failed to calm the unrest.

When in the spring of 2012 rumours began circulating about the possibility of a new dialogue between al-Wifaq and the government, Sahwat al-Fateh was loudly stating its discontent in street demonstrations. NUG on the other hand was open to negotiating a political solution to the country's problem. When I interviewed her, source C said she was overall sceptical of any kind of dialogue. She argued the Shia Muslim opposition had misused their chance of dialogue the summer before. Providing them with a new chance now would be the same as rewarding them for creating chaos, she said:

> Not with the anti-government asking so condescendingly, so pompously for dialogue on their own terms like they did last year. They messed up last year because they were too arrogant, and they are messing up again now. For them to get into the dialogue they have specifically asked that no Sunni will be present. And we oppose any agreement or dialogue the government has with the other side purely because they do not represent Bahrain.[167]

In their narrative the dialogue would just serve as another example of concessions given from the state to protesters. Source D said:

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[167] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Actually, the reason why this is going on is the idea of forgiveness. It has happened many times during the last maybe 20 years. The people causing problems for the government are still leading what is happening in Bahrain and there is no punishment.[168]

So remaining firm in their rejection of dialogue became important for the members of Sahwat al-Fateh. Both because they did not think the state should talk to the opposition, but also because they were not asked to participate. This illustrates how they were concerned with their relative share of power and influence, making co-option increasingly difficult for the government. This also applied to international dialogue. The US has strong interests in Bahrain as it serves as a base for their fifth fleet. They initiated dialogue with al-Wifaq as part of their efforts to reconcile the situation on the island. The members of Sahwat al-Fateh were frustrated that the US had not chosen to speak to other oppositional groups in Bahrain. Source A meant that the American efforts were half-hearted and irrelevant when they did not speak to all parts of the opposition. One of Sahwat al-Fateh's first demonstrations, named "hands-off Bahrain" was directed at the American involvement as well as the suggested Iranian influence. When Sahwat al-Fateh was not considered for a seat at the negotiation table, they refused the dialogue altogether, calling for stronger responses to the opposition.

The tension between the hard-liners and the moderates is a complicating factor for the regime trying to co-opt social forces. It certainly limits their political space and it makes a negotiated solution increasingly difficult to achieve. The demonstrators on the street do not necessarily feel represented by those seated at the negotiation table and will not necessarily accept the compromises that a negotiated solution could include. Their negotiation is rather conducted through physical presence and expressions of discontent in the street. This means that co-option of social forces is increasingly difficult for the government and that they have to resort to hard power to bring the demonstrators into line. If oil money could buy political support, this should not be necessary.

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[168] Interview in Manama, March 2012

5.1.4 The emergence of leaderless movements

A final challenge for the rentier domination is the shape and form of the newly emerged movements in the region. Since the Arab spring emerged in Tunisia and Egypt the driving forces of the revolutions have been youth coalitions with unidentified leadership. Refusing to operate within the political frameworks established by former generations, the new movements have been more concerned with arranging rallies and demonstrations than formally registering their organization. Several of them use, like Sahwat al-Fateh, types of Shura councils as their upper authority. The movements have expressed a more critical stance towards the elder's past records and an aim to assert independence from the politics of the past. The movements also seem to have widened the protest base in the population. These groups have across the region been able to mobilize parts of society that have formerly not been politically active. The mobilization of new groups of society runs counter to the rentier theory's suggestion that the government can forestall political mobilization through high public spending.[169]

For many Sunni Muslims in Bahrain, voicing political demands is something new. This was also the case for several of the members of Sahwat al-Fateh that I interviewed. None of them had extensive political experience. Source C said that was something completely new for both her and her generation that they were taking to the street to say that they were opposed to things the government were doing. She said they had been raised to never question the government, since they were like parents to the citizens. She said:

> We have been raised, our generation, we have been raised not to question government. We listen to the older ones. We listen to, you know, the government, they are your parents, they understand. And so we are not raised to question, to speak out. [170]

This illustrates how the political establishment for many Sunni Muslims in Bahrain has been trusted with running politics because of an understanding that "they know best". This suggests that previously the government has succeeded in forestall possible political discontent by keeping citizens content with their economic and material

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[169] Filiu, Jean-Pierre (2011): *The Arab Revolution: Ten lessons from the democratic uprising*, Hurst and Company, London: p. 67
[170] Interview in Manama, March 2012.

situation. Now, however, things had changed. According to source C the mentality of young Sunni Muslims was no longer the same. She also proposed that the future generation, her children and their friends, would put even harder pressure on the government when they grew up. She said:

I think the younger generation will be more outspoken than our generation and will probably pressure the government much much more than what the other side is doing now. When our kids will go out, when the future generations go out, they will go out because they now understand it. When they will go out they will be more aware.[171]

Her statement underlines a new political awareness amongst groups that formerly had been content with being passive in terms of politics. And they are well aware of the transformation that their mobilization is contributing to. Source B said that the voice that they are bringing in to the equation is "a power, a silent majority, that has spoken".[172] By raising their voice they are finding their political identity. They also find that the identity is not necessarily in the same format as organizations before them have chosen. The difference between NUG and Sahwat al-Fateh illustrates this. Whereas NUG, dominated by older political forces in the Bahraini setting, decided to become a political society, Sahwat al-Fateh refused. NUG's transformation resonates with Ross' argument that the rentier state through interfering in independent organizations thwarts attempts at creating a civil society. The members of Sahwat al-Fateh called that NUG had fallen into the trap of complying with the government's requirements becoming a political society. They, on the other hand, would not. To do so would be to fit its organization to the needs of the political establishment, something it would not agree to. The members wanted to define what the movement was themselves. When asked about why Sahwat al-Fateh operated without a leader source C said:

They cannot pay us off. We don't have a leader. We do not have a place where they can just pop up and say they need to talk to us. They cannot contact us through anyone. And if they contact us is has to be all 22 or 25 of us. So how can they control us? If it is consensus and the government says oh do not do it. And someone says: Fine, give me 1000 dinars, and I will not do it. Then I say: No, we will do it. The government cannot pay us all of.[173]

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[171] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[172] Interview in Manama, March 2012.
[173] Interview in Manama, March 2012

Aware of how politics have been run in the country for decades, with political forces being co-opted to fit the government's interests and stall political unrest, they try to avoid fitting into the old system. The same dynamics was visible on the Shia Muslims side as youth movements, such as the February 14th coalition, did not feel represented by al-Wifaq and decided to form their own movements to voice their own opinions, independent of the established political elite. The dynamic indicates a new understanding amongst the activists of what politics should be and a declining trust in the political authority of the political establishment. Rather than trusting authority figures with politics the new movements want to claim their rights as individual citizens to influence the political decisions shaping the realities around them. Then the political passivity that the rentier theory suggests is more difficult to achieve, because the citizens' expand their concerns beyond material welfare. The new movements are not willing to operate within the old framework and trust the old political elite with decisions making in return for economic resources. Their priorities have changed. Rather than accepting that political solutions are made for them, they want to participate in its making. Though they do not have identical aims, the different youth movements in Bahrain share an identity as expressions of a new political generation emerging in the Middle East.

The emergence of leaderless movements is a challenge to the government's rentier rule because bringing these movements into line through co-option is complicated. They are, as one of the members of Sahwat al-Fateh underlined, more difficult to approach with buy-off offers, as the government would have to approach an entire council not one leader. The new movements are growing discontent with this way of running politics and refuse to fit their organization to political buy-off. The way the government forced al-Wifaq to comply with and participate in the parliamentary system in Bahrain is not necessarily a tactic that will work with the new movements. Christopher Davidson suggests in his recent book "After the sheikhs" that whereas the Gulf monarchies were able to contain earlier opposition groups keeping the number of dissidents low, the post 2011-opposition has proved more difficult. The new movements can no longer be placed in the old categories.[174] They try to define their own way of doing politics, and that could discard the old way. As a consequence, rentier wealth seems increasingly incapable of buying their passivity.

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[174] Davidson, Christopher (2012): p. 231

6 Conclusion

When the February 14th uprising began the Bahraini government was careful to present it as an Iranian-led attempt to topple the regime. The strategy of framing demonstrations and uprisings in the country in sectarian terms had previously worked to defer political mobilization amongst groups of the population that may have been inclined to call for political and economic reform. Portraying itself as the only buffer against an Iranian takeover the government has been able to rally a majority of the Sunni Muslim part of the population behind itself. Whenever Sunni Muslims have voiced political concerns it has normally been against the Shia-dominated opposition and in support of the present rule. It has appeared like the government has succeeded in its survival strategy where the Sunni Muslims have provided the loyal power base it has needed. The government thus first welcomed the mobilization of Sunni Muslim counter movements in Bahrain following the February 14th uprising.

When the members of Sahwat al-Fateh came out into the streets of Manama for the first time in December 2011, they came out because they felt situation in the country had become unbearable. Inspired by the government narrative they claimed that Shia protesters in the street shunned no means as they were calling for the fall of the King. Importantly, they also urged the government to put out "the burning of the streets". Through a framing process where they both came to view the protesters as a threat to the stability of their country and the government as unwilling to restore security, formerly politically inactive groups were mobilized. They drew boundaries between themselves and the political establishment and chose the street as their avenue for voicing political discontent. Tired and frustrated with the situation in the country, they aimed to voice the demands of ordinary Sunni Muslims as opposed to those in privileged positions in the political establishment.

The mobilization of Sahwat al-Fateh has shown is that the government's survival strategy comes at a cost. When the movement entered the streets it was not as easily controlled and the government went from encouraging their mobilization to being unable or unwilling to suppress it. Though they may seem useful in countering the Shia-led opposition, their political identity and ambitions is a strain on Bahrain's rentier rule.

Firstly, because their mobilization is an expression of the ethno-religious dynamics in the country that makes stalling group formation by rentier means increasingly difficult. Their political and economic satisfaction is not just an effect of material welfare. Rather a concern for their relative status, relative power and relative access to material welfare affects their political priorities. Therefore, any appeasement with the Shia opposition by the government will be regarded as a loss for the mobilized Sunnis. Secondly, because the fear of the Shia Muslims that has been building amongst the Sunnis because of the government narrative makes them advocate a hard-line approach to the uprising. Balancing this pressure is not easy for the government. It is also in favour of a strong reaction, but has to restrain itself for the stability of the future of the country. Imprisoning any demonstrator is not a viable solution, neither practically nor with regards to international reactions. Finally, the movement is not willing to adapt itself to the government's co-option strategies. Like other youth movements in the region they are leaderless, administered by a Shura council. The members refuse being co-opted in return for material welfare and want to freely express their political opinions.

These three strains combined show that the cost of the regime's survival strategy is political forces on the Sunni side of the population that want political change. Being part of the power base of the government, any containment strategy would threaten to alienate them further. At the moment they still agree with the regime's overall strategy, but their newly discovered political awareness could change that. For the movement, since they have yet to voice opinions directly challenging the present system, their best chance at influencing politics in the country is by continuing to block attempts at dialogue. This would also be a good way to show that they are in fact as anti-government, as they themselves claim.

Despite Sahwat al-Fateh's ethno-religious dimension the political fault lines in Bahrain cannot be reduced to the divide between Sunni and Shia. Not all Sunni Muslims identify with state politics and equally not all Shia Muslims identify with the February 14th movement. Political awareness is not dependent on religious affiliation. Using *a* instead of *the* in front of terms such as Sunni Muslim street, I have attempted to underline that these movements do not represent all of the Sunni Muslims in the country. However, they do represent a sizeable part and those newly aware and mobilized Sunni Muslims add a new element to state-opposition dynamics. A dynamic where ethno-religious lines play an active part in shaping its fault lines. Despite calling

themselves anti-government, Sahwat al-Fateh is not fundamentally against state policies. They want to maintain the present rule, do not have strong opinions on the parliamentary system and rely on the government to contain the uprising. Regardless, their requirements and street demonstrations do represent a limitation for the government's rentier rule and challenge the rentier state's political space and autonomy.

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Appendix

6.1   Sahwat Al-Fateh Statement:[175]

Issued 13/1/2012:

In the name of Allah Most Merciful and Most Graceful Sahwat AlFateh Statement (AlFateh Awakening) Escalation Friday. Thanks to Allah and prayers and peace be upon the Prophet and his companions We meet again in this place that gathered the noble people of Bahrain in a historic that turned the tables and failed the plot against Bahrain. We meet to express our people, AlFatih people demands. The demands of the average man on the street who is fed up with those who wreak havoc and chaos, escalating day by day with attacks and destruction. He is fed up even more with the Authorities and it's stalling in applying the law and enforcing it. Tis simple man is struck by the waves of attacks and instigation, pushing him towards confrontations by those so-called anti-government protestors who block the streets and throw Molotovs and create fear.. He is also struck on the other side with authority decisions and concessions to please the protestors with the continued pardoning. And we say it from here, no more concessions, no more concessions, no more concessions!

Justice, equality and the enforcement of law are our demands. We care not for personal gains, external pressures or wealth in western banks which our 'big' people are worried about. Our message to the authorities are simple for all to understand: those who are not punished will, will misbehave. And if you accept misbehavior, we don't! Because justice is the basis of ruling, God will help a fair country even if it's not a religious one. Where is the justice in the pardoning of those criminals, who have infringed on individuals and public rights, due to fear of external powers or personal benefits. As Allah says "do you fear them? You should fear Allah if you believe".

The demands of e honest and noble Bahrainis are to get their legitimate rights that they are entitled to in the constitution:

1. Peace and security in their homes, villages and towns from the frightening activities that demonstrators have imported from outside

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[175] This statement is enclosed as published by Sahwat al-Fateh.

2. The independence if the judiciary system that is clearly stated in the constitution which is the basis of a modern civil country.

The noble citizens are fed up with the frightening activities under the so called 'peaceful' slogan adopted by them and from the concession by the government. AllFatih Youths are addressing their speech today to both sides and we say it to all concerned: we have learned our lesson.. S thank you protestors and thank you government. The lesson we have learnt is that those with the louder voice get their demands met. We will not accept loosing our rights and have our pride stepped our and the law get humiliated for suspicious deals to please criminals and wrong doers. And if you need us to get down into the streets to do so, then be it! We will go out onto the streets peacefully and civilly but we will not hesitate to defend our rights and will not accept humiliation in our nation.

We closely followed the work of the BICI and it's report that stated the events and stated that AlFatih people are victims and have been attacked by protestors.. They have been ignored and have not been protected by the government during the events -again to please the protestors that are calling for the co-called Islamic republic. And what worries us now after seeing all what has happened and the creation of the national implementation committee for the BICI report that if we agree on it's implementation, the varying interpretations of the members in order to please a group over the others which is completely unacceptable and it will take us down a steep hill. Therefore, we will place this historic responsibility in the member's hands to make their honest efforts to rectify the path otherwise, their membership in the committee is useless.

We also reiterate, we will not accept a reconciliation based on pleasing those who have erred and punish those who have obeyed the law and maintained peace. We have gathered in this spot to send a message to the government before the protestors: we will not accept being the low fence which you can trample over. We will not accept want to marginalised to please the criminals. Unity, without a doubt, is a necessity in political and national work.

There are many hands trying to mess up AlFatih people's unity, working on dispersing their efforts and words. They use the foreign settlers' strategy of 'Divide and conquer'.

To them we say that AlFatih unity is what saved the country and failed the foreign backed plot. The AlFatih Awakening Youth has made efforts and is still making efforts to unify our political societies. We are making continuous efforts and we are getting positive feedback from the main AlFatih societies. We are currently working to put in place the work mechanisms for the unity in order to re-unite AlFatih people and be a hard number to bargain with, to bring back the peace and security and to defend Bahrain.

We as youth believe that we have a responsibility on our shoulders and we will not rest until our people's rights are restored, until justice is served and corruption eliminated. We will continue to make our free voices heard to all through all available channels in hope that our country is healed and safe from all ill-will. May Allah protect the kingdom of Bahrain and bless us with peace and security. May Allah help Bahrain and it's people against those who do not good for it.