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Them vs Us

The ontological significance of identity and (in)security
in the Cold Conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

In recent years, identity has become increasingly important within the field of International Relations and in studies of conflict. This has led to the widening of the field with the help of perspectives from the field of Psychology, and the emergence of ontological security theory (OST) where identity is a centrality. Originally, OST was applied on the individual-level but more recently, International Relations scholars have in different ways applied it to nation-states, groups and alike. In this study, the Cold Conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran will be the subject of research with the help of OST. Since the two states value their identities and incorporate them in their governments' foreign and domestic policy through narratives and actions, OST will be used to help shed new light on this conflict and the security dilemma between the two states. The meaning of Cold Conflict in this context is that the two states yet have not, to a certain degree, directly engaged in or declared war with each other. The wars that are currently taking place in different countries in the Middle East can be traced back to Saudi Arabia and Iran, leading to the claim that these two regional powers are engaging in proxy wars for regional dominance in countries within the region. Saudi Arabia, as the government and by its state-officials, identifies itself as a powerful kingdom and the leader of the Muslim world. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Iran emerged as an Islamic Republic and presented itself as a leader of Muslims while seeking regional leadership, tensions sparked between the two powers. This conflict can be linked to the sectarian wars within the region since the government of Saudi Arabia identifies as Sunni and the government of Iran as Shia and both states legitimize their foreign policy actions through narratives in which they use identity. The purpose of this study is to better understand how identity correlates with (in)security in this conflict, by applying OST to study the narratives and actions, of state-officials and leaders, that reflect the identities of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

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1. Introduction

> The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. (Sagan, 1997, pp. 6–7).

Sagan's quote brings up a question: What can be so important that we tend to go to war or conflict with each other? This question motivates this study, while traditional theories fail to answer a deeper part of this question that may lie in the psychology of human beings when it comes to conflicts and identity, the field of International Relations still struggles to find answers to the behaviour of actors, states and groups (Krolikowski, 2008, p. 109).

Conflicts are often a result of differences between two or more parts and in one sense all conflicts consist of clash of identities: communists against democrats, British against the French (Kaldor, 2012, p. 7). In turn, one can draw the conclusion that these clashes or conflicts are a form of polarization of each side that increases as the conflict progresses. A conflict, or the background to a conflict, generally generates insecurity among the states and its people. Rhetoric and narratives can be used by leaders in times of insecurity or conflict resulting in, if successful, a contributor to the polarization if the narratives aim to strengthen the "self" and distinguishing the "other".

Buzan et al.'s securitization theory conceptualizes how an issue can be represented as threat through speech acts, where discourse and language are important, transforming the issue to a prioritized security issue where extraordinary measures can be taken to counter it, thus creating a sense of security (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 21). The speech act is an act of using rhetoric to frame something as a threat (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 26). These acts can be compared to the ones made by leaders or state-officials in times of conflict. Constructing and objectifying a certain identity, such as a nation-state, group, or religion as a threat could be argued to cause polarization which lays a foundation for conflict among states and the civic society.

"Divide and conquer" is a strategy used by military tacticians to divide the enemy side, turning them against each other, making it easier to rule.

> A Captain ought, among all the other actions of his, endeavour with every art to divide the forces of the enemy, either by making him suspicious of his men in whom he trusted, or by giving him cause that he has to separate his forces, and, because of this, become weaker. (Machiavelli, 1521/2006, sixth book).

Dividing oneself from the other, or the enemy, can also prove useful in a conflict, since it strengthens the sense of "us" and distinguishes "them" as the threat, making it easier or clearer how the conflict is to play out and easier to gain more followers into the conflict and legitimize actions. Constructing an enemy can be useful for hegemonic-seeking states since it can legitimize certain actions that can lead to gaining material and geopolitical interests, which in turn can lead to power. There are several examples of leaders constructing enemies to legitimize their goals.

From the beginning of its formation as a state, the USA gave itself an explicit identity as the leader of the world based on "Manifest Destiny", a sort of constructed identity with attributes such as exceptionalism which gave the USA a sense of duty to carry out a mission for the world. This identity was eminent during the Cold War. The construction of the Soviet Union as a threat and its military capability was allegedly exaggerated. President Truman had to "scare the hell out of the country" by claiming these threats when speaking to the congress in order to gain its support to advance the USA's military capabilities and nuclear weapons. Military presence in different regions of the world, where geopolitical and material interests could be gained were also legitimized through the threat framing of the counterpart (Karlsson, 2014, pp. 352–359).

This is not to say that the Soviet Union did not do the same but there are researches that claim that it was rather the ideology and politics of the USA that drove the Cold War, that the USA had the advantage, and that the threat from the Soviet Union was exaggerated and did not pose a direct threat to the USA or Europe. The American evaluation was that there was no direct threat from the Soviet Union the nearest decades and ahead (Karlsson, 2014, pp. 342, 344). In one sense, one can claim that the USA and the Soviet Union both benefitted from this relationship since it gave them a chance to advance its hegemonic aspirations through narratives and actions based on the identities or ideologies.

George W. Bush used dividing rhetoric when a terrorist attack occurred in the USA 2001, September 11, when he stated: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." (Bush, 2001, Sep 20). In a sense, he tried to compel states and actors to choose a side. The threat seemed to be exaggerated since the USA is one of the most powerful states in the world and the attackers were terrorist groups without the same capabilities as the USA. This securitizing speech act gave the USA legitimacy to further advance its control and leadership in the name of security, both domestically and internationally, in turn enhancing the USA's identity as a hegemonic power, giving the nation more room to act according to its own interests.

A similar phenomenon as explained above exists within a conflict that could be referred to as the "new" Cold War, taking place in the Middle East. Iran and Saudi Arabia are in conflict with each other, although not directly other than the rhetoric their state-officials make about each other. Their actions are taking place in other countries, throughout the region, and one can claim that these two powers are engaging in proxy wars in different countries in the region. These actions are legitimized through narratives of the state-identity and threat framing of the other, creating the dynamics of "them versus us".

1.1 Background

The motives that drive and have initiated the new Cold War between Iran and Saudi Arabia are best understood through a framework that consists of the understanding of political, geopolitical, and economic interests. The complexity of the conflict in the region is not justified by arguing that the conflict is primarily sectarian. Regional state ambitions, international interests, affiliations, and domestic conflicts are some of the factors that play a role in the new Cold War of the Middle East (Gause, 2014, p. 1).

Still, traditional theories cannot explain why states behave the way they do beyond the material and geopolitical interests and military security and insecurity. According to realists, states seek to escape the security dilemma, but uncertainty and insecurity will not let them. Studies with ontological security theory suggests that states may prefer to have a security dilemma, which is rooted in the psychology of the human being (Mitzen, 2006). By new Cold War, it is meant that Saudi Arabia and Iran are in "competition" with each other, while not

engaging in a military conflict directly with each other, the two powers play the leading roles in the conflicts in other countries throughout the Middle East (Gause, 2014, p. 3).

From now on, in this study, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran will be referred to as the Cold Conflict to avoid confusion.

Saudi Arabia and Iran seek leadership and control over the region of the Middle East, and both aspire to be the leaders of the Islamic world (Mabon, 2015, pp. 2, 216; Darwich, 2014). These aspirations have translated to proxy wars throughout the region which has caused sectarian conflicts between Shia and Sunni among the civil wars that are occurring in the region (Fisher, 2016, Nov 19). Until the Iranian revolution, the relations between Iran, also west-friendly at the time, and Saudi Arabia were relatively stable and both countries' alliances to the USA kept their disagreements under control. The USA saw the two countries as the "twin pillars" in the region for American policy and interest in oil supplies against leftist ideologies (Soage, 2017, p.3).

The revolution in Iran in 1979 meant the fall of the west-friendly government under the Shah and the rise of a government that was against monarchies and imperialism. This meant, for the Saudi government, turmoil since the revolution appealed to the marginalized Shia population in Saudi Arabia, threatening the territorial integrity and challenged Saudi Arabia´s claim for Islamic leadership. One incident, that exemplified the threat inside Saudi Arabia's territory was the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 and a Shia uprising (intifada) in the Eastern Province the same year (Wehrey et al., 2009, p. 13; Jones, 2006). The invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 by the Soviet Union was a chance for Saudi Arabia to re-establish its Islamic legitimacy to the international and domestic audiences concerning the challenges made by Khomeini. Saudi Arabia supported recruitment, travel, and training to foreign jihadist volunteers to Afghanistan (Wehrey et al., 2009, p. 14).

Iran wanted to increase its influence by offering a safe haven and other support to dissident Shia groups such as the Organization for the Islamic revolution on the Arabian Peninsula, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the Hizb-e Wahdat in Afghanistan, the Da'awa Party in Iraq, Hizballah groups in Kuwait and the Gulf and Hizballah in Lebanon (Wehrey et al., 2009, p. 15). Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980 had a severe impact on the Saudi – Iranian relations. Iraq's power and orientation upheld stability in the tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran. While Saudi Arabia supported Iraq as a buffer against Iran, the invasion worsened

the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia and prompted a changed regional order. The USA sent military aid and forces to the region, mainly at Saudi Arabia's invitation which further disturbed the power balance between the two (Wehrey et al., 2009, p. 16).

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 led by the USA that resulted in the fall of Saddam Hussein was probably one of the most significant events that came to affect the tense relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. As mentioned above, the regime under Hussein functioned as a power balancer in the region and helped maintain a moderately, albeit tense, stable relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Hussein was an opponent to Iran and the removal of him and his regime meant a shift in power in the region (Marcus, 2019, Sep 16). Many former state-officials were removed from their posts following the execution of Hussein. These officials and Hussein were Sunnis and these actions taken by the USA gained to the sectarian conflict in the region allowing for groups to establish and seek power. Iran gained influence in Iraq by supporting Shia groups in the dividing conflict between Shia and Sunnis following the fall of Hussein (PBS documentary, 2018; Wong, 2008, Feb 15).

When the demonstrations of the Arab Spring emerged in the Middle East, many Saudi allied countries were affected by the protests and Saudi Arabia worried that Iran would take advantage and take control in these countries where protests against the governments were taking place. Saudi Arabia acted to hinder this by offering economic aid to affected countries. When protests erupted in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia sent troops, through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), to Bahrain. In Yemen, protests led to a war between the rebel group Houthis, with alleged ties to Iran. Saudi Arabia, which is allied to the government in Yemen, launched a military operation against the rebels in Yemen (Fisher, 2016, Nov 19). These past and more recent events in this background provides a more conclusive study when analyzing how leaders and state-officials narrate the identity of the state and legitimize actions based on the narratives.

1.2 Aim, purpose and research questions

The wider purpose of this study is to better understand the nexus between identity and (in)security in a conflict. Though many studies about identity, security, and conflict in

International Relations have been made, many questions remain. This study seeks to add to the knowledge of the identity-security nexus with the help of the newly emerged ontological security theory in a conflict, not yet much studied with this theory. Further, this study hopes to contribute to the testing and forming of the theory in the field of International Relations, and the studies of identity-security nexus in the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Current studies show that similarities in identities can lead to cooperation, whereas differences can lead to conflict. However, this presumption is contravened in empirical evidence in the Middle East (Darwich, 2014), making this conflict a relevant source to study regarding the knowledge of identity and security in a conflict.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to further understand how identity and security are correlated by studying how the self-identity of the respective state is produced and sustained through narratives and actions in the Cold Conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Since this study is limited in time and resources, finding answers to why identity correlates to security in a conflict is difficult. However, by studying how identity is produced in narratives and then reflected in actions, which is what ontological security theory can help do, one can reach the beginning to the understanding of the nexus between identity and (in)security in a conflict. The research questions are therefore as follows:

1. How do Iran and Saudi Arabia, as states, use narratives to produce and sustain their self-identity?
2. How do Saudi Arabia's and Iran's foreign policy actions reflect these narratives?

2. Theory

Traditionally in International Relations theories, the state has been the main actor of security, constituting sovereignty in the international arena to assure safety from threats and dangers towards the state and its survival. This perspective originates from a realist theory and has been dominating the field of International Relations (Stern, 2005, p. 17). For classical realists, power is the currency and they argue that the reason that states strive for power is because of human nature (Dunne et al., 2013, p. 77). For neorealists or structural realists, it is the structure of the international system where anarchy exists, meaning that there is no higher

authority, that causes states to seek security through power to ensure their survival. Because of this, neorealists argue that states are uncertain of what other states' intents are, thus a security dilemma emerges between the states. The more steps a state takes into enhancing its security the more other states become insecure and because of the anarchic system, where states' main goal is their survival, they are uncertain of the intent of other states. This creates a security dilemma which is problematic because it essentially means that the international arena is always on the verge of conflicts (Dunne et al., 2013, pp. 78–80).

The concept of security has been a main subject in International Relations, defined as threats, dangers, military capabilities, and alliances (Dunne et al., 2013, p. 62). From Thucydides and Niccolò Machiavelli to Carl con Clausewitz and Hans J. Morgenthau, classical realism has dominated International Relations for nearly 2500 years (Dunne, et al., 2013, p. 60).

Recently, critical theories and perspectives have been included in the field of International Relations, and the addition of sociology implies that the need for "new" perspectives that involve the understanding of the human mind, is called for as international relations, not the field but the phenomena, is governed by humans. Hobden argues that including multi-disciplinary approaches to International Relations is a positive step for the field (Hobden & Hobson, 2002, p. 42) and Hobson counts several eminent scholars, Theda Skocpol and Wallerstein among others, who have made it possible for the inclusion of historical sociology in the discipline of International Relations (Hobden & Hobson, 2002, p. 3).

Buzan et al. acknowledged the lack of definition of the concept of security and provided a definition that is widely used and accepted in the field of International Relations: "the pursuit of freedom from threat" (Buzan, 1983, p. 11). They later updated the definition and found that the answer to security is about survival when an issue is presented as an existential threat (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 21; Stern, 2005, p. 17). One key aspect of the securitization theory is that the act of security begins with a speech act. By uttering the word security and presenting a threat that requires extraordinary approaches, the act of security or securitization has been practiced. It is not until the audience accepts the threat as legitimate for securitization of an issue to be finalized (Buzan, et al., 1998, pp. 26–27). Although Buzan et al. (1998) do not focus on identity, the speech act can help us understand how security is made, in turn, one can study how identities or "them" can be framed as a threat through narratives.

The concept of identity is a centrality in security studies (McSweeney, 1999, p. 5), conflicts, and wars and the study and inclusion of identity as a sector in the field of International Relations has taken shape and is continuing to grow (Bilgin in Burgess, 2010, pp. 81–88). The importance of the connection between identity and (in)security has not gone unnoticed and scholars are exploring its theoretical bases and suggest that (in)security is a discursive practice inseparable from the process of identification bounded by sovereignty (Stern, 2005, p. 16–17). Kaldor uses the term identity politics by which she means movements that organize around religious, ethnic, or racial identity to claim state power (Kaldor, 2012, p. 79). Kaldor raises the importance of identity in security and conflict studies and her work has influenced academic and policy circles. (Stern, 2005, p. 19).

Studies of identity in security studies have in a sense always been present but the meaning of identity in security and conflict is developing. Huntington's article Clash of Civilisations, which is about conflicts between states or groups of different civilizations, is debated on whether or not the root of the conflict is the cultural or religious differences (Bilgin in Burgess, 2010, p. 81). Like identity, security is a social construct and since the 1990s the nexus between identity and security has been increasingly eminent with the help of critical security studies which has led to the study of identity as a form of security. In doing so, critical approaches have studied identity "beyond" the terms of ethnic, religious, linguistic differences, etc. and to the wide range of "self – other" dynamics (Bilgin in Burgess, 2010, p. 81). Around the same time, following the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union, violent conflicts in Balkans and Africa and the attacks in 2001, September 11 in the USA, for example, were popularly viewed as connected to identity (Bilgin in Burgess, 2010, p. 81). Despite that, identity as a concept in the field of International Relations emerged after the Cold War, identity played a role during the Cold War and has always played a role in conflicts. As Kaldor describes it; "…all wars involve a clash of identities…" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 7).

The field of International Relations has answered many questions about identity in conflict and security studies, but many questions remain. How and why does identity have a role in conflicts, beyond the "clash of identities" meaning where cultural, ethnic, and, religious differences, among others, play a role? There seems to be a psychological dynamic of "us versus them" in conflicts that plays a more significant role than differences between people. Do conflicts create identity or do identity create conflict? To better understand these

questions, one must seek deeper in the concept of identity and security, deeper in the human mind among the existence of the fundamentals of the cognitive system and basic emotions, which can be done with the help of the field of psychology. As Kaldor (2013, p. 345) argues, rather than understanding that war is a contest between two sides, it is an effort of both sides to try and construct one political identity as a foundation for power. Kaldor (2013) further explains that sectarian identity is a result of war rather than a cause of it.

To this background, the evolution of theories and transition to perspectives in the field of International Relations shows that to better understand issues within International Relations, we need to "borrow" concepts, theories, and perspectives from different fields. Since the phenomena of international relations (not the field) are driven by humans it seems only natural to not only gain insights with the help of sociology but with psychology as well.

2.1 Earlier research

Ontological security theory is still new to the field of International Relations and foreign policy studies (Mitzen & Larson, 2017) and is currently in its building-process in the field. Scholars of International Relations have had different approaches when using this theory (Mitzen & Kinnvall, 2016). The theory this study will use is therefore based on earlier research which will be presented in the sections of "Ontological Security Theory" and "Analytical framework".

2.2 Ontological Security Theory

Ontological security is a concept "borrowed" originally from the discipline of psychology developed by psychiatrist R.D Laing (1965) (Behravesh, 2018). Sociologist, Giddens builds on Laing's idea and develops it within sociology and in turn, since the early 2000s, many scholars of International Relations has built on Giddens's idea and have brought the concept of ontological security to the field of International Relations to help explain foreign policymaking, decisions, and international events. This theory helps gain new insights into

problems, adding different explanations and depth to the problems (Mitzen & Larson, 2017, p. 1).

Giddens's definition of ontological security is: "a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual." (Giddens 1991, p. 243). To be human is to, more or less, continuously know what one is doing and why one is doing it (Giddens, 1991, p. 35). In other words, to be ontologically secure is to have a sense of one's own identity and the reality around it and to be able to act and react to the reality which is fundamental in being a human.

Wendt (1999, p. 131) describes ontological security as follows: "human beings need relatively stable expectations about the natural and especially social world around them. Along with the need for physical security, this pushes human beings in a conservative, homeostatic direction, and to seek out recognition of their standing from society." In order to act and react to the world, one must understand the world around one, and to understand this one must know who one is, understand one's own identity. For example, a football player must be certain that one is a football player and understand the game of football, both physically and mentally to be able to play football. "To have an identity is simply to have certain ideas about who one is in a given situation…" (Wendt, 1999, p. 170).

A *stable cognitive environment*, or a sense of one's own continuous existence, its meaning and the reality around it, means that one is aware of how to act and react to the reality, a sense of order in events. Another example is when a teacher is aware of the own identity or role as a teacher and is conscious of the students and the class which in turn means that the teacher is able to teach the student. Giddens draws on the example of the relationship between an infant and the caretaker when an infant is, maybe not so much aware of being an infant, but identifies trust with its caregiver and is aware of the own needs and feelings thus acting in a way to respond to these needs and feelings by crying or approaching the caregiver for example. According to Giddens, trust is an important factor to what creates ontological security: "Trust in the existential anchoring of reality in an emotional, and to some degree in a cognitive, sense rests on confidence in the reliability of persons, acquired in the early experiences of the infant" (Giddens 1991, p. 38). We learn habits and routines from our early days of life, and they are essential in creating a stable environment, or connectedness to reality, between infants and caretakers (Giddens 1991, p. 39). It essentially comes down to the

concept of identity, one identifies the self and relates it to the reality to be able to act and react, where routines are essential in creating the sense of self and the relation to reality.

An ontologically secure person is an individual that has a sense of self in the world as a real, whole and continuous person over time to experience the sense of agency and being able to handle encounters, including, dangers of life (Laing, 1965, pp. 39–42). Individuals need to feel secure of their own identity and in who they are as some uncertainties threaten identity security. This is why that agency requires a stable cognitive environment so that the actor know what to expect to be able to relate ends to means and since the ends are essentially connected to identity, actors want to establish *routinized inter-social relationships* with others to create a certain behaviour in order to maintain the self-identity. Not having a stable cognitive environment or being insecure in one's own ontological security can lead to the state where one does not know how to act and react to the surroundings, not being able to face dangers and threats because there is no knowledge of how to relate ends to means or plan ahead (Mitzen, 2006, p. 342). These relationships help define the own identity and identify the "other's" identity which in turn enforces the own identity, in a sense functioning as an identity-reinforcing circle.

In his article, Wendt (2004) compares the state to a person by attributing properties, we normally see in human beings such as interests, rationality, identity, and so on, to states. This perspective turns out to be useful when studying world politics as states act "as if" they were persons. The idea of state personhood seems to be widely agreed upon in the field (Wendt, 2004, pp. 289–290). Since states are governed by people it seems logical that the attributes that these people reflect how a state might act. To get a deeper analysis of how states behave in International Relations, the use of Psychology can help explain the behaviour in human beings, thus help explain states' behaviours.

However, Steele acknowledges the problem of "level of analysis" which is in many ways connected to the agent-structure problem since the concept of ontological security originates from the analysis on the individual-level, which International Relations scholars then want to apply to the state. Many International Relations scholars tend to build the "level of analysis" on the work of others, put differently: "everyone does it, so I can do it" (Steele, 2008 p. 15). Mitzen does not treat states as persons just because everyone else does and argues that ontological security is a need for the state's members, which is why states seek it. She

continues her argument by explaining that it is essential for a society to have an identity and that the ontological security concept helps explain certain macro-level patterns (Mitzen, 2006, p. 352).

As a state is governed and consists of human beings, consequently, policies and actions taken by the state reflects the human mind also since ontological security is a deep basic need for humans and exists consciously and unconsciously in the human mind, I draw the conclusion that this reflect how the state acts in the end. The individuals that lead the states have in some way or another exercised power in order to get to the leading position and since states must maintain sovereignty, it adds the dimension of power and interest of power to the identity of the state.

Steele argues that emotion is a resource for neoconservative philosophy and draws on the example of the Bush administration's foreign policy and its agenda in Iraq, with visions of national interests connected to the state-identity. He argues that individuals are emotionally connected to the nation-state and the state agents create an emotional connection to the authority of the nation-state to promote "national interest" (Steele, 2008, p. 16). The state's leaders are therefore the level analysis. This idea is similar to Steele's concept "State agents", where the state's leaders are the agents, and in a sense "are the state" (Steele, 2008, p. 18).

On the individual-level, identity is produced and maintained through relationships which means that it is important for the ontological security to have routinized relationships with significant others. Ontological security works similar in larger scales, as states. Besides physical security, states also seek ontological security (Mitzen, 2016, pp. 342–343). State agents will use narratives to establish and maintain a consistent self-identity, base and establish routinized foreign policy action that mirrors these narratives (Steele, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, states will engage in routinized relationships with other states to sustain a well-known environment in order to sustain the self-identity. Here, another dilemma appears where ontological security-seeking states may become dependent on conflicts, meaning that ontological security conflicts with physical security. States might prefer an ongoing conflict with each other because of the certainty it provides in the self-identity (Mitzen, 2006, p. 342). This sheds new light on the security dilemma that has been existent in the field of International Relations and realist theory.

Since ontological security is a basic need, it can be compared to the need for physical security (Mitzen, 2006, p. 343). Steele argues that while physical security is important for nation-states, it is not as important as ontological security since it fulfills the self-identity of the state, how it sees itself, and how others see the state. Notwithstanding the risk for compromising physical security, states seek ontological security through social actions because they want to sustain consistent self-concepts. The self-identity of states is created and sustained by narratives which in turn establishes routinized foreign policy actions. The self-identity can be disrupted when these narratives no longer mirror the state's identity. The actor will, therefore, pursue to maintain its identity by recreating routines (Steele, 2008, p. 3).

According to Mitzen and Larson (2017, p. 3), ontological security is created through our everyday practices, primarily in routines and narratives where we arrange our sense of self. In turn, this sense of self relies upon our embeddedness in material and social structures. If the narratives and routines, that upholds the self, gets destabilized, we would feel a deep sense of anxiety since they are vital to our wellbeing and gets invested in emotionally. This is not something that we are necessarily aware of, as it is something that exists in our everyday lives. Since these routines and narratives that sustain our self-identity are vital to our wellbeing, we get emotionally attached to ontological security. Mitzen (2006, p. 341), explains that a security dilemma between states helps them gain ontological security, even if it is on the cost of physical security. Relationships between states that have been long-going and conflictual provide stable routines.

There are two factors that respond to the question of how to obtain and sustain ontological security. First, we use narratives that communicate who we are, or who we perceive that we are, our identity and everything that we connect to our identity. These narratives are to convey ourselves and others around us, as intersubjectivity is important to differentiate or associate ours and other identities and so that we get a sense of this intersubjectivity. Second, we execute actions that reflects who we are and do them every day, making them routinized, which is important because they need to be rooted in our mind so that we feel the sense of continuity in ourselves in our reality. These factors apply similarly to nation-states where routinized narratives and actions are used to establish and maintain the self-identity. This is why analyzing narratives made by state-officials and actions taken by governments is important when studying ontological security and since a security dilemma between states can

be understood as a routinized relationship, a way to create a stable environment, ontological security theory becomes relevant in this study.

To summarize, ontological security refers to the confident self-identity of the actor which generates a stable cognitive environment, i.e. awareness and knowledge of the reality which the actors exist in. In turn, this gives the actor the capability to respond to threats and dangers or other actions or reactions. When uncertainty in the self-identity is developing, which is caused by sudden critical events that are related to the actor and its identity, anxiety occurs within the actor. In turn, the actor can respond to this by re-establishing narratives and thereby routines and policy actions and "transform" the anxiety by objectifying the threat on the "other". This creates a stronger sense of "them" thereby enforcing the identity of "us".

2.3 Analytical framework

There are two major concepts that define what ontological security is: secure or confident *self-identity*, that is a sense of who one is, generating a sense of agency and: a cognitive *stable environment,* which is a sense of order in events, being secure of one's own identity, thus agency, and having a sense of the surrounding environment as stable, producing capability to react and act to the reality, the world around one and the possible threats and dangers.

Three major concepts are used to define how ontological security is obtained and sustained: *Narratives* of the self-identity followed by *actions* that reflect these narratives. Since it is vital for ontological security and the self-identity to sustain over time, these actions and narratives need to be *routinized*. Routinizing inter-social relationship with other via narratives helps differentiate the self-identity from the other and routinizing foreign policy actions helps maintain the self-identity since actions are also needed in addition to narratives to get a greater sense of agency. These routinized relationships that consist of narratives and actions, means, in this case, a security dilemma between states.

Reproducing distinctiveness of the self-versus-other and routinizing the distinctiveness, which is sustained in consistent narratives, is important for the self-identity (Darwich, 2014, p. 8) which is why it is important for states to routinize their relationship with other states, in turn, generating ontological security (Mitzen 2006, p. 352).

According to Mitzen (2006, p. 354), two steps are required to understand the attachment to dilemmatic conflict. First, rather than being intrinsically, state identities are established and sustained through social relationships. This explains why states become attached to these relationships, in this case, the security dilemma between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Second, the recurrent interactions can reinforce the conflict in a security dilemma, and it is the conflict that states become attached to since its routines help sustain the identity.

Biographical narrative is what Steele calls the story or stories of the self, which is the narratives of the self (Steele, 2008, p. 10). The construction of the self-identity consists of how history, narratives, and memory relate to the understanding of the self (Steele, 2008, p. 49). Memory, narrative, and actions are related to ontological security (Steele, 2008, p. 17). Along with narratives and actions, memory gives the actor a sense of self. Organizing history through narratives with memory helps organize the self-identity and the sense that the self-identity is continued over time.

Mitzen's perspective on how state-identities are established and sustained differs from Steele's. As explained above, Mitzen argues that state-identities are not intrinsic but created in relationship with others, while Steele focuses on the internal production and sustainment of the self through continuous bibliographical narratives. The root of this difference lies in which aspect of ontological security each author focuses on, anxiety-avoidance or shame-avoidance (Mitzen & Larson, 2017, p. 7). I reason as Mitzen, that states seek to avoid anxiety to be able to act in their reality. However, Steele's concept of biographical narratives is also relevant since the production and maintenance of a self-identity require narratives that consist of history and stories.

2.4 Unit of analysis

As mentioned in the theory section above, there have been issues among scholars using ontological security theory when applying the unit of analysis since the theory is derived from the individual-level. Is it the state that needs ontological security or its members? Can the state be treated as an individual or a structure of its members?

Since ontological security consists of human emotions and attributes, I reason that the state itself cannot be a subject of ontological security as the state is not a physical person and does not require ontological security. It can, however, be treated as a person or persons, as Wendt argues (2004). It seems to be a matter of definition and the state could be defined as a collective of physical persons. Since ontological security is produced by state-agents (state-officials, leaders, etc.) and then contributes to the interests of the state (led by the state-agents) they are the unit of analysis. However, since they represent the state and its people, the people within it could also be affected by the process of seeking ontological security.

3. Method

This thesis is a qualitative case study of embedded cases within a broader case. The concepts that will be subjects of analysis are *narratives* and *actions*. To reach the aim of this study, of how identity and security are correlated through ontological security theory, a connection between narratives and actions needs to be found. In case studies, discourse analysis can be used to analyze the content of a state's biographical narrative and reveal how the effect of the discourse generates certain types of actions (Steele, 2008, pp. 10–11).

The backgrounds of Bahrain and Yemen and their relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia play a role when analyzing how the actions connect to the narratives of the identity of Iran and Saudi Arabia. For example, understanding that Bahrain is an ally and important to Saudi Arabia and its leadership-identity is important in order to analyze how Saudi Arabia's actions can be connected to the narratives of its identity. Understanding the background of Iran and Saudi Arabia and their relationship is also essential in understanding how their actions can be correlated to their narratives of the self.

3.1 Method of analysis

According to Steele (2008, p. 12), discourse analysis can help achieve three goals in case studies. First, it helps connect the narratives of the self to a policy choice by revealing how

state-agents legitimize a policy by explaining what this policy means for the self-identity of the state. Second, it helps indicate when thoughts of the self-identity can lead to a certain policy decision. Analyzing narratives by a state before, after and/or during an event can reveal how narratives and policy decisions are related. Third, discourse analysis can help explain how state-agents produce meaning of their vision of the state-identity and threats to the identity by explaining what has caused the threats, why they need to be addressed, and what policy is best to address them with.

 "All states justify their actions…" "States "talk" about their actions in identity terms" (Steele, 2008, p. 11). Steele further reasons that actions are given meanings by the actor so that the actions are consistent with their identities. "This means that state agents must explain, justify, and/or "argue" what a policy would mean about their sense of self-identity. Self-narratives are one manifestation of a "reality production," as they form the meaning of an agent's self-identity." (Steele, 2008, p. 11).

The problem in measuring ontological security is that we can only measure discursive consciousness but not practical consciousness. However, this method, even if it is incomplete in measuring ontological security, is the best way "…until we develop a method to read the minds of decision-making groups…" (Steele, 2008, p. 11). Giddens explains that there can be too much to be read into in day to day conversations but argues that "well-ordered speeches" ''is geared to the overall motivational involvements which speakers have in the course of pursuing their practical activities'' (Giddens 1984, p. 103). Words spoken by international actors can be assumed to have purposes connected to their interests (Steele, 2008, p.11). The chosen method is, therefore, the most relevant to analyze narratives and connect them to actions.

3.2 Research design

The design of this study consists of a primary case which in turn consists of two embedded cases. The primary case is the narratives about the self and the other between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The embedded cases are the foreign policy actions taken by the two states in Yemen and Bahrain. First, the narratives will be studied in the primary case to identify how

respective state-identities have been produced. Second, foreign policy actions will be studied in the embedded cases to understand how these actions correlate with the narratives of the self and the other in the primary case. This current design falls rather logically since there are no concrete and direct actions taken by Saudi Arabia and Iran against each other since they have yet to engage in a direct confrontation with each other, other than the rhetoric, hence the study of the narratives in the primary case. Their foreign policy actions instead take place in other countries throughout the region, therefore the part that consists of the actions will be studied in the two embedded cases. The embedded cases will also contribute to the study by exemplifying the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Material

The material that will be used to study the narratives of the state's self and the other by state-agents in Saudi Arabia will be:

- Statements about Iran made by Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, in an interview in the documentary "Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia" By Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Frontline in 2018.
- Statements about Saudi Arabia's foreign policy on the official website of the ministry of foreign affairs of Saudi Arabia.
- A statement about Iran's revolution in 1979 made by the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman during an interview on the program CBS 60 minutes in 2018.
- A speech about Saudi Arabia's foreign policy made by the former head of the general intelligence service, Turki bin Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud in 2013.

The material for analyzing narratives about the state's self-identity and the other made by state-agents for Iran will be:

- Speeches made by the past leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1987. Excerpts of the speeches are published in the news magazine The New York Times.
- Statements made by the foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, about Saudi Arabia in an interview in the documentary "Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia" By Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Frontline in 2018.

- Extracts from a speech held by the foreign minister, Zarif during Munich Security Council in 2019.

- Iran's constitution on Iran's official website.

- Speech by the leader Ayatollah Khamenei in 2019.

Material for analyzing the actions taken by Saudi Arabia and Iran in the event in Yemen and Bahrain will be:

- Article about the crisis in Yemen published in BBC in 2019, March 21.

- Article about Saudi Arabia's involvement in Yemen published in The Guardian, 2018, March 8.

- Article about Saudi Arabia's involvement in Bahrain published in The New York Times, 2011, March 14.

- Article about Iranian involvement in Yemen published in Middle East Eye in 2015, May 1.

- UN resolution 2452 (2019) about Iranian involvement in Yemen.

- Statements made by the leader Ayatollah Khamenei in 2011 and 2015 about the events in Bahrain and Yemen. These excerpts are published on and translated to English on Khamenei's official website.

- Statements on the website of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia regarding Iran's involvement in Yemen.

- An academic article about Iran's and Saudi Arabia's reactions to the events in Yemen and Bahrain, written by Cerioli in 2018.

- An academic article about the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab Spring, written by Colombo in 2012.

- An academic article about Iran's involvement with the Houthis, written by Clausen in 2015.

- An academic article about Iranian involvement with the Houthis in Yemen, written by Salisbury in 2015.

3.4 Analyzing the material

The order to get a conclusive "picture" of the narratives of the identities of Saudi Arabia and Iran, have been to collect enough speeches and statements made by state-officials and leaders that represents the respective states and finding a common factor in the speeches and statements that responds to the state-identity with the help of the concepts from the section "Analytical framework" in this study. To further support this "picture" of narratives of the self, academic articles written by scholars that have studied Iran and Saudi Arabia and their state-identities have been included in the material.

Analyzing the foreign policy actions of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the embedded cases is more of a challenge since reliable information about the events can be difficult to find. This is because Saudi Arabia and Iran are two major powers in the region making it possible for their governments to control media and information about the events. Furthermore, major powers such as the USA and Russia, among others, also have interests and allies in the region, making it less reliable that the information about the events is non-bias. Academic articles should be non-bias, it is rather the source information that is collected by scholars that can be problematic. To counter the problem of finding reliable sources about the events in Yemen and Bahrain, comparisons have been made between news articles and academic articles about the events while reviewing authors and news corporations. Still, the reliability of the information regarding the events can be questioned.

Studying the narratives about the self and the other in the primary case should not be a problem, since statements that are made about the self and the other have no reason to be altered or bias, on the contrary, they should be biased because statements of the self is made to enhance the self-identity as "good" and statements about the other is often negative, which makes the study of the narratives easier.

Since one of the factors of ontological security is a sense of continuity over time and routinized narratives and actions, it is relevant that the chosen material ranges from 1979 to 2019.

4. Analysis

Here, the analysis of the narratives made by state-agents in Iran and Saudi Arabia will be presented followed by an analysis of the foreign policies or actions taken by the respective state in Bahrain and Yemen. The first three sections will analyze the narratives of the self and the other made by Saudi Arabia and Iran to reveal any connections to the concepts that define ontological security in order to see how they produce their self-identity. The sections about the actions in Bahrain and Yemen will analyze how these actions correlate to the narratives of the self and the other.

4.1 The identity of Saudi Arabia

The former director of Saudi Arabia's general intelligent service and prince Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud uses these narratives in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy:

> Saudi Arabia, with its stability and influence, plays an important regional and international role. Working diligently to address many of its major international and domestic concerns, the Kingdom is a confident participant in world affairs and keeps an ever-vigilant eye toward its own internal safeguarding. Why is the Kingdom confident? For a number of reasons. Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam, a religion that today has an estimated 1.2 billion adherents. Saudi Arabia represents over 20 percent of the combined GDP of the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region (and an estimated quarter of the Arab World's GDP, according to the latest IMF numbers), making it the economic engine of the region and an effective partner and member of the G-20. (Al Saud, 2013, p. 37).

This is a biographical narrative, or a story, made by the state-agent which gives a picture of Saudi Arabia's identity as a secure, confident, and being a powerful leader that addresses foreign and domestic concerns and justifies this through the confidence in religion. Here, the state-agent has justified actions and any actions it might take. Since Saudi Arabia's identity consists of being a leader and/or protector of the Islamic world, it has created meaning for the actions it might take, setting a basis for a stable cognitive environment in which Saudi Arabia can relate its goals to its methods. Similar statements can be found on the official website of the Ministry of foreign affairs of Saudi Arabia:

> The main characteristics of the Foreign Policy is support of Arabic and Islamic solidarity, defense of the fair Arabic and Islamic cases , service of Islam and Muslims all over the world, maintaining the international stability and peace and non interference in other countries interior affairs. On the other side, not allowing others to interfere in its affairs. (Ministry of foreign affairs, Saudi Arabia, 2017)

These narratives further contribute to the identity of Saudi Arabia as a leader and protector of the Arabic and Islamic world and justify foreign policy actions. These statements are consistent with the speech al-Saud made about Saudi Arabia's identity where he further stated:

> While Saudi Arabia has the world's largest petroleum reserves, Iran has the second-largest. Saudi Arabia is Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the birthplace of Islam, and as such it is the eminent leader of the wider Muslim world. Iran portrays itself as the leader of not just the minority Shiite world, but of all Muslim revolution aries interested in standing up to the West. (Al Saud 2013, p.38)

Using Iran in the narratives of the self in order to distinguish the self and re-enforce the self-identity of Saudi Arabia, has become routinized and recurrent. These narratives are followed by foreign policy actions, making the interactions and the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran routinized, creating and re-enforcing a security dilemma in which both can gain ontological security from and take foreign policy actions that are legitimized by framing the other as a threat. This security dilemma provides distinct identities and a stable environment for both states.

Referring to history and memory to construct the identity of the state further gives a sense of continuity of the identity over time by claiming that the revolution of Iran in 1979 was a critical moment for Saudi Arabia, who was "forced" to change or re-establish its identity. As Darwich argues (2014, pp. 9–10), the revolution in 1979 created a critical situation for Saudi Arabia, which in turn had to re-establish its identity to sustain the sense of self by distinguishing itself from Iran, who also claimed to be an Islamic leader. This, in turn, generated a stricter Wahhabi code of conduct (Darwich, 2014, p. 15). When asked during an interview, if it is true that Saudi Arabia practices a strict Islamic rule, the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman said the following: "After 1979, that's true. We were victims,

especially my generation that suffered from this a great deal." (bin Salman in CBS, O'Donnell, 2018, Mar 19).

In the documentary, the interviewer argues that the crown prince traces most of Saudi Arabia's problems to the 1979 revolution (Donnell, 2018, Mar 19). However, it is not certain whether or not bin Salman's statements are agreed upon. Khashoggi disagrees that it was much different before 1979 but agrees that the government restricted strict Wahhabi traditions before 1979. Khashoggi writes in his article that by blaming the 1979 Iranian revolution, Mohammed bin Salman is promoting revisionist history (Khashoggi, 2018, Apr 3).

4.2 The identity of Iran

The identity of Iran as a state can be interpreted as a "thin revisionist" state with "resistance identity" as a result of discontent and injustice prior to the 1979 revolution. Thin revisionists seek to overcome their dissatisfaction through policies that are being defiant by resisting the dominating force of the status quo (Behravesh, 2018). The ideas of revolution can be found in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

> The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran advances the cultural, social, political, and economic institutions of Iranian society based on Islamic principles and norms, which represent an honest aspiration of the Islamic Ummah. This aspiration was exemplified by the nature of the great Islamic Revolution of Iran… (Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, p. 1)

Similar to Saudi Arabia, this narrative tells a story about the state, giving it an identity with legitimacy in religion which came to through the legacy of the revolution. The idea or the meaning of the revolution as a part of the identity of Iran gives continuity to the self-identity since it provides a meaningful vision of the state, in turn generating a confident and stable state-identity. In further statements, which can be interpreted as policy for the state, the narratives give indications of what foreign policy actions it might take:

> With due attention to the Islamic content of the Iranian Revolution, the Constitution provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad. In particular, in the development of international relations, the Constitution will strive with other

Islamic and popular movements to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community… (Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, p. 4)

The continuation of the revolution home and abroad can be seen as a policy which is legitimized through the meaning this policy had for the state's self-identity (which is the emergence of the state/state-identity itself), revealing the connection between eventual actions the state might take and the narratives of the self. After the 1979 revolution in Iran, Khomeini made statements that came to characterize Iran's identity as an opponent to the West, the USA, and Saudi Arabia:" The al-Saud family is not worthy of being in charge of the hajj and Kaaba affairs. The Moslems and the intellectuals should think of an alternative." (Khomeini, 1987).

Delegitimization of the government of Saudi Arabia as an Islamic role model or leader can be seen as a way of constructing the own identity as an Islamic nation that is legitimate and that can appeal to all Muslims.

> It is not surprising to see the contaminated hands of the United States and Israel emerging from the sleeves of devious people, the ringleaders of Saudi Arabia and the traitors to the two holy shrines, and then taking aim at the hearts of the best Moslems, the dear ones, the guests of God. It is not surprising to see those who lay claim to guarding Mecca and the House of God drenching Mecca's streets and side streets with the blood of Moslems. (Khomeini, 1987)

Resistance with anti-imperialistic views on the actors in the Middle East legitimizes Iran as an actor that stands up against external powers and those who are friendly to the external powers and since Saudi Arabia has stated that they are allied to the West and the USA, these statements concern Saudi Arabia.

> If we wanted to prove to the world that the Saudi Government, these vile and ungodly Saudis, are like daggers that have always pierced the heart of the Moslems from the back, we would not have been able to do it as well as has been demonstrated by these inept and spineless leaders of the Saudi Government. (Khomeini, 1987)

The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged through a revolution with the help of resistance and its identity as a resistant nation was constructed by the narratives by Khomeini. The rhetoric represents Iran's identity as a religious nation who sees the west, particularly the USA as a threat and Saudi Arabia as unworthy as an Islamic leader. Demonizing statements of the other

while legitimizing the own self through religion helps strengthen the state's self-identity which in turn can legitimize certain actions against Saudi Arabia.

The resistance against foreign powers and delegitimization of Saudi Arabia has sustained and continues through narratives and actions and helps maintain the resistance identity. Over time, narratives about resisting external powers in the region are created by state-agents, which is a way to construct a stable and continuous identity and a stable environment. This is exemplified in the correlation between the speeches made by Khomeini in 1987 and statements made in 2019 by the foreign minister of Iran:

> Iran's foreign policy is designed to further the goal of creating a strong region, that precludes the emergence of hegemonic aspirations by any power, inside or outside the region... A strong region... …simply means that more confidence, more trade and more interaction, between and among the countries in the region than with external powers… (Zarif, 11:36–12:11, 2019)

Zarif's statements can give life to foreign policy actions to counter an eventual hegemonic aspiration by Saudi Arabia, which in turn reflects the narratives of the self-identity of resistance. He further said that the USA has been "obsessed" with Iran for a time and he stated the following about the USA:

> From arming Saddam Hussein in his attack against Iran, including the use of chemical weapons, to supporting the propagation of extremism, just listen to what the crown prince MBS said., from aiding and abetting the ruining of Syria and bombing innocent in Yemen… …All in the name of containing Iran. (Zarif, 04:47–05:25, 2019)

The resistance against Saudi Arabia through narratives and actions have in turn generated an opportunity for Iran to further distinguish itself from Saudi Arabia and a chance to compete for leadership in the region. In a sense, it makes it easier for Iran to engage in a conflict, albeit cold, with Saudi Arabia enabling Iran and Saudi Arabia to gain ontological security and in turn a chance to gain control in the region since the security dilemma provides a stable environment where the states are confident in their actions due to their confident identities. A circle of polarization and securitization of each other emerges, where the governments gain ontological security and a chance to advance its leadership but in turn affects the region by worsening situations and allegedly engaging in proxy wars. Ontological security generates a deeper sense of legitimate reasons to enhance its control in the region.

Khamenei expressed the religious identity of Iran in a speech, stating that "The Islamic Republic is the continuation of the Holy Prophet's be'that." (Khamenei, 2019, Apr 3).

> It describes it as "baath" [literally "to send"]: "Allah did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them an apostle from among themselves" [3: 164], "It is He Who has sent among the unlettered an apostle from among themselves" [62: 2], "For We assuredly sent among every people an apostle" [16: 36]. It is referred to as "baath". (Khamenei, 2019, Apr 3)

Here, Iran can be seen as a form of a leader of the Islamic world, since the Islamic republic has been giving, by a prophet, to continue its missions or messages to the rest of the world. This is the part of Iran's identity that represents the religious part, which gives the identity of the state further meaning and legitimacy, generating confidence.

4.3 Blaming and differentiating identity

One factor for sustaining the self-identity is the creation of distinctions between the self and the other with the help of narratives. Often, the narratives about the other are demonizing or threat framing, creating a dynamic of Manichaean dualism of "us versus them", where "them" is evil and "us" is good. This type of duality or bipolar view of the world occurred during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the USA and was created by the state-leaders who formed ideologies (Cox, 1994, p. 367).

State representatives in Iran and Saudi Arabia share similarities with representatives during the Cold War when making statements about each other and these statements can be referred to as routinized since this type of relationship between the two has existed at least since 1979. During separate interviews in the same documentary, foreign minister of Saudi Arabia and Iran were asked how to respond to being referred to as the country that is hostile and supports terrorism. The Iranian foreign minister answered: "Saudi's helped Saddam Hussein for 8 years. Saudis helped Al Qaida. Saudis created Daesh. Saudis created Al Nusra. Saudi's are funding terrorist war operating in eastern Iran. So, they started the sectarian message, not us." (Zarif in PBS documentary, 2018). The Saudi foreign minister answered: "The Iranians are the ones who are exporting terrorism, they are the ones who are stoking fires of sectarianism,

they are the ones that are violating international laws and norms, and acceptable behaviour."
(Al-Jubeir in PBS documentary, 2018).

According to ontological security theory, the self-identity is maintained through relationship and distinctiveness (Darwich, 2014). Therefore, by having an interactive relationship with each other and in this case creating a security dilemma where they recurrently refer to one and other as a threat or a problem, helps strengthen a certain self-identity for Saudi Arabia and Iran and creates a stable environment for both, from which they can relate ends to means. In turn, these narratives give life to foreign policies and actions, further contributing to an increased sense of agency, the self-identity, and a stable environment.

These actions are reflected by the narratives of the self and the other and in this case, the actions that are legitimized by these narratives take place in different countries in the region. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia saw the Houthis as a threat backed by Iran and engaged in military operations to eliminate these threats. The demonstrations in Bahrain during the Arab Spring were seen as a threat and it was claimed that the protest was induced by Iran, consequently, Saudi Arabia sent troops to Bahrain to counter the demonstrations.

4.4 Uprising in Bahrain: Background

Bahrain is a monarchy ruled by the tribe and family al-Khalifa who emerged from the Arabian Peninsula and took the power in the country from Persian rulers in the eighteenth century. The family of al-Khalifa is Sunni and rules over the country which has a population with a majority of Shia, making up to around 70 percent of the population. Sectarian tensions exist within the country and discrimination occurs, which is mainly against the Shia community (Mabon, 2012, p. 85). The government of Bahrain is a western ally, hosts the USA's fifth fleet on its territory, is the largest oil exporter in the Middle East, is a neighbour and ally to Saudi Arabia and a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Black, 2012, Jun 19; Mabon, 2012, p. 84).

The discontent with the government can be traced back to the 1920s with outbreaks and social unrest. The al-Khalifa government has a popular opposition that has its roots in inequality and selective development. Iran had made territorial claims to Bahrain during the rule under the

Shah claiming that Bahrain was Iran's 'fourteenth province' (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 2). After the Iranian revolution in 1979, it was alleged that a coup attempt in Bahrain in 1981 had Iranian involvement (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 2). Bahraini Shia's "have long been viewed as a potential Iranian fifth column – a legacy of 1981 coup attempt by the Islamic Front for Liberation of Bahrain, an Iranian-backed Shia militant organisation" (Kaye & Wehrey, 2007, p. 116).

These historical events, along with Bahrain's government's history of violations against human rights (Black, 2012, Jun 19) and the discontent causing protests against the government that was mainly uttered through Shia communities, sets the basis for a complicated situation in the face of an uprising, especially with the interest in Bahrain that lies with Saudi Arabia and Iran (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 10).

After the ruler Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa died in 1999, his son came to power and promised changes through political reforms but delivered little of substance. A security law that functioned as a cover for the suppression of the opposition with human rights violations was scrapped. Other changes were made, and the kingdom became a constitutional monarchy (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 2).

Political problems remained and the 2006 and 2010 elections were characterized by fraud and practices to establish political advantage and promote certain leaders. This was followed by a harsh treatment to the political opposition and human rights activists, allegations of detention and torture, socioeconomic discontent and high unemployment. The Bahraini youth was given insufficient economic opportunities and jobs. After the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, people of Bahrain planned a protest in 2011, February 14. The protests were in the beginning small and limited to Shia villages but escalated and spread after police shot and killed two protestors on February 14 and 15. The protestors were against sectarianism and chanted "no Shias, no Sunnis, only Bahrainis". The government responded by sponsoring pro-government counterdemonstrations, which consisted of Sunni communities (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3).

On March 14, the GCC sent troops, which consisted of 1800 from Saudi Arabia and 800 from the United Arab Emirates (Slackman & Bronner, 2011, Mar 14). The next day, a state of emergency was declared that lasted until June 1, 2011. The uprising of Bahrain was put down and the King, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa stayed in power (Mcevers, 2012, Jan 5) while tensions and protest continuous in the country (BBC, 2018, Nov 12).

4.5 Uprising in Bahrain: Reactions by Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's state-agent traces the demonstrations back to the Iranian revolution in 1979, claiming that Khomeini wanted to export revolution, causing violence and destabilization in Muslim countries, in turn causing demonstrations in Bahrain. Claims that Khomeini created Hezbollah in Bahrain still exists, along with claims that Iranian propaganda is being broadcasted towards Bahrain and that Iranian officials have issued statements that Bahrain is a province of Iran leads to the statement "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will never accept Iran taking power in Bahrain." (Al Saud, 2013, p. 42).

Al-Saud justifies the state's actions of countering the uprisings in Bahrain by explaining that Iran is a threat and what the threat consists of. In the same speech, as presented in the section about Saudi Arabia's identity, al-Saud gave a vision of the state-identity that consisted of being a confident and influential actor that addresses international concerns. The narrative of the self consists of explaining what these policies of addressing concerns mean for the identity of Saudi Arabia: to be an influential and important actor in the region. Here, al-Saud presents this threat in the same speech, making it a threat to the state-identity of Saudi Arabia that needs to be addressed.

Accordingly, Saudi Arabia sent GCC troops to Bahrain to aid the government in stopping the protesters by refereeing to a mutual defence agreement within the GCC. The economic aid was increased to Bahrain from Riyadh in that event, which is an act that reflects the identity of a regional leader (Cerioli, 2018, p. 305). According to Colombo (2010, p. 10), to avoid being affected as governments by the Arab Spring, the GCC members played the card of sectarianism, while all members are monarchies harbouring Sunni. Furthermore, Morocco and Jordan were invited to join the GCC which can be understood as a way to render a new identity to GCC based on political affinity, since Jordan and Morocco are also Sunni monarchies (Cerioli, 2018, p. 306).

A strong alliance, military and politically, in the region is important for Saudi Arabia's identity as a strong regional leader since it helps the Saudi government to maintain control in the region. "Loosing" Bahrain to Iran would mean a loss of control in the region, negatively affecting Saudi Arabia's confident identity as a regional leader, especially if it means for the opponent to gain control. Sending troops to aid the government of Bahrain and aiding

economically to help the government to sustain in power reflects the part of Saudi Arabia's identity as a regional leader.

The uprisings in Bahrain and the fear that Iran could take control was a critical event for Saudi Arabia's government and threatened the stable environment, the routines, and the state's self-identity. Saudi Arabia tried to re-establish its identity by trying to expand the GCC by suggesting including Morocco and Jordan, also monarchies with similar values, but there were no signs of this later on. Saudi Arabia then wanted to create a union with Bahrain to counter Iranian power (Chubin, 2012, p. 25). For Saudi Arabia to strengthen its power for control in the region, it uses GCC because of its military capability but also to legitimize its actions and re-enforce its self-identity since the members of GCC shares similar values to Saudi Arabia, generating a stable cognitive environment.

4.6 Uprising in Bahrain: Reactions by Iran

In the case of Iran, the uprisings in the region and Bahrain themselves represent, in a sense, some sort of action that reflects Iran's narratives about its identity. The government of Iran came to power through a revolution that was inspired by Khomeini's rhetoric which promoted revolutionary ideas throughout the region. As mentioned in the section about Iran's identity in its constitution, revolution has been a part of Iran and a form of "policy" to continue the revolution home and abroad. The reactions to the uprisings in Bahrain by state-agents in Iran consisted mostly of rhetorical support of the uprisings through narratives. It was mentioned, in the "Method" section of this essay, that a state legitimizes a policy by explaining what this policy means for the state's self-identity. For Iran, the "policy" or in this case, a revolution meant the basis for the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which in turn legitimizes this "policy" abroad. This policy was expressed when Khamenei compared the uprisings in Bahrain to the Iranian revolution and supported the demonstrations: "What is the goal of the popular uprising of the Bahraini people? Their main demand is that there should be elections in which each person can have one vote. Is this too much to expect?" (Khamenei, 2011, Mar 21).

He further said that the majority of the people are being oppressed by the minority who has the power (Khamenei, 2011, Mar 21). The majority of the population in Bahrain are Shia and the

minority and government are Sunni (Mabon, 2012, p. 85). In a sense, this is a dividing rhetoric about identity, it is though unclear if he is referring to Shia's and Sunni's, rather he explains that this is not a Shia versus Sunni conflict and that Iran not only supports Bahrain but also supports other countries that are not Shia (Khamenei, 2011, Mar 21).

For Iran, the uprisings in the region and the emergence of Islamic movements meant a chance of advancement in its role as regional hegemony and wanted to introduce its own revolution as a model for the uprisings (Cerioli, 2015, p. 303). A strong part of Iran's identity consists of being an Islamic nation and its aim to establish a link to Islamic groups in the region is an action that reflects its Islamic identity. It was also stated in the constitution that it will aspire to help Islamic and popular movements in order to form a world community, which connects the narratives of the self to these actions.

It is uncertain if Iran had any presence in Bahrain and it is difficult to find evidence of this, other than accusations made by Saudi and Bahraini officials. However, it is probable that Iran supported and possibly instigated the protest according to Mabon (2012, p. 90). Many Bahraini Shia clerics have ties with Tehran and during the protests several of them wrote to Khamenei, calling for him to help Shia Bahrainis. This letter became published in Iranian media (Mabon, 2012, p. 90).

Iran and Saudi Arabia have proximity in the Gulf, where their claims to be regional leaders and protectors of Muslims were tested (Chubin, 2012, p. 21). According to Chubin (2012, p. 22), Iran was not expecting the Arab Spring, and neither was it expecting the decisive actions taken by the GCC led by Saudi Arabia and its military interventions served as a message to Iran, which only reacted rhetorically rather than taking actions.

4.7 War in Yemen: Background

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and was so even before the conflict which is now considered by the UN as one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world (UN, 2018, Sep 24). Prior to 1990 the country was divided into North and South Yemen and was often ruled by different regimes (Brehony, 2015, p. 232; Clausen, 2015, p. 18). A civil war broke out in 1994 when South Yemen wanted to withdraw and create its own republic but was defeated which led to centralized power in North Yemen (Clausen, 2015, p. 18). The

president Ali Abdullah Saleh who came to power in 1978 was the one behind the unified government and was "skilled at divide and rule". First, he encouraged Sunni and tribal Islamic militias to counter Marxists, then, when the militias became too powerful, he gave the Believing youth, who later became the Houthis, to take space. Saleh used similar "games" in tribal and regional disagreements (Brehony, 2015, p. 234). The previously divided country that was characterized by tribalism, corruption, inequality and competing political elites (Cerioli, 2018, p. 306) together with the dividing political strategies that were used, sets a basis for a problematic and polarized conflict that could turn sectarian in the face of a conflict.

The uprising in Yemen 2011 was a call for democracy, political change and the removal of the long-time president Saleh (Clausen, 2015, p. 17). The level of unemployment, lack of food and illiteracy became high (Cerioli, 2018, p. 306). By that time, the regime was fracturing, and Saleh was beginning to lose support both domestically and internationally. The GCC induced Saleh to resign in exchange for immunity but he was allowed to stay in Yemen where he joined the resistance (Brehony, 2015, p. 232). More than fifty people were killed when the regime attacked demonstrators outside of Sana'a University in 2011, March 18, which led to a turning point where mass deflections took place in the ruling party (Clausen, 2015, p. 18).

The youth-led demonstrations that led to a transition in the leadership in the country led also to the National Dialogue Conference, which would work as a forum and bring together all parts in the country's political spectrum, including the Houthis, to discuss the countries new constitution. However, as the political elites were discussing the future of Yemen, the country was at decline with increasing food insecurity and worsening basic security among others (Clausen, 2015, p. 19). The new administration failed to respond to the country's declining state and to the problems the protesters had demonstrated against.

In the 2011 uprising in Yemen, the Houthis had taken an active role and the time between 2011 and 2014 they organized their military and political section (Brehony, 2015, p. 241). By 2015, the Houthis, together with many other Yemenis, had taken over Sana'a and attempted to take over the whole country forcing the sitting president Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi to flee the country (BBC, 2019, Mar 21).

4.8 War in Yemen: Reactions by Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been the most significant external player in the Yemeni conflict, whereas Iran's involvement has been limited. Both the government in Yemen and Saudi Arabia have claimed that the Houthis are puppets of Iran (Clausen, 2015, p. 20). The sectarian part of the conflict has its roots in the history of the conflict where the previous divide of the country held most of the Shia population in the northeast and the Sunni population in the southeast. The government is Sunni and the Houthis are Shia and, while debated, the Houthis gain some support from Iran (New York Times, 2015, Apr 21).

According to an article by Landry (2015), a confidential UN report states that Iran has shipped weapons to the Houthi rebels since 2009. In a resolution by the Security Council of the UN (UN, 2452, 2019), it is stated that the Houthi militias are supported by Iran. Though it remains not entirely clear whether or not Iran has backed the Houthis and to what extent since much of these claims, according to Salisbury (2015, pp. 1, 6) comes from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain and Western countries who also have conflicts of interests in the region.

The Saudi-led military operation began on March 2015 and consisted of air to ground bombing against the Houthis in Yemen. Rights groups have accused Saudi Arabia of striking civilian targets and a UN panel which analyzed the airstrikes stated that it is very likely that Saudi Arabia has not shown respect to the international humanitarian law (Wintor, 2018, Mar 8).

Saudi Arabia's massive offensive against the opposition in Yemen shows how eager the government of Saudi Arabia is to be decisive against the opposition, Iranian influence and a potential power transition to an Iran-friendly regime in Yemen. This is stated by Saudi officials in their narratives about Iranian involvement.

> The chaos and instability at hand in Yemen is the direct result of Iran's blatant intrusion in internal Yemeni affairs. It seems that Tehran is aiming to undermine Yemen's security and stability, stoke sectarian divisions and thwart international efforts seeking to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Yemeni crisis in accordance with the UN Security Council's Decision 2216 (2015). (Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2016).

In the narratives of the self, Saudi Arabia has used Iran as an opponent and a threat to help identify the self-identity of the state. These statements are a way to justify actions in Yemen since Iran is considered a threat and Saudi Arabia needs to respond to this threat to sustain its identity. Furthermore, it is stated that Iran is supporting the Houthi rebels with arms, missiles and military exercises (Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Saudi Arabia frames the Houthis as the opposition and as a threat backed by Iran. Consequently, Saudi Arabia launched military operations against the alleged threat.

For Saudi Arabia to retain its leadership over the region and its status as a protector of Islam or leader of the Muslim world, it is important for the government to not lose control over its neighbouring country and at the same time have legitimate reasons to intervene in Yemen. Saudi official's statements about the opposition in Yemen posing as a security threat, being terrorists and backed by Iran enables Saudi Arabia to launch military operations in Yemen. Since Iran has been a part of Saudi Arabia's narratives, Saudi Arabia uses Iran and itself as an identity to legitimize or enable actions.

4.9 War in Yemen: Reactions by Iran

As in the case with Bahrain, Iran supports the protests in Yemen and the people's right to stand up against an oppressive government (Cerioli, 2018, p. 307) as these events are similar to Iran's own revolution, where the people stood up against an oppressing regime. Supporting the opposing groups in Yemen would mean for Iran that the country follows actions according to its narrative and rhetoric. Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, part of Iran's identity has been about spreading revolutionary ideas to influence countries in the region. Narratives that expresses these ideas can be seen as actions because if the leader's aspiration is to spread revolutionary ideas, then one can assume that the leader wants these ideas to be implemented.

Revolutionary ideas, in this case, means to stand up against the government and eventually take the power in the nation. So, if the leader aspires to spread those ideas through rhetoric and narratives, and if those aspirations are successful, it would mean that a revolution would take place, hence an action has taken place as a result of foreign policy. In Iran's biographical narrative, the policy regarding revolution is justified by referring it to the state's own identity,

it is then further justified to apply this policy abroad. If the alleged Iranian involvement is true, then it corresponds to foreign policy actions that are justified in the narratives of the self-identity where it was stated in the constitution that Iran would aspire to support Islamic and popular movements abroad.

According to interviews with people who have access to Houthis' inner circle, the Houthis are committed to Islamic revolutionary ideas that were set by Hussein Badr al-Deen al-Houthi, which in turn is strongly borrowed the ideas from Iran (Salisbury, 2015, p. 6). This shows how influential Khomeini's ideas about revolution was, appealing to ontological security because these ideas can be interpreted as an identity. Similar to religion, which can be seen as a form of identity, which in turn can produce ontological security. Kinnvall (2004) explains how nationalism and religion can function as an "identity-signifier" and can help reduce anxiety and insecurity, thus providing ontological security.

Khamenei stated that Saudi Arabia committed genocide in Yemen and oppressed its people, that Iran will support all those who are oppressed (Khamenei, 2015, Apr 9). Being against the Saudi military operations in Yemen and accusing Saudi Arabia of imperialism reflects Iran's role as anti-imperialistic (Cerioli, 2018, p. 308).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to further understand how identity and security is correlated by studying how the self-identity is produced and sustained through narratives and actions in the Cold Conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia with the help of these research questions:

1. How do Iran and Saudi Arabia, as states, use narratives to produce and sustain the self-identity?
2. How do Saudi Arabia's and Iran's foreign policy actions reflect those narratives?

Ontological security theory has helped explain that states need ontological security, even more so than physical security. Ontological security is defined as a secure or confident self-identity in a stable environment, which in turn enables the essential ability to act and react to reality, being able to handle threats, dangers or any other events that require a cognitive

and/or physical response. The process to obtain ontological security is through routinized narratives, actions, and relationships with others which is why states become attached to relations, in this a case security dilemma. The routinized interactions with the other state reinforce the security dilemma and thus the ontological security. This perspective can help us understand how identity and (in)security are correlated.

Both Saudi Arabi and Iran blame each other for events that have taken place in the region, accusing one another of supporting terrorism, stoking sectarianism, and being a threat among others. Accusations made by Saudi Arabia are relatively similar to the ones made by Iran. Iran claims that Saudi Arabia is supporting terrorism and terrorist groups while Saudi Arabia claims likewise for Iran.

This is a way to distinguish the self from the other so that the self-identity of the state re-enforces, creating a more confident identity of the self. The blaming of the other in narratives has been ongoing at least since 1979, making them routinized interactions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Since the blaming of the other consists of framing the other as a security threat, the routinized narratives create and/or contributes to a security dilemma between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This security dilemma, in turn, contributes to enforcing the self-identity and generating a stable environment, hence creating ontological security. In turn, these narratives give life to foreign policies or actions since the narratives consist of giving meaning to the self-identity and relating the identity to a policy by reasoning what this policy means for the self-identity. The state justifies its actions through identity terms and the threat framing of the other.

Iran identifies with a resistance or revolution identity, opposing external powers such as the West and the USA, and opposing Saudi Arabia. This is expressed through its narratives. Saudi Arabia is presented as a threat and state-agents of Iran justifies why this threat needs to be addressed and correlates these actions with its own identity, by resisting or standing up against the government.

Iran's actions reflect its narratives in the following way: Statements in the constitution explains what the revolution and Islam mean for the Islamic Republic of Iran. They legitimize the state as a form of leader or protector in the region since statements about supporting Islamic and popular movements abroad exists within its constitution. The ideas of revolution are then being acted out by the leader of Iran by rhetorically supporting and encouraging the

protestors in Bahrain and Yemen. This is what Khomeini did before the revolution of Iran in 1979 and this exists within the state's self-identity. Furthermore, Iran identifies as opponents to external powers in the region such as the West and the USA and Saudi Arabia for being allied with these powers. This is then justified in Iran's foreign policy actions, by allegedly supporting groups within Bahrain and Yemen and by condemning Saudi Arabia.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, the actions are reflected in its narratives as follows: State-agents portray Saudi Arabia as an important regional and international actor that addresses domestic and foreign concerns. It is a leader in the region, which justifies addressing concerns. State-agents further claims that Iran is a threat that exports terrorism. Here the state-agent has identified a threat that justifies it addressing the threat. Saudi Arabia, as a responsible leader in the region, needs to address this concern. If Saudi Arabia does not address this concern it could damage the identity as a leader in the region and it could mean that Iran emerges as a leader in the region. During the military operation against the opposition in Yemen, state-agents in Saudi Arabia legitimized these actions by blaming Iran. In Bahrain when Saudi Arabia sent troops to help put down the uprisings, state-agents blamed Iran for causing it. By using Iran in its narratives of the self and as a part of the self-identity, Saudi Arabia justifies its actions.

The difference between Saudi Arabia and Iran, when it comes to identity, in the case of Yemen and Bahrain, is that Saudi Arabia has portrayed itself as a wealthy, active leader of the region and Islam and allied to the West while Iran has represented itself as a "thin revisionist" state with a resistance or revolution identity, also a representative of Islam but opposing the West. Iran can re-enforce its identity and make it more confident and certain as resistant and opponent to the West through its relationship with Saudi Arabia since Saudi Arabia represents what Iran resists. In turn, Saudi Arabia can gain from having Iran as an enemy since Iran gives Saudi Arabia concerns to address, contributing to a stable identity for Saudi Arabia.

What would Saudi Arabia be without Iran or any other to blame and vice versa? Seen through the lens of ontological security theory, Saudi Arabia and Iran prefers to have the security dilemma ongoing since it responds to their ontological needs. As regional leaders who seek leadership, having an adversary strengthens their roles as "strong" leaders that take action when it is needed. Furthermore, it legitimizes actions that strengthen themselves as powerful states.

Ontological security theory has shed new light on why Iran and Saudi Arabia persist to demonize and frame threat each other while allegedly engaging in proxy wars throughout the region and it has helped explain how identity correlates with security in this conflict.

5.1 Discussion

One issue that became eminent throughout this research was when trying to account for states' material, geopolitical and power interests and it seemed difficult to explain these interests and why they matter for states through ontological security theory. However, this became clearer when looking at the problem through the lens of constructivism where material interests can be seen as ideas (Wendt, 1999, p. 1). If these material interests are essentially ideas, they create meaning in life. Ontological security is about knowing who one is and what the reality around one is, having an understanding of life and trying to avoid confusion and anxiety since life is full of these and is never essentially stable. These material interests, that essentially are ideas, give understanding and meaning in life of the self and its surrounding.

I reason that nation-states choose certain actions mainly based on nation-interests but the question on why they do it remains. One explanation could be that these interests derive from human minds which in turn can be derived from identity. Nation-states were built on the foundation of sovereignty, centralized power and leadership with a monopoly on violence, this identity, in turn, generates what interests the nation-state might have. Another explanation to this problem can be that, in order to gain these material and geopolitical interests, the state needs ontological security. As explained throughout this research, ontological security is required to be able to face dangers but also the daily challenges in life. It is similar on the individual-level, if you feel more confident in yourself and your surroundings you gain a sense that you can accomplish more, which in turn gives life to these abilities.

It seems that Iran and Saudi Arabia as states has identities of leadership/hegemonic states that seek control in the region rather than just being resistant or monarchy, Sunni or Shia and both states seem to follow the interests that lie in the identity of the leadership/hegemonic aspirations or nation-interests. If Iran supported all protesters and demonstrations in the

region, why did it not support the protests in Syria but supported the government (Gause, 2014, p. 12)? Saudi Arabia condemns the government in Syria and states that it acts criminally by oppressing and killing protestors and civilians (Al Saud 2013, pp, 40–41) yet Saudi Arabia helped suppress the uprisings in Bahrain and engaged with military means against the opposition in Yemen.

The identity of the state that is represented by the state-agent differs from that of its citizens. A state, especially a power-seeking state, has different main interests than ordinary citizens that become represented in its actions and narratives. Moreover, the identity of the person that is the state-official may be characterized by a leader or an authoritative identity, or another personality that requires certain traits in order to achieve a position of certain leadership, which in turn might reflect the person's narratives that are supposed to represent a whole country's identity. However, the narratives and actions seem to represent ideas or identities that citizens can relate to. Saudi Arabia, being Sunni and supporting governments that are Sunni can appeal to groups who are Sunni. Iran, being Shia and support groups that are Shia appeals to the Shia population. This, in turn, can contribute or cause polarization among the people in countries that are affected by conflict, making conflicts or civil wars harder to resolve or even generating future conflicts. The sectarian wars in the region, especially between Shia and Sunni, have likely worsened, if not prompted by the actions taken and narratives made by state-officials and leaders of Iran and Saudi Arabia by using identity to legitimize or justify actions in order to gain ontological security and/or national interests. The states might not be able to gain these material and geopolitical interests if they did not have ontological security, which in turn has given this conflict the dynamics of "us versus them".

5.2 Further research

Ontological security theory could help provide knowledge on why civil conflicts occur and why they are difficult to resolve and provide different possible solutions. Rumelili (2015) has an interesting approach to this problem where she argues that securitization is the key political process in containing anxiety and producing ontological security. Securitization transforms anxiety or fear of the unknown to a known fear or threat, making it easier to manage. She

argues that peace can cause existential anxiety within groups in conflict, in states that have had long-going routines of conflicts since they can gain ontological security from conflictual relationships which is why these conflicts are hard to resolve. Rumelili argues that the key to conflict resolution is to contain the anxiety without securitization.

This type of research could prove useful in other areas as well where polarization and conflict between people occur due to anxiety and fear. Globalization brings people closer to each other, which also means that it brings a sense of change closer. For many, change can generate fear and anxiety which is why it is relevant to try to better understand the nexus between identity and (in)security.

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