

# Slick Operators: Revising Rentier State Theory for the Modern Arab States of the Gulf

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## **DECLARATION**

Unless otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents the original research of the author.

The total word count for this thesis, excluding footnotes, bibliography, and appendices, is 99,388 words.

Jessie Moritz

12 August 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Rentier state theory (RST) remains the dominant literature on state-society relations in the Arab States of the Gulf, yet by focusing on case studies of three ostensibly ‘rentier’ states, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, and their experience during the post-2011 period, this dissertation challenges assumptions of rent-induced political stagnation, state autonomy, and poor economic development prevalent in RST. The study is based on seven months field research in the Gulf region and among expatriate communities residing in the United Kingdom conducted between June 2013 and February 2014, including over 130 personal interviews with members of royal families, elected and appointed representatives, development advisors, youth entrepreneurs, and demonstrators involved in protests since 2011, as well as other data gathering activities.

By examining informal and formal opposition in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman since 2011, this thesis disputes RST’s assertion that distributions of wealth stymie political dissent. Participants in street demonstrations generally did not refer to material interests when justifying their opposition, but instead emphasised dissatisfaction with political rights, desire to hold the state accountable, or – in Qatar and Oman where society did not form ‘opposition’ so much as ‘reform-oriented movements’ – a sense that reform was in the national interest. Even *loyalists* justified their support for the state not by reference to rent distributions, but rather a sense of responsiveness and, in most cases, a shared identity with the ruling elite. The dissertation also disputes RST’s typical depiction of the state as a coherent actor, analysing political pressures emanating from reform-oriented groups within the state. As rent distributions were a poor determinant of political activism, the thesis identifies several dynamics that overpowered rent-based incentives to remain politically inactive.

While RST depicts states as effectively coopting society through rent distributions, the dissertation draws from an in-depth examination of Omani economic development between 1990 and 2014 to reveal that the state’s rent-driven economic development strategy had unintentionally *contributed* to a sense of inequality among nationals and the emergence of popular dissatisfaction, highlighting the importance of examining rent-based cooptation strategies at a sub-national level rather than relying on assumptions of cooptation at the national level. In a similar critique, the research also investigates the international dimensions of rentierism, finding that rentier states were far less insulated than typically assumed, examining three key cases where international networks or political pressures have impacted the state-society relationship.

Societies, then, were far from quiescent, and this research examines the networks and dynamics that have allowed citizens to challenge state authority. The dissertation argues that rentierism remains critical to understanding state-society relations in the Gulf states during the post-2011 period, but it is not necessarily *dominant*, and that several assumed outcomes of oil and gas wealth require revision and refinement. Ultimately, the dissertation depicts oil and gas-rich states of the Arab Gulf as having exceptional capacity to respond to the material demands of their citizenry, but also remaining responsive to a politically active society, even where formal political liberalisation has been limited, or even regressed since 2011.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION</b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b><u>11</u></b>
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>16</b>
SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES	18
INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA	24
<b>SCOPE OF THE THESIS</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS</b>	<b>31</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 1 - RENTIER STATE THEORY AND STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST</u></b>	<b><u>34</u></b>
<b>CLASSIC RENTIER STATE THEORY</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>THE LIMITS OF THE CLASSIC LITERATURE AND REVISIONIST RST</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>57</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXTUALISING STATE AND SOCIETY IN QATAR, BAHRAIN AND OMAN: HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS</u></b>	<b><u>58</u></b>
<b>BAHRAIN</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>QATAR</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>OMAN</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>91</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 3 - STATE DIVERSITY, LOYALISTS, AND PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE: SUPPORT FOR THE RENTIER STATE</u></b>	<b><u>93</u></b>
<b>GOVERNMENT ACCEPTANCE OF THE RENTIER BARGAIN</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>STATE DIVERSITY AND INTERNAL CONTEST OVER STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE OF THE RENTIER BARGAIN</b>	<b>107</b>
QATAR	107
OMAN	112
BAHRAIN	115
<b>RENTIER ELITES AND ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR THE RENTIER BARGAIN</b>	<b>116</b>
BUSINESS ELITES AND TRIBAL ALLIES	117
ACTIVE SUPPORTERS IN POPULAR MOBILISATIONS: COUNTER-PROTESTS	121
REFORM DEMANDS FROM ACTIVE SUPPORTERS	127
<b>CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR RST</b>	<b>134</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 4 - OPPOSITION AND REFORM: REJECTION OF THE RENTIER BARGAIN</u></b>	<b><u>136</u></b>
<b>RENT-SEEKING AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES</b>	<b>139</b>
RENT-SEEKING AND QATARI TWITTER ACTIVISM	140
RENT-SEEKING AND THE 14 <sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY COALITION	143

RENT-SEEKING AND OMANI REGIONAL DEMONSTRATIONS	149
<b>REJECTION OF THE RENTIER BARGAIN</b>	<b>156</b>
THE OMANI REFORMIST ELITE	159
REFORMERS AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES IN QATAR	161
BAHRAIN: ACTIVE OPPOSITION AND REJECTION OF THE RENTIER BARGAIN	166
<b>STATE RESPONSES TO POLITICAL CHALLENGES IN BAHRAIN</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>REPRESSION</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>INEQUALITY</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>DYNAMIC REFORMISM: ACTIVIST FAMILIES, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND GENERATIONAL CHANGE</b>	<b>185</b>
ACTIVIST FAMILIES IN BAHRAIN	185
SOCIAL MEDIA IN QATAR	188
GENERATIONAL CHANGE IN OMAN	190
<b>FRAGMENTATION IN OPPOSITION</b>	<b>194</b>
FRAGMENTATION IN OMAN	195
FRAGMENTATION IN QATAR	198
FRAGMENTATION IN BAHRAIN	199
<b>CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR RST</b>	<b>205</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 5 - DEVELOPMENT POLICY, INEQUALITY, AND RENTIER EFFECTIVENESS</u></b>	<b><u>208</u></b>
LATE STAGE RENTIERISM, EXPATRIATE LABOUR, AND OMANI DEVELOPMENT	210
ESTIMATING OMANI UNEMPLOYMENT	217
DEVELOPMENT AND THE STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF OMANI UNEMPLOYMENT	226
INDUSTRIAL ESTATES, REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT, AND THE SOHAR PROTESTS	236
CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR RST	248
<b><u>CHAPTER 6 - THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS</u></b>	<b><u>252</u></b>
AN IRANIAN FIFTH COLUMN? THE SHI'ITE CRESCENT AND GCC INTERVENTION IN BAHRAIN	255
A TRANSNATIONAL OPPOSITION: BAHRAINI HUMAN RIGHT NETWORKS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE	268
THE LIMITATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE: MIGRANT LABOUR RIGHTS AND THE QATAR 2022 WORLD CUP	284
CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR RST	295
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b><u>298</u></b>
REVISING RENTIERISM FOR THE MODERN ARAB STATES OF THE GULF	299
GENERALISABILITY OF FINDINGS	311
THE 2014 OIL PRICE FALL AND THE FUTURE OF REFORM IN THE GULF	318
<b><u>APPENDIX</u></b>	<b><u>322</u></b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b><u>324</u></b>

## GLOSSARY

### Key terms, acronyms, and groups

‘Ajam/‘Ajamī	Shia of Persian descent
Alliance for the Republic	al-taḥāluf min ajl al-jumhūriyya, a Bahraini opposition political grouping formed in March 2011 by Haq, Wafaa, and the BFM
Amal	jam‘iyyat al-‘amal al-islāmī, a Bahraini Shirazi opposition group
al-Asalah	Al-Asalah Islamic Society, or jam‘iyyat al-aṣāla al-islāmiyya, a Bahraini Salafi political society
BCHR	Bahrain Centre for Human Rights
BCCI	Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry
14 <sup>th</sup> February Coalition	Bahrain’s Coalition Youth of the 14 <sup>th</sup> February Revolution, or i’tilāf shabāb thawra 14 febrāyir, a youth street opposition group
BFM	Bahrain Freedom Movement, or ḥarakat aḥrār al-baḥraīn al-islāmiyya, a London-based Bahraini opposition group
BHRO	Bahrain Human Rights Observatory, an umbrella group for Bahraini opposition focused on international advocacy
Baḥārna/Baḥrānī	An indigenous group within Bahrain formed from the pre-1783 peasant underclass. In Oman the term refers more broadly to any Arab Shia
BAPCO	British Arabian Petroleum Company
BICI report	Report of the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry, also known as the Bassiouni report
dīwān (pl. dīwāniyya)	In all Gulf states: a formal council or office, such as the Emiri Diwan in Qatar In Kuwait: also refers to a social gathering, similar to a majlis

al-Fateh Youth	al-Fateh Youth Coalition, or i'tilāf shabāb al-fāteḥ, a Sunni nationalist youth group
Haq	ḥarakat ḥaq: ḥarakat al-ḥuriyyāt w-al-dīmūqrāṭiyya, a Shia Islamist society
Huwala (adj. Huwalī)	Arabs who settled for some time on the Persian side of the Gulf, but have now largely returned to the Arabian Peninsula
IFLB	Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain
al-Tajamua al-Qawmi	jam'iyat al-tajamu' al-qawmī, a Baathist nationalist secular political society
al-Ikhaa	jam'iyat al-ikhā' al-waṭanī, an 'ajamī Shia-oriented political society
al-Tajamua al-Watani	jam'iyat al-tajamu' al-waṭanī al-dīmūqrāṭī, an opposition-oriented political society
LMRA	Labour Market Regulatory Authority
majlis (pl. majālis)	A social gathering used in the Gulf as a protected space for open discussion
Majlis al-Dowla	Majlis al-Dawla, the appointed upper house of parliament in Oman
Majlis-al Shura	Majlis al-Shūra, in Qatar: the unicameral appointed parliament In Bahrain: the appointed upper house of parliament In Oman: the elected lower house of parliament
Majlis al-Nuwwab	Majlis al-Nuwwāb, the elected lower house of parliament in Bahrain
Majlis Oman	Majlis 'Umān, Oman's bicameral parliament, consisting of the Majlis al-Dowla and Majlis al-Shura
MB	Muslim Brotherhood, also referred to as the Ikhwan (al-Ikhwān)
al-Minbar	al-Minbar Islamic Society, or jam'iyat al-minbar al-waṭanī al-islāmī, a Bahraini political society affiliated with the MB
Najdī	Denotes origins from the Najd, Saudi Arabia



NAC	National Action Charter of Bahrain
NCSI	National Centre for Statistics and Information (Oman)
NUG	National Unity Gathering, or <i>tajammu‘ al-waḥda al-waṭaniyya</i> , a Sunni umbrella group formed in 2011. Later renamed the National Unity Assembly
OCCI	Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry
OGHR	Omani Group for Human Rights, a reformist group founded by Omani human rights activists
ORPIC	Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company
OSWL	Omani Society for Writers and Literati, an Omani scholarly group that functions as a space for moderate reform discussion
PASI	Public Authority for Social Insurance (Oman)
PDO	Petroleum Development Oman
PFLOAG	Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf, the Arab Nationalist and leftist precursor to Waad
SESRI	Qatar University’s Social and Economic Survey Research Institute
Waad	<i>wa‘ad</i> , or <i>jam‘iyyat al-‘amal al-waṭanī al-dīmūqrāṭiyya</i> , a Bahraini secular leftist opposition group
Wafaa	<i>tayyār al-wafā’ al-islāmī</i> , a Shia Bahraini opposition group
<i>waṭanī ḥabīb, ṣabāḥ al-khayr</i>	Popular Qatari radio program. Translates to “Beloved Homeland, Good Morning”
al-Wafaq	<i>jam‘iyyat al-wefāq al-waṭanī al-islāmiyya</i> , Bahrain’s largest opposition society, Shia in orientation

## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Arabic transliteration in this thesis generally follows the guidelines set by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.

Some exceptions include words used commonly in English-language press (Sunni, rather than Sunnī), whereas those words not commonly used outside of the Gulf context (Ibādī, Baḥārna, ‘Ajamī, etc) are regularly transliterated. Names of political societies are introduced in Arabic (and can be referred to in the glossary) but shortened to accepted English spellings thereafter, names of Arabic language newspapers are spelled according to their website if an English name is available, and transliterated if not, and names of places are spelled according to common usage in English-language publications, or, where this was not possible, by that used by Google Maps. Arabic names are spelled according to the preference of the individuals themselves, in publications, on websites, or on business cards, the exception being for non-living individuals, or where an Anglicised version might invite confusion: these are fully transliterated.

To enhance clarity, the word Shia is used both to invoke the noun and adjective forms of the word Shī‘a/Shī‘ī. The Shi‘ite Crescent is spelled according to common English usage.

# Introduction

In 2011, the Arab world reeled from revolutionary unrest that toppled seemingly immovable autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, fostered civil war in Syria, and generated widespread protests across much of the rest of the Middle East and North Africa. While scholars focused on Egypt and Tunisia puzzled over why their fields had failed to foresee such tumultuous change,<sup>1</sup> researchers working on the resource-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula instead saw the relative *absence* of revolution in these states as vindication of the influential rentier state theory (RST), which depicts oil and gas-rich states as having an exceptional ability to resist democratisation and popular accountability so long as phenomenal resource wealth continues to flow. It is this understanding that prompted Michael Ross to ask in late 2011 whether oil would “drown” the Arab Spring,<sup>2</sup> noting: “the Arab Spring has seriously threatened just one oil-funded ruler – Libya’s Muammar al-Qaddafi – and only because [NATO]’s intervention prevented the rebels’ certain defeat”.<sup>3</sup>

For a theory often treated as a comprehensive explanation of state-society relations,<sup>4</sup> however, RST has difficulty accounting for the emergence of society-driven reform movements in oil and gas-rich states, particularly those that emerged as a result of the Arab Spring. The purpose of this dissertation is to nuance RST’s core understanding of the link between petroleum wealth and societal quiescence, in order to better understand the emergence of these societal reform movements. By examining the networks and dynamics that have allowed citizens<sup>5</sup> to *challenge* state authority in oil and gas-rich states, even in the absence of revolution, this dissertation disputes RST’s assertion that distributions of wealth stymie political dissent and instead highlights the atmosphere of

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<sup>1</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2011) <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2011-07-01/why-middle-east-studies-missed-arab-spring> accessed 11 July 2016.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis is cognisant of the problems with the term ‘Arab Spring’, in reference to the so-called Prague Spring in 1968, but, as it remains the most common term associated with the series of popular unrest and revolutionary movements that occurred across the Arab World in 2011 (and a direct translation into Arabic, al-rabī‘ al-‘arabī, was the term most often used by interviewees who had participated in protests), uses it in this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Ross, “Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring? Democracy and the Resource Curse,” *Foreign Affairs* 90:5 (September/October 2011) 2.

<sup>4</sup> State-society relations are defined here as the interactions and interdependency between the ‘state’ and ‘society’. There is also greater discussion of this dissertation’s approach to state-society relations in Chapter One.

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘citizen’ is used interchangeably with ‘national’ in this thesis, as is the common practice in scholarship on the Gulf region.

competition, negotiation, dominance, and resistance that pervades state-society relations, even in states that have benefitted from phenomenal oil and gas wealth.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Arab states of the Gulf, often viewed as archetypal rentier states.<sup>6</sup> Drawing from the example of the Gulf region, early RST works posited that since these states<sup>7</sup> accrue substantial ‘rents’,<sup>8</sup> especially from oil and gas exportation, they are able to generate a substantially altered relationship with their society.<sup>9</sup> Termed a ‘rentier bargain’,<sup>10</sup> the basic premise is that, due to exceptional rent-derived revenue, the state can refrain from extractive activities, such as taxation, and distribute a portion of its wealth to its population; as a result, societal incentives to collectively challenge state authority are reduced, or even absent, in favour of incentives to ‘rent-seek’<sup>11</sup> for greater and higher value ‘rent distributions’.<sup>12</sup> As leading RST theorist Giacomo Luciani declared in 1987: “the fact is that there is ‘no representation without taxation’ and there are no exceptions to this version of the rule”.<sup>13</sup> Further,

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Kenneth C. Omeje, *High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006) 2; Justin Gengler, “Political Segmentation and Diversification in the Rentier Arab Gulf,” (paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Gulf Research Meeting, Cambridge UK, 1-5 July) 4.

<sup>7</sup> The ‘state’ is defined here as two entities: a sovereign country; and a recognised system of formal institutions and positions holding primary authority over rule of law, use of force, and sovereignty over territory. Due to regime stability in the Arab states of the Gulf, there is a great deal of overlap between references to the ‘state’, ‘government’ and ‘regime’, yet these should be considered as distinct: ‘state’ implies a broader structure, including, for example, state bureaucrats as well as state institutions, whereas ‘government’ refers to the persons holding state authority during a distinct period of time but not the institutions themselves, and ‘regime’ refers to the few power players who hold political control, again for a distinct period of time.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Rents’ refer here to the difference between the cost of production and price on the international market, which is exceptionally large for resources such as oil, gas, diamonds, and other natural resources, suggesting rents are in part “the income derived from the gift of nature”, as Alfred Marshall put it. Quoted in Hazem Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” in *The Rentier State*, ed. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (London: Croom Helm, 1987) 85.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Society’ is defined in this thesis as the population living within the territory of a sovereign state (or living abroad but holding citizenship in it, as of 2010). This thesis focuses almost exclusively on *citizens*, and the term ‘society’ refers primarily to the citizens of each state, unless it is made explicitly clear that the broader population (including migrant workers) is meant.

<sup>10</sup> The ‘rentier bargain’ refers to the specific relationship implied within RST between state and society, where the state offers lucrative material benefits but also funds an extensive internal security apparatus (raising the cost of political activism), and society assumedly remains politically quiescent as a result.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Rent-seeking’ refers in this thesis to the act of attempting to improve one’s (or one’s group’s) material circumstances by requesting greater rent distributions from the state. The thesis defines protest movements that primarily advocate for material improvements as rent-seeking, the intention being to distinguish this from more political challenges that defy the logic of the ‘rentier state’. As noted in Chapter Three, the use of the term ‘rent-seeking’ is not intended to imply any value judgement but rather to speak to the broader literature on RST.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Rent distributions’ refer to the material benefits offered by the rent-rich state to society, including loan forgiveness, direct cash transfers, subsidised utility rates, special land and loan packages reserved for citizens, and even public service employment. See Michael Herb, “A Nation of Bureaucrats: Political Participation and Economic Diversification in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009) 382.

<sup>13</sup> Giacomo Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework,” in *The Rentier State*, ed. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (London: Croom Helm, 1987) 75.

argued Hazem Beblawi, for the Arab states (and this would especially apply to the Gulf region): “the rentier nature of the new state is magnified by the tribal origins of these states. A long tribal tradition of buying loyalty and allegiance is now confirmed by an *état providence*, distributing favours and benefits to the population”.<sup>14</sup> This process of ‘cooptation’<sup>15</sup> is also enhanced by what Michael Ross calls the “repression effect”: a rent-funded security apparatus capable of actively repressing those parts of society that have not been coopted.<sup>16</sup> Although the literature on the rentier state has developed considerably since its inception in the 1970s, scholarship on Gulf state-society relations continues to defer to this framework, depicting the state as largely autonomous from a coopted and passive society; reform, where it does occur, is generally explained as the result of periods of low or reduced oil revenue (as occurred during the 1990s), or due to top-down processes driven by the ruling elite.<sup>17</sup>

Within this context, the study of societal-driven reform movements (such as the Arab Spring protests) has been sorely neglected. More problematically, the central causal link underpinning much of RST – that the distribution of rent-derived wealth necessarily leads to societal quiescence – remains largely unquestioned, especially at the sub-national level.<sup>18</sup> By investigating three case studies of ostensibly ‘rentier’ Gulf states and their experience since 2011, this thesis questions this causal link between rent-derived wealth and societal cooptation. In doing so, it also challenges assumptions of rent-induced political stagnation, state autonomy, and other characteristics typically considered outcomes of ‘rentierism’.<sup>19</sup> It approaches the study of state-society relations from the sub-national perspective, contrasting the expectations of RST at the national (and comparative cross-national) level with interview and fieldwork data obtained at the individual and group level. The thesis asks: how can RST explain large-scale protests that occurred in the Arab states of the Gulf in 2011? Do they represent a failure of cooptation mechanisms, or a more fundamental challenge to RST? Further, does the

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<sup>14</sup> Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” 89.

<sup>15</sup> Throughout this thesis, the term ‘cooptation’ refers specifically to the cooptation mechanism as understood within RST: that is, the exchange of rent-derived material benefits from the state for societal political quiescence. The use of repression is considered a separate, but highly relevant, mechanism for societal control.

<sup>16</sup> Michael L. Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy,” *World Politics* 53 (April 2001) 325 – 61.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the discussion of top-down reform in Anoush Ehteshami and Steven Wright, eds., *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Rentierism’, as defined here, refers to the *influence* of rents, or the process through which rent-derived wealth influences political, social, and economic outcomes (note that it does not include preconditions as to what these outcomes are, as they have changed as the literature on RST has developed over time).

absence of major street demonstrations in the UAE and Qatar actually imply societal quiescence, or do citizens in those states adopt alternate means through which to pressure the state on political matters? If RST is accurate at the sub-national level, should this not suggest that demonstrators, at least in aggregate, were motivated more by material<sup>20</sup> factors (such as frustration with unemployment or dissatisfaction with economic benefits, which could be considered a form of rent-seeking) than by non-material motivations, (such as desires for political liberalisation or greater state accountability)? Ultimately, if a sizeable portion of the population acts in ways contrary to the logic of rentierism, then what utility does RST have in explaining state-society relations, and how might the theory be revised to more accurately reflect reality in these archetypal rentier states?

The Arab Spring represents an ideal opportunity to revisit RST; as the period between 2011 and mid-2014 was a time of high oil and gas revenue (see Figure 1), not only is this a moment where cooptation should be, theoretically, at its most effective, but underlying practices of governance are often best revealed during moments of political pressure. While extant work has established that rentier states tend to struggle when economic downturns reduce the availability of rents,<sup>21</sup> to date there have been few opportunities to examine what happens when rent-rich regimes face serious political challenges during times of *high* rents. Even less so has this been done in well-established rentier states; some work has been done on political transitions and the higher incidence of violent conflict in rent-rich sub-Saharan African states,<sup>22</sup> however many of these countries have been unable to consolidate power in a long-lasting way. The Arab Spring therefore provides an opportunity to audit RST in a context of state

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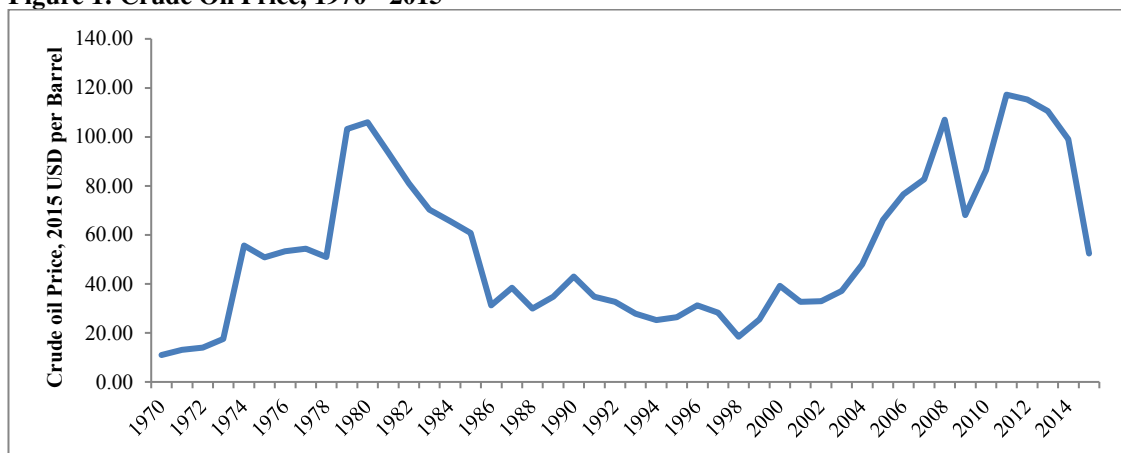
<sup>20</sup> The distinction between ‘material’ and ‘non-material’ interests is drawn in order to distinguish between motivations for political action that fit within RST’s understanding of rent-seeking, and more political challenges that, in a theoretically perfect rentier state, should not occur. ‘Non-material’ interests and motivations, defined here as ‘of political or social nature and not easily quantified or holding direct monetary value’, distinctly differ from the societal quiescence narrative in RST, whereas ‘material’ interests (referring to ‘basic material needs, such as those relating to bodily needs or wants’) *could* be considered a form of rent-seeking. Extracting the influence of rentierism from other material motivations is extremely difficult, even at the individual level. Thus, material motivations may not necessarily equate to ‘rent-seeking’, but do indicate *potential* rent-seeking and therefore provide a (weak) form of evidence in favour of RST.

<sup>21</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*; Khalid M. Abdullah, “The State in Oil Rentier Economies: The Case of Bahrain,” in *Change and Development in the Gulf*, ed. Abbas Abdelkarim (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) 51 – 78; Giacomo Luciani, “Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State, and Democratization,” in *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salamé (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Sharon E. Hutchinson, “A Curse from God? Religious and Political Dimensions of the Post-1991 Rise of Ethnic Violence in South Sudan,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39:2 (2001) 307 – 331; Luke Patey, “State Rules: Oil Companies and Armed Conflict in Sudan,” *Third World Quarterly* 28:5 (2007) 997-1016.

upheaval and social unrest in consolidated regimes where rents were, at least until mid-2014, widely available.

**Figure 1: Crude Oil Price, 1970 - 2015**



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2016. 1970-1983 is Arabian Light posted at Ras Turana, 1983-2015 is Brent dated.

This dissertation is thus an investigation into the rentier bargain itself, but not solely from the perspective of the state and ruling elite (the most common approach, generally resting on the correlation between rent-funded benefits distributed by the state, and the relative absence of societal unrest at the national level)<sup>23</sup> but also from the perspective of citizens themselves. It examines state-society relations during a period of regional political unrest, focusing on the processes through which the state attempts to secure societal loyalty, and how and why citizens (and political groups) choose to accept, promote, or reject state authority. It furthers recent work, such as Jocelyn Mitchell's 2013 study of Qatari opinions on rent-funded benefits, which similarly questioned the effectiveness of cooptation,<sup>24</sup> but differs in that this study does not focus primarily on citizen views of the rent allocations themselves. Rather, this research explores citizen justifications for why they personally engaged in, or alternatively refrained from, 'political action'<sup>25</sup> since 2011, including participation in street demonstrations, and in public debates, through traditional media (including call-in radio programs that function

<sup>23</sup> As an example of an elite-driven approach, see Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Jocelyn Sage Mitchell, "Beyond Allocation: The Politics of Legitimacy" (PhD Diss., Georgetown University, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> This dissertation focuses on the most overt forms of political activism, such as street demonstrations and public statements. Pro-reform actions are distinguished from those *countering* reform movements, the former exemplifying a challenge to the rentier bargain and the latter supporting it. See other "common 'repertoires' of political action", meaning "the ways that citizens choose to express themselves politically" to the state in Pippa Morris, "Young People and Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?" (Report for the Council of Europe Symposium, Strasbourg, 27-28 November 2003).

as a forum for public discussion, such as *waṭanī ḥabīb*, *ṣabāḥ al-khayr* (Beloved Homeland, Good Morning) in Qatar); in-person (such as during public meetings held by political societies in Bahrain); and through online forums such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and country-specific websites (such as *al-Zaman* in Oman). The ultimate intent is to examine the overarching mechanism(s) of cooptation, and where it is, or, more importantly, is *not* effective in precluding political action, with the purpose of revealing any weaknesses of RST's explanation of state-society relations and contributing to a substantive revision of the theory.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

This thesis is thus concerned with evaluating key 'causal mechanisms'<sup>26</sup> underpinning RST, particularly the process of cooptation, whereby the state distributes rent-derived wealth to society and, assumedly, receives societal quiescence in return. It employs the congruence method of analysis, whereby the expected outcomes and causal mechanisms of RST are compared with actual outcomes and causal process in real-world cases, as a form of controlled comparison within and between case studies. This design is intended to "assess [RST's] ability to explain or predict the outcome in a particular case [or cases]" and has previously been identified as having particular advantages in contributing to the "refinement and development" of a theory.<sup>27</sup> The research objective, therefore, is primarily to qualitatively test<sup>28</sup> RST as an explanation of state-society relations, but also to identify alternative variables and causal paths that better explain the state-society relationship in these cases, and which might be beneficially incorporated into a rentier analysis.

To guard against an identified weakness of the congruence method – the "unjustified, questionable imputation of a causal relationship on the basis of mere consistency" – this dissertation simultaneously utilises process-tracing techniques.<sup>29</sup> The process-tracing method, as described by Peter Hall, "draws observations from the empirical cases, not

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<sup>26</sup> As Gerring notes, there has been substantial disagreement over the precise definition and understand of 'causal mechanism'. The definition used here is "the pathway or process by which an effect is produced", or the process through which rents produce the political and economic characteristics of a 'rentier state' identified in the literature (in both a general way, and in the specific context of each country). See John Gerring, "Causal Mechanisms: Yes, But..." *Comparative Political Studies* 43:11 (2010)1499-1526.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005) 181-182.

<sup>28</sup> A 'test' in Political Science is often a loaded term, understood very differently between quantitative and other forms of qualitative analysis. The term here refers to George and Bennett's understanding of "theory testing" as outlined in their classification of research objectives for case study analysis, and does not imply the use of formal quantitative or qualitative 'tests'. See *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 183.



only about the value of the principal causal variables, but about the processes linking these variables to the outcomes”.<sup>30</sup> It is generally accepted as being effective at illuminating complex causal relationships, addressing equifinality,<sup>31</sup> and “test[ing] whether the observed processes among variables in a case match those predicted or implied by the theory”; thus it not only complements the congruence method, but can also address the multiple causes that lead to societal quiescence and other characteristics of the ‘rentier’ state.<sup>32</sup> As George and Bennett note, process-tracing is often a more implicit method of case study research, taking the form of, a “detailed narrative or story presenting in the form of a chronicle that purports to throw light on how an event came about”, or “an *analytical* causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms”.<sup>33</sup> This thesis preferences the latter approach, linking findings to the theoretical expectations (hypotheses) of RST where possible; it is in part for this reason that the structure of the thesis is thematic, rather than chronological or on a case-by-case basis.

The congruence method and process-tracing are, of course, techniques of comparative case study analysis. Aside from the practical considerations that necessitated this form of qualitative analysis,<sup>34</sup> this is considered an effective approach to reveal the inner workings of the rentier state. Specifically, case studies have a “powerful advantage” in examining causal mechanisms, protecting against conceptual overstretching (a common criticism of RST), and in identifying new variables and alternative explanations for political outcomes.<sup>35</sup> They are particularly able to accommodate complex causal relations, such as what might cause an individual citizen to remain politically quiescent, or alternatively drive them to political action, disentangling the effect of rentierism from

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 206-223; Hall actually terms his approach ‘Systematic Process Analysis’ but it is similar enough to the broader literature on process tracing to justify using his definition here. See Peter A. Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics,” in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 394; David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *Political Science and Politics* 44:4 (2011) 823-830.

<sup>31</sup> Equifinality refers to a situation in which there are multiple causes of a single outcome.

<sup>32</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 217.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>34</sup> For example, at the time this research was conducted, political research, particularly on sensitive questions such as political loyalty and dissent, was difficult to conduct in the Arab States of the Gulf. The likelihood of receiving a research visa was remote, let alone conducting a comprehensive survey of political opinions and motivations. Moreover, having received negative media attention in the wake of popular unrest in 2011, governments in these states were actively seeking to ban political researchers from the country. See Michael Peel and Simoen Kerr, “LSE scraps UAE event after ‘restrictions’,” *Financial Times* (24 February 2013) <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/bbdbaa30-7e99-11e2-9080-00144feabdc0.html#axzz4E75cddJf> accessed 11 July 2016.

<sup>35</sup> See discussion of the weaknesses in RST revealed by conceptual overstretching in George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 19-20; on the dangers of conceptual stretching more generally, see Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 64:4 (December 1970) 1033-1053.

other variables. By utilising both within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons, an approach upon which “there is a growing consensus that [it is] the strongest means of drawing inferences from case studies”,<sup>36</sup> the dissertation questions not only whether rentier states are as immune from societal dissent as typically assumed, but also whether, where rentierism and societal quiescence correlate, this can be convincingly explained by RST.

There are also trade-offs, of course. A major drawback of case study analysis, for example, is that it necessarily produces narrower and more contingent findings.<sup>37</sup> Another potential trade-off is in theoretical parsimony, which is clear between hypotheses driving quantitative research on the rentier state (for example: oil impedes democracy, as tested by Michael Ross in 2001) and those driving qualitative case studies (such as Jill Crystal’s comparative case studies of Qatar and Kuwait, which suggested that oil set in motion certain ‘transformations’ over time, including the destruction and reformation of political coalitions, institutional structures, and arenas for political bargaining between, for example, merchants and rulers).<sup>38</sup> However, considering the weaknesses of RST, these are considered reasonable trade-offs to increase explanatory richness and examine a key causal mechanism that remains highly influential but only rarely questioned.

### ***Selection of Case Studies***

This study selects its cases from the universe of rentier states identified through the literature on RST since 1970, which includes cases as diverse as Nigeria, Venezuela, Iran, and Norway. More specifically, it focuses on a sub-set of rentier states located in the Arabian Peninsula, which have long been considered archetypal rentier states and, along with Iraq and Iran, were among the most influential cases in the formation of RST.<sup>39</sup> They thus represent ideal states upon which to form a “comparative crucial case study”, a selection method depicted by Harry Eckstein as, arguably, “the most powerful

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<sup>36</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> See Ross “Does Oil Hinder Democracy”; Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

<sup>39</sup> Hossein Mahdavy based his original idea of the rentier state on a study of Iran, and Beblawi particularly drew from the example of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar in his theoretical formulation of the rentier state. See Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” 89-95; Hossein Mahdavy, “The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran,” in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M. Cook (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

study of all for theory building”.<sup>40</sup> The most essential characteristic of a crucial case, as described by Eckstein, is that the case “*must closely fit* a theory” or that “in a crucial case it must be extremely difficult, or clearly petulant, to dismiss any finding contrary to theory as simply ‘deviant’...and equally difficult to hold that any finding confirming theory might just as well express quite difficult regularities”.<sup>41</sup> As perfect crucial cases are so rare, Eckstein also allowed ‘most-likely’ and ‘least-likely’ cases: “cases that ought, or ought not to invalidate or confirm theories, if any cases can be expected to do so,” as acceptable selections for crucial qualitative tests of a theory.<sup>42</sup> Unsurprisingly, given the theory was created with these states in mind, the Gulf states, particularly those that form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), display many of the characteristics of a classic rentier state and form most-likely, if not ideal crucial cases. These characteristics are outlined more fully in Chapter One, but generally speaking include: expansive public spending programs (including, in most cases, free healthcare and education, as well as preferential distributions of land and loan packages); the existence of an extensive repressive apparatus funded by resource wealth; an excessively large bureaucracy with inflated public service salaries, even in comparison to neighbouring (resource-poor) welfare states; a strong preference for public sector employment among citizens, usually taken as evidence of a ‘rentier mentality’;<sup>43</sup> and an authoritarian and relatively autonomous state, responding only selectively to societal pressures.<sup>44</sup> Even after 2011 protests spread from Tunisia to the rest of North Africa and the Middle East, no Gulf state experienced political revolution or forced regime change as a result of societal unrest, and in some, such as Qatar and the UAE, street demonstrations were entirely absent. In terms of the expected *outcomes* of rentierism, then, these states seemingly display close correlation to that expected by the theory.

They are also all rentier states, according to classic RST measures of rentierism. In his foundational work on RST, Luciani defined a rentier state as “all those states whose revenue derives predominantly (more than 40 percent) from oil or other foreign sources, and whose expenditure is a substantial share of GDP”, including the Arab Gulf

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<sup>40</sup> Harry Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” in *Case Study Method: Key Issues, Key Texts*, ed. Roger Gomm, Martyn Hammersley, and Peter Foster (London: Sage, 2000) 156.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 148.

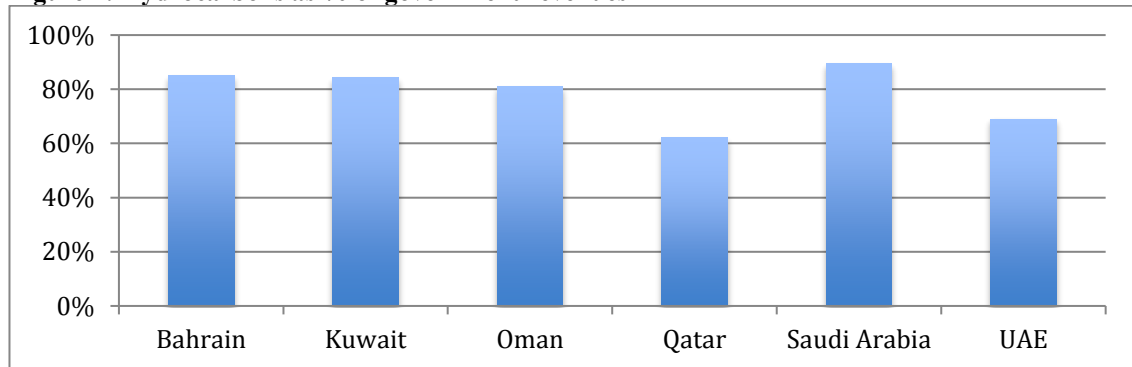
<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 149; B. Guy Peters, *Strategies for Comparative Research in Political Science* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 158, 165-166.

<sup>43</sup> The idea of the ‘rentier mentality’ refers to a breaking down of the work-reward causation and elimination of incentives to be productive that are so essential to capitalist development. See Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” 88, 52.

<sup>44</sup> This was the crux of the argument in Ross, “Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring”.

countries as “primary examples” of the phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Figure 2 below outlines the percentage of government revenue drawn from hydrocarbons in the GCC states, all of which are above 40 percent.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure 2: Hydrocarbons as % of government revenues**



Source: Various. Bahrain and Oman figures for 2010, Kuwait figure for Financial Year (FY) 2009-2010, Qatar for FY 2010-2011, Saudi Arabia for 2013, and UAE for 2009.<sup>47</sup>

More recent iterations of RST preference measures of ‘resource abundance’, usually measured through resource exports or rents per capita.<sup>48</sup> Figure 3 below locates 28 states described as ‘rentier’ in extant RST works between resource abundance and ‘resource dependence’ (rents as a percentage of GDP):

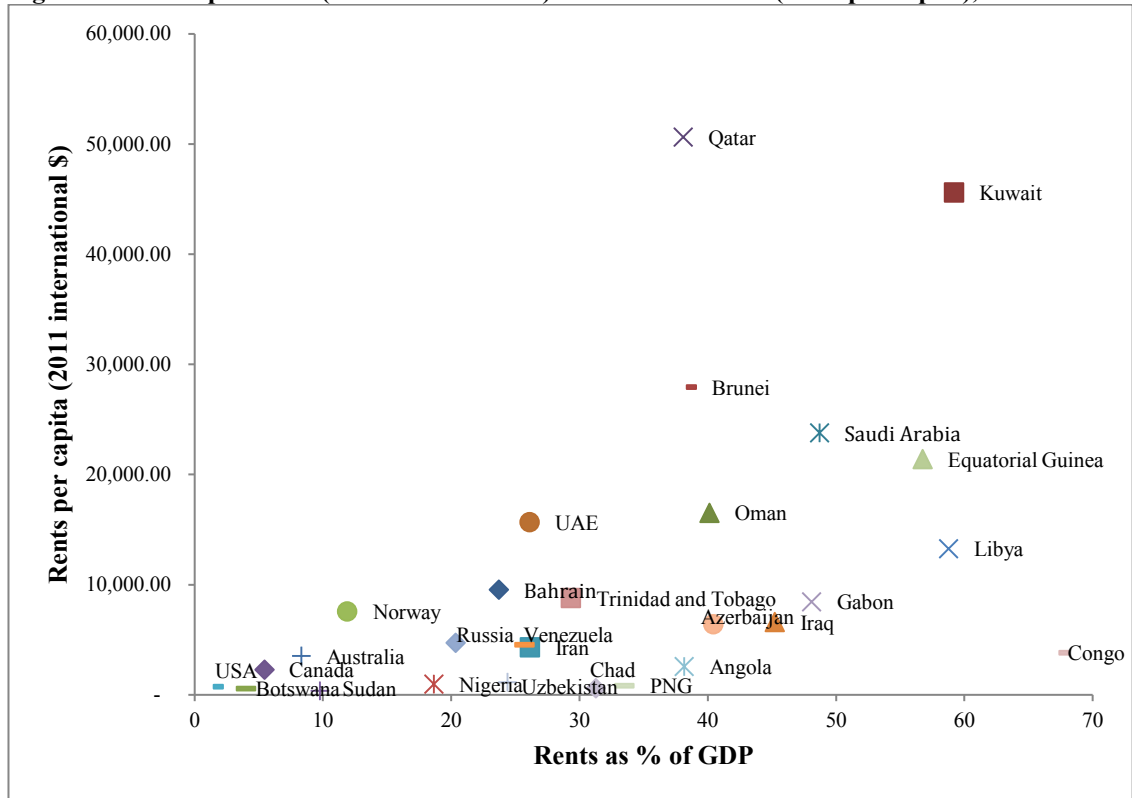
<sup>45</sup> Luciani explicitly identified Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia as examples of rentier states. Bahrain was considered a borderline case, for in 1982 oil and grants formed 78.5 percent of GDP, but government expenditure formed only 40 percent in 1977, declining to 34.6 percent in 1981. However, other measures of oil dependence (termed oil reliance by Michael Ross), such as a 1995 study of 113 states, measuring fuel-based exports as a percentage of GDP, placed Bahrain as the third most oil dependent state, after Brunei and Kuwait. See Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States,” 72 – 74; Michael Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy,” 326.

<sup>46</sup> While Qatar’s position in Figure 2 at first seems surprisingly low, this is in part an accounting issue. Qatar counts investment income and corporate tax receipts as non-hydrocarbon revenue, despite “practically all” of this revenue coming from state-owned Qatar Petroleum; in 2015 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) claimed that over 90 percent of government revenue was drawn (directly and indirectly) from hydrocarbons, a substantial increase from the 60 percent figure reported by the state. These figures were for Financial Year 2013, see International Monetary Fund, “Qatar: Selected Issues,” *IMF Country Report* 15:87 (March 2015) <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/cr1587.pdf> accessed 6 August 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Bahrain figure for 2010, drawn from Economic Development Board, *Economic Yearbook* (2013) 28; Kuwait figure for Financial Year (FY) 2009-2010 and includes oil revenue only, drawn from Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau, *Government Finance Statistics 2008/2009-2012/2013* (2014); Oman figure for 2010, calculated from data available in National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook 2014*; Qatar figure for FY 2010-2011, drawn from Qatar Central Bank, *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report 2010* (August 2011); Saudi Arabian figure for 2013, drawn from al-Khabeer Capital, “GCC Budget Analysis,” (August 2014); UAE figure for 2009, calculated from data available in International Monetary Fund, “United Arab Emirates: 2011 Article IV Consultation,” *International Monetary Fund Country Report* 11:111 (May 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Michael Herb, *The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014) 10-15; Annika Kropf, “Resource Abundance vs. Resource Dependence in Cross-Country Growth Regressions,” *OPEC Energy Review* (June 2010) 125.

**Figure 3: Rent dependence (rents as % of GDP) vs rent abundance (rents per capita), 2012**



Source: Calculated from World Bank data, available at <http://data.worldbank.org/>.<sup>49</sup>

Every state in this chart – the exception being resource-rich but non-rentier states Australia, Canada, and the United States, which are included to provide a comparison – has, at varying points, been considered a rentier state in the RST literature, even if the *extent* to which they are truly rentier is debated.<sup>50</sup> Nigeria, Uzbekistan, and Papua New Guinea are reasonably oil dependent, for example, but their low rents per capita (rent abundance) make it unclear “whether the outcome is caused by resource wealth or by non-resource poverty”.<sup>51</sup> For countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and Iran, larger populations problematise notions that they can effectively coopt their entire citizenry; instead, they must resort to targeted distributions that may or may not produce societal quiescence at the national level. On the other end of the spectrum, Qatar, Kuwait, and Brunei are clearly both rent-dependent *and* rent-abundant, joining a category of

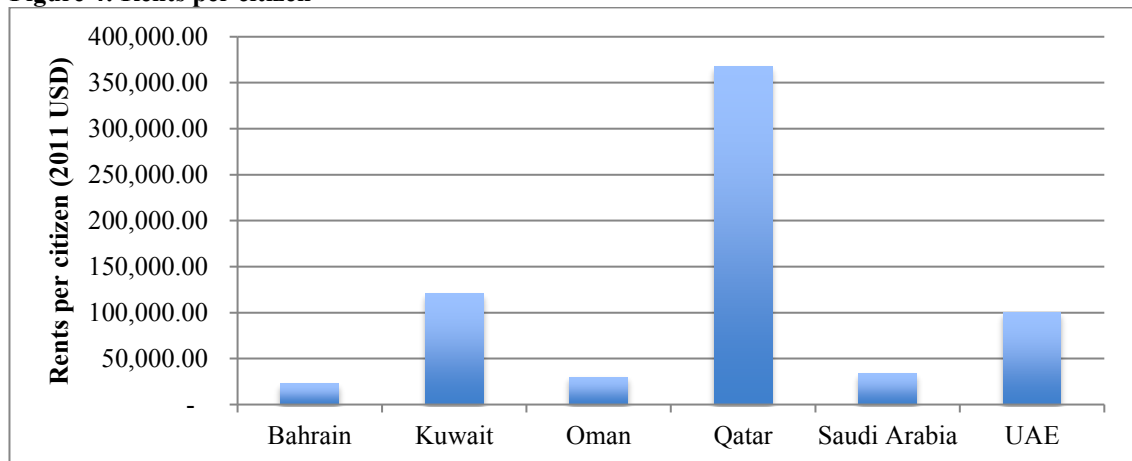
<sup>49</sup> This chart also represents an updated version of Figure 1.2 in Herb, *The Wages of Oil*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Some have argued that states such as Australia should be considered ‘quasi-rentier’, due to the impact of natural resource exportation on foreign currency, and resultant shrinkages in manufacturing exports, a process of ‘Dutch Disease’ common to rentier states. U.S. states such as Alaska, and some Canadian territories also exhibit characteristics of rentierism, yet overall the strength of non-resource sectors in the economy is such that they do not easily fit with the majority of ‘rentier’ states, even Norway. See Drew Cottle and Joe Collins, “From Client State to Rentier State? New Compradors, Transnational Capital, and the Internationalization of Globalizing Dynamics in Australia, 1990-2013,” in *Globalization and Transnational Capitalism in Asia and Oceania*, ed. Jeb Sprague (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Herb, *The Wages of Oil*, 11.

“extreme” rentier states.<sup>52</sup> This distinct sub-type of rentier state, which Herb limits to Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Brunei, is revealed more clearly through Figure 4, which compares rents per citizen for the Gulf states, thus removing non-national migrant workers who are generally not included in processes of cooptation.

**Figure 4: Rents per citizen**



Source: Calculated from World Bank data for 2012 and various estimates of citizen populations.<sup>53</sup> Citizen estimate for Bahrain is for 2010, 2015 for Kuwait, 2010 for Oman, 2014 for Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and 2013 for the UAE.

Qatar, again, is a clear outlier, due largely to its small citizenry (estimated at less than 300,000 in 2014) and phenomenal natural gas rents, in turn a product of massive reserves, deliberate state investment in the liquefied natural gas industry in the 1990s, and fortuitous increases in long-term Japanese gas contract prices just as Qatar sought to sell its gas on the international market. It has also faced the least political dissatisfaction, in that it has experienced no street demonstrations, protests, nor widespread societal movements calling for political reform since 2011. If RST’s cooptation mechanism is expected to work anywhere, Qatar should form one of the best possible environments for its success.

Yet viewing Qatar alone, or even in comparison to other “extreme” rentier cases, provides only a partial picture of how cooptation works in real-world rentier states. This thesis draws from two other case studies from the crucial Gulf region, neither of which

<sup>52</sup> Herb, *The Wages of Oil*, 12-15.

<sup>53</sup> Citizen population estimates drawn from Oxford Business Group, *Bahrain: The Report* (2013) 13; Jure Snoj, “Kuwait’s Population: By Nationality,” *BQ Magazine* (11 August 2015) <http://www.bq-magazine.com/economy/socioeconomics/2015/08/kuwaits-population-by-nationality> accessed 11 July 2016; Jure Snoj, “Population of Qatar by Nationality,” *BQ Magazine* (18 December 2013) <http://www.bq-magazine.com/economy/2013/12/population-qatar> accessed 11 July 2016; Arab News, “KSA Population is 30.8m; 33% expats,” (31 January 2015) <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/697371> accessed 11 July 2016; Government of Oman, *General Census of Population, Housing, and Establishments* (2010).

are “extreme” rentier states, but which share many geographic, social, and economic characteristics: Oman and Bahrain. The intention is to achieve a degree of “concomitant variation”,<sup>54</sup> where the independent variable (rent-derived wealth) varies in expected directions with the dependent variable (societal quiescence), at least at the national level.<sup>55</sup> That is, Qatar represents the most rent abundant state, and has experienced the least societal unrest; Oman represents a middling case, which experienced unrest in 2011 but has quietened since then; and Bahrain represents the ‘poorest’ (keeping in mind this is relative in the Gulf) case and has experienced widespread, intense, and ongoing protests since 2011.

More specifically, Omani demonstrations emerged in February 2011 in Muscat and subsequently in Salalah, Sohar, and other cities, particularly following the death of Abdullah al-Ghamlasi during a police crackdown on protests in Sohar. There was variation in the exact demands of protesters, but in general they included: expansion of political rights; greater accountability of Ministers; limits on the authority of state security services; improved access to higher education through the establishment of new universities and provision of more scholarships; pay increases; greater financial support for struggling families and unemployed citizens; and controls on rising prices.<sup>56</sup> The state responded rapidly to escalating unrest, with a mix of increased rent distributions (such as the expansion of public sector employment and establishment of a monthly unemployment benefit), responsiveness (such as the replacement of half the Cabinet, and promises to increase the political power of the consultative parliament), and repression (crackdowns on protests and arrests of prominent agitators). Though small instances of unrest have occasionally occurred, mass demonstrations have effectively halted since late 2011, when Oman entered a period of societal quiescence.

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<sup>54</sup> Concomitant variation was originally outlined by John Stuart Mills, as distinct from the better-known ‘most similar’ and ‘most different’ case selection approaches. The approach, and the assumptions underpinning it, are summarised as “if two variables tend to vary in the same pattern, then they are somehow linked, either causally or through some other pattern of connection (linked to some third variables)” in Peters, *Strategies for Comparative Research in Political Science*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Concomitant variable obviously implies selection on both the dependent and independent variables, a “mortal sin” to some, particularly quantitative, methodologists. This thesis, however, aligns with Peters and others advocating for careful and “purposeful” selection of case studies, including on the dependent variable, who argue that for small-N qualitative case studies, selecting cases for variation on the dependent variable “is more permissible, or even desirable”. See Peters, *Strategies for Comparative Research in Political Science*, 32, 33, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Said Sultan al-Hashimi, “The Omani Spring: Towards the Break of a New Dawn,” *Arab Reform Brief* 52 (November 2011).

The Bahraini Spring also emerged in February 2011, but quickly escalated to a major threat to state stability, as diverse opposition movements coalesced in demonstrations that spread from largely Shia rural villages into Pearl Roundabout and other areas in downtown Manama. Despite attempts by a reformist faction in government to attract opposition leaders to negotiations, by mid-March protests had grown so intense that King Hamad determined it was necessary to invite GCC Peninsula Shield Forces, primarily from Saudi Arabia, to intervene in order to shore up state authority. Since then, Bahrain has experienced continuing unrest, punctuated by periods of fragile quiescence and regular outcries of repression among opposition political societies and other organised groups. State efforts to address dissatisfaction, ranging from the expansion of public sector employment, reform of state security procedures, and direct distributions of rent-derived wealth, to repressive crackdowns and widespread arrests of demonstrators, have failed to achieve societal quiescence.<sup>57</sup>

Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, then, have been chosen not only for their status as Gulf rentier states but also for the variation between them. The purpose in this thesis is to draw out an analysis that can pinpoint both similarities and differences in their responses and experiences of the post-2011 period and determine whether these are likely to stem from rentierism or from other features of their domestic and international context. In doing so, the findings generate both evidence of the continued impact of rents on the state-society relationship, but also revision of how the rentier bargain influences political activism, particularly the formation and maintenance of reform movements and other challenges to state authority.

### ***Interview Methodology and Sources of Data***

This thesis draws from a diverse range of sources in both English and Arabic. Primary sources of data consulted for this research include:

- Government sources, such as press releases, transcripts and footage of speeches and public debates, published economic development strategies and planning documents, statistical reports, outcomes of national surveys (where available), published works by senior members of the ruling elite, legal databases, state company websites, and official Twitter and social media accounts held by senior

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<sup>57</sup> Jane Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse* (London: Chatham House (Royal Institute for International Affairs), June 2012).



government officials and members of the royal family.<sup>58</sup> These sources were consulted to clarify government views of the state-society relationship, rent distributions, economic development, international relations (specifically transnational relations between the state and foreign partners, and between societal and foreign groups, as discussed in detail in Chapter Six), and to explore intra-state variation in attitudes towards society and reform movements since 2011.

- Government statistical databases, especially: the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in Oman; the Economic Development Board (EDB) and Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) in Bahrain; and the Qatar Statistics Authority (QSA); as well as polling data from the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) in Qatar. Data from these sources were corroborated where possible with international sources such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund statistical databases. They were particularly consulted in order to understand *how* rent-derived wealth had been distributed to society over time, as well as the economic development and diversification strategy followed by the state that, as discussed in Chapter Five, has important implications for the effectiveness of the rentier bargain.
- Sources that reveal the political opinions of citizens, instances of societal political activism, and other forms of engagement with the state since 2011, such as: published works by individual citizens, local newspaper articles, particularly opinion pages or regular columns penned by citizens, transcripts and recordings of public debates (such as various conferences held to discuss the Oman 2040 Economic Vision strategy), websites, pamphlets, tweets, personal blogs, country-specific online forums,<sup>59</sup> online videos uploaded through YouTube or similar sites, and other public expressions of positions on political issues (especially on issues of reform and the Arab Spring).

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<sup>58</sup> The report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) is technically a government report, but given its exceptional independence, it is considered an independent source for documenting the events of early to mid-2011 and evaluating many of the claims made by state and societal groups during that time. See Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Manama: Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> For example Bahrain Online, which functioned as a site of civil debate and public expressions of reform desires in the lead-up to 2011. See Bahrain Online, <http://bahrainonline.org/forum.php> accessed 7 August 2016.

- For political societies, formal organisations, and other organised groups, many of the previously mentioned sources were consulted, alongside: official documents, including published lists of demands, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, manifestos and platforms (where available), newsletters, official YouTube accounts, satellite television programs (most notably the Lualua TV channel that broadcasts Bahraini opposition views via satellite from London) and private and public meetings held to debate political and economic reform since 2011 (such as a series of meetings held at the UK House of Lords by Bahraini opposition societies to publicise their call for political reform). These sources highlighted the motivations and political actions of Gulf reformist groups, as well as positions taken by loyalist and ostensibly apolitical organisations such as the Omani, Qatari, and Bahraini Chambers of Commerce and Industry (traditionally bastions of the business elite and often also forming a rentier elite supporting the perpetuation of the rentier bargain).<sup>60</sup>

Further, intensive in-country fieldwork was conducted between June and July 2013 in the United Kingdom (to access Bahraini opposition communities residing in the UK, especially those who had fled Bahrain since 2011), and between September 2013 and February 2014 in the Gulf region. The intention was to supplement primary and secondary sources with semi-structured interviews with citizens of Gulf states, particularly targeting those who had been directly involved in political unrest (or, in Qatar, public movements calling for reform) since 2011, but also capturing a broad range of political views, including those who eschewed reform movements in favour of loyalist counter-demonstrations, and members of different factions within the state who hold diverse understandings of what the relationship with society is, or should be. The semi-structured nature of interviews was critical to conducting research on such a sensitive political subject, allowing the interviewee to direct discussion towards or away from sensitive topics, as well as having a heuristic purpose, in that the interviewee could bring up topics and variables not previously considered. They were conducted in both English and Arabic, and on average took between 60 to 100 minutes to complete. Questions focused on:

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<sup>60</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

- Establishing a personal history, including a family background to ascertain if they were part of groups traditionally incorporated into cooptation mechanisms (such as the rentier elite), or if they had previously been politically active prior to 2011.
- Identifying whether the individual had received significant rent distributions (in terms of public sector employment, subsidised healthcare and education, land and loan transfers, or direct cash distributions), and whether they felt materially satisfied.
- Illuminating their views on contemporary political and economic developments, the intention being to reveal whether they had, or were likely to, demand reform from the state. Exact questions varied significantly between interviewees, as participants in street protests were generally eager to discuss why they had become involved, whereas others (for example loyalists) were reluctant to directly criticise the state on political issues. This latter group was asked instead about their views on less-sensitive topics (such as, in Qatar, their views on Qatari economic and foreign policy), which nevertheless provided an understanding of whether the individual was satisfied with political, social, and economic developments in the country, or whether they desired change. The former group, those who had actively participated in reform movements since 2011, were additionally asked for their personal motivation for joining these movements, the intention being to draw out whether these motivations were primarily material in nature (suggesting potential rent-seeking motivations) or non-material (suggesting, if the individual had benefitted significantly from rent distributions, that cooptation mechanisms were ineffective).
- Understanding *how* citizens interact with the state (or, for members of government, how they interacted, or expected to interact, with citizens). Participants were asked how, if they did have reform desires, they would convey these demands to the state, and what level of state accountability they expected in return. These questions were designed to highlight alternative pathways of engagement with the state (in Qatar, for example, this revealed the importance of a morning radio show as a rent-allocation pathway, as well as the utilisation of Twitter to access senior members of government directly) and critically

evaluate assumed societal quiescence, especially in states such as Qatar that have experienced little public dissent.

- Documenting their views on other supposed outcomes of rentierism. For example, development experts and state representatives were asked about challenges for economic diversification in their country, in order to examine if these aligned with those expected by RST (this was particularly an evaluation of a classic RST argument, which claims that resource rents induce myopic economic policymaking).<sup>61</sup> Others, particularly private sector employers, were asked about the existence of a ‘rentier mentality’ or productivity issues with citizen-workers, also a theoretical outcome of rentierism. Finally, members of government were asked about governance networks (for example, what kind of access elected MPs have to Cabinet), duplication between ministries (another key characteristic of rentierism),<sup>62</sup> intra-state reform movements, and their personal and professional views on domestic political and social developments since 2011.

The study resulted in 135 formal interviews – 57 interviews in Oman, 34 in Qatar, and 44 with Bahrainis based in Bahrain or the UK. Participants included: members of royal families; senior government bureaucrats, such as ministers and undersecretaries; elected and appointed representatives; development and economic advisors (independent, and those based within the state or in quasi-state institutions); members of the business elite; youth entrepreneurs (in order to understand if RST has truly created a rentier mentality); prominent leaders in civil society; members of political societies, where these exist; and demonstrators involved in protests or reformist movements since 2011. All but six were citizens, the non-nationals being expatriates, Western and Arab, holding senior government positions or otherwise based in the region and having in-depth knowledge and personal experience of the state-society relationship. Many more nationals also contributed their expertise in an informal capacity, though they cannot be cited here.

While the findings of this research are described in as transparent a manner as possible, the balance between research transparency and ethical research practices, particularly

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<sup>61</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States”; Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, “The Macro-Behaviour of the Oil-Rentier States in the Arab Region,” in *The Rentier State*, ed. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (London: Croom Helm, 1987) 83-85.

<sup>62</sup> Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

the protection of interviewee identities, is weighted heavily in favour of the latter.<sup>63</sup> The authoritarian context in which this research was conducted necessitates confidentiality regarding, for example, when, where, and with whom, exactly, the interview was conducted; it is for this reason that often only the year and country of interview are provided.<sup>64</sup> Further, due to the level of trust needed to ensure interviewees were willing to share views on sensitive political topics, interviewees were identified using snow-balling techniques, which by nature is vulnerable to selection bias.<sup>65</sup> Yet in authoritarian contexts, snow-balling has been consistently identified as one of the most suited techniques, particularly “when the focus of study is on a sensitive issue”, and “requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study”, a primary example being members of youth street groups such as the 14<sup>th</sup> February Youth Coalition in Bahrain, who are actively pursued by the state yet agreed to participate in this research.<sup>66</sup> To guard against potential bias resulting from skewed interviewee participation, this thesis also corroborated findings wherever possible, comparing opposition statements to those released by state media, and findings from interviews with published materials, including secondary sources such as media and academic discussion of state-society relations in the Arab Gulf states since 2011. Ultimately, these trade-offs are considered reasonable in order to encourage open communication on sensitive political topics and to access communities that rarely speak to foreign researchers, yet are critical to understanding state-society relations in these states since 2011.

## Scope of the Thesis

This thesis is an investigation into a key relationship between rent-derived wealth and societal unrest, as understood within RST. It narrows its investigation to the theoretical outcomes and processes of rentierism that impact this core relationship, although other

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<sup>63</sup> This conforms to the recommendations for researchers conducting interviews in authoritarian regimes outlined in Victor Shih, “Research in Authoritarian Regimes: Transparency Tradeoffs and Solutions,” *Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 13:1 (Spring 2015) 20-22; Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Transparency in Intensive Research on Violence: Ethical Dilemmas and Unforeseen Consequences,” *Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 13:1 (Spring 2015) 22-27.

<sup>64</sup> This may include those who have consented to be identified by name and position, if the comment was deemed too politically sensitive or there was otherwise concern that the interviewee may suffer negative repercussions if identified. It is also why there exists no complete list of interviews in the appendix, an approach advocated by Erik Bleich and Robert J. Pekkanen, “Data Access, Research Transparency, and Interviews: The Interview Methods Appendix,” *Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 13:1 (Spring 2015) 8-13.

<sup>65</sup> Nissim Cohen and Tamar Arieli, “Field Research in Conflict Environments: Methodological Challenges and Snowball Sampling,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48:4 (July 2011) 423-435.

<sup>66</sup> Patrick Biernacki and Dan Waldorf, “Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling,” *Sociological Methods and Research* 10:2 (November 1981) 141.

outcomes of rentierism are peripherally discussed as needed. The evidence and conclusions elaborated here are also necessarily specific to the states under investigation. Comparisons to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, as well as to the wider universe of rentier states, are made throughout the thesis, but the focus remains on developing a detailed understanding of state-society relations in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, with an indication of (contingent) generalisations that could be drawn from this work outlined in the Conclusion.

This thesis also focuses on the state-*citizen* relationship, largely omitting discussion of migrant workers.<sup>67</sup> As Beblawi noted in 1987, expatriates are not the target of, and often excluded from, cooptation, and do not display characteristics of a ‘rentier mentality’:

Expatriates are called upon to help fill the gap in available manpower in oil states. More often than not, these expatriates assume productive activities to satisfy the growing needs of the society...The relationship work-reward is actually maintained in their case. Rent economy, on the other hand, is normally confined to nationals; the privileges it conveys hardly extend to expatriates...Even if they form the core of the productive manpower, expatriates nevertheless remain alien to the body politic...expatriates are thus part of the labour force but not of the society.<sup>68</sup>

As a result, though expatriates are critical to the sustainability of the rentier bargain (it is difficult to imagine the Qatari construction industry, among many others, functioning without migrant labour), they are discussed in this thesis only insofar as they directly relate to state-citizen relations. Chapter Five, for example, discusses the impact that increasing migrant numbers have had on a sense of inequality in Oman, which in turn was one of several critical motivations for political unrest in 2011.

In terms of temporal scope, the thesis focuses primarily on the period between early 2011 and mid-2014, as this remains the best opportunity to examine how cooptation mechanisms operate when rents remain high. However, historical events critical to understanding contemporary state-society relations are also discussed where relevant, as are post-2014 developments (particularly in Chapter Six, which examines an alternative dimension of state-society relations often neglected within RST).

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<sup>67</sup> The terms ‘migrant worker’, ‘non-national’, and ‘expatriate’ are used interchangeably in this thesis, as is common practice in scholarship on the Gulf.

<sup>68</sup> Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” 94-95.

## Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is thematic, in order to better clarify which outcomes and causal relationships of RST are under examination. As a theoretically-motivated study, Chapter One provides a detailed overview of the emergence and development of RST, as well as broader discussion of alternative approaches to the study of state-society relations in the Gulf region that have informed this research.

Chapter Two contextualises the case studies, examining the history of state-society relations in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, in order to highlight historical trends and other context-dependent political, social, and economic dynamics, both shared across the region and unique to these states, that have shaped these relations since 2011.

Chapters Three and Four form the empirical heart of the thesis, outlining support and rejection of the rentier bargain, respectively. Chapter Three focuses on support for the rentier state, which is often cited at the national level as evidence of cooptation but rarely examined in detail. That is, the chapter identifies where rent distributions and societal quiescence correlate (such as within the business community or other favoured groups), but questions whether rentierism is the primary cause of their 'passive acceptance' of state authority, or even 'active support' for the regime. It confirms that cooptation mechanisms are active, in that each state has distributed rent in an effort to reinforce societal loyalty, yet uncovers significant evidence challenging the primacy of cooptation in determining support for the state, instead discussing alternative factors that were arguably more influential. Even loyalist interviewees, those citizens who have actively defended the state since 2011, justified their political action not by reference to rent distributions but, rather, a sense of responsiveness and, in most cases, a shared identity with the ruling elite. The chapter also disputes RST's typical depiction of the state as a coherent actor, analysing political pressures emanating from reform-oriented groups *within the state* that, ironically, have been strengthened by rent-driven development strategies, especially those forming semi-autonomous agencies tasked with implementing ambitious economic liberalisation programmes.

Chapter Four turns to reform and rejection of the rentier bargain, outlining evidence of reform movements in all three case studies. By examining informal and formal opposition in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman since 2010, this thesis disputes RST's assertion that distributions of wealth necessarily stymie political dissent. Participants in street

demonstrations, for example, generally did not refer to wealth or material dissatisfaction when justifying their opposition, but instead emphasised dissatisfaction with political rights, desire to hold the state accountable, or – in Qatar and Oman where society did not form ‘opposition’ so much as ‘reform-oriented movements’ – a sense that reform was in the national interest. There was little correlation between whether a citizen had received rent distributions and their participation in opposition or reform movements. In Bahrain, some protesters even accepted a 1,000 Bahraini dinar (USD2,659.57) distribution and returned to demonstrations, using the cash to buy food for other demonstrators. Only in a small minority of cases (specifically, a movement against a major state-owned telecom company in Qatar, among 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition youth activists in Bahrain, and young Omanis who participated in demonstrations in Sohar) did material interests emerge as the primary motivation for political action.

As rent distributions were a poor determinant of political activism, Chapter Four identifies several dynamics that demonstrated a capacity to overpower rent-based incentives to remain politically inactive, including: the state’s use of repression against the individual, their family, or broader kinship networks; a strong sense of economic or political inequality; and three interrelated issues termed ‘dynamic reformism’, referring to rising education levels and a generational shift to viewing rent distributions as rights of citizenship rather than grants rewarding political loyalty, the utilisation of internet-based organisational technologies (Information Communication Technologies, or ICTs), and the diffusion of political opposition across familial and social networks over time. Crucially, the existence of opposition and reformist pressures is not taken as indicating the inevitable *success* of moves to shift power from state to society, and the dissertation outlines the fragmentation of opposition groups since 2011 that has ultimately reinforced the dominance of the state.

Chapters Five and Six extend these empirical findings in two additional directions. Drawing from an in-depth examination of Omani economic development between 1990 and 2014, Chapter Five finds considerable evidence of long-term economic planning, challenging early depictions of rentier states as devoid of anything more than a myopic allocation policy, and instead aligning with more recent theoretical work, which posits that oil and gas rich states invest their rent-based wealth more efficiently than traditionally assumed, yet remain subject to numerous developmental challenges. Further, because long-term economic planning focused heavily on state-funded



megaprojects such as economic free zones, port construction, and other industries that could capitalise on oil and gas inputs, the state had unintentionally *contributed* to rising unemployment, deteriorating purchasing power, and a sense of inequality and injustice among nationals. The rent-driven economic development strategy of the state was thus a critical factor driving the emergence of popular dissatisfaction and opposition, highlighting the importance of examining the effectiveness of rent-based cooptation strategies at a sub-national level.

Chapter Six turns to the international dimensions of rentierism, finding that rentier states were far less insulated than typically assumed within the literature, using process tracing of three key cases that were repeatedly referenced by interviewees as examples of how international networks or political pressures have impacted the domestic state-society relationship. These cases include: the March 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) intervention in support of the Bahraini monarchy; transnational Bahraini opposition groups that pressure the state through international human rights networks; and migrant labour rights and controversy surrounding the Qatar 2022 World Cup. While the first two cases illustrate the power of international dynamics, the last highlights the limitations of foreign pressure in the absence of support among Qatari nationals; all, however, represent examples of transnational dynamics that have little theoretical space within typical RST works, yet are critical to understanding state-society relations in the Gulf since 2011.

Societies, then, were far from quiescent, and this research examines the networks and dynamics that have allowed citizens to challenge state authority. The dissertation argues that rentierism remains critical to understanding state-society relations in the Gulf during the post-2011 period, but that its influence is often weaker than typically assumed. Further, the specific process through which rents assumedly cause political outcomes needs more detailed interrogation, as in some cases the practical implementation of a cooptive strategy – as in the case of Oman – has resulted in heightened, rather than reduced, political mobilisation. Ultimately, the dissertation depicts oil and gas-rich states of the Arab Gulf as having exceptional capacity to respond to the material demands of their citizenry, but also remaining responsive to a politically active society, even where political liberalisation has been limited, or even regressed, since 2011.

# Chapter 1 - Rentier State Theory and State-Society Relations in the Modern Middle East

The challenge of development in some states – those endowed with significant natural resources such as oil, phosphates, natural gas, or which receive masses of foreign currency from foreign aid or tourism – has been compounded by a phenomenon known as the ‘resource curse’, giving rise to a particular socio-political structure known as a ‘rentier state’. This chapter provides a theoretical background to the literature on the rentier state, establishing the context in which it arose, outlining the major characteristics of a rentier state as espoused within the literature, and discussing major criticisms of the theory that have driven a second, revisionary phase of the literature. As a major motivation for this work is to broaden RST’s understanding of state-society relations in order to allow greater theoretical space for the impact of non rent-based political dynamics, this chapter also provides an overview of several prominent theories of state and society in the modern Middle East, the intention being to introduce broad trends that inform the conception of state-society relations promulgated in this thesis rather than to engage in depth with any of these literatures. The ultimate purpose of the chapter is to theoretically ground the study, building on the latest developments in the extant literature while also clarifying more specifically where this research adds value.

RST, as a subset of the broader idea on the resource curse,<sup>69</sup> first emerged as a challenge to theories of development prominent in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the most influential discourses in development economics in the 1950s and 1960s were those that identified shortages of resources as a key challenge for developing states. Despite available labour, these theorists argued, lack of capital hindered economic progress.<sup>70</sup> The logical assumption was, of course, that if a state *did* have significant natural resources generating capital, its development would be more successful.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Specifically, some works that discuss the ‘resource curse’ include cases where the government is not the principle recipient of the rent, which as noted below is a defining characteristic of a ‘rentier state’. These are nevertheless considered part of the same broad literature, with RST representing the manifestation of the resource curse within the definitional conditions noted by Beblawi. See Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World” 87 – 88. See also another approach where Ross treats the ‘rentier effect’ as a mechanism through which the resource curse hinders democratisation in a cross-national survey of 113 countries in Ross “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” 325 – 361.

<sup>70</sup> Pr. Raul Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems* (Lake Success: United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 1950); Dean Forbes, *The Geography of Underdevelopment: A Critical Survey* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); James M. Cypher and James L. Dietz, *The Process of Economic Development*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 224-227; Michael L. Ross, “The Political Economy of the Resource Curse” *World Politics* 51:2 (January 1999) 301.

<sup>71</sup> Jahangir Amuzegar, “Oil Wealth: A Very Mixed Blessing” *Foreign Affairs* 60:4 (Spring 1982) 814.

Resource-driven strategies expounded by Jacob Viner, W. Arthur Lewis, Walter Rostow, and Joseph Spengler, for example, suggested that developing states could exploit natural resources to accelerate economic growth and rapidly reach the standard set by developed countries.<sup>72</sup> “One day”, boasted President Carlos Andrés Pérez of mineral-rich Venezuela in 1979, “you Americans will be driving cars with bumpers made from our bauxite, our aluminum, and our labor”.<sup>73</sup>

By the 1970s, however, this conventional wisdom was increasingly being challenged. Contrary to mainstream expectations, resource-rich<sup>74</sup> developing states were growing more slowly than their resource-poor counterparts.<sup>75</sup> The poor performance of resource-rich states fostered the development of a new theory that attempted to explain this “Paradox of Plenty”.<sup>76</sup>

### **Classic Rentier State Theory**

Hussein Mahdavy first developed RST as an explanation for the poor development performance of pre-revolutionary Pahlavi Iran. Resource wealth, he argued, distorted the economy and fostered dependence on rents rather than stimulating manufacturing or other more productive sectors,<sup>77</sup> Mahdavy was the first to identify rent-dependent developing states as ‘rentier states’, where the economic structure of the state generated a particular type of socio-political organisation that fostered stagnation and inertia.<sup>78</sup> Consider, for example, his argument regarding inequality and social pressure in rentier states:

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<sup>72</sup> Joseph J. Spengler, ed., *Natural Resources and Growth* (Washington D.C.: Resources for the Future Inc., 1960); Jacob Viner, *International Trade and Economic Development* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952); W. Arthur Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth* (Homewood: Richard. D. Irwin, 1955); Walter Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

<sup>73</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Not all natural resources had similarly negative effects – researchers have generally confined their conclusions to non-renewable natural resources such as gas, oil or diamonds which require little labour to produce lucrative results, although the literature has also expanded to encompass non-natural resource activities such as foreign aid and tourism. This dissertation focuses almost exclusively on oil and gas rents.

<sup>75</sup> Alan Gelb and Associates, *Oil Windfalls: Blessing or Curse?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988); Richard M. Auty, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource Curse Thesis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>76</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*; Matthias Basedau and Jann Lay, “Resource Curse or Rentier Peace? The Ambiguous Effects of Oil Wealth and Oil Dependence on Violent Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46:6 (November 2009) 774.

<sup>77</sup> Mahdavy, “The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States,” 428 – 467.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 437 – 438.

In the Rentier States, the increasing welfare and prosperity (of at least part of the urban population) acquired through government expenditures and large imports pre-empt some of the urgency for change and rapid growth encountered in other countries. The blatant inequalities of income and wealth may create frictions, but not as much as in other countries since exploitation of a resource rather than the direct exploitation of the people is the main source generating the disparities.<sup>79</sup>

Mahdavy's analysis of Iran draws from an influential literature on the roots of modern democracy in Europe and North America, where the exploitation of the masses through taxation was critical to the emergence of representative government – note the famous slogan: “no taxation without representation”.<sup>80</sup> Unlike the European states cited within the taxation-democratisation literature, however, rentier states were not reliant on extracting revenue from their populace. Instead, states like Iran benefited from massive windfalls from natural resource (particularly oil) exportation, where the revenue far exceeded the costs of production. Logically, if taxation was fundamental to the emergence of representation in Europe, and if the same mechanisms operated in developing rentier states, the *absence* of taxation reduced this pressure and allowed these states to remain autocratic while their neighbours democratised. Rather than the understanding dominant within Western political science of state-society relations as governed by a ‘social contract’, resource rich states offer a ‘rentier bargain’ to their citizens, where the state refrains from extractive activities – even offers exceptional rent-funded material benefits to citizens – in exchange for political quiescence.<sup>81</sup>

Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani subsequently provided a more precise definition of a rentier state and broader discussion of the theoretical consequences of rentierism. Beblawi outlined the definitional conditions for a rentier state, including: that a rentier situation predominates the domestic economy; that rent is externally generated; that only a few are engaged in its production (whereas many benefit from its distribution);

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 437. This thesis explores the issue of inequality and political frictions in Chapter Four, and in greater detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>80</sup> See for example Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Robert Bates and Da-Hsiang Donald Lien, “A Note on Taxation, Development, and Representative Government,” *Politics and Society* 14 (January 1985) 53 - 70; Philip T. Hoffman and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *Fiscal Crises, Liberty, and Representative Government, 1450–1789* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>81</sup> See for example Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, ed. and with intro by Susan Dunn, with essays by Gita May et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: A Critical Edition*, with intro and apparatus criticus by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 95, 98 – 100; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. A.P. Martinich (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd., 2002); Bill Jordan, *The State: Authority and Autonomy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1985) 28 – 30.

and that the government is the principle recipient of the rent.<sup>82</sup> The distinguishing feature of rentierism, he stressed, was the creation of a rentier mentality that breaks the work-reward causation and eliminates incentives to be productive that are so essential to capitalist development.<sup>83</sup> This fits with a broader understanding of rents as inhibiting labour productivity, where wealth generated from externally derived rents, essentially obtained by the lucky circumstance of geography rather than productive industry, is anathema to many economists.<sup>84</sup>

By comparison, Luciani advanced a theory of allocative states, limiting his concept to cases where rents from resource exportation comprise at least 40 percent of government revenue.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, he specifically cautioned against theories of a rentier state, claiming there was “a distinct danger of exaggerating the argument and overlooking the fact that oil...is not the only significant dimension”.<sup>86</sup> Despite his warning, the theoretical conception of allocative states in his chapter included such generalisations as:

For those [states] that depend on an income from abroad, allocation is the only relationship that they need to have with their domestic economy...the state, being independent of the strength of the domestic economy, does not need to formulate anything deserving the appellation of economic policy: all it needs is an expenditure policy.<sup>87</sup>

Allocative states, whose characteristics mirror those of rentier states closely enough to justify using the terms interchangeably, are thus assumed to be highly autonomous from society. Turning the traditional taxation-representation linkage on its head, Luciani stated: “the fact is that there is ‘no representation without taxation’ and there are no exceptions to this version of the rule”.<sup>88</sup> Luciani further extended Mahdavy’s argument

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<sup>82</sup> Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World” 87 – 88.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 86, 88, 52; on labour productivity, see Richard M Auty, “The Political Economy of Resource-Driven Growth,” *European Economic Review* 45:4-6 (May 2001) 839-846.

<sup>83</sup> Ross, “The Political Economy of the Resource Curse,” 307.

<sup>84</sup> Adam Smith is most often quoted within the RST literature as decrying the unproductive practice of rent-generation, yet other classical and neoclassical economists such as Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Henry George, and Alfred Marshall, among others, have also debated the effect of rents on productivity. Some economists, of course, would strongly disagree that rents negatively affect productivity, but the dominant understanding within RST is that they do. See Douglas A. Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa: Oil Rent, Dependency and Neocolonialism in the Republic of Gabon* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 15 – 20; Warwick Knowles, *Jordan Since 1989: A Study in Political Economy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005) 5; Adam Smith and R. A. Seligman, *The Wealth of Nations* (London : Dent, 1970).

<sup>85</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States,” 70.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 70 – 74.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 75.

regarding inequality and societal passivity, reasoning that the incentive to individually petition the state for a greater share of rents “is always superior” to collective action challenging the system as a whole.<sup>89</sup> Further reinforcing the image of a state divorced from traditional forms of political legitimacy, he claimed that rentier states have no need to refer to a national myth – in fact they will often deliberately avoid referencing them – as their legitimacy is instead founded on the allocation of rents. Finally, and related to the absence of a national myth argument, Luciani’s theoretical allocative state does not have a clearly delineated constituency, as the distribution of rents essentially coopts the majority of society into acceptance of the regime.<sup>90</sup>

Others built on this basic conception of the rentier state, observing that rentier states tend to spend lavishly on large-scale investments in infrastructure or housing rather than expanding the manufacturing sector, indicating a focus on creating temporary prosperity while neglecting long-term sustainability.<sup>91</sup> Directly contradicting theories of resource-driven development, Alan Gelb and associates argued that oil booms actually hindered development in oil exporting developing states.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, Richard Auty found a net negative result from mineral resource booms when he examined a group of hard mineral exporting states in the early 1990s.<sup>93</sup> In one of the earliest comprehensive studies of the ‘resource curse’, covering 96 countries over a 19-year period, Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner observed that states with high natural resource endowments had abnormally low growth rates, even after controlling for factors such as initial GDP, trade policy, investment rates, terms of trade volatility, inequality, and bureaucratic effectiveness.<sup>94</sup> These works provided quantitative evidence for the existence of a resource curse, or, at least, negative *economic* consequences of reliance on rents. A key causal process through which this occurs is as follows: large inflows of foreign capital drive up the real exchange rate of the local currency, making manufacturing and other non-resource, export-oriented sectors less competitive in international markets, redirecting labour and capital away from non-rent producing sectors, and resulting in an overdependence on the exportation of natural resources and exposure to international price shocks, a process known as ‘Dutch Disease’.<sup>95</sup> Combined with the discovery of a

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>91</sup> Abdel-Fadil, “The Macro-behaviour of the Oil-rentier States in the Arab Region,” 83 – 85.

<sup>92</sup> Gelb and Associates, *Oil Windfall*.

<sup>93</sup> Auty, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies*.

<sup>94</sup> Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner, “Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Papers 5398* (1995) 1 – 47.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid; Ross, “The Political Economy of the Resource Curse,” 306.

long-term decline in terms of trade for primary product exportation (the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis)<sup>96</sup> and the knowledge that resource exportation created few forward and backward linkages and thus provided limited opportunities for expansion of other sectors of the economy, resource-based development became increasingly problematic as a development strategy.<sup>97</sup>

However, as Ross noted in 1999, the economic outcomes of rentierism alone do not explain why governments in developing states often failed to take action to mitigate the resource curse.<sup>98</sup> Rather, the political and economic outcomes of rentierism are intertwined, forcing rentier states into a downward spiral where the economic consequences of rentierism strengthen the political consequences, and *vice versa*.<sup>99</sup> Theorists also observed a clear lack of democratisation in many rentier regimes that indicated an inverse relationship between rentierism and political pluralisation.<sup>100</sup> Mechanisms through which this might occur usually relied on the assumption that rentier states were able to coopt the populace – through direct distributions, wage controls and public sector employment, but also through an overall system that encouraged incorporation into, rather than challenges to, the rentier bargain. Related to the cooptation effect, Douglas Yates noted the prevalence of a ‘rentier elite’ (Jill Crystal described this group as a ‘merchant elite’ in the Gulf context), which was closely tied to the regime in power and supported the perpetuation of the rentier system – although interestingly few noted how this might conflict with Luciani’s supposition that rentier states do not play to particular constituencies.<sup>101</sup> Beyond cooptation, theorists noted the ability of rentier regimes to fund effective repressive apparatuses capable of quashing dissent as soon as it emerged.<sup>102</sup> Even in rentier states that were supposedly democratic,

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<sup>96</sup> Although there is debate over whether the decline in terms of trade has continued since 2000, it was certainly relevant to a theory developed in the 1980s. Dutch Disease has been similarly questioned regarding its applicability to resource-rich states today, yet remains important to understanding the emergence and early development of RST. See Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems*; Hans W. Singer, “The Distribution of Gains between Investing and Borrowing Countries,” *American Economic Review* 40:2 (1950) 473-485; Thorvaldur Gylfason, “Lessons from the Dutch Disease: Causes, Treatment, and Cures,” *Institute of Economic Studies Working Paper Series* (Reykjavik, Iceland, 2001).

<sup>97</sup> Sachs and Warner, “Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth,” 4 – 7.

<sup>98</sup> Ross, “The Political Economy of the Resource Curse,” 307.

<sup>99</sup> Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, 23.

<sup>100</sup> Marsha Pripstein Posusney, “Enduring Authoritarianism: Middle East Lessons for Comparative Theory” *Comparative Politics* 36:2 (January 2004) 130.

<sup>101</sup> Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, 32 – 36; Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

<sup>102</sup> Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?”; Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “Resource Rents, Governance, and Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:4 (2005) 625 – 633; Macartan Humphreys, “Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:4 (2005) 508 – 537;

such as Venezuela, Terry Lynn Karl noted intensive centralisation of resources and power in the executive that coincided with influxes of rents to the government.<sup>103</sup> Crucially, the early literature argued that institutions are often coopted through clientelism and unable to place limits on the centralisation of political authority.<sup>104</sup>

The state that emerges from this literature, then, is highly autonomous from its society and primarily focused on the generation and distribution of rent rather than the overall development of the domestic economy. It encounters little public opposition even when there is significant economic inequality and does not exploit national myths or rely on the support of particular constituencies, as its legitimacy is instead founded on the allocation of rents. Workers are unproductive, leaders are myopic, and development founders as the state spends its ‘unearned’ income on short-term public spending programs to buy popular support rather than creating a sustainable base for economic growth. Further, rentier states are likely to be authoritarian, or at least to centralise power, stymying popular dissatisfaction through cooptive or repressive governance tactics. Institutions, though there may be many, are coopted and unable to prevent the effects of rentierism from spreading through the whole of the domestic political and economic system. These characteristics as described in classic RST are summarised in Figure 5:

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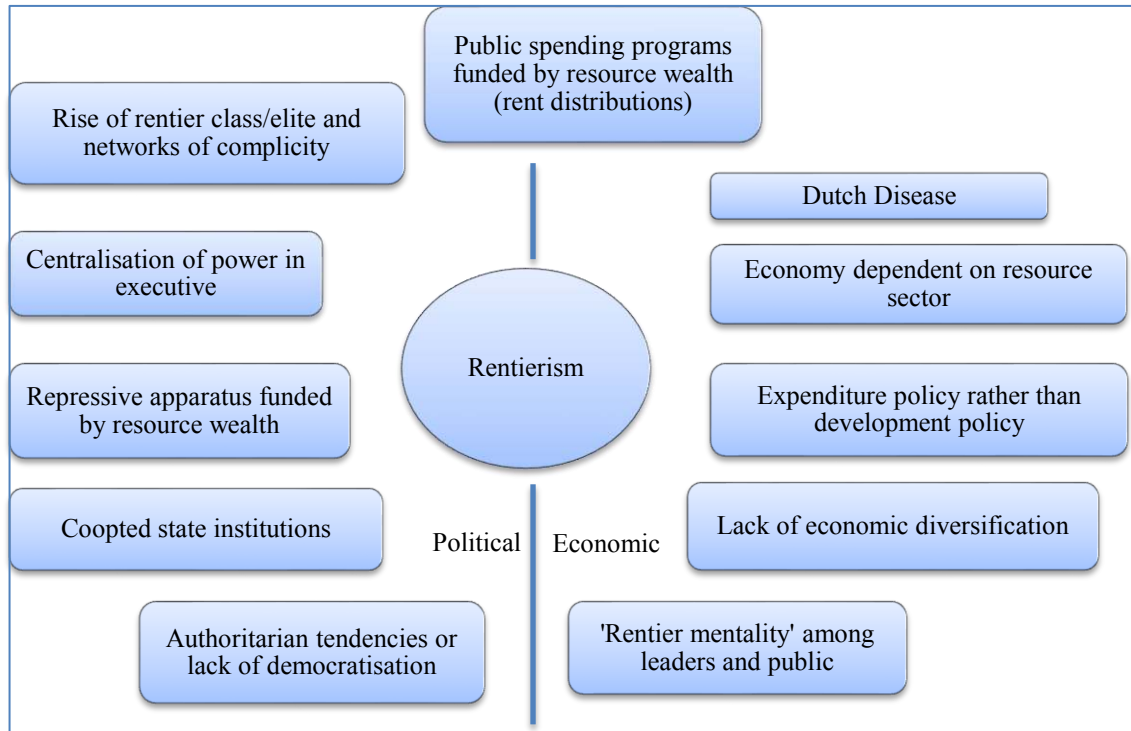
Michael Ross, “Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008) <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2008-05-03/blood-barrels> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>103</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 59; see also Osmel Manzano et al., “Oil Fueled Centralization: The Case of Venezuela” (paper presented at the Conference on Oil and Gas in Federal Systems, Washington, D.C., 3-4 March 2010) 1 – 8.

<sup>104</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 58 – 64.



**Figure 5: Rentier State Characteristics**



Source: Author's own figure.

It is hardly a positive image of rentier states that emerges from the early phase of RST. According to the literature, there are few parts of state or society untainted by the natural resource 'curse'. However, even a cursory glance at states that fit Beblawi and Luciani's conditions exposes a multitude of exceptions to the characteristics summarised in Figure 5. If economic diversification, for example, is precluded, why have the small oil Gulf states like the UAE ostensibly made prolonged and deliberate efforts to diversify their economies? For that matter, why have they bothered to create economic and development policy at all? If democratisation is prevented in rentier states, then why has Botswana consistently had fair and representative elections since independence in 1966? And, the question fundamental to this thesis: if rentier states are autonomous from societal dissatisfaction, or, in fact, if societal discontent is precluded by rentierism to begin with, why have there been protests in rent-rich states since 2011, and why did rentier regimes respond to them so rapidly?

### **The Limits of the Classic Literature and Revisionist RST**

While some anomalies in a theory so broadly applied as RST are to be expected, the number and variety of exceptions to classic RST suggest the theory requires review. This section focuses not on external critiques that argue the literature is fundamentally

flawed,<sup>105</sup> but on critiques of RST from within the literature that have produced a second, revisionary phase of the theory.

The two most common criticisms of classic RST are that it is inherently deterministic and overly reductionist. Certainly, the assertive wording in works like Luciani's 1987 chapter on allocative states – where there are “no exceptions” to the no representation-no taxation rule and society will “always” have more incentive to work within the rentier system rather than challenge it – is vulnerable to critique.<sup>106</sup> RST has also been widely applied, partially due to a sub-trend within the early literature towards cross-country quantitative analyses.<sup>107</sup> While part of the appeal of RST is that there do seem to be some broad correlations between rent-rich regimes as otherwise different as Indonesia, Mexico, Iran and Nigeria, stretching the theory to this extent has also exposed an overemphasis on rentierism in classic RST, where theorists struggled to downplay differences between case studies and stress rents as the overarching determinant of a state's political economy.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps, also, it is partly an issue of nomenclature. True to Luciani's warning in 1987 that notions of a ‘rentier state’ would lead to an exaggeration of the influence of rents, labelling rent-rich states as *rentier* states implies that rents are automatically, if not consciously, assumed to be the predominant factor in the state's political economy; similarly, as Matthew Gray argues, the focus of RST on the rentier *state* also lends itself to structural economic explanations, rather than understanding rentierism as both a political dynamic and tactic of governance.<sup>109</sup>

Regardless of the cause of the overemphasis, by the early 2000s it was clear that RST needed to take greater account of factors that might mitigate or transform the effect of

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<sup>105</sup> For that type of critique, see for example Christa N. Brunnschweiler and Erwin H. Bulte, “The Resource Curse Revisited: A Tale of Paradoxes and Red Herrings,” *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 55:3 (May 2008) 248 – 264; Michael Alexeev and Robert Conrad, “The Elusive Curse of Oil,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 91:3 (August 2009) 586 – 598.

<sup>106</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States,” 74, 77.

<sup>107</sup> As opposed to a more recent trend of using multivariate regression, which by nature is probabilistic, rather than deterministic.

<sup>108</sup> See Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 189- 211; and recent critiques of her work including Thad Dunning *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Jonathan DiJohn, *From Windfall to Curse? Oil and Industrialization in Venezuela, 1920 to the Present* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

<sup>109</sup> Matthew Gray, “A Theory of ‘Late Rentierism’ in the Arab States of the Gulf,” *Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar Occasional Paper No. 7* (2011) 1 – 44.

rentierism.<sup>110</sup> Michael Herb, for example, questioned the assumption that political outcomes in the absence of resource wealth would have been better if not for the resource curse: instead, he found that often the level of pre-existing poverty in the state was a greater predictor of lack of democracy than oil rents. The discovery of lucrative natural resources in poor developing states may have provided ample capital, he argued, but did nothing to solve underlying inefficiencies and authoritarian tendencies that pre-existed rentierism.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the rent-autocracy linkage in RST, summarised most crudely by Thomas Friedman's "First Law of Petropolitics", by which "the price of oil and the pace of freedom always move in opposite directions",<sup>112</sup> has been one of the most criticised, with theorists suggesting that in some cases – especially those in regions other than the Middle East and North Africa – rents have actually *increased* democratic tendencies.<sup>113</sup> Contrary to earlier accounts where economic inequality was at best irrelevant to state-society relations in rentier states and at worst actually heightened authoritarian tendencies, revisionist theorists like Thad Dunning argued that inequality in non-resource sectors of the economy caused rents to have a democratising effect on the state.<sup>114</sup>

Reductionism was not the sole criticism of classic RST; theorists also questioned the determinism inherent in the literature.<sup>115</sup> Most early theorists made a cursory note that the resource curse was not inevitable, yet much of the literature – especially works that stress the structuration of the political economy by rents – still tends towards determinism. Even case studies that stressed the uniqueness of the particular context in which a rentier state arose have difficulty discussing ways in which the negative consequences of rentierism could have been avoided. Having written a path-dependent history of how oil rents consistently structured choice in 20<sup>th</sup> century Venezuela, for example, it would be difficult for Karl to then suggest that Venezuela could have

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<sup>110</sup> See for example Eva Bellin, "The Politics of Profit in Tunisia: Utility of the Rentier Paradigm?" *World Development* 22:3 (March 1994) 427 – 436; Gwenn Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States," *Comparative Politics* 31:3 (April 1999) 295 – 315.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Herb, "No Representation Without Taxation? Rents, Development and Democracy," *Georgia State University* (3 December 2003) 18.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "The First Law of Petro-Politics," *Foreign Policy* (25 April 2006) [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2006/04/25/the\\_first\\_law\\_of\\_petropolitics](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2006/04/25/the_first_law_of_petropolitics) accessed 5 November 2012.

<sup>113</sup> Dunning, *Crude Democracy*.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid; Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States"; Leonard Wantchekon, "Why Do Resource Dependent Countries Have Authoritarian Governments?" *Journal of African Finance and Economic Development* 5:2 (2002) 57–77; James D. Fearon, "Primary Commodities Exports and Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:4 (2005) 483–507.

<sup>115</sup> Andrew Rosser, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse: A Literature Survey," *Institute of Development Studies Working Paper* 268 (April 2006) 21 – 24.

escaped this structuration.<sup>116</sup> Even the most sophisticated works of early RST grappled unsuccessfully with this issue: Crystal's *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, while remaining one of the more nuanced works on the Gulf, argues that every development occurs "within the broad constraints set by oil".<sup>117</sup> She notes that pre-existing state-society dynamics (such as the organisation, relationship to royal family, and political strength of merchants in Kuwait and Qatar before oil exportation) play an important role in shaping the rentier state that subsequently develops, yet there is no theoretical space for the impact of non-oil factors which emerge *after* oil; once the rentier state is put in motion, every other factor becomes subordinate to the overwhelming influence of rentierism.

While these criticisms directed at the classic literature have some validity, RST is far from static. In response to critiques, theorists have now offered revised versions of earlier work or fresh insights that offer more nuanced understandings of rentierism and its impact on state-society relations. Michael Ross's work, for example, spans both phases of the literature, with his early work criticised for over-simplicity and later works seeking to address these issues and revise his conclusions about the effect of natural resources on a state's political economy.<sup>118</sup> While Ross maintained that rents engender authoritarianism, Dunning observed a difference between 'resource abundance' – where the state has a low resource to GDP ratio, implying the existence of a large private sector – and 'resource dependence' – where government revenue *and* GDP are dependent on resource rents – positing that only the latter and only in cases where there did not exist great inequality of non-resource income was the authoritarian effect of rentierism predominant; otherwise, there existed an opposing democratic effect from rents which overpowered the authoritarian effect.<sup>119</sup> Annika Kropf defined resource abundance and dependence differently, yet similarly found that only resource dependence (share of resource exports in GDP, or as a percentage of total exports) was linked to poor development outcomes, whereas resource abundance (rent per capita) "did not seem to create any kind of 'curse' if this is measured without any information about the state of development of the economy".<sup>120</sup> Herb came to similar conclusions

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<sup>116</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*.

<sup>117</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 2.

<sup>118</sup> See the changes in argument between Ross, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse," 297 – 322; Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" 325 – 361; and Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>119</sup> Dunning, *Crude Democracy*.

<sup>120</sup> Kropf, "Resource Abundance vs. Resource Dependence in Cross-Country Growth Regressions," 125.

about the conditional effect of rents, although through different mechanisms such as an indirect increase in GDP (which then reinforces democracy), and, in more recent work, by *kind* of rentier state, differentiating between rich, medial, and poor rentiers (based on rent income per capita, currently the preferred measure of resource abundance).<sup>121</sup> Further, he writes:

The usual assumption, when analyzing the political and economic consequences of rent wealth, is to suppose that the consequences are monotonic: an increase in rentierism (however measured) results in an increase in authoritarianism or economic stagnation. Rents, however, might better be thought of as having a conjunctural causal impact. That is, rents in conjunction with one variable may cause one outcome, but in combination with another variable may cause an entirely different outcome.<sup>122</sup>

These works highlight some of the most important changes in revisionist RST: greater scrutiny of how a rentier state is defined, how rentierism is measured, and investigation into key causal mechanisms and their interaction with other political variables.

Qualitative work focused on the Arab states of the Gulf has also explored the interaction between ‘rentierism’ and other political variables shaping domestic politics.<sup>123</sup> This is not simply a method of triangulation, but, rather, underscores the complex influence of rentierism, and the importance of contextualisation. Gray’s theory of late-stage rentierism in the Gulf, for example, draws together findings from RST and related literatures on new state capitalism and neopatrimonialism to explain the recent development strategies of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states while maintaining the basic tenets of RST.<sup>124</sup> Work on the Arab Gulf states has particularly questioned the relationship between the rentier state and the private sector, especially as several countries, notably Qatar and the UAE, have pursued development strategies which entail the close cooperation of state and private sector (indeed, members of the state and ‘private’ sector are often closely related by marriage or blood) and require especially stable political atmospheres that they (so far) have been able to provide.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Herb, “No Representation Without Taxation?”; Herb, *Wages of Oil*, 11-15; Basedau and Lay, “Resource Curse or Rentier Peace?” 757-776.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Herb, *The Wages of Oil*, 190.

<sup>123</sup> Mona Hamade’s recent work, for example, focuses on combining RST, or more specifically late rentierism, with Gender Studies. See Mona Hamade, “Gender and Transitional Rentierism in the UAE” (paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Gulf Research Meeting, Cambridge UK, 1-5 July 2013).

<sup>124</sup> Gray, “A Theory of ‘Late Rentierism’ in the Arab States of the Gulf”.

<sup>125</sup> Matthew Gray, *Qatar: Politics and the Challenges of Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013); see also Herb, “A Nation of Bureaucrats,” 375-395.

State-owned enterprises (SOEs), in these contexts, function as a crucial “rentier tool” to build both state legitimacy and provide an alternative rent-like income to the state.<sup>126</sup>

Theorists focused on the Gulf region have also questioned whether key characteristics of the ‘rentier state’ require revision. Recent research on Saudi Arabia, for example, has retreated from claims of state autonomy from society and emphasised instead the state’s continued quest for popular legitimacy and careful balancing of interests between powerful actors like the ‘ulamā’ (hereafter ulama, religious scholars or clerics),<sup>127</sup> and a diverse society.<sup>128</sup> Other theorists have provided more sophisticated understandings of ‘state’ and ‘society’. Steffen Hertog, in particular, notes the importance of breaking down concepts of ‘state’ and ‘society’ rather than treating each as cohesive aggregates. He also introduces a middle or, ‘meso’ level of analysis between state and society into which the bureaucracy – so often bloated in rentier states – fits. His study of Saudi Arabia suggests rentier states tend to be fragmented even as power is over-centralised, creating serious issues for bureaucratic efficiency and encouraging clientelist tendencies.<sup>129</sup> Simultaneously, the creation of “islands of efficiency”, lean and well-managed institutions that are largely isolated from wider government bureaucracy and typically run by technocrats operating under direct royal patronage,<sup>130</sup> reflects state attempts to circumvent bureaucratic inefficiency and support economic diversification. Hertog’s work represents an important attempt to understand how rentier dynamics vary between government institutions, and underlines the importance of agency in influencing how oil rents are used (shaping, by extension, their political impact); they are, as he notes, “merely a passive resource”.<sup>131</sup>

An emerging trend in revisionist RST in the Gulf region has started to interrogate some of the core causal mechanisms of RST that are so crucial to the rent-societal quiescence linkage, and, critically, they have started to do so at the sub-national level. A recent survey of Bahraini citizens, for example, found that the exchange of rent-distributions for political quiescence may be effective only for Bahraini *Sunni* respondents; for most

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<sup>126</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 65.

<sup>127</sup> Ulama is capitalised where it refers to a specific body of religious clerics, such as in the case of the Saudi Arabian Ulama.

<sup>128</sup> Toby Craig Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010) 15.

<sup>129</sup> Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*.

<sup>130</sup> Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) and Aramco are good examples of “islands of efficiency”. See *Ibid*, 28-29.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

Bahraini Shia respondents, the sense that the government was persecuting Shia as a political group was enough to prompt even very wealthy Shia (who had no material cause to challenge the state) to join anti-regime demonstrations in 2011.<sup>132</sup> Research on Qatar has similarly questioned how effective rent distributions are in precluding societal discontent, noting that even in the most rent abundant state in the world, in terms of rents per capita, there remains significant dissatisfaction about the quality and availability of rent distributions.<sup>133</sup>

These works represent an important attempt to move beyond an understanding of state-society relations as allocative-passive and towards something that can better explain the political activism of Gulf society, even in the absence of revolution or democratisation. Yet they remain, for the moment, a minority within the broader literature, which continues to assert that rentier states, *especially* the wealthy ‘extreme’ rentier states of the Gulf, are able to resist, or even prevent, popular opposition.<sup>134</sup> Kuwait, the most politically liberalised Arab Gulf state, is a clear exception to this ‘rule’, yet, even here, explanations for its active parliament and outspoken dissent typically focus on external factors (such as the threat of invasion from Iraq) and other ‘exceptionalisms’: it is not usually considered a case that might undermine the overarching logic of cooptation.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, while recent developments in the literature are beginning to address core criticisms of early RST and add complexity to the understanding of state-society relations in rentier states, greater examination of state-society relations in the Arab Gulf archetypal rentier states is sorely needed, particularly at the sub-national level. To achieve this while simultaneously allowing theoretical space for the impact of non-rentier dynamics, it is worth drawing back a step to examine some alternative explanations that contribute to a more holistic picture of the state-society relations in these Gulf states during a period of regional political agitation.

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<sup>132</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>133</sup> Mitchell, “Beyond Allocation: The Politics of Legitimacy”; Jocelyn Sage Mitchell and Justin Gengler, “What Money Can’t Buy in Qatar: Wealth, Status, and the Rentier Bargain in Qatar” (paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Conference, Washington D.C., 28-31 August 2014).

<sup>134</sup> Ross, “Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring?”

<sup>135</sup> See a classic RST work on Kuwait in Jill Crystal, *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); a revisionist approach is exemplified by Herb, *Wages of Oil*.

## State and Society in the Developing World

While there are several theories drawn from traditional Western political science that inform this thesis,<sup>136</sup> political theory focused on the experience of non-Western ‘developing’<sup>137</sup> states provides greater insight into the relationship between state and society developed in this thesis. Of most importance is the suggestion that the position of the state may be inherently fragile, impacted not only by its relationship with society but also by exogenous influences, such as power struggles occurring in the international arena.<sup>138</sup> This understanding contributes to a broader challenge to the assumed primacy of the state over society. Joel S. Migdal, for example, criticises the depiction of society within state-centric models prevalent in Western political science as a “supine mass”, acted upon but not reacting, and argues instead that organised groups within society compete with the state for authority.<sup>139</sup> By setting norms, sanctions, and rewards, he contends, societal groups encourage individuals to obey their authority rather than that of the state.<sup>140</sup> Migdal’s conception of state-society relations rests on an inherent assumption of competition and conflict between interests.<sup>141</sup> Authority, legitimacy, and power are gained only through a constant struggle with other interests, and the primacy of the state over societal interests is far from certain.

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<sup>136</sup> These are mentioned in greater specificity throughout the work, but, broadly speaking, this thesis is informed by contemporary debate within Western political sociology, particularly between Pluralist, Elitist, and Marxist theories of the state. It conforms most closely to the idea forwarded within Elite Pluralism (as well as some Marxian and Elitist analyses) that state and society are formed of diverse groups engaged in political competition, yet the existence of structurally determined privilege means this competition “does not take place on a level playing field”. See David Marsh, “The Convergence between Theories of the State,” in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (London: Macmillan Press, 1995) 271; Robert Dahl, “Pluralism Revisited,” *Comparative Politics* 10:2 (January 1978) 191-203; Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics, and Welfare* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishard, 1971); Paul Wetherly, *Marxism and the State: An Analytical Approach* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>137</sup> This thesis acknowledges well-known issues with the term ‘developing’ as a description for states, yet its use here is for the purpose of expediency, and to be able to speak to a very broad literature on the development experience of non-Western states. A ‘developing’ state is defined in this thesis as any state that is not a member of the OECD. See discussion of ‘developing/developed’ measurements in Lyng Nielsen, “Classifications of Countries Based on their Development: How it is Done and How it Could be Done,” *IMF Working Paper* (2011).

<sup>138</sup> Huma Haider, *State-Society Relations and Citizenship in Situations of Conflict and Fragility* (Birmingham: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (University of Birmingham), 2010); Daron Acemoglu, “Politics and Economic in Weak and Strong States,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 11275* (April 2005) 1 – 38.

<sup>139</sup> Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 9.

<sup>140</sup> Joel S. Migdal, “Vision and Practice: The Leader, The State, and the Transformation of Society,” *International Political Science Review* 9:1 (1988) 23 – 41.

<sup>141</sup> See particularly his model of state-society relations in Chapter One of Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).



Crucial to many of these is the supposition that neither state nor society is necessarily a cohesive entity. Within the context of the developing world, a consolidated and cohesive ‘state’ is often far from the reality. A fragmented understanding of state and society is central to this thesis, especially considering some of the most recent findings discussed earlier in RST that claim rents *increase* the fragmentation of state and society. Moreover, American political scientists such as Eric Nordlinger, drawing from a Weberian analysis of state institutions,<sup>142</sup> emphasise that the state itself is embedded within society. He writes:

The state is situated in a societal environment but not fully of it. Being separate from society by virtue of the authoritative positions they occupy, even the officials of an open, highly permeable state commonly subscribe to distinctive interests and beliefs that make for policy preferences that diverge from those of society’s. And being embedded in society and subject to the state’s directives, private actors commonly hold preferences that diverge from the state’s, concomitantly prompting a variably activated interest in influencing and constraining its actions.<sup>143</sup>

This thesis extends Nordlinger’s argument, noting that members of the state may concomitantly hold private (societal) interests, and that members of society may occasionally play roles typically thought of as belonging to the state.<sup>144</sup> It is therefore less than helpful to think of the state and society as diametrically opposed; the line between the two is blurry and constantly shifting, depending on the interests of individual elements within each. Some groups within society may also be part of the state, and thus represent either state or societal interests depending on the situation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the Saudi Arabian Ulama, who are simultaneously integrated into the state, through their control over state education, and society, through their role as interpreters of Islamic texts.<sup>145</sup> The example Nordlinger

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<sup>142</sup> Eric Nordlinger, alongside Stephen Krasner, comes from one of two ‘schools’ of thought that advocates the revival of Weberian-inspired political sociology (in response to the popularity of Marxist thought in the preceding decades, which depicted the state as shaped primarily by class division) to reintroduce the importance of state institutions to political analyses. Major theorists of their counterpart ‘school’ include Theda Skocpol, Peter Evans, and David Laitin, yet their work is considered less useful to a conception of state-society relations in the Gulf states due to their emphasis on the autonomy of state institutions and minimal focus on the informal power relations that are considered critical to understanding Gulf politics.

<sup>143</sup> Eric Nordlinger, “Taking the State Seriously,” in *Understanding Political Development*, ed. Myron Weiner and Samuel Huntington (Boston: Little Brown 1987) 368 – 369.

<sup>144</sup> This has particularly been noted in non-democratic and authoritarian contexts, where power is often more informal than institutionalised. See Jessica C. Teets, “Governance in Non-Democracies: The Role of Civil Society in Increasing Pluralism and Accountability in Local Public Policy,” (PhD Diss., University of Colorado, Boulder, 2008); Ido Shahar, “State, Society, and the Relations Between Them: Implications for the Study of Legal Pluralism,” *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 9:2 (2008) 417-441.

<sup>145</sup> The Ulama’s dual role is particularly interesting given the frequent disputes between various clerics and the royal family over policy and governance. See a comprehensive overview of the Saudi clerics and

takes of public officials is also highly relevant to the theoretical framework developed here: the state bureaucracy throughout much of the Middle East is exceptionally bloated, especially in rentier states.<sup>146</sup> If public servants have both private interests (thus making them part of society) and public responsibilities (making them part of the state), this has important consequences for the relationship between state and society, especially if these individuals make up a sizeable portion of the overall population of the state.

Many theories of state and society in the developing world draw from the difference in context between traditional Western political science, understandably focused on the development of state and societies within Europe and North America, and the vastly transformed setting in which the developing world has emerged. Write Grzymala-Busse and Luong: “much of the [traditional Western] literature on the state has focused on the gradual and evolutionary development of state structures and functions and examined them as consolidated outcomes”,<sup>147</sup> hardly representative of the experience of most developing states. The borders of many of these new states were artificial, resulting from international power-broking rather than emerging organically over time, producing significant challenges for both nation- and state-building, particularly where transnational communities hold multiple identities and, potentially, allegiances.<sup>148</sup>

Developing states have arisen in an international system that is more than willing to intervene and shape the domestic politics of these nascent polities. Conceptions of state and society in this context must therefore leave theoretical space for the role of international politics in shaping state-society relations. In some cases, particularly in international political economy literatures rooted in Marxist theory and popular in the 1960s – 1980s, this has occurred. However, these literatures have been criticised for going too far in the opposite direction, overemphasising the role of international actors

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their relationship with the state in Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>146</sup> Clement M. Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 11; Nazih Ayubi, “Arab Bureaucracies: Expanding Size, Changing Roles” in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 129 – 149.

<sup>147</sup> Anna Grzymala-Busse and Pauline Jones Luong, “Reconceptualizing the State: Lessons from Post-Communism,” *Politics and Society* 30 (2002) 529 – 554.

<sup>148</sup> James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: Little Brown, 1990) 40.

and underestimating the capacity of developing states.<sup>149</sup> Developing states were often understood within dichotomous models of developed-developing, modern-traditional, centre-periphery, and colonisers-colonised, which left insufficient theoretical space for the role of domestic political and economic dynamics (and agency) in shaping state-society relations. Yet a conception of state and society *without* reference to their relationship with the international system would be equally problematic. Not only do external forces intervene directly in these states, but models of development based on the Western experience are often exported, either imposed through colonialism, or, more often, “carried by the configuration of power that has structured a worldwide, international order since the end of the eighteenth century, activated and reactivated by the claim to universalism that characterises the Western political construct”.<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, this mimicry has continued even as developing state elites loudly protest that such models do not ‘fit’ their societies.<sup>151</sup>

There are four additional literatures that bear relevance to the discussion of state-society relations in this thesis. These literatures are particularly pertinent to the states in the modern Middle East and North Africa and two of them, neopatrimonialism and new state capitalism, are sometimes combined with RST, especially in the Gulf. Moreover, it would be misleading to advance a theoretical conception of state-society relations in the Middle East without addressing the role of Islam, yet, for reasons which shall be discussed, it would be equally misleading to overstate its role in conditioning the relationship between state and society in modern Middle Eastern rentier states; it is rather sectarianism, and the politics of confessional, ethnic, and tribal identities, that tend to shape societal schisms and popular unrest in the Gulf.

### **State and Society in the Modern Middle East**

The state capitalism literature goes some way towards reconciling the deliberate and pronounced emphasis on economic development and diversification in many modern rentier states, and the claim of RST literature noted earlier in this chapter that such development efforts (successful or not) are precluded by phenomenal rents. According

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<sup>149</sup> For example, dependency theory understood the relationship between ‘peripheral’ developing states and the capitalist ‘core’ of the international economic system as one of exploitation and subjugation, leaving little agency for the ‘periphery’ to develop except by isolating themselves from the core. See an overview of Dependency Theory in Tony Smith, “The Dependency Approach” in *New Directions in Comparative Politics*, ed. Howard J. Wiarda. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002) 45 – 61.

<sup>150</sup> Bertrand Badie, *The Imported State: The Westernization of the Political Order*, translated by Claudia Royal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 7.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

to its founder, Ian Bremmer, state capitalism refers to “a system in which the state functions as the leading economic actor and uses markets primarily for political gain”.<sup>152</sup> Although the literature is more focused on the economic implications of such a strategy, it also imagines a different type of state-society relationship where the state is willing and able to use its predominant role in the domestic economy to reinforce its political legitimacy.<sup>153</sup> For rent-rich states, where the government is not only the primary actor in the domestic economy but their capacity to spend is enhanced by rents, this conception of state-society relations is crucial; extant research, for example, has highlighted how sovereign wealth funds – a popular tool of state capitalist regimes – have been used in Gulf rentier states to strengthen a rentier bargain between state and society.<sup>154</sup> It is the ‘entrepreneurial state capitalist’ approach that best captures the development approach of Gulf states like Qatar, where the state plays a dirigiste yet market-oriented and, as Gray argues, business-friendly role intended to cement political alliances and encourage (limited) diversification.<sup>155</sup> Though the state capitalist literature remains state-centric and offers limited explanation for societal political activism, it does generate useful conclusions about the relationship between the regime, state-owned companies, and the private sector: specifically, that the regime utilises patronage and deliberately preferences certain business groups for political, rather than economic, reasons.<sup>156</sup> Close personal ties support client-patron dynamics in a system that can compete internationally – especially if the state papers over inefficiency with increased funding – yet is opaque and often unaccountable to its society.

Interestingly, the patron-client network suggested in state capitalist theory has similarities to an older literature on patrimonialism (and neopatrimonialism). While this literature, when applied to the modern developing world, tends to focus more on Sub-Saharan Africa, it has also been used as a lens to interpret Middle Eastern and North African state-society relations. Drawing from Max Weber’s political sociology of domination, particularly that contained in his seminal work, *Economy and Society*, the literature on patrimonialism emerged in the 1960s, and by the early 2000s had developed into a concept of neopatrimonialism where a highly personalistic state exists

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<sup>152</sup> Ian Bremmer, “State Capitalism Comes of Age: The End of the Free Market?” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2009) 2.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 1 - 11; Matthew Gray, “The Politics of the ‘New State Capitalism’: The Origins and Aims of Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds” in *Australasian Political Studies Association Conference (APSA 2009)*, ed. Conference Program Committee (Sydney: Australasian Political Studies Association, 2009) 1 – 26.

<sup>154</sup> Gray, “The Politics of the ‘New State Capitalism’,” 17.

<sup>155</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 55.

<sup>156</sup> Bremmer, “State Capitalism Comes of Age” 1 – 11.

alongside modern institutions and practices.<sup>157</sup> Although some theorists, such as Günther Roth, make significant efforts to differentiate between clientelism and neopatrimonialism,<sup>158</sup> on a broad level the strategy of governance is similar. Banks and Richter, for example, identify two types of state legitimation used in neopatrimonial societies: that of traditional loyalty based on tribal or family ties; and that of material rewards.<sup>159</sup> Clearly, the latter is highly relevant to rentier states, where the distribution of rents throughout society forms an important part of the rentier bargain (and the former also relevant as an explanation for persisting tribal authority in the contemporary Gulf). Historical analyses of rentier states, for example, often highlight the continuity between pre-rentier tribal traditions of war booty distribution and the more recent distribution of rents in order to maintain societal loyalty in the Gulf.<sup>160</sup> In neopatrimonial societies, power centres on an individual; thus state-society relations are interpreted by examining an individual's relationship with the ruler through patronage networks and the exchange of loyalty for political influence or material benefits.<sup>161</sup> At the same time, the structures and institutions of a 'modern' nation-state also exist and provide an alternative to the more informal influence of the ruler:

Neopatrimonialism is, then, a mix of two types of domination. Elements of patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination penetrate each other. The distinction between the private and the public sphere formally exists, but in the social and political practice it is often not observed. Thus, two role systems or logics coexist, the patrimonial of personal relations and the bureaucratic of impersonal legal-rational relations. The patrimonial system penetrates the legal-rational system and affects its logic and output, but does not take exclusive control over the legal-rational logic.<sup>162</sup>

While neopatrimonialism may provide *some* explanation of the state-society relationship in Gulf rentier states, it is by no means comprehensive. There is little direct examination of the state itself, for example, as the focus remains on the impact of clientelism on society.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, the literature struggles to explain exactly how influential the two types of domination are relative to each other, especially in states

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<sup>157</sup> See a detailed literature review of Neopatrimonialism in Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, "Neopatrimonialism Revisited – Beyond a Catch-All Concept," *German Institute of Global and Area Studies Working Paper No. 16* (February 2006) 1 – 38.

<sup>158</sup> See Günther Roth, "Introduction," in Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1978).

<sup>159</sup> André Bank and Thomas Richter, "Neopatrimonialism in the Middle East and North Africa: Overview, Critique and Alternative Conceptualization" (paper presented at the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies workshop, Hamburg, 23 August 2010).

<sup>160</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

<sup>161</sup> Bank and Richter, "Neopatrimonialism in the Middle East and North Africa".

<sup>162</sup> Erdmann and Engel, "Neopatrimonialism Revisited," 18.

<sup>163</sup> Neopatrimonialism has been particularly criticised for conflating 'regime' with 'state'.

where merit-based practices have had time to consolidate. It may, therefore, be helpful to consider neopatrimonialism (and state capitalism) as political dynamics influencing the state-society relationship, rather than overarching explanations of the broader system.

Similarly, this thesis interprets the role of religion – in the case of the Middle East, Islam – as another *political* dynamic, shaping, but not defining, the state-society relationship in rent-rich states. While rejecting views of religion as “the most significant force shaping Middle Eastern societies”,<sup>164</sup> this thesis also does not wish to understate its role.<sup>165</sup> Rather, the view adopted here is that society in the Middle East is not a product of religion – that is, it is not a dependent variable of religion – yet nor is it completely independent of it.<sup>166</sup> Certainly, Arab rulers remain “acutely sensitive” to the influence of Islam and many, such as Jordan’s King Abdullah II and his father, Hussein, consistently refer to their ancestry and relation to the Prophet Muhammad in order to legitimise and sustain their rule.<sup>167</sup> In this way, religion has been used as a mechanism of control by the state, yet also by religious establishments, social movements, and ruling classes and thus becomes as much a political, as spiritual, force, at least in terms of its impact on state-society relations. Writes Halim Barakat: “Rulers throughout Arab history have used religion to discourage rebellion and dissent (*fitna*) on behalf of unity of the *umma* [’Umma, meaning Islamic community] and the need to safeguard it against internal and external threats”.<sup>168</sup> Individuals holding religious authority, such as prominent clerics, may also play political roles in mobilising society behind a ‘divine’ cause, or by setting the moral and religious boundaries for political action. This has occurred repeatedly in Gulf states since 2011, such as in February 2011 when Saudi Arabia’s grand mufti, Shaikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Āl al-Shaykh, issued a fatwā (hereafter

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<sup>164</sup> See Barakat’s summary of Orientalists and Islamists in Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1993) 119.

<sup>165</sup> For example, interpretation of Islamic principles can affect the shape and intent of modern state institutions in the Middle East – an obvious example is the Shūra (consultative council), which has been used in several Gulf states to fulfill the need for popular representation while also demonstrating continuity of culture and tradition (even if the Majlis al-Shura, in its current form, is ultimately a ‘created’ tradition). Whether or not the Shura has legislative power, on the other hand, varies considerably between states who follow similar interpretations of Islam, demonstrating the interplay between politics and religion that characterises the Middle East. In the case of Oman, see Khalid M. Al-Azri, *Social and Gender Inequality in Oman: The Power of Religious and Political Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>167</sup> John L. Esposito, Mohammad A. Muqtedar Khan, and Jillian Schwedler, “Religion and Politics in the Middle East,” in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004) 382.

<sup>168</sup> Barakat, *The Arab World*, 130.

fatwa, meaning a legal opinion issued by a religious jurist) intended to delegitimise the nascent Arab Spring movements, claiming the Tunisian and Egyptian demonstrations were orchestrated “by the enemies of the Umma” in order to “strike the Umma and destroy its religion, values, and morals,” and again in March, when Saudi Arabia’s Senior Council of Ulama (Saudi Arabia’s highest religious body, appointed by the king) issued a fatwa condemning anti-government protest as un-Islamic.<sup>169</sup>

The role of religion, however, should be distinguished from the role of sects, the latter being in general more relevant to the state-society relationship in Gulf rentier states during the Arab Spring. As Barakat argues: “the social reality in the eastern Arab world...is one of sect rather than religion. Arabs must contend with more or less separate communities of Sunnis, Shi‘as, Druze, Alawite, Syrian Orthodox, Maronites, Eastern Catholics, and the like. These sectarian affiliations are comparable to – indeed, inseparable from – tribalism or ethnicity”.<sup>170</sup> To some extent, the study of sectarianism is the study of the politics of identity, and can be understood broadly to include not only religious but also ethnic, tribal, and other ‘minority’ groups.<sup>171</sup> The debate over ethno-nationalism, modernism, invented traditions, and contested national identities, understood via the work of Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Anthony Smith, among others, becomes increasingly relevant to this conception of state-society relations, shaping political contests over authority and legitimacy.<sup>172</sup> The state plays an instrumental role in this context: it can, to a large extent, determine the

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<sup>169</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, “Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring,” *Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance, and Globalisation in the Gulf States* 36 (May 2014) 3. ASharq al-Awsat, “hay‘at kibār al-‘ulamā’ fi al-sa’udiyya taḥarem al-muẓāhirāt fi al-bilād wateḥḍer min al-ratbātāt al-fikriyya wal-ḥezbiyya al-munḥerfa,” (7 March 2011) <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11787&article=611299&feature#.Vy3XtRV96Rs> accessed 7 April 2016.

<sup>170</sup> Barakat, *The Arab World*, 125.

<sup>171</sup> Lawrence G. Potter, “Introduction,” in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013) 2; on ethnic politics in the Gulf, see M.R. Izady, “The Gulf’s Ethnic Diversity: An Evolutionary History,” in *Security in the Persian Gulf: Origins, Obstacles, and the Search for Consensus*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (New York: Palgrave, 2002); on minority politics, see A. H. Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947); J.C. Hurewitz, “The Minorities in the Political Process,” in *Social Forces in the Middle East*, ed. Sydney Fisher (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>172</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

degree of sectarian cohesion, or conflict, within its borders.<sup>173</sup> As Kristin Diwan notes of Bahrain: “sectarian strife is not simply the product of entrenched communal divisions; rather, it is contingent upon choices made by the ruling elite”.<sup>174</sup>

Sectarian politics, meaning “the process of socio-political instrumentalization of subnational (ethno-linguistic, religious, etc.) identities, either by the regime or by non-state political actors”,<sup>175</sup> thus has continued relevance to Middle Eastern states.<sup>176</sup> It can reinforce state legitimacy, justify repressive responses, provide mobilising symbols and rationalisation for political action, or support the power of a particular elite (from a specific sect) at the expense of others. They can also offer semi-protected ‘private’ spaces for sub-national communities, even those engaged in active opposition to state authority, to gather. It is no accident that Shia political activism in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, for example, centred on the marja‘iyya (marja‘, pl. marāji‘, referring to the religious establishment followed by Twelver Shia),<sup>177</sup> and the matam (Shia funeral house), particularly between the mid-1970s to early 2000s, when leftist/nationalist influence was in decline and overt political activism driven underground.<sup>178</sup> The maritime history and migration patterns of Gulf society also mean inhabitants of this region have multiple and overlapping identities that defy simplistic categorisation,<sup>179</sup> meaning that sectarian politics remain critical to understanding the complex configuration of shifting alliances and identities that characterises the Gulf.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Pre-existing levels of sectarian division, transnational societal networks, influence from regional events, especially sectarian conflict, and many other factors do restrict the state’s agency in this regard, yet as the guardian of national identity it plays a critical role in determining whether this identity is able to include, or reject, sub-national schisms, and whether sectarian conflict is tolerated, or even encouraged. The importance of an exclusivist national identity, particularly considering the hybrid nature of pre-independence society in the Arab states of the Gulf, is covered in Potter, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>174</sup> Kristin Diwan, “Royal Factions, Ruling Strategies, and Sectarianism in Bahrain,” in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013) 143.

<sup>175</sup> Marc Valeri, “Identity Politics and Nation-Building Under Sultan Qaboos,” in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013) 179-180.

<sup>176</sup> This is well documented in extant research. See for example Laurence Louër, “The State and Sectarian Identities in the Persian Gulf Monarchies: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait in Comparative Perspective,” in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013); Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shī‘a Islam*.

<sup>177</sup> Al-Sayid ‘Ali al-Husainī al-Sistāni, an Iranian-born cleric based in Najaf, Iraq, and popular among Iraqi, Saudi, and Bahraini Shia Muslims, is a good example of a marja‘.

<sup>178</sup> Louay Bahry, “The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11:3 (2000) 129-143; on political mobilization through marja‘iyya in general see Sajjad Rizvi, “Political Mobilization and the Shi‘i Religious Establishment (Marja‘iyya),” *International Affairs* 86:6 (2010) 1299-1313; Rosemary Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (Oxon: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>179</sup> Potter, “Introduction,” 6-7.

<sup>180</sup> Toby Matthiesen, for example, stresses the importance of “sectarian identity entrepreneurs”, who seek to strengthen sectarian identities for political purposes. His definition includes both those within that community, for example Bahraini Shia who emphasise the importance of Shia identities in challenging



## Conclusion

Despite its critics, RST provides valuable insight into the state-society relationship in the Gulf region. Yet it does not provide a convincingly holistic explanation of these relations when viewed in isolation, and more recent works in the literature have increasingly combined RST with alternative approaches to understanding politics and society in the Gulf region. The review of these other literatures in this chapter additionally serves a heuristic purpose, identifying variables that escape a typical RST approach yet are critical to state-society relations in the Middle East, and providing a framework for the empirical studies of Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar that follow. Chapters Three to Six detail the actual workings of these case studies during the 2011 to mid-2014 period, yet it is first important to contextualise the theoretical conception of state and society developed here and highlight the unique dynamics at play in each case study. The following chapter details the historical dimensions of the state-society relationship in Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman, outlining the nature of this relationship on the eve of 2011 and setting the scene for the events that have followed.

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state authority, and those external to the community, such as Salafi clerics who depict the Shia as a threat to societal unity. See Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent, and Sectarianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Esposito, Muqtedar Khan, and Schwedler, "Religion and Politics in the Middle East," 378.

## Chapter 2 - Contextualising State and Society in Qatar, Bahrain and Oman: Historical Dimensions

At first glance, state-society relations in Qatar, Bahrain and Oman seem broadly similar. All three are small states on the Arabian Peninsula and have historically contended with typical features of the Gulf political economy – tribal politics, Islamic social and political values, contested boundaries, and incursions by both neighbouring and distant powers intent on capturing some part of the Gulf’s land and sea territory. Despite these similarities, the countries’ specific histories – and the implications for state-society relations – are diverse and deserve some elaboration. This chapter details the history of the three case studies investigated in this thesis, drawing out historical trends that have shaped state-society relations in the post-2011 period. The intention is to contextualise the theoretical conception of state and society developed in Chapter One, not to engage in an in-depth study of Bahraini, Qatari or Omani history. The chapter particularly highlights the foundations of ruling family authority, administrative reforms marking the emergence of legal-rational legitimacy, and the rise of rent-based cooptive state-society relations, as well as more unique elements of the Bahrain, Qatari, and Omani polities that have shaped state and societal actions since 2011.

### Bahrain

Long before Bahrain’s current ruling family, the Al Khalifa, arrived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bahrain sustained a traditional agrarian, fishing and pearling economy, forming an ancient seafaring and trading centre noted in Mesopotamian inscriptions dating back to 2,000 B.C.E.<sup>181</sup> The origin of the indigenous Baḥārna population, the historical underclass of agricultural labourers and fishermen spread across Bahrain and the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, is contested; the Baḥārna claim links to the Abd al-Qays (bānū ‘abd al-qays) tribe, who migrated from the Arabian mainland in 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E., yet their genealogy is likely more mixed, a result of Bahrain’s status as a regional

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<sup>181</sup> See historical coverage of ‘Dilmun’, the ancient name for Bahrain and potentially parts of eastern Saudi Arabia in Constance-Marie Piesinger, *Legacy of Dilmun: The Roots of Ancient Maritime Trade in Eastern Coastal Arabia in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Dionisius A. Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: People of the Dhow* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Harriet Crawford, *Dilmun and Its Gulf Neighbours* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Samar K. Datta and Jeffrey B. Nugent, “Bahrain’s Pearling Industry: How It Was, Why It Was That Way, and Its Implications,” in *Bahrain and the Gulf: Past Perspectives and Alternative Futures*, ed. Jeffrey B. Nugent and Theodore H Thomas (Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985) 25-41.

trading centre located along ancient trade and migratory routes.<sup>182</sup> While the majority of Baḥārna subscribe to Twelver Shi‘ism, other inhabitants of pre-1783 Bahrain include Sunni tribes of Huwala origin, who migrated to Bahrain from southern Iran yet trace their heritage to ancient tribes in the Gulf and Arabia.<sup>183</sup> For much of its history, Bahrain was passed between more powerful players, paying tribute or casting allegiance to the dominant power of the time – be it the Portuguese, Omanis, Wahhabis, Ottomans, Persians, or British – yet generally it was held as a dependency, not interfered with directly.<sup>184</sup>

This changed following the 1782-83 conquest of the island by a section of the Bani Utub (banī al-‘utūb) tribal confederation, marking the arrival of the Al Khalifa family as rulers of Bahrain, whose dominance has continued, with some interruptions in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, until today.<sup>185</sup> Their arrival forms a contested founding myth, with the Baḥārna and Al Khalifa advancing contrasting narratives that have re-emerged repeatedly in contemporary political mobilisations.

The founding myth, as described by Bahrain’s current King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, unfolds as follows. After a period of migration, a section of the Bani Utub tribe led by Mohammed bin Khalifa, an “outstanding character” with “mature wisdom and piety”,<sup>186</sup> settled in Zubara, on the coast of Qatar and close to the island of Bahrain. Bahrain’s ruler at the time, Shaikh Naṣr Āl-Madkhūr, controlled the island as a dependency of Iran, and invaded Zubara in 1782, “driven by jealousy and hatred because the people of Zubara enjoyed peace, stability and progress and were rich and prosperous”.<sup>187</sup> In response to this aggression, Mohammed bin Khalifa’s son and successor, Ahmed, counter-attacked and conquered the small island community in 1783. According to this

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<sup>182</sup> See linguistic evidence for the indigenous status of the Baḥārna and historical origins of Huwala in Clive Holes, *Dialect, Culture and Society in Eastern Arabia*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Handbuch der Orientalistik Series, Brill, 2001). This thesis agrees with Khuri, who claims the Baḥārna are “the original Bahraini ‘pot’ into which the human relics of invasions and conquests have melted” but, aligning with Holes, accepts that there exists a long and embedded folk history for the Baḥārna stretching back at least to the ‘Abd Al Qays migration in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. See Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), fn 2.

<sup>183</sup> Well-known Huwala families who still inhabit Bahrain include Kanoo, Fakhro, and Khonji, many of whom are prominent business actors today.

<sup>184</sup> Even the first Al Khalifa ruler, Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, at first ruled Bahrain from Zubara, visiting the island only in the summers.

<sup>185</sup> For example, the Omanis conquered Bahrain in 1800, holding it until 1801 when they were defeated by an Al Khalifa-Wahhabi alliance in 1802. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, 26.

<sup>186</sup> Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, *First Light: Modern Bahrain and Its Heritage* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994) 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

narrative, when Ahmed invaded: “the people of Bahrain were ready to accept someone who could save them from Persian influence”,<sup>188</sup> and they “gave him a hearty welcome, and gathered under his banner to build with him the modern Bahrain”.<sup>189</sup> Ahmed himself earned the title Ahmed al-Fāteḥ, or Ahmed ‘the Conqueror’, and became a symbol of victory that has re-emerged in subsequent Sunni political movements.<sup>190</sup>

While for those groups al-Fāteḥ symbolised victory and success, for the Baḥārna and more generally Bahrain’s Shia population it served as a reminder of historical persecution and subjugation. A counter-narrative of this foundational period emerged that idealises the pre-1783 past and contrasts it with the persecution and inequalities experienced by the Baḥārna community since that time. According to this reading, the glory days of simple Baḥārna communal life were disrupted by greedy conquerors – the Al Khalifa royal family in Bahrain and the Al Saud on the mainland – and since this time they have been subjugated and persecuted.<sup>191</sup>

The reality, of course, is more complex,<sup>192</sup> but the critical point in terms of Bahraini state-society relations is that these symbols and heritage are contested, and have been reformed and utilised by subsequent political movements, including since 2011. Moreover, divisions between (and within) the Al Khalifa ruling family, their tribal allies of Sunni Najdī origin, and families of Sunni Huwala origin that would eventually form a prominent part of the merchant class, have long been key to the fragmented nature of state-society relations in contemporary Bahrain.

From the 1780s to the 1920s, the rulers of Bahrain consolidated their authority through tribal-patrimonial rule. Succession disputes within the ruling family, and wider conflicts between tribes and powers across the Gulf, were eventually subdued by a series of British treaties, and by the mid-1800s, the Al Salman branch of the ruling family had cemented its control of Bahrain, resulting in greater regime stability and embedding

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>190</sup> These groups often name themselves after Ahmed al-Fāteḥ, such as various incarnations of the al-Fateh Youth Coalition, a Sunni youth group, discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>191</sup> This myth emerged repeatedly in interviews conducted for this thesis, but is also described in published works such as Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shi‘a Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 29-30.

<sup>192</sup> The best coverage of this period in Bahraini history is in Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, and John Gordon Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol 1, Historical Part 1B (Westmead: Gregg International Publishers Ltd, 1970) 836-841.

systems of rule that continued until the administrative reforms of the 1920s.<sup>193</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British had established themselves as Bahrain's primary advisors, shielding Bahrain from Wahhabi, Omani, Ottoman and Persian encroachment and allowing the British a greater role in shaping Bahrain's international and internal relations.<sup>194</sup> Of particular import was British pressure during the 1920s to institute a number of bureaucratic reforms that created, for the first time, authority based on legal-rational relations and public expenditure on infrastructure and welfare, rather than traditional tribal patrimonialism. Resistance among the established merchant elite and some members of the Al Khalifa family – who recognised that their influence would diminish under the new reforms that addressed, among other issues, patterns of land ownership, taxation, forced labour, and separating the public from the private purse – resulted in conflict between pro- and anti-reform groups and, eventually, direct British intervention. British mediation resulted in the forced abdication of Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa in favour of his pro-reform son Hamad, exile of those responsible for violent attacks, and overpowering of opponents to the administrative reforms. A particularly infamous event occurred in 1923, when the Sunni al-Dawāsir tribe and two sons of Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa attacked the Shia village of Barbar and, subsequently, Sitra and Ali. The Dawāsir were exiled for their participation and the Shaikhs sentenced to death (although they escaped before execution and subsequently attempted to assassinate Shaikh Hamad bin Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa in 1926).<sup>195</sup>

Accompanying these political machinations were significant changes to Bahrain's economy. These were not entirely due to the administrative reforms (the pearling industry, for example, suffered a crushing blow from the emergence of cultured pearling in Japan), yet by 1930, Bahrain's economy was heavily based on rent from customs revenues, not productive industry. The administrative changes enacted in the 1920s and 1930s, followed by the discovery of oil in 1932, were also monumental in that they were the first effort to formalise public rights and restructure traditional benefit networks. In 1930, Bahrain also became the first Arab state of the Gulf to establish a public education system, resulting in a more highly skilled workforce. Yet Khuri claims

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<sup>193</sup> Treaties of major importance were signed in 1820, 1861, 1868, 1880, and 1892. See details in Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Even these violent attacks in the 1920s are remembered very differently among different societal groups; Clive Holes documents contrasted retellings by a Shia villager and Sunni member of Dawāsir in Clive Holes, *Dialect, Culture and Society in Eastern Arabia*, Vol. 2 (Leiden: Handbuch der Orientalistik Series, Brill, 2005) 147.

that social relations remained essentially unchanged: that is, the state was not yet *responsive* to wider society beyond traditional tribal patrimonial relations. “Here lies the peculiarity of Bahrain polity,” he wrote in 1980, “a combination of civil society and relatively advanced bureaucracy pieced together onto a ‘persisting’ system of tribal politics”.<sup>196</sup>

The state may have remained unresponsive, but by the 1950s, emerging social groups based on Bahrain’s new economic structure (oil revenues accounted for 75.8 percent of total government revenues on average from 1948-1970) increasingly challenged state authority.<sup>197</sup> Interestingly, it was the arrival of oil companies, such as Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO),<sup>198</sup> with standardised employment practices that produced conditions ripe for collective action. Contrary to pre-oil conditions where labour contracts were short-term, individual arrangements, formalised employment allowed the emergence of collective interests, be they those of the working class, the Shia community (both Baḥārna and increasing numbers of ‘Ajam, Shia of Iranian origin), or benefits of nationals in the face of increasing numbers of migrant workers.<sup>199</sup> International dynamics were also influential: it was a group inspired by Nasserist Pan-Arabism who intervened to transform the 1953-54 sectarian riots, sparked by a confrontation during a Shia ‘āshūra’ ritual<sup>200</sup> in Manama, into a cross-sectarian protest movement. Earlier protests, strikes and riots had occurred in Bahrain, but the mid-1950s protests, driven by the High Executive Committee (HEC), represented the first truly *national* opposition movement, crossing sectarian, class and ideological divides.<sup>201</sup> Cooperation was only short-lived, as internal divides between pan-Arab nationalists and Shia local political interests caused the ultimate collapse of the HEC committee (by then renamed the Committee of National Union (CNU)) and arrest or exile of many of its

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<sup>196</sup> Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, 133.

<sup>197</sup> Abū Abdel Latif, “Public Finance in Bahrain from 1935-1981 with Special Emphasis on the Allocation of Oil Revenues in the Past, Present, and Future,” in *Bahrain and the Gulf: Past Perspectives and Alternative Futures*, ed. Jeffrey B. Nugent and Theodore H. Thomas (Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985) 97.

<sup>198</sup> BAPCO was founded by Standard Oil Company of California and received Bahrain’s only oil concession for the Awali Field (or Bahrain Field). In 1936, Texaco acquired 50% of BAPCO’s shares, a situation that continued until 1975, when the Bahraini government acquired 60% ownership of the company, and 1980, when it became fully owned by the Bahraini government. In 1999, BAPCO merged with the Bahrain National Oil Company (established 1976) to create the Bahrain Petroleum Company.

<sup>199</sup> See Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, 115-153.

<sup>200</sup> The day of ‘āshūra’ is held on the tenth day of Muharram, and commemorates the martyrdom of Ḥusāin bin ‘Alī, grandson of Prophet Muhammed, during the battle of Karbala on 10 October, 680C.E.

<sup>201</sup> An exception should be made for the 1938 demonstrations, which served as the precursor for the mid-50s movement. See *Ibid*, 194-216.

central figures.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, leftist movements remained a feature of Bahrain's political economy, with various movements – such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the precursor to Bahrain's current leftist-nationalist party, Waad (wa'ad, or jam'iyyat al-'amal al-waṭanī al-dīmūqrāṭīyya) – organising strikes, protests, and political action challenging state authority.

In terms of state-society relations, the key developments of this era were: the emergence of labour-based collective action networks and attempts to create a broad-based national opposition; increasing professionalisation of labour (strengthening legal-rational authority); and, in response to political activism, distribution of state resources to society through widespread welfare policies, new housing communities with favourable lending rates (such as Isa Town, built starting in 1968), and direct cash transfers. The latter indicated a clear awareness within government that at least part of its legitimacy stemmed from its ability to materially satisfy a broad base of citizens, not simply its traditional tribal allies.

In 1971, as a result of British withdrawal from the Gulf, Bahrain officially became an independent state. Rent distributions continued, with a notable cash transfer of USD5,000 (almost double per capita GDP, which was USD2,507 at current prices in 1972)<sup>203</sup> occurring at the first anniversary of independence; the transfer was granted to every Bahraini home owner and in some cases was enough to purchase the home.<sup>204</sup> The government also experimented with a semi-elected parliament, forming Bahrain's first National Assembly of 30 elected members and 14 government-appointed Ministers in December 1973.<sup>205</sup> However, its lifespan was brief; when its members opposed the controversial National Security Law, issued by Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa in December 1974, which allowed the government the right to imprison any person suspected of disturbing national security, without interrogation or trial, for up to three years, the government simply dissolved the body in August 1975.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 196-214.

<sup>203</sup> Drawn from United Nations, "UN Data," (2016) [data.un.org](http://data.un.org) accessed 7 August 2016.

<sup>204</sup> Prices for houses in Isa Town, for example, ranged from USD3,750-USD35,000 and these loans were already payable by instalment over 15 years with no interest. See Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, 121.

<sup>205</sup> See Emile Nakhleh, *Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1976).

<sup>206</sup> See Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, 231-233.

Starting with the establishment of Aluminum Bahrain (ALBA) in 1968,<sup>207</sup> Bahrain has also made continued efforts to diversify its economy, denoting awareness that Bahrain's domestic reserve levels were low and long-term development would need to shift away from oil-based industries. Some of these efforts, such as the Arab Shipbuilding and Repair Yard (ASRY, established 1977), the Gulf Petrochemicals Industries Company (GPIC, founded 1979) have been pursued as joint ventures, capitalising particularly on Bahrain's close relations with Saudi Arabia, which has provided the vast majority of Bahrain's oil feedstock since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>208</sup> Bahrain also worked to become a leading regional financial centre – a position it achieved when the Lebanese Civil War caused businesses to flock from the Levant to the Gulf. As a result, Bahrain has one of the highest rates of citizen-participation in the private sector in the Gulf.<sup>209</sup> Independence also necessitated the creation of new bureaucratic structures to take over governance responsibilities previously provided by the British, yet the number of ministries created during this time – particularly the doubling of ministries between 1973 (14 ministries) and 1978 (29 ministries) – suggests a rentier effect caused by the practice of bestowing high government positions to regime allies, combined with the 1974-75 oil price boom.<sup>210</sup>

Due in part to the National Security Law, formal political opposition in Bahrain was limited and activism driven underground from 1975 to the early 2000s, yet it was by no means eliminated. Instead, opposition increasingly operated through religious institutions like Shia funeral houses, or drew members from youth clubs.<sup>211</sup> Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Shia political activism, encouraged by the *marja'iyya*, took on a greater role, especially as the decline in Pan-Arabism weakened leftist/nationalist influence.<sup>212</sup> Coupled with the government's fear of Iranian revolutionary ideology spreading to Bahrain's majority Shia population (seemingly vindicated when Iran-linked Shia activists attempted to orchestrate a coup in 1981),

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<sup>207</sup> Arguably, an even earlier effort was the establishment of Bahrain Fishing Company in 1966, yet this seems more an example of modernising traditional industries, not diversification.

<sup>208</sup> See details at Bahrain Petroleum Company, (2016) <http://www.bapco.net/en-us/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 7 August 2016.

<sup>209</sup> Over 60 percent of economically active Bahrainis have been employed in the private sector since at least 2003. Calculated from data available from the Labour Market Regulatory Authority, "Bahrain Labour Market Indicators," (n.d.) [http://blmi.lmra.bh/2015/12/mi\\_dashboard.xml](http://blmi.lmra.bh/2015/12/mi_dashboard.xml) accessed 16 June 2016.

<sup>210</sup> Oil revenue actually decreased as a proportion of government revenue from 1975-1979, due to stagnation in oil prices, rapid increases in imports (which increased customs revenues), and substantial increases in foreign loans and aid (especially from Saudi Arabia). Overall, however, dependence on oil increased during the 1970s. See Abla Abdel Latif, "Public Finance in Bahrain," 99.

<sup>211</sup> Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*.

<sup>212</sup> Bahry, "The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain"; Rizvi, "Political Mobilization and the Shi'i Religious Establishment (Marja'iyya)".



relations between the Bahraini government and the Shia have taken on increasingly sectarian tones.<sup>213</sup> Popular protests, such as the 1994-1999 Uprising, also known as Intifāda al-Karāma or the ‘Dignity Uprising’, were not exclusively Shia movements, in that many of their demands for social justice and democratisation were not specific to Shia groups, yet the prominence of religious leaders such as Shaikh Isa Ahmed Qasem in guiding and mobilising the community indicates the central role accorded to religious figures. It was during this uprising, for example, that Shaikh Ali Salman, who would go on to become the Secretary General of al-Wefaq (jam‘iyyat al-wefāq al-waṭanī al-islāmiyya), emerged as a leader, and it was his arrest in December 1994 that transformed small-scale protests over the attire of Western women during a marathon in November into protracted social unrest.<sup>214</sup> Religious figures generally do not participate directly in politics,<sup>215</sup> but rather serve as spiritual guides to major political societies. Shaikh Isa Qasem, for example, is widely perceived as the spiritual guide for al-Wefaq, Bahrain’s largest opposition society, founded in 2001, yet he has never personally stood for elections.

The relationship between the Al Khalifa-dominated government and Shia-dominated opposition was not simply one of repression and resistance; there had also been several moves in the 1990s to press for political reform through public petitions in 1992 and 1994, organised by the secular leftist opposition groups, and in 1993 Emir Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa appointed a Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shūra, hereafter Majlis al-Shura) of 30 appointed members.<sup>216</sup> However, it was not until Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa came to power in 1999 and led a series of conciliatory movements in the early 2000s that the state-society relationship showed significant signs of change.

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<sup>213</sup> Hasan Tariq al-Hasan, “The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981: The IFLB in Bahrain,” *The Middle East Journal* 65:4 (Autumn 2011); Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn’t* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>214</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain,” (1997) <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/bahrain/> accessed 12 July 2014; Ali Alfoneh, “Between Reform and Revolution: Shaikh Qasim, the Bahraini Shi’a, and Iran,” *American Enterprise Institute* (12 July 2012) <http://www.aei.org/outlook/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/middle-east-and-north-africa/between-reform-and-revolution-sheikh-qasim-the-bahraini-shia-and-iran/> accessed 12 July 2014.

<sup>215</sup> Although there was a Shia religious bloc in the 1974 National Assembly formed of several prominent clerics, notably Shaikh Abdulmir al-Jamri, who also became a leading religious figure in the 1990s Uprising.

<sup>216</sup> The 1992 petition was signed by over 200 Bahrainis and forwarded by a cross-sectarian movement with equal Sunni and Shia representation. See F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994) 99-115; the London-based Islamist opposition group *Bahrain Freedom Movement* has also published the original and translated texts of the petition with list of signatories on its website. See Bahrain Freedom Movement, <http://english.voiceofbahrain.org/> accessed 7 August 2016.

Political reforms at this time included: the pardoning of all political prisoners exiled or incarcerated during the 1990s; the abolition of the 1974 State Security Law and the State Security Court; the creation of the Council of Representatives, Majlis al-Nuwwab (Majlis al-Nuwwāb), an elected body to balance the appointed Majlis al-Shura; and the transformation of Bahrain into a constitutional monarchy, with Hamad as Bahrain's first king.<sup>217</sup> The National Action Charter (NAC), embodying these changes, was overwhelmingly supported by public referendum, with 89 percent electoral turnout and 98.4 percent of those voting in favour of the NAC.<sup>218</sup> According to a last-minute clarification on vague wording in the NAC between (then-)Emir Hamad and several leading Shia clerics, only the elected Majlis al-Nuwwab was to have legislative power; the appointed Majlis al-Shura was intended for consultation only.<sup>219</sup> However, when the Bahraini Constitution was released in 2002, it emerged that both bodies would have legislative power, in effect stifling the democratic nature of the reforms. This discrepancy has fomented much of the opposition from political societies such as al-Wefaq since 2002, as well as internal splits within the opposition. Shia Islamist political society Haq (ḥarakat ḥaq: ḥarakat al-ḥuriyyāt w-al-dīmūqrātiyya), for example, broke away from al-Wefaq in late 2005 over the latter's decision to participate in 2006 Majlis al-Nuwwab elections, whereas the members of Haq, led by Hassan Mushaima, felt that participation implied acceptance of the bicameral system.<sup>220</sup>

Another notable development in 2006 was the release of the Bandar report, a series of revelatory documents allegedly exposing deliberate encouragement of sectarianism by an anti-Shi'ite faction of the Bahraini government. Nicknamed 'Bandar-Gate' after the former government official, Saleh al-Bandar, responsible for its release, the report provided ammunition for opposition groups, legitimating their long-held belief that the government was largely responsible for worsening sectarian tensions. "All of this fits within our own political reading," explained Ibrahim Sharif, a Sunni businessman and Chairman of secular leftist society Waad. "What he did for us was connect the dots and

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<sup>217</sup> J. E. Peterson, "Bahrain's First Steps Towards Reform Under Amir Hamad," *Journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs* 33:2 (June 2002) 216-227.

<sup>218</sup> Steven Wright, "Fixing the Kingdom: Political Evolution and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain," *CIRS Georgetown Occasional Paper No. 3* (2008) 4.

<sup>219</sup> J. E. Peterson, "The Promise and Reality of Bahraini Reforms," in *Political Liberalization in the Gulf*, ed. Joshua Teitelbaum (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>220</sup> Al-Akhbar, "Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street: Wifaq and Haq," US Embassy Cable 08Manama593 (n.d.) <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/973> accessed 16 February 2015.

show the extent of the effort”.<sup>221</sup> The report also revealed the extent of internal government factionalism, particularly highlighting the ascendancy of a hawkish conservative faction that interprets Shia political activism as a major national security threat.<sup>222</sup> Contestation between this security-focused group, a pragmatic conservative faction formed of established power-brokers such as Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, and a reformist faction associated with Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, which that has driven Bahrain’s economic reform programme from around 2004, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three; of importance for the moment is that there were regular factional disputes within government and between opposition groups.

These historical dimensions suggest that, on the eve of 2011, Bahrain was divided along several lines: there was an established opposition utilising embedded societal networks, yet that struggled to create a sustainably unified front in the face of class, sect, and ideological divides; these divides were often exploited by government nervous of any potential cross-sectarian political mobilisation; government itself had internal disputes on matters of governance that impacted how it related to societal groups; and economic development had resulted in the emergence of new societal groups that challenged traditional state-society relations. Traditional tribal-patrimonial dynamics, though they have evolved, continue to offer a form of legitimacy for the state; in this, Bahrain today is strikingly similar to the image Khuri forwarded in 1980, where:

[t]wo diametrically opposed political ideologies are involved here: a tribally controlled government deriving ‘legitimacy’ from historical rights and a ‘peasant’ (community-based), urban population seeking participation in government through public representation. The first believes and acts as if government is an earned right; the other seeks to modify government and subject it to a public vote.<sup>223</sup>

It is this struggle between forms of legitimacy that has characterised state-society relations in Bahrain’s past, and continues to colour political mobilisations in the post-2011 period. Yet this duality oversimplifies the complex nature of state-society relations

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<sup>221</sup> Quoted in Hassan M. Fattah, “Report Cites Bids by Sunnis in Bahrain to Rig Elections,” *New York Times* (2 October 2006) [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/02/world/middleeast/02bahrain.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/02/world/middleeast/02bahrain.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0) accessed 9 June 2016.

<sup>222</sup> This includes, interestingly, several descendants of Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, the opponent of the 1920s administrative reform noted earlier. See Justin Gengler, “Royal Factionalism, the Khawalid, and the Securitization of ‘The Shia Problem’ in Bahrain,” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3:1 (June 2013) 53-79.

<sup>223</sup> Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, 219.

in contemporary Bahrain. It cannot capture, for example, the role of Shia clerics in mobilising political opposition, how traditional Sunni (Najdī and Huwala) allies might support the Al Khalifas when faced with a restive Shia opposition and yet challenge state authority in other contexts, nor account for the emergence of Sunni political movements that subscribe to transnational Salafist or Muslim Brotherhood ideologies; these complexities are the central concern of the rest of this thesis.

## **Qatar**

Qatar must also contend with multiple systems of authority. These stem from a similar traditional-reformist dichotomy to Bahrain, though the greater cooptive capacity of the Qatari state increases the ability of the state to enforce a rentier bargain. However, Qatar's enhanced cooptive capacity is a recent phenomenon. Before the exportation of oil, which only started *en force* after World War II, Qatar was a backwater in the Gulf, with few natural resources and, particularly after the economic devastations of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, only sparsely populated. Archaeological evidence suggests Qatar had long been inhabited, but its early settlements were ephemeral, providing a place for clans seeking an independent but temporary base to engage in trading, pearling, or piracy, not supporting the development of any centralised political system beyond that of the tribe.<sup>224</sup>

This pattern of state-society relations continued through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and reflects the contested nature of authority at the time.<sup>225</sup> Qatar was technically a dependency of Bahrain, but, in practical terms, Al Khalifa authority over the peninsula was limited.<sup>226</sup> Various revolts and attempted uprisings by Qatari tribes against Al Khalifa rule in 1828, 1835, and 1851 indicated the restive nature of Qatari society and tenuous grip of Al Khalifa authority.<sup>227</sup> By 1867, tensions came to a head when the

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<sup>224</sup> For ancient history of Qatar, see Richard H. Curtiss, "Qatar in History: Ties to World's Earliest Civilizations," *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* 10:1 (June 1996) 82-83; 1766-1907 history, favouring a British perspective, is covered in John Gordon Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. 1, Part 1B (Westmead: Gregg International Publishers Ltd, 1970); and more recent histories are available in Gray, *Qatar*; Habibur Rahman, *Emergence of Qatar* (London: Columbia University Press, 2006); Allen J. Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014); Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

<sup>225</sup> This most memorably led to the destruction of Doha in 1821 by the British for flouting the General Treaty of Peace of 1820. As the British Resident in the Persian Gulf found in 1823, although Qataris were subjects to treaties signed by the Al Khalifa, such as the 1820 Treaty, they were entirely ignorant of its terms and thus had no idea why they had been attacked two years earlier. See Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. 1, Part 1B, 792-4.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 794.

<sup>227</sup> The 1828 revolt was by the Al Bu Ainan (at the time of Doha, but they were subsequently removed to Ruwais and Fuwairat), 1835 by the people of Huwailah and 1851 by residents of Doha, Wakra and

Bahrainis imprisoned prominent tribesman Jassim bin Muhammad bin Thani and, with the help of an Abu Dhabi fleet, sacked Doha and Wakra to such an extent that “even the rafters and doors of the houses [were] removed”.<sup>228</sup> The attack would transform Qatari-Bahraini relations and lead to the establishment of the Al Thanis as rulers of an independent Qatar.

Having arrived in Qatar, according to family legend, in the 1750s, the Al Thani were certainly not the oldest tribe in Qatar,<sup>229</sup> nor did they have a religious or historical claim to authority that set them apart from other Qatari tribes, as was the case for the Bahraini and Omani royal families.<sup>230</sup> Rather, Muhammad bin Thani’s authority was only limited, as William Palgrave attested in 1865:

Ebn-Thanee...is indeed generally acknowledged for head of the entire province...yet [he] has in matter of fact very little authority over the other villages, where everyone settles his affairs with his own local chief, and Ebn-Thanee is for those around only a sort of collector-in-chief, a general revenue gatherer, whose occupation is to look after and to bring in the annual tribute on the pearl fishery.<sup>231</sup>

Muhammad bin Thani was therefore ‘first among equals’, not the uncontested ruler of Qatar when the British, feeling they could not ignore such a blatant violation of the maritime peace as had occurred in 1867, arrived in Qatar.<sup>232</sup> Their mediation resulted in the 1868 Agreement, a precursor to Qatari independence. Muhammad bin Thani signed the agreement with the British, assumedly on behalf of all Qatari tribes, establishing the Al Thanis as internationally recognised representatives, if not rulers, of Qatar.<sup>233</sup>

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Fuwairat. Qatari tribes also weighed in on Al Khalifa succession disputes, particularly an 1840-1843 conflict between Abdullah bin Ahmad and Muhammad bin Khalifa, where a Qatari contingent assisted Muhammad’s capture of Muharraq in 1843. See Ibid, 795-801.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 892-894; see also Mohamed A. J. Al Thani, *Jassim the Leader: Founder of Qatar* (London: Profile Books, 2012).

<sup>229</sup> The tribe with the longest continual history in the Qatar peninsula is the al-Musallam, who have been there since at least 1555. Fromerz, *Qatar*, 53.

<sup>230</sup> Although from the late nineteenth century, Al Thani rulers (starting with Jassim bin Mohammad bin Thani) and increasing numbers of Qataris would convert from Maliki to Hanbali Sunni Islam, adopting Wahhabism and later using it as another source of legitimacy for their rule. See A. Nizar Hamzeh, “Qatar: The Duality of the Legal System,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 30:1 (January 1994) 79-90.

<sup>231</sup> William Gifford Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year’s Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1966) 232.

<sup>232</sup> It was particularly a violation of the 1861 Friendly Convention between Great Britain and the Al Khalifa, whereby the Al Khalifa accepted British protection from all maritime threats, in return promising to refrain from all maritime aggressions (including against Qatar, though this was not immediately clear to the Al Khalifa). See James Onley, “The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century,” *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004) 30-92.

<sup>233</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. 1, Part 1B.

Though Al Thani rule became increasingly entrenched over the following decades, in economic terms, Qatar's dry interior and small fishing villages failed to attract significant trade, overshadowed as they were by the more geographically desirable and resource-rich ports in other parts of the Gulf. For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Qatar had little wealth and faced a series of economic crises that drove over 40 percent of its population abroad in search of economic opportunities.<sup>234</sup> Although oil was discovered in Qatar in 1932, and first exploited in 1938, World War II suspended production between 1942 and 1947. The absence of oil revenues, combined with Japanese competition from cultured pearls, a Bahraini trade embargo, and fallout from the Great Depression, devastated Qatar's economy – Shaikh Abdalla bin Jasim Al Thani was even forced to mortgage his own home to repay debts.<sup>235</sup> When the British Political Resident arrived in Doha in the late 1940s, he described it as: “little more than a miserable fishing village straggling along the coast for several miles and more than half in ruins...the roads were dusty tracks, there was no electricity, and the people had to fetch their water in skins and cans from wells two or three miles outside the town”.<sup>236</sup>

Economic crises had also greatly weakened Qatar's society, and there was little revenue to support the creation of state institutions. Patrimonial state-society relations continued, though many groups had migrated abroad and would not return for some decades. While the merchant elites of Qatar have long been noted for their weakness as a political class, Abdalla Darwish was particularly prominent during Shaikh Abdalla (r. 1913-1949) and Ali's (r. 1949-1960) reigns for his exceptional access to the state.<sup>237</sup> Under Shaikh Ali, for example, Darwish controlled the state's accounts prior to the establishment of formal accounting practices and “Ali himself saw neither cash nor books”, indicating both the power Darwish wielded over state revenues and the trust Shaikh Ali had placed in him.<sup>238</sup>

In part to counter the monopolistic power of individuals like Darwish, the British had been continually advocating the establishment of administrative institutions that would (theoretically) provide greater transparency in state finances. In 1950, Shaikh Ali reluctantly agreed to do so, drawing a distinction between the public and private purse

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<sup>234</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Qatar's population was 27,000, which was reduced to 16,000 or even lower in 1949. See Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 117.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Sir Rupert Hay, quoted in Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> The weakness of Qatar's merchant class is a central argument of Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 135.

and marking the emergence of legal-bureaucratic authority in Qatar.<sup>239</sup> In 1947, oil exportation resumed, and a period of prosperity began. Nascent state institutions and standardised business practices of the Qatar Petroleum Company (QPC) supported the emergence of legal-rational authority, and as the economy recovered and oil revenues increased, Shaikh Ali's patronage capacity rapidly expanded, as did the rent-seeking demands of his family. His patrimonial network did not simply distribute wealth; as Gray notes, Shaikh Ali placed members of Al Thani (and other societal elites whose loyalty he was seeking to ensure), in high-level government positions, allocating social prestige as well as rents.<sup>240</sup>

Yet doing so reduced the funds available to meet or develop Qatar's social and infrastructure needs, a problematic strategy at a time when economic growth was encouraging the development of a strong working class identity. Qatari society, buoyed by rising pan-Arab sentiment across the region, became restive and dissatisfied with their exclusion from the cooptation process. In the 1950s, a series of labour crises reflected the strength of organised labour in Qatar, from protests against foreign oil company workers in 1951, to a more threatening coalescence of Qatari oil company workers, members of the royal family, and major merchants in 1956. As in Bahrain, disparate groups were able to create unified political action, even as actual demands differed between them. These demands included: increased salaries and fewer foreign labourers (from free and slave oil industry workers, and slave-owning elites); greater political participation (from leftists, many of whom were oil workers); greater allowance increases (from royals); almost all groups had some reason to oppose Abdalla Darwish; and even Shaikh Ali had quietly supported early strikes as a way to enhance his bargaining position with the oil company.<sup>241</sup> The collective actions in 1956 were also the first emergence of ideologically-organised, mass opposition to central authority, bridging class, tribal and other divides to unite under a pro-Arab, anti-British front.<sup>242</sup>

Although patrimonial practices of rule continued to dominate Qatari state-society relations, the labour movements did impress upon the ruler the importance of extending

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<sup>239</sup> Jill Crystal even called the administrative landscape of the 1950s "virtually a blank slate". Ibid, 121.

<sup>240</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 33.

<sup>241</sup> The issue of slaves was only relevant before Shaikh Ali freed all slaves in 1952; afterward it was the anti-British and anti-Abdulla Darwish sentiment that attracted the royal family and merchants to the leftists' cause. See detailed coverage of the 1950s labor movements in Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 123-145.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 140.

state largesse into society, and of developing public infrastructure. Both Shaikh Ali and his son, Ahmad, who took power upon Ali's abdication in 1960, expanded and developed distributive policies and Qatarisation laws designed to coopt the Qatari populace.<sup>243</sup> The 1960s also marked the beginning of state housing programmes, low-income land loans and grants, although greater benefits would still be reserved for members of the Al Thani family.

At this point, no ruler had managed to bring the restive royal family under control. In 1963, after an altercation between pan-Arab nationalists and Shaikh Ahmad's nephew, where the nephew had shot and killed a member of the crowd, opposition leaders organised a week long strike and called for a number of popular measures, including a reduction of allowances to the royal family.<sup>244</sup> As in 1956, the movement attracted a broad coalition of supporters, and forced some responsiveness by the Shaikh to their popular, although not their political, demands.<sup>245</sup>

Family members vying with the ruler for authority is a typical power relation in the Gulf region,<sup>246</sup> yet, in Qatar, the ruling family's repeated requests for increases in the family allowance, coupled with their tendency to purchase arms and riot if these increases were denied, represented a serious security threat.<sup>247</sup> Several features of the Qatari political economy have exacerbated and encouraged the development of these fissures: personal and autocratic practices of rule; the dependence of the ruler on his family's support for legitimacy; the large size of the ruling family relative to the population (in terms of absolute size, it is smaller only than the Al Sauds); and the absence, at least until the 1950s, of alternative sources of income other than to petition the ruler for greater family allocations.<sup>248</sup> Both rent-seeking and more substantial challenges to authority have thus long been a central element of intra-state relations in Qatar.

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<sup>243</sup> See details in Ibid, 145-150.

<sup>244</sup> Other demands included expansion of social welfare, greater Qatarisation in government and QPC, establishment of a budget, greater popular representation, recognition of trade unions, better utility rates, and a movie house and broadcasting station. Ibid, 153.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>246</sup> See Ibid, 129; Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 109-126; Mehran Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," *Middle East Journal* 63:3 (Summer, 2009) 401-420

<sup>247</sup> Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf," 30-92.

<sup>248</sup> See Herb, *All in the Family*.



By the 1960s, then, the ruler of Qatar faced a dual challenge: from a society that had become increasingly adept at organising and iterating their demands, and from members of his own family, who remained factionalised and continued to make rent-seeking demands. The threat of assassination or revolt orchestrated by family members was very real. In 1957, for example, detonators were discovered at the home of an Al Thani amid rumours that Shaikh Ali's palace had been mined, and in 1960 Shaikh Khalifa's brother, Nasir Hamad, attempted to kill Shaikh Ali in Lebanon.<sup>249</sup> In February 1972, Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani, whose role in the day-to-day management of state affairs had grown steadily throughout the 1960s, seized power from Ahmad, with the support of the British and a faction of the royal family largely composed of his brothers and sons, ensuring his religious legitimacy by having the chief cleric support the coup in his Friday mosque sermon.<sup>250</sup>

Shaikh Khalifa was the first Qatari ruler to shift his basis of support from the royal family to broader society. Although some social services had been introduced during Ahmad's reign, development was constrained by the allocation of oil revenues to the royal family (under Ahmad, 25 percent of oil revenues went to the ruler and at least another 25 percent to the royal family).<sup>251</sup> In contrast to Qatar's previous rulers, Khalifa curtailed the power of the royal family and cut allowances, first transferring his own quarter of revenue to the state budget and subsequently announcing 20-30 percent increases in social aid, raises to civil servant and armed forces wages, and old age pensions. To cement his popular legitimacy, he also cancelled all outstanding payments on public housing, enacted price controls on some consumer goods, and, within 12 months, oversaw construction of 2,500 new, free, housing units.<sup>252</sup>

Khalifa also sought to buttress his legitimacy by reforming Qatar's institutions, establishing an appointed Majlis al-Shura of 20 members, (subsequently expanded to 30 in 1975), composed of members of societal elites, including leaders of key tribes, merchants, educated elites, and regional representatives.<sup>253</sup> These reforms indicated that state-society relations remained highly allocative but were becoming more inclusive of wider society, and, combined with responses to 1950s and 1960s leftist movements,

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<sup>249</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 126,153-155.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 156; Herb, *All in the Family*, 115-116.

<sup>251</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 156.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 156-157.

<sup>253</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 37.

also indicated a greater level of responsiveness and consultation with society than had previously been the case.

State-society relations, however, remained heavily skewed towards the state, and formal political participation was limited. The Majlis al-Shura had clear restrictions on its powers – it was able to review legislation but not make wider demands on the ruler – and, in any case, it was formed of appointed elites that the ruler was personally focused on coopting.<sup>254</sup> Business interests, weak in the 1940s, had by now broadened with the return of merchant families to Qatar, but were either linked to the oil industry or heavily dependent on state contracts that were, in turn, funded by rents. Wider society engaged with the state largely through informal links with the ruling elite – and it is worth noting here that some estimates of these linkages extend to half the Qatari citizenry, an unusual feature of Qatar’s small population that reinforces the cooptive capacity of the state and ruling elite.<sup>255</sup>

Another feature of this period, driven by development policies based on hydrocarbon exportation, was an increasing reliance on migrant workers, as well as unprecedented numbers of Qataris joining an expanding state bureaucracy.<sup>256</sup> Foreign labour, which reached almost 60 percent of the total population in 1970 and has increased steadily since then,<sup>257</sup> coupled with the decline in pan-Arabism, weakened Qatari organised labour, especially as Qataris moved into civil servant positions and thereby became part of the ‘state’ itself, making them less likely to externally challenge its authority.<sup>258</sup> It would take several decades for the expanded Qatari education system to produce a significant number of citizens that could accept high-skill positions in the private sector,

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 37

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>256</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, “Arab versus Asian migrant workers in the GCC countries,” in *South Asian Migration to Gulf Countries: History, Policies, Development*, ed. Prakash C. Jain and Ginu Zacharia Oommen (New York: Routledge, 2016); J. S. Birks, I. J. Seccombe, and C. A. Sinclair, “Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf: The Impact of Declining Oil Revenues,” *The International Migration Review* 20:4 (Winter 1986) 799-814; Claude Berribi, Francisco Martorell, and Jeffery C. Tanner, “Qatar’s Labor Markets at a Crucial Crossroad,” *Middle East Journal* 63: 3 (Summer 2009) 421 – 442; Maurice Girgis, “National Versus Migrant Workers in the GCC: Coping with Change,” in *Employment Creation and Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Heba Handoussa and Zafiriz Tzannatos (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002).

<sup>257</sup> Emile Nakhleh, “Labor Markets and Citizenship in Bahrayn and Qatar,” *Middle East Journal* 31:2 (Spring 1977) 154.

<sup>258</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, this means that public servants served dual roles, and acted variably in the interest of the state (through their professional life) and society (through their private interests). See also discussion of class interests and rent-based development in ‘extreme’ rentiers in Herb, *The Wages of Oil*.

and, by that time, the preference for stable employment in the public sector would be entrenched in the Qatari workforce.

Political opposition during this period was diminished and did not operate openly.<sup>259</sup> The pro-democracy wave that flooded Kuwait and the region after the Gulf War resulted in a 1992 signed letter from 54 prominent Qataris, calling for greater political participation (including an elected assembly), transparency, and greater civil and political rights. However, the government quickly detained some of its more prominent signatories and the effort was soon overshadowed by border disputes between Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>260</sup>

However, these societal mobilisations provided justification for a challenge of a different sort. In June 1995, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani overthrew his father, citing frustration with the slow pace of political reforms under Khalifa and promising an era of greater responsiveness. There was, writes Gray, “an expectation of considerable political change – only a small amount of which has occurred thus far – and of social change and modernization” under Hamad.<sup>261</sup> Like other young rulers who came to power in the 1990s, such as Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad Al Thani was viewed as a reformist figure, more open to political and economic liberalisation than his predecessors.<sup>262</sup>

Hamad certainly seemed open to (limited) economic liberalisation, creating the Doha securities market in 1995, amending the laws on foreign investment in 1997 to allow for foreign nationals as equity partners, and privatising Qatar’s power and water desalination plants in 1998. He also took the lead in developing Qatar’s gas industry, drawing from foreign partnerships to invest in infrastructure to support liquid natural gas (LNG) production. Writes Ulrichsen: “the first export of LNG cargo took place in 1995 and the pace of development was such that in 2006 Qatar overtook Indonesia to become the largest exporter of LNG in the world”.<sup>263</sup> Coupled with the rise in global gas prices since 2002, particularly those achieved in long-term bilateral agreements with states such as Japan, South Korea, and China, Qatar has managed to leverage gas “to

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<sup>259</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 43.

<sup>260</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 184-185.

<sup>261</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 48.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>263</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014) 32.

transform the barren peninsula into the world's richest country, on a per capita basis".<sup>264</sup> On top of burgeoning gas receipts, Hamad also created Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), in 2005, which re-invests Qatar's considerable oil and gas revenue, and encouraged the development of competitive and efficient SOEs.<sup>265</sup> It is worth noting here that, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the royal family itself has played a prominent role in the private sector, along with a number of notable Qatari (and Gulf) families, who also often have positions in government.<sup>266</sup> The domestic economic sector, then, remains oligarchical, and closely linked to the state via clientelist and personal ties.

Hamad's other reforms were political and social in nature, making overtures towards the GCC, announcing an end to media censorship, and dissolving the once-feared Ministry of Information.<sup>267</sup> The creation of Al Jazeera in 1996, a technically autonomous but state-funded media body, chaired by a member of the royal family, would greatly heighten international awareness of Qatar and of Hamad's initiatives, suggesting his reforms were intended for an international audience as well as to reinforce his domestic legitimacy.<sup>268</sup> Other state-funded but nominally independent bodies were also created during Hamad's reign, most notably Qatar Foundation in 1995, chaired by then-First Lady Shaikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, the most publicly visible of Shaikh Hamad's three wives. Qatar Foundation is behind a large number of social, research and education initiatives, including the Qatar National Research Fund and Qatar Science and Technology Park, which fund domestic and international research projects based in Qatar, and Education City, which allowed a number of prestigious international universities to set up campuses in Qatar and offer education to international and domestic students.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Jim Krane and Steven Wright, "Qatar 'Rises Above' its Region: Geopolitics and the Rejection of the GCC Gas Market," *Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance, and Globalisation in the Gulf States* 35 (March 2014) 9-10.

<sup>265</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 10.

<sup>266</sup> Examples of royal family members involved in finance and state investment include Shaikh Hamad bin Thamer bin Mohammad Al Thani, Chairman of Al Jazeera and Al-Gharafa Sports Club, and Shaikh Khalifa bin Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani, Chair of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Notable merchant families include al-Mahmud, al-Attiyah, Jaidah, al-Mannai, al-Jaber, al-Fardan, al-Mana and al-Ghani. See *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>267</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of media freedom in Qatar post-2011; suffice it to say that Qatar's media landscape is strongly self-censored and could not be characterised as 'free'.

<sup>268</sup> This is the argument in Andrew Rathmell and Kirsten Schulze, "Political Reform in the Gulf: The Case of Qatar," *Middle East Studies* 36:4 (October 2000) 47-62; see also Louay Y. Bahry, "The New Arab Media Phenomenon: Qatar's Al Jazeera," *Middle East Policy* 8:2 (June 2001) 88-99.

<sup>269</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 60; Jason E. Lane and Kevin Kinser, "Reconsidering Privatization in Cross-Border Engagements: The Sometimes Public Nature of Private Activity," *Higher Education Policy* 24 (2011) 255-273.

In terms of political liberalisation, 1999 marked Qatar's first ever elections for public office, with candidates running for the 29-seat Central Municipal Council (CMC), an advisory board under the umbrella of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture. As in Bahrain, reforms were legitimised through public referendum, and in 2003, 96.6 percent of participating Qataris expressed support for the new constitution (subsequently enacted through Emiri decree in 2004), whereby 30 of 45 seats in the Majlis al-Shura would be elected.

Elections for the Majlis al-Shura, however, have been continually delayed and, as of mid-2016, have yet to take place. The stalling of political reform since the early 2000s suggests Hamad's agenda was driven not by popular calls for change – although there were certainly Qataris who desired greater political liberalisation – but by an effort to strengthen his legitimacy by appearing as a reformist figure to the international community, not least to the United States, with whom Qatar had signed a defence cooperation agreement after the 1990-91 Gulf War.<sup>270</sup> Poor turnout for subsequent CMC elections – as low as 38 percent of 24,125 registered voters, or less than 2 percent of the total population, in 2003 – reflects Qatari apathy toward a body that has very little real power.<sup>271</sup> Said one Qatari, frankly: “People are not interested in a council that absolutely has no power whatsoever to do anything. I don't even know why they're still there, to tell the truth”.<sup>272</sup>

Hamad's agenda, then, though it had driven a number of economic reforms, including the ambitious *Qatar 2030 Vision*,<sup>273</sup> still rested on a highly cooptive state-society relationship with little institutionalised political participation. Rent-funded benefits accessible to Qataris include: free healthcare and education (including at prestigious universities in Education City); free utilities; and near-guaranteed public service employment for all high school graduates, which comes with a generous housing

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<sup>270</sup> Rathmell and Schulze, “Political Reform in the Gulf,” 47-62.

<sup>271</sup> Habib Trabelsi and Faisal Baatout, “Apathy Prevails Ahead of Qatar's Municipal Polls,” *Middle East Online* (30 March 2007) <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=20188> accessed 16 August 2014; Population statistics drawn from Qatar Statistics Authority, “Social Statistics 2003-2012,” *Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics* (March 2014) 7. Government population estimates do not differentiate between Qataris and expatriates, but even a conservative estimate of the number of Qatari citizens – say 100,000 – would still mean that only 9 percent of Qataris participated in the 2003 poll.

<sup>272</sup> Author interview, Doha 2013.

<sup>273</sup> See a Qatari view on *Vision 2030* in Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, “The Visions and Strategies of the GCC Countries from the Perspective of Reforms: The Case of Qatar,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5:1 (January – March 2012) 86-106. The *Vision 2030* plan was headed by then-Crown Prince Tamim, who became Emir in 2013. See Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring*, 84.

allowance (doubled if married). Qatari men married to Qatari women can also receive a regular government stipend, and all Qatari citizens can receive plots of land (from 700-1,500 square meters) and an interest-free loan of 850,000 Qatari riyals to develop it. “Significantly,” writes Kamrava, to receive these benefits, “Qataris need to apply directly to the Amiri Diwan, a process through which the Amir’s patronage is reinforced both symbolically and practically”.<sup>274</sup> Hamad also embarked on an identity-building project aimed at creating a unified Qatari heritage that strengthens both Qatari national identity and the ruling family legitimacy, as well as presenting a stable and attractive image to foreign investors. This national “branding” strategy includes the construction and rehabilitation of sites such as Souq Waqif, Katara Cultural Village, the Museum of Islamic Art and other developments that support tourism and economic diversification, but, even more importantly, project an image of the state as protecting and promoting Qatari identity and values, and Muslim and Arab culture more generally.<sup>275</sup>

There are substantial economic benefits then, encouraging acceptance of the rentier bargain in Qatar, as well as evidence of more indirect use of oil and gas rents to support traditional and cultural legitimacy. However, while society is largely coopted and political organisations banned, isolated expressions of opposition exist, driven more by backlashes against the large number of expatriates and social liberalisation, rather than demands to increase political participation in the rentier system. There have also been some further examples of royal factionalism, most notably a 1996 coup attempt by members of the royal family and tribes such as the al-Ghafran clan of the āl-Murra tribe, who attempted to re-install ex-Emir Khalifa to power. There were further reports of coup attempts in the following years, including in 2002 and 2005 (both allegedly linked to Saudi Arabia and ex-Emir Khalifa), and less clear reports claiming that internal coups, driven by the military, were foiled in 2009, 2011, and 2012, but the 2009-2012 reports were ultimately drawn from questionable sources, including Ilaf.com, a Saudi-owned, London-based website, and, in 2012, an Al Arabiya report that was briefly online but quickly removed (and Al Arabiya later claimed their site had been hacked by the Syrian Electronic Army).<sup>276</sup> In the absence of concrete information, Fromherz posits

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<sup>274</sup> Kamrava, “Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar,” 406.

<sup>275</sup> Gray, *Qatar*, 159 – 180.

<sup>276</sup> See also Al Bawaba, “Report: Qatar Emir Foils Coup Attempt Amid Growing Tensions,” (28 February 2011) <http://www.albawaba.com/main-headlines/report-qatar-emir-foils-coup-attempt-amid-growing-tensions> accessed 14 June 2016; Doha News, “Updated: Regional Media Spread Reports of Fake Qatar Coup Attempt,” (17 April 2012) <http://dohanews.co/updated-regional-media-spread-reports-of-fake-qatar/> accessed 14 June 2016; Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring*, 29-30; Al Arabiya, “shabiḥa al-’assad

that the reports may have been part of “an elaborate public relations ruse by Saudi Arabia to paint the Emir’s picture in Qatar, falsely, as unstable”.<sup>277</sup> Ultimately, despite the potential for intra-family discord, there was no widespread civil society organisation poised to organise demonstrations on the eve of 2011, nor were there public challenges to Hamad’s rule domestically; most Qataris instead displayed strong loyalty to him and the Al Thani family.

Qatar’s historical dynamics, then, have resulted in a number of consequences for the state-society relationship that had emerged by late-2010, including: an expanded (but inefficient) government bureaucracy, through which considerable rent-based wealth is distributed to society; a longstanding awareness of the importance of carefully balancing foreign interests to retain independence; a domestic merchant class and civil society clustered around the state, dependent on allocations of rent and prestige, and thus unlikely to form a significant public challenge; and repeated instances of internal government factionalism driven by a restive and large royal family.<sup>278</sup> While legal-rational practices have emerged in some settings, traditional forms of legitimacy hold the balance of power in Qatari state-society relations, particularly as expatriates and Qataris remain, for the most part, socially segregated, and links with the state tend to reinforce neopatrimonial practices of rule. Moreover, there exist few independent societal bodies with sufficient political power to challenge state authority. Hamad’s rule lasted only a few more years before he abdicated to his son, Tamim, in 2013, but the state-society relations created and reshaped under him and his predecessors have continued to impact state and societal reactions to the Arab Spring since 2011.

## Oman

Unlike the relatively homogenous Qatar, the history of Oman could be more accurately described as the history of three interrelated but culturally and socially distinct regions: the seafaring, mercantile empire based in Muscat; the religiously conservative and tribal Imamate interior; and the restive southern region of Dhofar.<sup>279</sup> They have had varying

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yuzūwurūn ṣafḥa <<al-‘arabiya.net>> al-asthedāf qatar,” (17 April 2012)  
<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/04/17/208380.html> accessed 14 June 2016.

<sup>277</sup> Fromherz, *Qatar*, 94, 144.

<sup>278</sup> See also Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring*.

<sup>279</sup> For more on the history of Muscat, see J. Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). For the Imamate interior, see John C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). The history of Dhofar is best covered in Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. 1, Historical Part 1B, 589-601; S.B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1966)

levels of contact with each other, and with the outside world. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the Imamate (at that time controlling both Muscat and the interior) was a naval heavyweight in the Gulf region, driving out the Portuguese in 1650 and controlling a maritime empire stretching from Mombasa to Kilwa on the coast of East Africa to the Malaba coast of India, the southern tribes and nomadic mountain Bedouins of Dhofar had more cultural and linguistic similarities with northern Yemen than the rest of contemporary Oman.<sup>280</sup> These divisions, attests John Wilkinson, “are very deep fundamental splits in the Omani regional personality”, and their emergence and character deserve elaboration.<sup>281</sup>

The Imamate, itself a product of succession disputes in early Islamic history resulting in a sect of Islam, Ibādism, that is traditionally resistant to centralised authority and opposed to hereditary rule, was established in Oman in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>282</sup> Its Omani adherents were primarily members of Arab tribes of 'Azd origin who had migrated many centuries earlier and settled across the north-eastern and interior regions of Oman, particularly in the Jabal al-Akhdar region.<sup>283</sup> From its inception, then, the Imamate managed both religious and tribal identities; the selection of Nizwa, politically neutral tribal territory, as the capital of the First Imamate reflects this reality.<sup>284</sup> What followed was a succession of Imamates, punctuated by collapse and dynastic struggles, involving tribes such as the 'Azd, Yaḥmad, Kharūṣ, Nabāhina, Ya'āribā, Ghāfirī and Hināwī (to name only a few). Of particular importance for the role they were to play in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the al-Khalīlī line within the Kharūṣ tribe, whose descendants were among the last Imams, and the Āl Bū Sa'īdīs (hereafter Al Busaidis), a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Imamate dynasty and Oman's 'royal' family today.<sup>285</sup> There appeared little in the way of a 'state' during this period; rather, political power was vested in an Imam, elected by

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498-514; J. E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: SAQI Books, 2007) 183-395; It is worth noting, however, that there is very little coverage of Dhofari history before the 18<sup>th</sup> century; likewise, prior to Wilkinson's *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, reliable sources on the history of the Ibādī interior from the start of the millennia to the advent of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century were scarce.

<sup>280</sup> There is some suggestion that Dhofar was once held by the Portuguese and then passed to the Imamate; however there is thus far little confirmed historical evidence for this. It seems more likely that, until the interventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Southern region was functionally independent, trading in commodities like frankincense with the rest of the country but not interfered with directly. See Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. I, Part 1B, 589.

<sup>281</sup> Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 40.

<sup>282</sup> John C. Wilkinson, *Ibadism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>283</sup> Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>284</sup> Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 206-207.

<sup>285</sup> The ruling line within the Al Busaidi family is referred to as Āl Sa'īd (Al Said), rather than Al Busaidi, hence Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said is the current head of the Al Busaidi dynasty.



the Ibādī Ulama, while military forces belonged to individual tribes, resulting in a balance between tribal and Imami authority that could support only a minimalist form of statehood.<sup>286</sup>

Though the Imamate controlled most of contemporary Oman (excepting Dhofar) for much of the last thousand years, the dynastic disputes that consumed its energies generally played out in the interior. The urban coast, particularly the port cities of Sohar and Muscat, instead contended with foreign powers seeking to dominate Oman's lucrative trading position. Under the Ya'āribā dynasty (1650-1740s) Oman had succeeded in driving out the Portuguese (who had occupied Muscat from 1507 and Sohar from 1616) and building an empire supported by trade in spices, frankincense, ivory, gold, silks, and slaves, yet the rule of many cities was entrusted to a Wālī, or Governor.<sup>287</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a series of political intrigues and insurrections by the descendants of Ahmed bin Said (also known as Al Busaidi, elected as Imam in 1744) and their tribal allies resulted in further separation between Muscat and the interior, governed from Nizwa or Rustaq.<sup>288</sup> Just before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, three of Al Busaidi's sons contended for control of the country: Said, who was recognised as Imam by the Ibādī Ulama and ruled in Rustaq; Qais, who controlled Sohar; and Sultan, who conquered Muscat.<sup>289</sup> Ultimately, Sultan achieved de facto ruler status (despite Said still holding traditional Imamate legitimacy) due to his role in repelling Wahhabi advances and expanding Oman's overseas prospects. Yet the competition denotes three key aspects of Omani state-society relations at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a confirmed tendency towards hereditary sovereignty within a single family; the granting of Waliships or other positions of authority to relations of the ruler; and multiple power centres (including not only Nizwa, Rustaq, Sohar, Muttrah, and Muscat, but also Oman's overseas interests such as Mombasa and Zanzibar), formed by various claimants to authority.<sup>290</sup>

It also became increasingly clear that foreign powers, particularly Britain, were to play a critical role in reinforcing the authority of some rulers over others; yet obtaining foreign

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid, 200-205.

<sup>287</sup> Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman*; for internal governance, see Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>288</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. I, Part 1A, 407-440; and Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, 265-303.

<sup>289</sup> A fourth brother, Saif, and his descendants would vie for leadership through alliance with the Wahhabis and connections in East Africa. See Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 226-228.

<sup>290</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. I, Part 1A, 419.

support did not assure legitimacy in other parts of Oman.<sup>291</sup> This was particularly the case for the Muscat regime under Sultan's successor, Said bin Sultan, which, in developing its maritime empire, had alienated much of its Imamate legitimacy, and as a result became increasingly dependent on external powers.<sup>292</sup> Although they could not ensure the support of the Imamate interior, the British were able to navigate a series of succession disputes, the most important of which occurred upon Said bin Sultan's death in 1857. The final result of British mediation in the late 1850s was the separation of African and Arabian territories, each being ruled separately by a descendant of Said: this agreement in 1861 marked the end of Muscat's imperial history in East Africa, though descendants of Sultan bin Ahmad continued to rule there until the 1960s, and the beginning of the 'Sultan' era.<sup>293</sup>

Separating Oman into distinct and internationally recognised territories encouraged the development of two very different types of state-society relations: the traditional minimalist statehood of the Imamate, and a type of urban tribalism special to the coastal region, where the authority of the ruler was increasingly based on foreign relations. Unfortunately, these agreements did nothing to solve succession disputes, and tribal disturbances and insurrections (particularly between two opposing confederations, al-Hināwī and al-Ghāfirī), punctuated by attempted Wahhabi and Persian invasions, characterise much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>294</sup>

Of particular importance was a vicious feud between the Al Busaidi rulers and the Ibādī Ulama, who by now viewed the Muscat regime as unacceptably dependent on the British and in 1913 elected a new Imam whose authority challenged that of the Al Busaidi ruler in Muscat.<sup>295</sup> In 1920, as a result of continued hostilities between the British-supported forces of the Sultan and tribal-supported forces of Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi, the British negotiated the Treaty of Seeb, which recognised *de facto* separation of the Sultanate of Muscat and the Imamate interior, leaving the latter autonomous from the former for three decades.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 524, 534-535.

<sup>292</sup> Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 70, 228.

<sup>293</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. I, Part 1A, 470-471.

<sup>294</sup> Persian invasions were more prominent during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and earlier) whereas Wahhabi/Saudi machinations were key to the 1950s Muscat-Imamate conflict.

<sup>295</sup> Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 230-243.

<sup>296</sup> Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 90-96.

Contemporaneously, global politics in the lead-up to the two world wars meant oil was becoming a securitised (and lucrative) commodity. With the break-up of Oman's empire and autonomy of the Imamate had come greater stability of succession in the Sultanate of Muscat. Yet it soon emerged that much of Oman's oil resources were likely to lie not within the territory controlled by the Sultanate of Muscat – which had positive relations with foreign powers and, through them, oil companies – but within the Imamate interior, where power was diffuse and spread between tribal shaikhs. This became particularly problematic when Sultan Said bin Taymur, who had styled himself as the 'Sultan of Muscat and Oman', granted an oil concession to Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in 1937 that included these interior territories.<sup>297</sup> The search for oil eventuated in a dispute over control of the Al Buraimi Oasis, which sits on today's border with Al Ain in the UAE. The Imamate, recognising that it could not overpower the combined strength of the Sultanate, PDO, and their British supporters, called on the Wahhabis to intervene, which, with the support of US-owned ARAMCO (American-Arabian Oil Company),<sup>298</sup> they did.

This transformed an Omani issue over sovereignty of the interior region (and its potential oil wealth) into violent conflict, pitting the Imamate and interior tribes, with support of the Saudis and the US, against the Sultanate and their British allies.<sup>299</sup> Yet the Imamate itself was by this time internally weak, particularly following the death of Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili in 1954 and the election of a politically weaker successor, who reinforced his authority through Saudi patronage.<sup>300</sup> With British military and financial support and the collapse of the Imamate in the late 1950s, the Sultan of Muscat was able to finally assert dominance over interior Oman, capturing Jabal al-Akhdar in 1958 and integrating the interior into the Sultanate.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> The full concession was granted in 1944. PDO was originally owned by several Western companies, including: Royal Dutch Shell (23.75%), the Anglo-Persian Company (the forerunner of BP, 23.75%), Compagnie Française des Pétroles (23.75%), the Near East Development Company (the forerunner of ExxonMobil, 23.75%) and Partex (5%). Today, PDO is owned by the Government of Oman (60%), Royal Dutch Shell (34%), Total (4%) and Partex (2%).

<sup>298</sup> Around the time of the Al Buraimi dispute, ARAMCO was owned by Standard Oil of New Jersey (the forerunner of Exxon, 30%), Socony Vacuum (later Mobil, 10%), Standard Oil of California (later Chevron, 30%), and Texaco (30%). Saudi Arabia obtained 100% ownership of ARAMCO in 1980, and changed the name to Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi ARAMCO) in 1988.

<sup>299</sup> Abu Dhabi, which claimed half of al-Buraimi, was also opposed to Saudi control of the oasis. In the context of strengthened pan-Arabism and because the Imamate portrayed their cause as anti-colonial, the Imamate also received support from Nasserist leftists.

<sup>300</sup> See complete details of this rebellion in Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*; and details of the collapse of the Imamate in Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*.

<sup>301</sup> There was continued small-scale resistance among some tribes in the interior until the early 1970s, however as the new Imam, Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai, and his supporters had fled overseas, support for the Imamate gradually died out.

Just as Wahhabi forces had infiltrated interior Oman in the 1950s, leftist-nationalism had similarly spread within the southern region of Dhofar, especially as pan-Arab sentiment grew across the Middle East.<sup>302</sup> Sultan Said bin Taymur's governance was key to the disaffection of the South, as his management of state finances had left Dhofar virtually undeveloped and meant Dhofaris had to travel abroad for work, where they adopted Marxist and pan-Arab ideologies.<sup>303</sup> Leftist networks stretched across linguistic and social divides, eliciting support both among the Kathīrī tribes in Salalah and the coastal plain, and the non-Arabic speaking jabbālīs (tribes who lived in the southern mountains).<sup>304</sup> As Dhofaris were largely Sunni Muslims, the Ibādī Imamate had limited authority in the South; nor did the externally oriented and urban Muscat regime appeal to Dhofaris, especially as it was headed by Sultan Said bin Taymur. Rather, transnational support from foreign communist powers (such as Maoist China and Soviet Russia), and the independence of South Yemen radicalised the Dhofari rebel movement and drove the emergence of Marxist-Leninist organisations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG, or the Front). By early 1970, most of Dhofar was under the Front's control, yet the hard-core Marxist ideology of the rebellion's leaders, particularly the rejection of Islam, tribalism and traditional social structures, had only narrow appeal; the real driver of conflict was discontent with state leadership that had left Dhofar without great political or economic power.<sup>305</sup>

This meant that after the 23 July 1970 coup where Sultan Qaboos bin Said (hereafter Sultan Qaboos), with the active support of the British, overthrew his father and demonstrated commitment to a radical shift in governance, popular support for the Front in Dhofar began to weaken, though it was not until 1975 that the extension of central authority across the whole of Oman was complete.<sup>306</sup> It is worth making some note on the composition of Omani society at this point, as it is central to the state-society relations that subsequently developed. This chapter has thus far discussed the history of Muscat largely in terms of tribal struggles and the involvement of foreign powers.

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<sup>302</sup> This region had first been annexed by Sultan Said bin Sultan al-Saidi in 1829, but then left untouched for half a century.

<sup>303</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 183-193.

<sup>304</sup> Some jabbālī tribes had adopted Arabic, but most had not and their ancient linguistic heritage in Yemen and South Arabia has to some extent defined their community borders. See J. E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Southern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58:2 (Spring 2004) 254-269.

<sup>305</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*.

<sup>306</sup> Among other attractions, Sultan Qaboos's mother, Mazoon bint Ahmad, was from the jabbālī Bayt al-Ma'shāni tribe in Dhofar, and had strong personal affiliations in the southern region. *Ibid.*

However, the Muscat community is diverse and its international and urban character much stronger than other parts of the country. Centuries of seafaring, migration and its historical trading centre status had brought merchants from India, Persia, Baluchistan, Goa, Somalia, and Armenia, slaves came from East Africa, while the oil industry and imperial interests in the Gulf region brought the Portuguese, French, British, Dutch, and various other Europeans as diplomats or representing commercial interests.<sup>307</sup> Although the majority of the Omani population remains Ibādī, Muscat and the Batinah (the stretch of coast from Muscat to the UAE border that includes many major cities of Oman) are also home to a large number of Sunni and Shia communities, including the Lawātiyya, Shia of (most likely) Indian origins who form an important part of the commercial elite, and a small number of Baḥārna, who migrated from other parts of the Gulf.<sup>308</sup> While the northern regions of Oman are ethnically and religiously diverse, Dhofaris are almost entirely Sunni Arabs (largely Shāfi‘ī, though a Ḥanbālī minority resides in Salalah). Religious homogeneity, however, belies the separate linguistic communities that exist in the mountainous South, between al-Ḥarsūsī, al-Mahrī, al-Qāra, and al-Shaḥrī (among others), each of which speak a non-Arabic language with roots in South Arabia and ancient Yemen, and complicating nation-building strategies.<sup>309</sup> Further, a notable consequence of Oman’s historical empire was the spread of practices preferred by the Imamate and Muscat elite – tribal (or quasi-tribal) forms of governance, for example – to diverse communities in Zanzibar, the Malaba coast of India, and Dhofar. In Zanzibar, decades of intermarriage and cross-cultural communication have resulted in a large number of ‘Zanzibari Omanis’ who closely guard their Omani identity and many of whom have converted to Ibādism. Various migratory waves to and from Oman over the past three centuries have brought these groups from the periphery to the core, resulting in the incorporation of those communities into the modern Omani ‘nation’. Following the 1964 revolution in Zanzibar, for example, many Zanzibari Omanis fled to Oman, especially after Sultan Qaboos had come to power. This community spoke both Swahili, English, and, to some extent, Arabic, formed one of the most highly educated groups in Oman in the early 1970s, and obtained middle-to-high positions in the burgeoning bureaucracy.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> J. E. Peterson, “Oman’s Diverse Society: Northern Oman,” *Middle East Journal* 58:1 (Winter 2004) 31-51.

<sup>308</sup> Unlike in Bahrain, where Baḥārna refers to a specific community of rural Shia who are (according to folk history, at least) indigenous to the island, in Oman Baḥārna refers to any Arab Shia.

<sup>309</sup> Peterson, “Oman’s Diverse Society: Southern Oman”; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>310</sup> See information on Zanzibari Omanis in Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi, “The Arabs in Zanzibar: From Sultanate to People’s Republic,” *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 7:2 (1986) 404-418; Anthony Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution and Its Aftermath* (London: C. Hurst, 1981); Valerie J. Hoffman, “The

Aiming to consolidate authority in the wake of two rebellions, Sultan Qaboos faced the challenge of building, for the first time, a national unity that could encompass the urban coast, the Ibādī interior, and the restive South, as well as all the communities within them. To some extent, Qaboos had “inherited a territory without a state” and immediately faced the need to build his domestic legitimacy.<sup>311</sup> The cornerstone of the government’s strategy during the Dhofar rebellion had been to encourage defections from the Front and build legitimacy through economic development and wealth distributions;<sup>312</sup> this strategy continued post-conflict and marks the emergence of institutionalised legal-rational authority based on material transfers from state to society.

A central element of legitimacy-building involved the pacification and cooptation of formerly rebellious groups, thus one of Qaboos’s earliest moves was to offer amnesty to all opponents of his father’s regime. Many individuals were offered high positions within Qaboos’s new government: a notable example is the nephew of Imam Muhammad al-Khalili, Shaikh Saud bin Ali al-Khalili, who became Oman’s first Minister of Education.<sup>313</sup> A second element of state-building was a concerted effort to modernise the country through the establishment of public education, development of infrastructure, and distribution of Oman’s newly discovered (in 1967) oil revenues, which, due to the 1973-74 OAPC oil embargo, had more than quadrupled in 1974 from 1970-1972 levels.<sup>314</sup> Resources were particularly directed at securing the support of dissident groups or historically restive regions like Dhofar. Writes Peterson:

Emphasis was placed on Dhufar to the extent that some northern Omanis complained that Dhufaris were getting far more than their fair share of oil revenues: some 40 percent of government expenditure went to Dhufar in and just after the war years, despite the fact that Dhufaris constituted only 10 per cent or so of the country’s total citizenry.<sup>315</sup>

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Articulation of Ibadi Identity in Modern Oman and Zanzibar,” *The Muslim World* 94:2 (April 2004) 201-216; Marc Valeri, “Nation-building and Communities in Oman Since 1970: The Swahili-speaking Omanis in Search of Identity,” *African Affairs* 106:424 (2007) 479-496.

<sup>311</sup> Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); J. E. Peterson, “Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development,” *Middle East Policy* 11:2 (Summer 2004) 128.

<sup>312</sup> J. E. Peterson, *Oman’s Insurgencies*.

<sup>313</sup> J.E. Peterson, “The Emergence of Post-Traditional Oman,” *Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper No. 5, University of Durham* (January 2005) 9.

<sup>314</sup> Peterson, “Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development,” 127.

<sup>315</sup> Peterson, *Oman’s Insurgencies*, 416.

Oman's economic development policies are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, however, a key point, in terms of historical state-society relations, is that Omani development emerged not through institutionalised and transparent government spending, but, rather, as royal patronage: this explains in part why the Ministry of Diwan Affairs, established in 1972 and elevated to ministerial status in 1974, issued more contracts than the combination of all other ministries, until its replacement with the Palace Office in the late 1980s.<sup>316</sup> It is also worth noting that, in the 1970s, revenue from the oil industry went *directly* to the account of the Sultan, who then distributed it to government offices.<sup>317</sup> Moreover, when disagreements arose over particular positions, such as that of the Prime Minister in 1971, the Sultan stepped in and personally took over the position, further centralising power around his personage. Consequently, economic development since 1970 is viewed not as the organic result of the expanding oil industry, nor as driven by foreign powers, but rather attributed almost entirely to the agency of Sultan Qaboos and his exceptional control over the Omani polity; he is considered the “architect of modern Oman”.<sup>318</sup>

Expanding political participation, too, was a top-down process, framed as an act of Sultanistic benevolence and fulfilment of the Ibādī interpretation of Shūra (consultation), not driven by popular demands for participation. The Majlis Oman, referring to both the elected lower house (Majlis al-Shura) and appointed upper house (Majlis al-Dowla, transliterated as Majlis al-Dawla), has evolved slowly through various royal decrees, including: the 1981 creation of the appointed State Consultative Council (or al-majlis al-'istishārī lil-dawla); in 1991, the creation of a semi-elected Majlis al-Shura;<sup>319</sup> the 1994 expansion of the Majlis al-Shura and move toward proportional representation; the announcement of Oman's Constitution, or ‘Basic Law’ in 1996, which provided for the creation of the Majlis al-Dowla; reforms between 1997 and 2003 that gradually expanded suffrage to all citizens over 20 years of age; and, in 2011, royal decree 39/2011, which granted “legislative and audit powers” to the Majlis

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<sup>316</sup> Calvin Allen, Jr and W. Lynn Rigsbee II, *Oman Under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 41.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>318</sup> This language is ubiquitous in contemporary Oman, but see one example in Times of Oman, “Oman Salutes His Majesty on 42<sup>nd</sup> National Day,” (18 November 2012)

<http://www.timesofoman.com/News/Article-1711.aspx> accessed 25 July 2014.

<sup>319</sup> In that selected Omanis from each of Oman's 59 Wilayats elected three candidates, from whom the Sultan would choose one to serve in the Majlis al-Shura.

Oman.<sup>320</sup> It remains unclear, however, what the extent of these new powers are; for the moment, the Majlis Oman remains in practice a purely consultative body, devoid of legislative power, (nor, until the Omani Spring in 2011, were there major popular calls for it to have any).<sup>321</sup> Starting in 1977, Qaboos also made what might be termed an ‘annual royal tour’, whereby he would personally travel across the country and hear petitions from citizens; in many cases his decisions on these petitions led to tangible resolutions or even legislative changes, building his personal legitimacy.<sup>322</sup>

The centralisation of political power in Sultan Qaboos was also enabled by the weaker position of Oman’s royal family, relative to those of other Gulf states. Though many Al Busaidis occupy prominent roles in government, leaders of other tribes or commercial elites were potentially as powerful as an Al Busaidi family member, denoting a comparatively flat power structure where tribal, business and royal elites compete for patronage from the Sultan, who stands alone at the apex.<sup>323</sup> Further, as a result of Qaboos’s vulnerable position in the early years of his rule, the political power of these merchants remained essentially unchallenged prior to 2011, and many members of the merchant elite – for example brothers Qais Zawawi, who, until his death in 1995, served as Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Financial Affairs, and Omar Zawawi, whose official title is Senior Advisor for External Affairs but who holds considerable influence over both domestic and foreign policy – are also senior members of government.<sup>324</sup> Despite the stipulation in Oman’s Constitution (the ‘Basic Law’ of 1996) that members of Oman’s Cabinet should not serve on the board of directors for public companies, the 2001 appointment of Jumaa Ali Jumaa, Chairman of Al Ansari

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<sup>320</sup> Uzi Rabi, “Majlis al-Shura and Majlis al-Dawla: Weaving Old Practices and New Realities in the Process of State Formation in Oman,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38:4 (October 2002) 41-50; Peterson, “Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development”; Oman News Agency, “His Majesty the Sultan issued Royal Decree no. 39/2011,” *Muscat Daily* (14 March 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/His-Majesty-the-Sultan-issued-Royal-Decree-No-39-2011> accessed 15 June 2016.

<sup>321</sup> Whether this makes Oman autocratic and unlikely to ever willingly share power with society or simply subject to a slow evolutionary process of development that trends in the direction of reform is the subject of great dispute. See an interpretation favouring opposition views of Oman’s political development in Valeri, *Oman*, and another favouring government views in Sulaiman al-Farsi, *Democracy and Youth in the Middle East: Islam, Tribalism and the Rentier State in Oman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>322</sup> Dawn Chatty, “Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View from the Edge,” *Working Paper 173, QEH Working Paper Series, Oxford University* (May 2009) 12.

<sup>323</sup> See detailed overview of the role of the Al Busaidis under Qaboos including genealogies depicting the royal family members in Cabinet positions in Herb, *All in the Family*, 145-158.

<sup>324</sup> Valeri, *Oman*, 116-117; J. E. Peterson, “Rulers, Merchants and Sheikhs in Gulf Politics: The Function of Family Networks,” in *The Gulf Family: Kinship Policies and Modernity*, ed. Alanoud Alsharekh (London: Saqi, 2007) 32.



group, as Minister of Manpower suggests this was not necessarily enforced in practice.<sup>325</sup>

Consolidation of state authority was thus a very recent endeavour, and societal groups “continue to the present day to jealously safeguard their distinct identities” even where intermingling of groups has occurred.<sup>326</sup> In Dhofar, the recent nature of the 1970s rebellion means that leftist tendencies continue to elicit (some) support (particularly among older, former dissidents), and, across Oman, tribalism, Ibādism, and traditional patrimonial relations remain central elements of Omani politics. State-building efforts have not directly negated these identities or traditional relations inasmuch as attempting to place the Omani national identity in a superior position, overcoming alternative allegiances by offering a new Omani identity underpinned by a re-shaped history and the promise of a bright future built on oil-based development and guided by Sultan Qaboos.<sup>327</sup>

Despite the expanded bureaucracy, there are few institutional intermediaries between state and society, or at least none with enough authority to challenge that of the Sultan. All laws in Oman, for example, are ‘royal decrees’ and any bureaucratic or institutional decision at any level remain subordinate to the personal decision of the Sultan.<sup>328</sup> Even Oman’s Constitution is an integral part of the nation-building project:

The Sultan himself presides over the *dawla*; he is called the “symbol of national unity” (art. 41). Emphasising the common aspects of Oman, the Basic Law downplays the heterogeneity of Omani culture and highlights instead a constructed national unity. This helps to strengthen the Sultan’s claim to authority over the entire territory of Oman.<sup>329</sup>

There is some indication that post-1970 economic development – particularly the spread of public education that increased literacy levels from only 44 percent in 1970 to 86.9 percent in 2012 – has driven the emergence of new societal groups that may challenge

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<sup>325</sup> Marc Valeri, “Liberalization from Above: Political Reforms and Sultanism in Oman,” in *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, ed. Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacomo Luciani (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006) 193.

<sup>326</sup> M. Reda Bhaker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: The Roots of British Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1994) xxvii.

<sup>327</sup> Valeri, *Oman*, 116-117.

<sup>328</sup> See discussion of institutions and political power in *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>329</sup> Nikolaus A. Seigfried, “Legislation and Legitimation in Oman: The Basic Law,” *Islamic Law and Society* 7:3 (October 2000) 371.

this traditional social contract, a point returned to in Chapter Four.<sup>330</sup> Certainly, there were issues associated with Oman's economic development that resulted in societal discontent: as discussed in Chapter Five, Omani economic development necessitated the arrival of large numbers of migrant workers, which in turn resulted in calls for greater Omanisation of the workforce. Before 2011, however, there were few cases of overt reform demands from society; those that did occur, such as a May 1998 demonstration of nurses, were limited to criticism of a specific issue, not a challenge to the overall system.<sup>331</sup> Two notable exceptions occurred in 1994 and 2005. The first was reportedly formed by highly-educated youth, mostly Sunni but with a sizable Ibādī contingent, drawing supporters from Muscat, Sharqiyya, and Dhofar, including several government officials. They were also, according to the regime, connected to the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>332</sup> The second group were Ibādī, including several conservative academics from Sultan Qaboos University, and were dedicated to spreading Ibādism, but neither group elicited widespread approval. Moreover, in both cases the Sultan personally pardoned almost all dissidents within a year of their arrest, in a display of benevolent patronage.<sup>333</sup> Minor disturbances – most memorably an incident where Omani police found it necessary to seize a donkey whose flank had been inscribed with an anti-regime political message – have also occurred but nevertheless indicate that, in general, popular opposition to state authority remained limited and hidden from the public sphere.<sup>334</sup>

On the eve of Oman's 2011 protests, then, Oman was vastly different to the country that Sultan Said bin Taymur had known during his rule. Economic and infrastructural development, funded almost entirely through the exportation of oil, had resulted in rapid

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<sup>330</sup> The statistics reported here are for all Omani adults, though literacy levels specifically among women were as low as 12 percent in the 1970s. Youth (15-24 years) literacy, the indicator of future Omani literacy, was 97.4 for males and 98.2 for females in 2012. Data drawn from United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), "Statistics: At a Glance: Oman," (last updated 27 December 2013) [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/oman\\_statistics.html#117](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/oman_statistics.html#117) accessed 26 July 2014; See also discussion of youth opinions and the emergence of bottom-up pressure for political reform in al-Farsi, *Democracy and Youth in the Middle East*.

<sup>331</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Oman* (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 1998) 11.

<sup>332</sup> Valeri, *Oman*, 184-187. Valeri claims these individuals belonged to a minority upper middle class, were highly-educated, and held good socioeconomic positions; this presents an interesting challenge to RST logic.

<sup>333</sup> Details on the 1994 case are unclear but reported in Mark N. Katz, "Assessing the Political Stability in Oman," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal* 8:3 (1 September 2004) <http://www.gloria-center.org/2004/09/spyer-2004-09-01/> accessed 17 August 2014; the 2005 details are well covered in Economist Intelligence Unity, *Country Report: Oman* (February 2005) 1-2; Marc Valeri, "Something Stirring Under the Still Waters of Oman," *Arabian Humanities* 14 (2007) 105-116; Abdullah Juma al-Haj, "The Politics of Participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: The Omani Consultative Council," *The Middle East Journal* 50:4 (Autumn 1996) 559-571.

<sup>334</sup> The donkey incident and other examples of opposition are detailed in Dale F. Eickelman, "Kings and People: Information and Authority in Oman, Qatar, and the Persian Gulf," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, ed. Joseph A. Kechichian (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 201.

improvements in education levels, access to electricity, roads, and other modern conveniences. Tribal authority, although pervasive throughout the country, had become subordinate to the Sultan's authority (yet was also perpetuated by the prominent status of tribal leaders in the Omani government). Commercial elites had faced very little challenge to their status and also remained influential members of the government. Religious and societal diversity, a result of Oman's unique history, spurred a concentrated process of cooptation through economic development that, while hardly financially sustainable, had certainly been effective in sustaining state legitimacy over the past few decades. There was both unity – in that the vast majority of Omanis had accepted the created Omani tradition and publicly announced their support for Sultan Qaboos – and fragmentation – in that regional, ethnic, and other markers of identity still defined, with some exceptions, community boundaries. There had been a few instances of public challenge to Sultanistic authority – stemming from traditional sources of resistance to Muscat rule – but most political opposition, if it existed, operated underground, remained fragmented, and, before 2011, had not demonstrated an ability to elicit widespread public support. It would take both pressure from the emerging Arab Spring and repeated public evidence of serious corruption to mobilise Omanis and bring opposition networks into the open, and, even then, there was strong resistance to any criticism of Sultan Qaboos himself.

## **Conclusion**

How, then, do these historical dynamics link to the political environment of the Gulf states since 2011? As Terry Lynn Karl argued over two decades ago, rentier states are “built on what already exists”.<sup>335</sup> While history does not *determine* what subsequently occurs in these states, it has certainly played a role in shaping state-society relations since 2011.

In Bahrain, the Baḥārna identity and contested founding myth has shaped Baḥrānī opposition to Al Khalifa rule, and, as discussed in Chapter Six, provided a nativist myth and rhetoric through which to reject Al Khalifa authority. Historical dynamics not only help to explain political loyalties; they have also shaped the specific demands and goals of protest movements. Bahraini protesters since 2011, for example, have explicitly cited the 2002 ‘failed’ constitutional promises and demanded the re-institution of the 1973 National Assembly in place of the current bicameral system.

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<sup>335</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 74.

In Qatar, the late emergence of legal-rational authority, particularly that the separation between the public and private purse occurred just as the state obtained enhanced cooptive power from the resumption of oil exportation, indicates that legal-rational authority and rentier legitimacy are intertwined. The small size of the Qatari citizenry, a relic of both geography and the economic crises of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, also enhances the cooptive power of the state, which in turn allowed Qatari rulers sufficient autonomy to pursue ambitious economic development projects, (though the rapid modernisation pursued under Hamad has also contributed to the perceived threat to traditional Qatari values). As discussed in Chapter Four, the backlash evident in Qatar between 2011 and 2016, both to social and economic liberalisation, must be understood within this context: it is not a rejection of modernisation in its entirety, but rather a product of the minority status of Qatari citizens in an increasingly foreign population.

In Oman, the historically fragmented nature of societal groups, even as they share a sense of ‘Omani-ness’, helps to explain why the 2011 mobilisations failed to create a national reform movement, instead operating as regionally discrete demonstrations. The continued strength of Ibādī traditional authority is also important: as discussed in Chapter Five, statements by Oman’s Grand Mufti, Shaikh Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili, and the Ibādī religious establishment in support of the state have contributed to the quiescence since 2011 of the Dakhliya region (which includes much of the territory of the former Imamate), relative to Batinah, Muscat, and Dhofar.<sup>336</sup> The strength of Oman’s national myth, which not only positions Qaboos as the “architect” of modern Oman, but also describes the period of his rule as the Omani nahḍa, or ‘Renaissance’, celebrating 23 July, the day on which he came to power in 1970, as “Blessed Renaissance Day,”<sup>337</sup> explains to a great extent the outpouring of support for the state and loyalist counter-protests that emerged in response to the Omani Spring in 2011.

These unique features of Qatari, Bahraini, and Omani politics highlight the importance of contextualising any ‘rentier’ state-society relationship. This dissertation now turns to the outcomes of its investigation of the rentier bargain in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman since 2011, and the implications of these state-society relations for RST.

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<sup>336</sup> See also Marc Valeri, “Simmering Unrest and Succession Challenges in Oman,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (January 2015).

<sup>337</sup> Oman News Agency, “His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said receives greetings for Blessed Renaissance Day,” *Times of Oman* (22 July 2015) <http://timesofoman.com/article/64128/Oman/His-Majesty-Sultan-Qaboos-bin-Said-receives-greetings-for-Blessed-Renaissance-Day> accessed 16 June 2016.

## Chapter 3 - State Diversity, Loyalists, and Passive Acceptance: Support for the Rentier State

Societal support, or at least acquiescence, is critical to the perpetuation of the rentier bargain. Even as an emerging trend in revisionist RST questions the effectiveness of cooptation mechanisms in preventing opposition on an individual level, there has been very little investigation of the complexity of *support* for the rentier state.<sup>338</sup> This chapter draws from in-depth interviews and detailed analysis of political, social, and economic developments in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman between 2011 and mid-2014 to address this gap. It first examines, crucially, how the *state* views its relationship with society, since this is the initial step in evaluating any assumed rentier bargain between state and society. Utilising a disaggregated understanding of the ‘state’ (as discussed in Chapter One) it finds that while there is *prima facie* evidence suggesting the state views its relationship with society as primarily allocative, deeper exploration revealed the state itself faces internal debate over its relationship with society. What this means, in a practical sense, is that some groups within the state are more inclined than others to respond to societal demands, some resist political reform but support economic liberalisation, and others have vested interests in maintaining the status quo, and that contestation for authority between these groups has shaped how the state engaged with society in the 2011 to mid-2014 period.

This chapter also draws an important distinction between *support for* and *acceptance of* the rentier state within society. *Active support* denotes the deliberate, repeated, and public promotion of rentier networks and the power relations underpinning them, including strong expressions of loyalty to the state and vehement rejection of opposition demands where they emerge. *Active supporters*, or *loyalists*, evoke the idea of a ‘rentier elite’ discussed in Chapter One,<sup>339</sup> yet active support is not limited to an economic or political elite. A member of Bahrain’s business elite who has publicly supported government policy would be considered a Bahraini active supporter, for example, but so would a low-income Sunni participant in a pro-government protest.

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<sup>338</sup> An important exception, part of the emerging trend in Revisionist RST questioning cooptation on an individual level, is Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*.

<sup>339</sup> Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, 32 – 36; see also discussion of rentier elites in Chapter One.

*Passive acceptance*, by comparison, is typified more by acquiescence than by energetic political engagement. This category is formed of individuals who have *not* mobilised politically (either in support of, or in opposition to, the state) since 2011. While they may petition the state, individually, for additional rent-financed distributions, they have not participated in concerted *political action*, meaning street demonstrations, social media movements, or public debates held through local newspapers, online forums, and television. Passive acceptance is reminiscent of the most typical state-society relationship described in RST, based on the assumption that distributions of wealth to society remove or reduce popular dissatisfactions that might otherwise have taken hold. Yet when Qatari, Bahrain, and Omani citizens who had refrained from political action in the 2011 to mid-2014 period were asked to explain why they had not joined demonstrations, their justifications focused far more on a sense that the state listened to and responded to their non-material demands than on material satisfaction.

This chapter thus advances a critique of traditional state-society relations as described within classic (and some revisionist) RST, which portrays society as essentially passive, and unlikely to mobilise politically. The structure is thematic, yet the chapter emphasises the context-dependent and dynamic nature of state-society relations, questioning, for example, what factors might prompt a citizen to move from passive acceptance to either active support or opposition. The chapter also questions assumptions of state autonomy prevalent in RST, noting that active supporters may defend the state against opposition groups while simultaneously making demands of their own. Even the state's most dedicated allies maintain independent interests and place political constraints on the state, revealing the complex interaction between rents, loyalty, and autonomy that typifies the modern rent-rich states of the Gulf.

### **Government Acceptance of the Rentier Bargain**

At first glance, state rhetoric and actions suggest they perceive a rentier bargain with their citizens. They have actively distributed rents to citizens, and publicly questioned the loyalty of those who received distributions yet challenged state authority. In the post-2011 period, GCC governments reacted quickly to the outbreak of dissent across the Middle East and made large transfers of rent-derived wealth to society, including raising public sector wages and other changes designed to increase living standards and access to welfare. In a KWD1.4 billion move, for example, Kuwait channelled oil-based rents directly to Kuwaiti citizens through a KWD1,000 grant per person and the

provision of heavily subsidised food for 14 months.<sup>340</sup> Saudi Arabia's response was even less subtle, announcing in June 2011 a series of packages totalling USD130 billion to increase salaries, provide bonuses for public sector employees and students, and fund new housing projects.<sup>341</sup> Public reactions to these efforts were, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly supportive. "We are happy because the king has spent money on us, that's enough for us," said one Saudi in an article explaining the relative absence of social unrest in Saudi Arabia.<sup>342</sup>

These same governance strategies emerged in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. A mere three days before Bahrain's *Day of Rage* on 14 February, the Bahrain government announced a BHD1,000 transfer to every Bahraini family on 11 February, followed by the creation of 20,000 jobs in the Ministry of Interior on 5 March, and, as protests continued, a BHD200 million package increasing salaries and living allowances of public service employees in August 2011; the yearly budget increase for this last package is the largest in Bahrain's history.<sup>343</sup> Drawing a direct link between employment and security, the regime announced: "the [20,000 jobs] initiative follows directives from His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to boost employment in all ministry's departments out of Royal keenness on people's safety".<sup>344</sup> The state employed a mix of initiatives to reach the general population and to target sections of society, such as a private sector wage increase in September 2011, scaled to particularly impact lower wage, young Bahraini graduates.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Arab Times, "Amiri Grant to be Deposited in Bank Accounts Feb 24," (25 January 2011) <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smId/414/ArticleID/164796/t/Amiri-grant-to-be-deposited-in-bank-accounts-Feb-24/Default.aspx> accessed 26 April 2013.

<sup>341</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "In Saudi Arabia, Royal Funds Buy Peace for Now," *New York Times* (8 June 2011) [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/09/world/middleeast/09saudi.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/09/world/middleeast/09saudi.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) accessed 22 April 2013.

<sup>342</sup> Jason Benham, "Saudi King Orders More Handouts, Security Boost," *Reuters* (18 March 2011) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/18/us-saudi-king-idUSTRE72H2UQ20110318> accessed 22 April 2013.

<sup>343</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "HM King Hamad Directs to Pay BD 1000 For Every Bahraini Family," (11 February 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/446908?date=2012-03-2> accessed 15 October 2014; Mohammed al-Jayousi, "Bahrain Approves Public Sector Salary Increase," *Al Shorfa* (4 August 2011) [http://al-shorfa.com/en\\_GB/articles/meii/features/main/2011/08/04/feature-02](http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/main/2011/08/04/feature-02) accessed 15 October 2014; Bahrain News Agency, "HM King Hamad's Historic Pay Rise Package Lauded," (2 August 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/467163> accessed 22 April 2013.

<sup>344</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "Interior Minister Unveils Plans to Recruit 20000 Employees," (5 March 2011) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/449075> accessed 15 October 2014.

<sup>345</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "Wage Increase Sought for Bahraini Graduates in Private Sector," (21 September 2011) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/473359?date=2011-09-28www> accessed 15 November 2014.

At the individual level, there were also many statements from government officials that indicated a conscious rentier relationship with society. This was often framed as a perception that public protests and reformist movements were fundamentally driven by material demands (rent-seeking), not deeper political objectives. The 2011 Bahraini Uprising was *absolutely* driven by economic, not political demands, averred Dr. Abdulaziz Abul, a member of the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee in the appointed Majlis al-Shura. While acknowledging that some “elite” societal groups would have more political demands, he claimed that he had personally heard complaints from citizens and they were all material. “If economic development improves,” he advised, “there will not be any more protests”.<sup>346</sup> Other Bahraini government officials similarly linked the protests to “perceived inequality in economic distributions,” but noted, for example, that the presence of religious groups in opposition (read: Shia Islamist groups like al-Wefaq) had shifted the focus to more political and sectarian demands.<sup>347</sup> This latter view is considered the “standard explanation for Shia activism in Bahrain”.<sup>348</sup> Even King Hamad, in an open letter to the *Washington Times* in April 2011, typified the protests as “demands for well-paying jobs, transparency in economic affairs and access to better social services,” and recommended entirely material responses to restore stability.<sup>349</sup>

It should be noted that this interpretation was not universal among Bahraini government interviewees. While the majority of government officials interviewed claimed the protests were driven primarily by material interests (and therefore could be addressed by increasing distributions to restive elements within society), there were two strands of government interviewees who viewed the protests in a more political framework: those associated with a conservative faction in government, who felt the demonstrations were the result of Iran-linked transnational networks fomenting discontent; and, on the other side of the spectrum, reform-oriented members of the state who saw (some of) the opposition’s demands as legitimate calls for political equality.<sup>350</sup> Yet the perception among many state officials that protests were fundamentally driven by rent-seeking is

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<sup>346</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>347</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>348</sup> Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization*, 107.

<sup>349</sup> His article did admit that “there is no doubt that grievances about civil and political rights for all Bahrainis are legitimate,” but did not recommend any political responses to restore stability. See HM King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, “Al Khalifa: Stability is Prerequisite for Progress,” *The Washington Times* (19 April 2011) <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/apr/19/stability-is-prerequisite-for-progress/> accessed 22 January 2016.

<sup>350</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain and the United Kingdom 2013 – 2014.



important: it not only delegitimises political demands as rent-seeking, but, as discussed in the next chapter, it also directly contradicts the justifications for protest expressed by opposition interviewees themselves.

Bahrain, of course, is similar to Saudi Arabia (and to a lesser extent Kuwait), in that sectarianism is a key influence shaping the state-society relationship and contributing to an influential societal perception that inequality in rent-based distributions is a deliberate state policy.<sup>351</sup> This is not the case in Oman. Yet, in a similar vein and also facing domestic unrest, albeit on a much smaller scale, the Omani state's first response to the protests that had started in small-scale on 17 January 2011 was to raise the private sector minimum wage by over 40 percent, from OMR140 to OMR200. When protests spread from Muscat to Salalah (25 February) and Sohar (26 February), the government announced an increase in student allowances for those attending university and vocational schools.<sup>352</sup> After the death of a protester, Abdullah al-Ghamlasi, during violent clashes between police and (largely) unemployed youth demonstrators in Sohar, a state-run newspaper, the *Oman Daily Observer*, carried an enormous image of Sultan Qaboos – taking up half the front page – alongside the announcement: “His Majesty Orders Jobs for 50,000,” highlighting details such as “RO 150 per month for registered job seekers,” and emphasised how Sultan Qaboos had given “much attention to citizens’ living standard”.<sup>353</sup>

Omani state officials interviewed also described an allocative relationship with society. The government attitude, in general, is “still about placating society,” confided one official, while several others lamented that society expected continual distributions of wealth from the state.<sup>354</sup> Particularly over the past decade, Gulf states have increasingly discussed the rentier mentality as a development challenge. “We don’t like to talk about it,” said the Hon. Salim Ghattani, Chair of the Economic Committee in Oman’s

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<sup>351</sup> For an overview of sectarianism in the modern Gulf, see Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*. Chapters Four and Five also discuss the link between inequality and political mobilisation, and Chapter Six discusses in the influence of sectarianism on Bahraini transnational opposition networks.

<sup>352</sup> Royal Decrees 13-17/2011, all announced on 26 February 2011, were the first of several Cabinet changes that would be made in 2011. See Muscat Daily, “Oman Reshuffles Ministers,” (27 February 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Oman-reshuffles-ministers> accessed 15 October 2014; Al Jazeera, “Oman Shuffles Cabinet Amid Protests,” (26 February 2011) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/201122620711831600.html> accessed 15 October 2014.

<sup>353</sup> Oman Daily Observer, “His Majesty Orders Jobs for 50,000,” (28 February 2011) 1.

<sup>354</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

appointed Majlis al-Dowla, “but it [the rentier mentality] is still very strong”.<sup>355</sup> The depiction of Oman’s youth among government interviewees was particularly close to a typical ‘rentier mentality’. Said an Omani public servant: “These people [youth] as I said are passive, unmotivated, no incentives and they want everything free. It’s a very big challenge for government now”.<sup>356</sup> Statements such as this, of course, implied not that Omanis were inherently less productive than nationals of any other country, but rather recognised that the system of distributions that has typified Oman’s economy for the past four decades (and has roots in much longer practices of allocation) had created disincentives for citizens to engage productively with the economy. As in Bahrain, there were diverging opinions among government interviewees as to whether political or economic factors primarily drove unrest. Yet *unlike* Bahrain, even government interviewees who claimed the opposition was a purely rent-seeking movement felt the state’s political responses to unrest, discussed at the end of this section, were just as critical to ensuring societal peace as were rent allocations. To some extent, this is a function of the Omani (as compared to the Bahraini) context: the emphasis on the benevolent and responsive nature of the Omani state (and, specifically, Sultan Qaboos) is part of a nation-building effort that stretches back to the early 1970s. It is difficult to imagine the same rhetoric achieving similar levels of success in Bahrain, where nation-building efforts are complicated by deep social cleavages and the contested founding myth described in Chapter Two.

While Bahrain and Oman (as well as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) faced overt opposition and street demonstrations, even those GCC states such as the UAE and Qatar that experienced little public unrest channelled rent-derived wealth to society in 2011.<sup>357</sup> In September 2011, for example, Qatari Emir Hamad announced decision 50/2011, which raised the basic and social allowances of public sector employees by 60 percent, 50 percent for regular military personnel, and a monumental 120 percent for military officers. Coupled with similar rises in pensions, the decree resulted in widespread salary increases across Qatari society.<sup>358</sup> On a surface level, then, pressure from society (or

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<sup>355</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>356</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>357</sup> The UAE increased military service pensions, started subsidising bread and rice, and announced a USD1.6 billion investment plan for the poorer northern emirates. See Steffen Hertog, “The Costs of Counter-Revolution in the GCC,” *Foreign Policy* (31 May 2011) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/05/31/the-costs-of-counter-revolution-in-the-gcc/> accessed 20 January 2016.

<sup>358</sup> Habib Toumi, “Public Sector in Qatar to Get 60 Percent Pay Rise,” *Gulf News* (7 September 2011) <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/public-sector-in-qatar-to-get-60-per-cent-pay-rise-1.862595> accessed

even the *threat*, however unlikely, of pressure) resulted in historically large distributions from state to society, conforming to the allocative state-society relationship espoused within RST. As in Bahrain and Oman, Qatari state officials also identified societal expectations of rent-based allocations and a persistent rentier mentality as key development challenges. Since his accession to power in June 2013, Emir Tamim has consistently highlighted productivity of citizens as a key issue, especially after oil prices fell in mid-2014. In his speech to open the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of Qatar’s Advisory Council in 2014, for example:

I stress that the waste, extravagance, mishandling of State funds, lack of respect for the budget, reliance on the availability of money to cover up mistakes are all behaviors that must be disposed of, whether oil prices are high or low...Reasonable spending is an economic matter first and foremost, however, it is not only an economic matter but it is also a civilized issue related to the type of society that we want and the type of individual that we rear in the State of Qatar.<sup>359</sup>

Other public officials who described the issue in more direct terms excited fervent societal condemnation. In a particularly infamous event, Dr Shaikha Abdulla al-Misnad, then-President of Qatar University, responded during a question and answer session of a public lecture at Dalhousie University in Canada with the following:

I’m always concerned that we live in a blessed society with economic resources [and a] small population. I’m always thinking about how we can motivate our youth, because I think in my country, the youth – or all the national population - look at things as entitlement, not like an opportunity [where] you need to take advantage of it and work hard on it.<sup>360</sup>

Her comments sparked a furious reaction in Qatari society, from letters to the editors of local newspapers labelling her comments as “insulting”,<sup>361</sup> to a popular Twitter hashtag calling for her public apology and resignation.<sup>362</sup> Yet the sentiment, perhaps expressed

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15 October 2014. It is worth noting the private sector was also pressured to offer pay rises to remain competitive employers.

<sup>359</sup> Qatar News Agency, “HH the Emir Patronizes Opening of Advisory Council’s 43<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session,” (11 November 2014) <http://www.qna.org.qa/en-us/News/14111109530027/HH-the-Emir-Patronizes-Opening-of-Advisory-Councils-43rd-Ordinary-Session> accessed 12 November 2014.

<sup>360</sup> Shaikha Abdulla Al Misnad, speaking in Ali Almohannadi, “mushārīka doctūra sheikha al-misnad fī ḥiwār naqāshī lil-jāmi‘a Dalhousie al-Canadiya mudīra jami‘a Qatar” (21 November 2013) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-KKSJN5RQ> accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>361</sup> Dalal Al Naimi, “Dr Sheikh Al Misnad Has Got It Wrong,” *The Peninsula* (28 November 2013) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/views/letters-to-the-editor/262510/dr-sheikha-al-misnad-has-got-it-wrong> accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>362</sup> See #itihār\_wistiqa\_almisnad\_haq\_alqatariyyīn, *Twitter*, (n.d.) [https://twitter.com/search?q=%23%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1\\_%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%)

less directly, was nonetheless common among both members of Qatari state and society interviewed for this thesis: there was a wide perception among Qatari interviewees that, as a consequence of the incentive structure of the domestic political economy, a rentier mentality had emerged within society.<sup>363</sup> Further, while the rentier mentality was generally described in terms of economic development, some, such as former Minister of Economy and Trade Mohamed Ahmed Jassim Al Thani, have noted the inseparable link between economic and political reform:

The question of economic diversification in the Gulf is thus not simply a technical exercise of adjusting structural macroeconomic policy variables. It is a more fundamental question of how to modify the structure of incentives such that it is in the interests of the population to enter into productive effort, and to what extent these adjustments will require associated changes to the political system.<sup>364</sup>

This connection drives at the heart of RST, and at the traditional political economy of the modern Arab states of the Gulf, where neo-patrimonial, tribal, and traditional dynamics intersect with rent-based allocative tactics. Describing the situation in Qatar, a public official claimed that the first reaction of citizens faced with a difficulty is “not to do it, but to ask the government to do it. They look for the big brother, the patron, the Shaikh of the tribe...they don’t see themselves as agents of change”. However, the same interviewee immediately clarified that this situation is changing, especially among Qatari youth, “who are motivated to have a positive impact in their community, more active, more willing to speak, criticise, demand reform if unhappy”.<sup>365</sup> There was, in his view, still a long way to go, but he maintained that Qatari productivity and engagement with public policy had become more active in the previous few years, partly as a result of state reforms, but also as a response to regional youth mobilisation through the Arab Uprisings.

Further, while there was strong *prima facie* evidence for an allocative relationship between state and society, exploration of these views during in-depth interviews brought out a more nuanced understanding of the role that rent-based wealth plays in state legitimation. Crucially, *none* of the Qatari interviewees cited above felt the relationship with society was purely allocative, nor did the majority of state officials

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<sup>363</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>364</sup> Mohamed Ahmed Jassim Al Thani, *The Arab Spring and the Gulf States: Time to Embrace Change* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012) 34.

<sup>365</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

interviewed across the case studies (with the partial exception of Bahrain, discussed earlier) believe that material distributions alone were sufficient to stymie societal demands. This was particularly the case when asked about the impact of the 2011 Uprisings in the Gulf. “It’s a new era in the whole region,” said an Omani state official. “Youth are calling for change everywhere”.<sup>366</sup>

Although none of the Gulf states have democratised as a result of the 2011 protests, some of the reforms they offered did have substance and demonstrate (limited) responsiveness to society. The increase in rent allocations in Oman, for example, was accompanied by a series of political concessions, from largely symbolic Cabinet shuffles to the widening of political powers for elected assemblies. Oman’s royal decree 39/2011, for example, granted the Oman Council (Majlis Oman) the power to approve or reject draft laws, although the Sultan retains ultimate legislative control. Another decree, 25/2011, made the Public Prosecution Office more administratively and financially independent, in a clear response to societal frustration with corruption.<sup>367</sup> The Omani state emphasises both its material and non-material responses to 2011 unrest, most clearly revealed on the *Oman News Agency* website, which features a special page dedicated solely to the Sultan and the “strong relationship between the leader and his people,” detailing not only his personal support for expansion of job opportunities and welfare, but also greater powers for the Majlis Oman and, highlighted in its own section, support for freedom of expression.<sup>368</sup> These changes could not be characterised as a *major* shift in power from state to society – their merit and effectiveness in practice were heavily debated between loyalists and reformers – but they do represent a *limited* political opening designed to enhance an image of responsiveness, not a typical ‘rentier state’ approach.<sup>369</sup>

Displays of benevolence and superficial reforms reinforce the state’s image, yet the breadth, frequency, and emphasis of specific issues for reform both in public and, more strongly, in private, suggests that there is an on-going negotiation process occurring *within* the state. In part, this reflects the dynamic nature of the state, which has

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<sup>366</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>367</sup> Views on whether this had altered the independence of the Public Prosecution in practice were mixed, yet it did represent a legal tightening of control.

<sup>368</sup> Oman News Agency, “H.M. The Sultan,” (n.d.) <http://www.omannews.gov.om/web/ona/h-m-sultan> accessed 23 October 2014.

<sup>369</sup> It is also worth noting that while Oman and Bahrain made *some* limited political concessions, they also tightened securitisation laws and pursued repressive responses. The role of repression in political mobilisation is discussed in Chapter Four.

developed in the decades since the RST literature first emerged, but also the competition between internal state groups. That is, the state, composed of a diverse range of participants, is engaged in an internal debate over what its relationship with society is, or should be.

### **State Diversity and Internal Contest over State-Society Relations**

The ‘state’, of course, includes not only the inner circle of decision-makers (usually Cabinet, but also personal advisors, senior members of the royal families, and others with high-level clientelist connections), but also the various majālis that function as consultative parliaments (Majlis-al Shura and Majlis al-Dowla in Oman, Majlis al-Nuwwab and Majlis al-Shura in Bahrain, and Majlis al-Shura in Qatar), and, where they represent state interests, bureaucrats. Moreover, diversification strategies since the 1970s have encouraged the creation of specialist, semi-autonomous ‘state’ bodies, or islands of efficiency, with a markedly different business approach to the traditional public sector: these bodies were deliberately created to play a reformist role in economic, if not political, liberalisation. Even within the inner circle of power, individuals with reformist attitudes play an important role in contesting state-society relations and how the state should respond to societal demands.

Some of these groups have become increasingly vocal since 2011. For example, the elected Omani Majlis al-Shura, responding to the Sultan’s expansion of their powers, has recently taken a more active role in debate over policy. In late 2013, the finance committee of Oman’s Majlis al-Shura recommended including a tax on expatriate remittances in the 2014 budget, a move that reflects a popular, though not universal, view in Omani society. While the Majlis al-Shura represents populist views, members of the appointed Majlis al-Dowla, more representative of the societal elite, objected to the proposal, claiming “this is not the right time for taxes”.<sup>370</sup> Oman’s Cabinet, having watched the debate play out, finally rejected the move in December 2013, with Darwish bin Ismail Al Balushi, the Minister for Financial Affairs, announcing it would not be included in the 2014 budget.<sup>371</sup> More revealingly, an earlier proposal by some members of the Majlis al-Shura to create a parliamentary committee with authority over security

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<sup>370</sup> Author interview with member of al-Dowla, Oman 2013.

<sup>371</sup> Times of Oman, “Remittance Tax not in this Budget,” (2 December 2013)

[http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=politics&id=675149&lim=120&lang=en&tblpost=2013\\_1\\_2](http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=politics&id=675149&lim=120&lang=en&tblpost=2013_1_2) accessed 19 October 2014.

and foreign affairs was rejected by Cabinet in June 2012.<sup>372</sup> This suggests that the much-publicised ‘expansion’ of Majlis Oman’s powers in 2011 is, at its core, a cooptive move to offer a limited political opening, allowing the Majlis al-Shura to become a gauge for public opinion, while maintaining the existing balance of power between state and society. Yet, the development of greatest importance, in terms of an evaluation of RST, is that internal debate within the state is clearly occurring in Oman and, since 2011, increasingly occurring within the public sphere.

In Qatar, the least politically liberalised case (at least in terms of political institutions), internal debates over state policy occur on a less public basis.<sup>373</sup> However, implementation of a late rentier development strategy has fostered the creation of semi-autonomous SOEs and government agencies, charged with implementing ambitious economic reform. These reform-oriented agencies, in turn, have attracted nationals with views far from the typical rentier mentality, and who are willing to, at least privately, question state policy. Consider the following from an interview with the Qatari CEO of one of these bodies:

I mean there are some good things happening in the country, no doubt, but with the resources available in this country, with the vision of this country, with the strength of this country, I feel that things can happen much quickly at a much wider level... In some pockets there are some success stories and some success progress, but are they sustainable? For example the Qatar Foundation model, is it sustainable? Bringing the elite Universities branches in Qatar, is there a plan for transfer of knowledge? If we get into a conflict with any of these universities and they decide to leave, what are they going to leave behind them?<sup>374</sup>

The reformist attitude of these individuals is not entirely surprising – they are a product of Hamad’s liberalisation program initiated in 1995, and many were hand-picked for management positions by senior members of the royal family; the perception of a reformist ‘mandate’, validated by the ruling elite, may explain their willingness to weigh in on the internal policy debate. Nor, in general, were they pushing for political liberalisation; most of their concerns were framed as challenges for economic development, not political reform. Yet they do represent, for Qatar, an important state group: they pressure the state internally to become more efficient, differentiating

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<sup>372</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2014 – Oman Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014) 12.

<sup>373</sup> Though extant work has identified multiple points of fragmentation within the ruling elite. See Kamrava, “Royal Factionalism and Liberalisation in Qatar”.

<sup>374</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

between their own centres and “traditional” state bureaucracy, and encouraging society to become equal partners in development – in essence, for the state to mitigate rentierism and move towards a more productive economy.<sup>375</sup>

In Bahrain, like Qatar, individuals from islands of efficiency were more willing to (privately) question state policy.<sup>376</sup> Bahrain, as the only case study where political societies can be legally formed, also faces a more active consultative assembly than either Qatar or Oman; their elected Majlis al-Nuwwab has been a forum for a vocal and organised opposition to challenge government policy since its establishment in 2002.<sup>377</sup> Yet one of the most interesting examples of internal state deliberation in Bahrain has occurred at a much higher level, between three factions of the Bahraini royal family: that associated with Bahrain’s Crown Prince Shaikh Salman (the CP faction); those clustered around Bahrain’s conservative Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa (the PM faction); and the security faction formed under Army Commander Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and his brother, Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, the Royal Court Minister (the Khawalid faction).<sup>378</sup>

There had been, prior to 2011, clear examples of disagreement between these groups that emerged into public view. In January 2008, for example, Crown Prince Salman became so frustrated with the PM faction’s attempts to block economic reforms he had initiated through the creation of the Economic Development Board (EDB) that he penned an open-letter to his father, King Hamad, resulting in the King openly siding with the CP faction and announcing that any Minister who disobeyed the EDB reforms risked losing their position.<sup>379</sup> These factions differ substantially on how the state should respond to societal unrest in Bahrain since 2011 – the CP faction, for example,

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<sup>375</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>376</sup> Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*.

<sup>377</sup> This has obviously changed since most of the Shia opposition, led by al-Wefaq, resigned from the Majlis al-Nuwwab in protest since 2011, yet Sunni and secular groups who remain in the Majlis have many demands of their own.

<sup>378</sup> Gengler, “Royal Factionalism, the Khawalid, and the Securitization of ‘the Shia Problem’ in Bahrain”; Patrick Cockburn, “Power Struggle Deepens Divisions Among Bahraini Royal Family,” *The Independent* (27 September 2011) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/power-struggle-deepens-divisions-among-bahraini-royal-family-2361462.html> accessed 20 October 2014.

<sup>379</sup> The Telegraph, “Bahrain’s Crown Prince Consolidating his Authority”, US Embassy Cable 08Manama89 (18 February 2011) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/bahrain-wikileaks-cables/8334484/BAHRAINS-CROWN-PRINCE-CONSOLIDATING-HIS-AUTHORITY.html> accessed 18 September 2014; Wright, “Fixing the Kingdom,” 2; Abbas al-Murshed, “Bahraini Military Institution: Doctrine of Exclusion and Clientelism,” *Bahrain Centre for Studies in London* (14 June 2013) <http://www.bcsf.org.uk/en/studies/bahraini-military-institution-doctrine-of-exclusion-and-clientelism/1586-bahraini-military-institution-doctrine-of-exclusion-and-clientelism?start=4> accessed 20 October 2014.



drove attempts to create a National Dialogue reconciliation process, whereas the hawkish Khawalid faction is generally associated with more repressive responses. Prime Minister Khalifa, who has held his position since Bahraini independence in 1971, and thus had an established power base well before Hamad came to power in 1999, is widely seen as an ‘old guard’ figure – conservative but more pragmatic than the ideologically-driven Khawalid faction. This suggests he may be less concerned with the *Shi‘ite Crescent* – referring to the idea of a transnational Shia threat, stretching from Iran across Bahrain, eastern Saudi Arabia, Southern Iraq, and into Lebanon and Syria, where reinvigorated Shia identities tie greater loyalty to clerical leaders in Iran than to their respective nation-states – than by awareness that reform would weaken his own political power.<sup>380</sup> The PM and Khawalid factions were historically at odds with each other, yet seem to have found a common cause in combatting the Bahraini Spring and various CP faction reforms.<sup>381</sup>

These divisions have played out in the public as well as private sphere since 2011. Soon after prominent Shia cleric and opposition leader Shaikh Ali Salman had been arrested and banned from travel pending trial in late 2013 for “incitement to religious hatred and spreading false news likely to harm national security”, Crown Prince Salman publicly showed his dissatisfaction with the move by posting an image on his Twitter feed of himself receiving Shaikh Ali Salman in his home.<sup>382</sup> Writes Gengler: “The message, to hardliners within the regime as much as to those in society, was a clear repudiation of, and even perhaps act of defiance against the state’s current security-based strategy for dealing with on-going protest”.<sup>383</sup>

There are, then, clear examples of internal state debate over public policy and over how the state should respond to challenges of the post-2011 era. The immediate question of importance, of course, is whether or not this internal debate will have a substantive impact on state responses. The Omani Majlis al-Shura may be *relatively* more vocal,<sup>384</sup> for example, but its actual powers remain limited. An excerpt from an interview with a

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<sup>380</sup> Wright, “Fixing the Kingdom,” 2; see also a frank interview with Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa in Spiegel Online, “Interview with Bahrain's Prime Minister: The Opposition ‘Are Terrorizing the Rest of This Country’,” (27 April 2012) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-bahraini-prime-minister-prince-khalifa-bin-salman-al-khalifa-a-830045.html> accessed 23 January 2016.

<sup>381</sup> Gengler, “Royal Factionalism,” 53-79.

<sup>382</sup> Justin Gengler, “Bahrain’s Crown Prince Makes His Move,” *Foreign Policy* (20 January 2014) [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/01/20/bahrains\\_crown\\_prince\\_makes\\_his\\_move](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/01/20/bahrains_crown_prince_makes_his_move) accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2014– Oman Country Report*.

member of the Majlis al-Shura reveals the relationship between al-Shura members and the Omani Cabinet, who remain in control of legislature:

Author: How easy is it to meet a government minister when you need to?

Interviewee: It is not easy. It is not difficult. It depends. There are certain ministers who are very supportive. We have an understanding with Cabinet that usually we should be given – within two weeks – an appointment. But in practice there are ministers who take a year—

Author: A year!

Interviewee: – for an appointment. But there are ministers, I, personally, have gone to four or five ministers. Except one minister, all others I have seen are very helpful. And they encourage the participation of the Shura Council. How much they implement it? I don't know.<sup>385</sup>

The actual policy effect of the expanded powers of Oman's Majlis al-Shura, then, may still depend heavily on the informal agency of individual members of the state, not an institutionalised policy process. In Qatar, too, members of islands of efficiency expand debate over policy issues but do not exert any formal control over policymaking. Only in Bahrain does the example of factionalism within the state carry any definite implications for the state response to the Arab Spring, and there it depends on the relative strength of the CP, PM, and Khawalid factions – a strength determined in large measure by non-material variables.<sup>386</sup>

Nevertheless, internal debate over policy remains a key aspect of the state response during the post-2011 period. Attitudes towards the state's relationship with society are not uniform and policy may shift depending on the internal balance of power between state groups. Yet the state, even as it displays understanding of political shifts within society, still offers phenomenal rent distributions, indicating that cooptation remains an important element of state legitimation in modern Gulf states. The question that immediately follows, then, is: how has society responded to these benefits? Do their perceptions and actions indicate a rentier relationship with the state?

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<sup>385</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>386</sup> For example, violent incidents of public protest in Bahrain greatly strengthen the Khawalid faction which can use them as justification for a crackdown. The Saudi-led intervention in Bahrain in March 2011 was widely perceived as having greatly weakened the CP faction in favour of the PM and Khawalid.

## **Passive Acceptance of the Rentier Bargain**

On a surface level, there does appear to be an association between countries that have distributed higher value (per capita) benefits to citizens and the intensity of societal opposition since 2011. If the dominant understanding of cooptation, meaning the transfer of wealth and material benefits (and absence of taxation) in exchange for political loyalty, is correct, this suggests that societal mobilisation is materially-determined. On an individual level, this should mean that when citizens of oil-rich countries are asked to explain why they did *not* mobilise politically in 2011, or, alternatively, to explain why they actively supported the state, their responses should focus on how the state provides for their material well being.

Yet this is not what occurred in the majority of cases across Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. Instead, Qataris, Bahrainis, and Omanis interviewed for this research who had *not* participated in political action since 2011 justified their (in)action, above all else, on the responsiveness they perceived from the state. Rent distributions were also referenced in the most extreme rentier state, Qatar, but only secondarily, suggesting that there *is* a cooptation effect, but that it interacts with other political dynamics, such as tribal and sect-based identities, nation-building efforts, and a sense of state responsiveness shaped by effective statecraft. The sub-sections below provide a country-by-country overview of how interviewees who remained politically inactive since 2011 explained their political views and motivations, highlighting the interplay between rent-based cooptation and other factors influencing political mobilisation.

### ***Qatar***

In Qatar, which recorded the highest petroleum (oil and natural gas) rent per capita in the world in 2013,<sup>387</sup> the first reaction of Qatari interviewees asked why there had not been public protests since 2011 was to note the absence of material incentives to challenge the state, contrasting their situation with that of Egypt or Syria, where unemployment and economic discrimination contributed to the outbreak of public unrest. The following is a typical response from a Qatari citizen who privately professed strong support for the regime but who had remained politically inactive between 2011 and 2014:

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<sup>387</sup> Calculated using oil, natural gas, GDP and population data from World Bank, “World Bank Open Data,” (2016) <http://data.worldbank.org/> accessed 23 January 2016.

I think Qatar has been stable for many reason. First of all the indigenous population are very small. So there is not a critical mass...Number two: normally, if you look at all the countries where actually they had a problem, it was primarily an economic problem, that turned into revolution...they revolted because they had nothing to lose, I mean they could not have been worse than what it was then.

Then if you look at Qatar – I can't talk about other countries but in Qatar – you don't see this. So you had good income, you had good government support – you had free electricity for example, free education, free healthcare...So basically there were no good reasons to change the system. Plus people had witnessed what happened [in Egypt and Syria]. It's not a good example, you know? It's really not a good example; nobody wants to replicate that.<sup>388</sup>

However, when asked to explain why they *personally* supported the state, or, at least, had refrained from joining reformist movements, their explanation immediately shifted to a sense that the Qatari state was responsive. Asked to explain their personal support for the state, a Qatari interviewee said: “there is no separation between state and society in Qatar – no barrier”.<sup>389</sup> Qataris can go to the royal *dīwān* (pl. *dīwāniyya*, hereafter *diwan*, referring to Qatar's royal council),<sup>390</sup> noted another, and personally meet figures of power.<sup>391</sup> There was explicit support for the ruling elite in Qatar, especially those associated with reformist programs such as Shaikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, who was lauded among Qatari women for her role in social welfare and women's rights.<sup>392</sup> Interviewees cited examples of state responsiveness to societal concerns to justify their political loyalty, such as the state's investment in public spaces that reinforce Qatari identity (for example Souq Waqif, Katara cultural village, as well as prestige projects like the Museum of Islamic Art and the Pearl), and the 2012 decision to shift the language of instruction at Qatar University from English to Arabic in response to Qatari citizen complaints.<sup>393</sup> Others pointed to Qatar's foreign policy as evidence that Qatar was “trying to stand for justice” and claimed that as a result they felt no need to demand

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<sup>388</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013. The final issue mentioned – that the failure of other states to produce stability after revolution during the Arab Spring worked as a *disincentive* for Qataris to support public dissent is important and was highlighted in multiple interviews.

<sup>389</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>390</sup> The use of the term *dīwān* varies slightly between countries. In Qatar the Emiri Diwan is the seat of government, whereas in Kuwait the term *diwan* is used in place of *majlis* (informal gathering).

<sup>391</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>392</sup> Often this was simply by acting as an example. Several young Qatari women noted that if their fathers refused to allow them to attend a restaurant or public gathering with their female friends, they could simply note that Shaikha Moza had already done so, meaning it must be acceptable. Author interviews, Qatar 2013 – 2014.

<sup>393</sup> These issues, as they exemplify Qatari reform movements, are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

reform from the state.<sup>394</sup> “The nice thing about our government is they listen and they do it,” summarised a Qatari interviewee.<sup>395</sup>

Qatar’s first-mover strategy, whereby the state makes highly publicised responses to potential societal concerns well before society has formulated or publicly expressed these demands, was thus key to the quiescence of Qatari citizens.<sup>396</sup> Views on the 2013 abdication of Hamad in favour of his son, current Emir Tamim, were a mix of positive and “hopeful uncertainty”.<sup>397</sup> One interviewee even claimed the 2013 leadership change was: “not much of a surprise. Government is always ahead of society”.<sup>398</sup> Tellingly, these individuals were strongly supportive of the ruling elite, and felt little cause to push for greater political liberalisation: “our leadership is actually very supportive of the democratic movement and I do think if we were to elect our Emir, I do think we would pick whoever is right now the Emir. People are very happy with our country”.<sup>399</sup> The following response from a Qatari private sector worker best captures the perspective of Qataris who did not feel it was necessary to mobilise politically:

Now, no country is perfect. We’re not perfect. We have flaws. We have issues and for sure there is injustice. But it’s nothing compared to the upside that we have. I mean, the injustice is very small so it doesn’t go to the extent of making people angry enough to go out on the streets. Okay? We might only complain, talking about a few things but then every country is not perfect...we don’t have political people jailed because of their political background or religious background. Our leadership is very transparent with us. And, especially in Qatar, we feel they are always, ya ‘nī [you know], on the right side.<sup>400</sup>

A strong sense of responsiveness, combined with the *absence* of various factors, such as widespread repression that, as discussed in the next chapter, tended to catalyse opposition, thus contributed to the political quiescence of the interviewee quoted above. While responsiveness, indicating effective statecraft, was the *primary* justification for Qatari passive acceptance of the rentier bargain, there was a strong correlation between respondents that spoke positively about rent allocations and statements of political

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<sup>394</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>395</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>396</sup> This policy generally refers to moves such as the 2011 distribution, abdication of Emir Hamad in 2013, and foreign intervention in other Arab Spring movements, the strategy being to offer (superficial) change before deeper reforms are demanded.

<sup>397</sup> Hopeful uncertainty was an expression of dismay that Hamad, for whom they felt strong personal loyalty, had left, uncertainty about Tamim, since they did not feel he’d had a very public domestic role before, yet ultimately optimism that Tamim would ‘prove himself’ in time.

<sup>398</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>399</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>400</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

loyalty to the regime. Qatari society was, in the view of these individuals, “pleased with the ruling family” because “we can see where the money goes” and it was obvious that Qatar’s wealth was being spent on Qatari citizens and on the country’s development.<sup>401</sup> The state’s investment of rent-derived revenue in cultural projects also exemplifies the interplay between traditional methods of cooptation and a limited responsiveness that is typical to late rentierism: by investing in projects that exhibit state responsiveness to non-material citizen concerns (such as development projects reinforcing national identity and culture), rent-based cooptation and responsiveness have become inextricably linked.

It is also important to differentiate passive acceptance of the rentier bargain from the complete absence of political and economic demands. A Qatari who had eschewed political action may nevertheless have – individually – sought greater distributions of rent-funded benefits from the state.<sup>402</sup> One Qatari interviewee who expressed support for the state but had not participated in any political action, for example, noted that when a family member was ill and needed treatment in Europe, they petitioned the state (through informal pathways), and the state covered the entire cost of treatment, travel, accommodation, and a spending allowance for two accompanying family members.<sup>403</sup> Others noted that they personally hoped to see political changes in the future, such as a reorientation away from Qatar’s activist foreign policy, but did not think it was necessary to pressure the state over it.<sup>404</sup> Some even questioned the sustainability of rent distributions themselves, particularly Qataris or Omanis working in the private sector. When discussing the effect of the popular radio program *waṭanī ḥabīb*, *ṣabāḥ al-khayr*, widely perceived as a rent allocation pathway, a Qatari private sector worker strongly disagreed with the idea that Qataris are less productive, but admitted frustration with state responsiveness to rent-seeking:

There are a lot of people who just do nothing all day and, you know, sit down and drink their tea and read the newspapers every day and complain about not being compensated enough or complain about not being a manager [and then through *waṭanī ḥabīb*, they get a promotion or a wage

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<sup>401</sup> Author interviews with Qataris, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>402</sup> Rent-seeking on an individual basis is *not* considered a challenge to RST, in that the classic literature expected such behaviour. Concerted rent-seeking campaigns, where societal groups collaborate to demand material benefits from the state are discussed in the next chapter because not only have they demonstrated a propensity to shift from primarily material to political movements, but also they challenge classic RST’s assumption that the incentives to compete for rent benefits outweigh the incentives to coordinate action. See Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States”.

<sup>403</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2014.

<sup>404</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014.

increase]...it just adds to the idea that all you need to do is just do nothing, and then if you complain enough, then you'll get what you want.<sup>405</sup>

Crucially, however, none of these Qataris were actively pushing for reform; these views or frustrations had not been enough to create political action. Ultimately, in terms of political action, even private sector workers who expressed a desire for economic reform declared that as long as Qatari society continues to receive large distributions of welfare benefits, land allocations, and preferential loans, “they won’t care about politics”.<sup>406</sup> There may be a layer of people, a *reformist elite*,<sup>407</sup> who care about politics, one clarified, but the general public doesn’t.<sup>408</sup>

These statements align with recent survey results from Qatar University’s Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) Omnibus Survey 2011, which found strong trust in government policy and institutions. A large majority – 74 percent – of Qatari respondents, for example, agreed, or strongly agreed, that: “citizens should always support decisions of government even if they disagree with those decisions”. Contrary to the idea of an apathetic populace, the survey also found that the majority of Qataris – 57 percent – were interested in politics, and 50 percent followed local political news “very often” or “usually”.<sup>409</sup> Although 84 percent of Qataris in the 2012 survey felt democracy was the best political system and 77 percent felt it was important to live in a country ruled democratically, only 8 percent identified having “more say” as a political priority. On an individual level, reform pressure was even weaker, with 66 percent of Qataris identifying “maintaining social and political order” as their top individual priority compared with only 6 percent support for having “more say”.<sup>410</sup>

This suggests that while Qataris are, or at least claim to be, interested in politics and support the *idea* of a democratic system, they are, for the most part, uninterested in challenging the status quo. This conforms broadly to the expectations of RST, but,

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<sup>405</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2014. See also discussion of *waṭanī ḥabīb* in Mitchell, “Beyond Allocation”.

<sup>406</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>407</sup> The idea of a reformist elite is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four, but it refers to members of society who have made organised and clear political demands despite receiving significant financial benefits from the state.

<sup>408</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>409</sup> Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, *Annual Omnibus Survey: A Survey of Life in Qatar* (Doha: Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, 2011). The result of the 2012 Survey were similar – with 59 percent of Qataris reportedly interested in politics and 53 percent regularly following local political news.

<sup>410</sup> Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, *Annual Omnibus Survey: A Survey of Life in Qatar* (Doha: Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, 2012).

antithetically, the most critical factor driving acceptance of the rentier bargain was not rents, but rather the belief, held by the majority of Qatari interviewees, that the state was responsive to their needs, even in the absence of institutionalised political participation. If the purpose of democracy is to ensure government listens and responds to society, asked one Qatari, then why do we need it when they already do both?<sup>411</sup>

### *Oman*

While Qatar faced few public reform movements, in Oman, 2011 demonstrations brought debate over state policy into the public sphere. Interestingly, Omanis who remained politically quiescent during that period tended to argue that, while there may have been certain issues – such as corruption – needing reform in 2011, these have since been addressed and there is no need for further unrest. Rather, government now needs time and space to implement the changes it made in response to societal concerns. The following, for example, is a typical depiction of the 2011 protests from an Omani who refrained from involvement in demonstrations:

I think part of the issue is they [protesters] didn't trust the government. Some people didn't trust the government because of certain people in the government and they thought they are not given a chance to do a lot of things in the government...So people get frustrated...And of course that caused conflict in a lot of areas. But in general, I mean, that was resolved in 2011. A lot of the issues at that time was resolved.<sup>412</sup>

As in Qatar, Omanis who eschewed 2011 political action pointed to examples of state responsiveness to justify their personal loyalty, particularly a series of court cases focusing on graft among state officials and state-owned companies, a clear response to societal frustrations with systemic corruption. Major Omani figures convicted thus far include: Mohammed bin Nasir al-Khusaibi, who was appointed Minister for Commerce for a mere three days in 2011; Adil al-Kindi, a former member of the appointed Majlis al-Dowla and CEO of Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company (ORPIC); Mohammed al-Amri, former Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport and Communication; Qasim al-Shizawei, Director General of Ports at the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications; Juma al-Hinai, the head of the Tenders Board at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO); and Ahmad al-Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Oil Company, who was sentenced to 23 years in jail for accepting bribes and abuse of

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<sup>411</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>412</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.



office.<sup>413</sup> “I think the court cases are important messages from the government to say: ‘you are not tolerated, let those who have evidence of corruption face their fate in courts and let that be public’,” said an Omani public servant. “This is quite an interesting time for Oman. Because of these court cases, there has been a lot of calmness in Oman and discontent has been quite low. And I hope that the government or His Majesty will be able to introduce some proactive measures in time to capitalise on this quietness and calm”.<sup>414</sup>

As in Qatar, Omani interviewees professed strong loyalty to the ruler – in Oman’s case specifically for Sultan Qaboos. When asked why they had not joined demonstrations in 2011, Omani interviewees noted the personal connection between citizen and Sultan, and his personal responsiveness to societal concerns *before* discussion of allocations. An Omani public sector worker, for example, placed credit for Oman’s stability squarely with Sultan Qaboos and on the changes in Oman since 2011:

I feel the country is improving in that [responsiveness to societal concerns is increasing] rather than declining. It’s really improving and trying to talk to people, to companies and through the years, His Majesty was – let’s say – our tutor, coach...I mean even in the simplest thing, he would mention it in his gathering every year when he gathers with tribes. He goes to certain areas and gathers with tribes to talk to them, sitting in a chair, a lot of them around [him], just to see what are their issues...I can tell you, Oman’s history is about this man.<sup>415</sup>

This quote highlights the centrality of Sultan Qaboos to Omani historiography and as an embodiment of the ‘state’, a result of a deliberate nation-building process initiated in 1970, where a “reinvented tradition” supported by rent distributions places Qaboos as the focus of political loyalty; even Omani reformers tended to express strong personal loyalty to him.<sup>416</sup> A sense that citizens *owed* political loyalty to Sultan Qaboos in gratitude for his nation-building efforts was a powerful influence shaping political mobilisation: not only did it allow loyalists to question those who had benefited from the nation-building project yet joined demonstrations, it also resulted in widespread counter-protests where active supporters announced their political allegiance to Sultan

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<sup>413</sup> Gulf News, “Oman Hands Down More Sentences in Corruption Case,” (3 March 2014) <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/oman-hands-down-more-sentences-in-oil-corruption-case-1.1298303> accessed 14 November 2014; Reuters, “Omani CEO Jailed for 23 Years in Graft Case: Court,” (27 February 2011) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/27/us-oman-corruption-sentences-idUSBREA1Q1OW20140227> accessed 14 November 2014.

<sup>414</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>415</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>416</sup> This is the central argument in Valeri, *Oman*.

Qaboos and, through him, the rentier bargain. It also exemplifies the interaction between rent distributions and non-material political loyalty in the modern Arab states of the Gulf. While the nation-building project was designed to build political legitimacy, it was only possible due to Oman's petroleum wealth. Similar to the use of rent-derived capital to fund cultural and prestige projects in Qatar, Oman's nation-building efforts project a sense of responsiveness; in return, citizens are asked to trust that political and economic reforms will be implemented when the country is "ready" for them.<sup>417</sup> That the nation-building project was designed to unite Oman's diverse population is also important; it is unlikely the same strategy would work in Bahrain, where a contested national myth has resulted in certain societal groups feeling excluded from nation-building efforts. Nevertheless, in both Oman and Qatar, interviewees repeatedly referenced rent-funded nation-building projects to explain their political quiescence, highlighting the contribution of these projects to a broader sense of responsiveness from the state.

Although most Omani interviewees who have refrained from political action spoke positively about the state's responsiveness on political issues, they were more critical of economic policy, potentially seeing it as a less controversial topic. As in Qatar, there was a strong sentiment that rentierism and the system of incentives that shaped economic productivity required urgent attention. When asked if they felt that RST was still accurate in Oman today, for example, one Omani (who did not participate in either protests or counter-protests) responded:

It is. Yes. I mean, to some extent it describes the situation in the country. Especially now, we have a really huge public sector that it not only affects the productivity of the people who just entered the market, entered the sector, it affects the people who were inside because they feel that "these people don't know that much and they receive similar salaries like us. They don't do that much. Why are we working hard?"... And also you need, even you are an entrepreneur and you have your own initiative, you will not benefit that much if you work without connection with the government in order to get a project done.<sup>418</sup>

It is worth noting that this same respondent was, in political matters, supportive of government efforts to address issues highlighted during the 2011 Spring and "hopeful"

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<sup>417</sup> This rhetoric focused on the balance between reform and state stability that typifies the gradual approach to development characteristic of Gulf politics. It was most common among Omani interviewees (from both society and state) but also emerged repeatedly in interviews with Qataris, and among loyalists in Bahrain.

<sup>418</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

that the Omani government was now more responsive to its citizens than prior to the 2011 movement; their dissatisfaction on an economic issue had not catalysed their mobilisation.

### ***Bahrain***

In Bahrain, by comparison, opinions were more polarised. In part due to the scale of political mobilisation, it was difficult to find interviewees who had *not* been politically active since 2011. There were two important exceptions to this: the first stemmed from groups in society that generally tended to mobilise in *support* of the state, who claimed that while they supported the state's response to opposition, they did not feel they personally needed to join counter-demonstrations. By not demonstrating, they argued, they were demonstrating their political loyalty, and also not, in their view, contributing to a disruption of social and economic life in Bahrain.<sup>419</sup> The second exception emerged among Bahrainis who, upon being asked for their personal political views, aligned closely with Bahraini mainstream opposition (both religious and secular), but who felt that the cost of political mobilisation was too high. Some were heads of households or otherwise in a bread-winning position, and they also held moderate political views, meaning they generally felt dialogue and engagement with the state was a more effective strategy than outright rejection of state authority. There remained an underlying resentment and distrust of certain state factions, but, for these individuals, the perceived cost of political action (including the loss of rent distributions, but more importantly the potential repressive response from the state) was deemed too high to merit their participation.<sup>420</sup>

Extant work has also found that rent distributions may be more effective on certain parts of society than others. Writes Gengler:

Consider, for instance, the question of participation in political demonstrations. Respondents were asked whether they had joined a demonstration in the preceding three years. According to the survey data, a Sunni reporting a "very good" household economy was just 7 percent likely to have participated, all else being equal, while a Sunni in "good" circumstances was 16 percent likely, "poor" condition 29 percent likely and "very poor" 45 percent. Among Shi'i respondents, by contrast, the estimated probability of demonstrating increased from 48 percent among those reporting "very good" economic health to just

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<sup>419</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain 2013-2014.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

51 percent among those with “very bad,” a rise that is statistically indistinguishable from zero. As of early 2009, the poorest Bahraini Shi‘a were no more prone to protest than any other Shi‘a. But poorer Sunnis were much more likely to do so.<sup>421</sup>

Gengler uses these findings to suggest that the rentier model works only in the case of Bahraini Sunnis, not Shias. “Insofar as there exists in Bahrain a rentier bargain,” he argued in 2015, “this is it”.<sup>422</sup> Yet, as is discussed later in this chapter, rent distributions alone cannot explain why many Bahraini Sunnis joined counter-demonstrations or other forms of political action in support of the state. Rather, Bahraini Sunni interviewees who had mobilised as active supporters justified their participation by reference to a sense of shared identity with the political elite, leading to a perception that the state generally acted in their interests (responsiveness) and, crucially, their dislike of opposition groups, which they perceived as radical, sectarian, and unlikely to act in their interests.<sup>423</sup>

Perhaps the reality lies closest to the perspective expressed by two Baḥrānī academics, where rentier wealth can, on a general level, undermine incentives to participate in political action, yet for a lot of reasons: “people may not be bought”.<sup>424</sup> Whether or not a critical mass of opposition emerges depends on, they argued, the state’s use of repression and the strength of divisions in society. While there were some indications of passive acceptance of the rentier bargain in Bahrain, the polarisation of the community and active unrest since 2011 has encouraged Bahrainis to become either active defenders of the state, or join opposition.

### **Rentier Elites and Active Support for the Rentier Bargain**

Passive acceptance may provide the state with some autonomy, but active supporters are critical to the perpetuation of a rent-based system. They are the active defenders of the status quo and strongly opposed the reformist movements that emerged in 2011. Contradicting Luciani’s original portrayal of a rentier state that deliberately avoids creating a defined constituency (instead coopting broader society), active supporters

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<sup>421</sup> Justin Gengler, “Bahrain’s Sunni Awakening,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* (17 January 2012)

[http://www.merip.org/mero/mero011712?ip\\_login\\_no\\_cache=953f7502579551cfc77625dd25f6fbad](http://www.merip.org/mero/mero011712?ip_login_no_cache=953f7502579551cfc77625dd25f6fbad) accessed 27 January 2016.

<sup>422</sup> Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*, 139.

<sup>423</sup> In some cases the interviewee even *disagreed* with state policy yet still supported the state due to dislike of the opposition.

<sup>424</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

denote the existence of a *rentier elite*, groups and individuals with preferential access to the state, and highlight the importance of variables that encourage political mobilisation in support of the regime.<sup>425</sup>

### ***Business Elites and Tribal Allies***

Many of these groups were tied to Crystal's 'merchant elite' discussed in Chapter One, historical allies of the ruling elite who lost a great deal of political power upon the introduction of oil into the economy but who have since re-emerged as crucial to economic diversification efforts.<sup>426</sup> As prominent Bahraini businessman Khalid al-Zayani put it: "now the relationship between the merchant class and the government is changing, because the government can't afford to employ more people, and there are more students coming from universities".<sup>427</sup> Many families of Sunni Huwala (adj. Huwalī) origin in Bahrain, including the Kanoo, Fakhro, Khunji and Bastaki families, among others, remain key allies of the Al Khalifa ruling family and have publicly declared their loyalty to the ruling elite since 2011, as have families of Sunni Najdī origin. Both the Bastaki (Huwālī) and Zayani (Najdī) families sent letters declaring support and allegiance to King Hamad in 2014, as did the Kooheji, Janahi, Khalfan, al-Attawi, al-Tamimi, al-Jaber, and many others. King Hamad, in return, thanked them for "their unwavering allegiance to HM and firm loyalty to the Kingdom of Bahrain, following in the steps of their fathers and forefathers".<sup>428</sup> These active supporters benefit from close informal ties with senior members of the royal family who frequent their personal majālis, such as a visit Crown Prince Salman made on 15 July 2014 to the al-Bin Ali family majlis (pl. majālis, referring to a social gathering used in the Gulf as a protected space for open discussion), or visits earlier in July to the Kanoo and Dhahrani majālis.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States," 75; See also Chapter One, and especially Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, 32 – 36.

<sup>426</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*.

<sup>427</sup> Author interview with Khalid Al Zayani, Bahrain 2014; see also Chapter One.

<sup>428</sup> King Hamad regularly makes press releases thanking those who have personally declared their loyalty, and the names above are drawn from August and September 2014 announcements. See Bahrain News Agency, "HM King Sends More Cables of Thanks to Loyal Tribes, Families and Individuals," (11 September 2014) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/632499> accessed 15 November 2014; Bahrain News Agency, "HM King Hamad Sends Cables of Thanks," (28 August 2014) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/630578> accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>429</sup> The al-Bin Ali are traditional tribal allies of the Al Khalifa and participated in the 1783 invasion of Bahrain. See Crown Prince Salman's official Twitter account and post in @BahrainCPNews, "HRH the Crown Prince Visits the Majlis of the Al-Binali Family," (1:36pm, 15 July 2014) <https://twitter.com/BahrainCPnews/status/489146391046807552> accessed 5 November 2014; and Kingdom of Bahrain Military Pension Fund, "Crown Prince Visits Dhahrani and Kanoo Majlisses," (7

In Qatar, as was discussed in Chapter Two, the Al Thani family permeates the private sector economy and has played a pivotal role not only as members of the ruling elite, but also as major business players. Other families of prominence, referring to elite business families and those with significant tribal or kinship ties to the Al Thani, include al-Fardan, Jaidah, Darwish, al-Mani, al-Attiyah, al-Misnad and al-Kuwari, as well as individuals such as Ali bin Ali (Ali Bin Ali Group), Ahmad Hassan Bilal (Ahmed Hassan Bilal Trading & Cont. Co.), and the descendants of Abdulla, Abduljaleel, and Abdulghani Abdul Ghani (Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros. Co.).<sup>430</sup> It is telling that the last of these groups to arrive in Qatar, Ahmed Hassan Bilal, established his firm in the 1980s – these are families with longstanding relationships with the Al Thani family. The interplay between business and ruling elite is evident in the composition of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, where many members of the Al Thani family hold senior positions, and the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), where business and tribal elites prominently feature.<sup>431</sup>

In Oman, the way in which Sultan Qaboos came to power has shaped the role of Omani private sector elites in government; unsure of the loyalty of all but a few members of the royal family, he turned to alliances with the merchant elite to build political legitimacy.<sup>432</sup> Omani business elites, such as the al-Zawawi, al-Zubair, and al-Sultan families, are thus key to the state-society relationship in Oman not only for their

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July 2014) <http://www.mpf.gov.bh/en/press-releases/crown-prince-visits-dhahrani-and-kanoo-majlisses.html> accessed 7 November 2014.

<sup>430</sup> The al-Fardan was originally a pearl merchant family but established a jewellery business just after WWII and now operates AlFardan Group Holding out of Qatar, Oman and KSA. Another merchant family, Jaidah, currently operates Jaidah Group, but traces its roots in Qatar back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Darwish merchant family was discussed in Chapter Two, though it is worth noting that the al-Mani were prominent around the same time. The al-Attiyah family is one of the best connected in Qatar, and its members include Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, former deputy prime minister and now head of the Emir's diwan. The al-Kuwari family are also traditional allies of the Al Thani, and are spread throughout the business community but also in government – prominent examples include Mohammed Jaham Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, Ambassador to the US, and Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage. The al-Misnad family is also intimately related with the Al Thani family; prominent members include Shaikha Abdulla al-Misnad, President of Qatar University until June 2015, and Shaikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, wife of former Emir Hamad and mother of current Emir Tamim.

<sup>431</sup> See General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, State of Qatar, "The Composition of the Council," (n.d.) <http://www.cm.gov.qa/English/councilofministers/Pages/TheFormationOfTheCouncil.aspx> accessed 27 January 2016; this trend became particularly clear after a January 2016 Cabinet reshuffle, see The Peninsula, "Emir Reshuffles Cabinet; Many Ministries Merged," (27 January 2016) <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/367903/emir-reshuffles-cabinet-many-ministries-merged> accessed 28 January 2016.

<sup>432</sup> Marc Valeri, "Oligarchy vs. Oligarchy: Business and Politics of Reform in Bahrain and Oman," in *Business Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Steffen Hertog, Giacomo Luciani and Marc Valeri (London: Hurst & Company, 2013) 22.

prominent position in society, but also for their dual role within the state in policymaking positions.<sup>433</sup> Several Omani economists interviewed referred to these three families (and two others: Bahwan and Kimji) as “the Muscat Mafia”, a reference to a term originally reserved for foreign advisors of Qaboos in the early 1970s.<sup>434</sup>

The relationship between these business elites and the state today is thus rooted in the historical state-society relations explored in Chapter Two, and this traditional alliance motivated active support from this community for the state during the 2011 period. In Bahrain’s case, for example, Esam Janahi, the former head of finance giant Gulf Finance House and second on *Arabian Business’s* “Bahrain Power List” of 2009,<sup>435</sup> represents the intricate links between business and ruling elite. He served for several terms in Bahrain’s appointed Majlis al-Shura and was noted for his close ties to Bahrain’s Prime Minister. At the same time, he was responsible, through the Gulf Finance House, for the twin towers development in Bahrain’s Financial Harbour, a development that in the post-2011 period became, as a critical exposé put it: “concrete expressions of the way business and politics so often merge in the Gulf and, as a result, targets in the unrest that has roiled Bahrain and the wider Middle East since the beginning of the year”.<sup>436</sup>

Further, members of the business community with close ties to, or positions in, government were among those *criticised* during the 2011 movements, at least in Bahrain and Oman. Omani participants in 2011 protesters demonstrated specifically against Maqbool al-Sultan, calling for his removal as Minister for Commerce and Industry,<sup>437</sup> and in Bahrain protesters brandished one dinar notes, alleging Prime

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<sup>433</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, Qays al-Zawawi was Deputy Prime Minister for Finance and Economy from 1982 until his death in 1995, and his brother, Omar, remains one of Sultan Qaboos’s closest advisors. Within the Zubair family, Muhammad Zubair helped found the OCCI in 1972 and was Minister for Commerce and Industry from 1974-1982, when he left to become a personal advisor to Sultan Qaboos. His nephew, Juma’a bin ‘Ali, was also the Minister for Manpower until 2008. The most prominent member of the Sultan family, Maqbool al-Sultan, was Minister for Commerce and Industry from 1991 until his removal (as a result of the 2011 protests) in February 2011. Other families of note include the Khalili family, including Sa’ud al Khalili, nephew of the former Imam of Oman Muhammad al Khalili, who became one of the first Cabinet ministers and whose own nephews hold Cabinet positions: Salim bin Hilal (Minister for Agriculture until 2011) and ‘Abd al-Malik bin ‘Abd Allah (Minister for Tourism 2011-2012 and Minister of Justice (2012-present)). See *Ibid*, 20-21.

<sup>434</sup> Allen and Rigsbee, *Oman Under Qaboos*, 36, 107; Author interviews, Bahrain 2013-2014.

<sup>435</sup> *Arabian Business*, “Bahrain Power List” (2009) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-power-list-151881.html> accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>436</sup> Frederik Richter and Martin de Sa’Pinto, “Special Report: In Bahrain, a Symbol at the Heart of Revolt,” *Reuters* (16 June 2011) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/16/us-bahrain-gfh-idUSTRE75F4LF20110616> accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>437</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2014– Oman Country Report*, 16.

Minister Khalifa (or, as they called him: Abū Dīnār) had purchased the land upon which Esam Janahi's twin towers were built for a mere one Bahraini dinar.<sup>438</sup> Even in Qatar, major merchants have been criticised for holding monopolies over certain products and being unresponsive to consumer demands, although not as part of a wider movement to renegotiate the state-society relationship.<sup>439</sup>

It was thus not only the state but also the preferential relationship between government and certain members of the business elite that came under fire during the post-2011 period, and the loyalty of business elite to the state is unsurprising in this regard. It should, of course, be noted that the business elite is not a cohesive block. Consider, for example, the differing relationships between the state and Bahraini Shia merchant families such as al-Arrayed, al-Alawi and Jawad.<sup>440</sup> While Jawad al-Arrayed, who became Bahrain's first Shia minister in 1971 and in 2006 was appointed deputy Prime Minister, continues to hold his position today,<sup>441</sup> other Shia ministers from merchant families, such as Majid al-Alawi, resigned in early 2011 in protest at the treatment of Bahraini opposition.<sup>442</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Shia families perceived to be supportive of the opposition suffered boycotts and, in the case of Jawad Business Group, vandalism and looting by loyalist militias.<sup>443</sup> While membership in the business

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<sup>438</sup> Simeon Kerr and Robin Wigglesworth, "Protesters Draw Bahrain Closer to a Reckoning," *Financial Times* (7 March 2011) <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/223443b4-48e6-11e0-af8c-00144feab49a.html#axzz3IF7AYIYR> accessed 6 November 2014.

<sup>439</sup> Callers to waṭanī ḥabīb, ṣabāḥ al-khayr, for example, criticised the monopoly of companies like Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros. Co. over supplies of Toyota and Lexus. See waṭanī ḥabīb, ṣabāḥ al-khayr, (26 December 2012); Mohammed Shoeb, "Putting People Before Profits," *The Pensinsula* (29 December 2012) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/219752/putting-people-before-profits> accessed 6 November 2014.

<sup>440</sup> Majid al-Alawi, one of the founders of al-Wafaq, was appointed Minister for Labour and Social Affairs in 2002 but resigned in protest in March 2011.

<sup>441</sup> Jawad al-Arrayed's position on the 2011 protests is unclear. Unlike most of the other Shia ministers, he did not resign in 2011 and has been associated with state-led movements to 'probe' the use of violence against protesters alongside other moderate Shia who are willing to engage with government. See Bahrain News Agency, "Deputy Premier Jawad Al Arrayed Announces Probe Committee," (16 February 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/447457?date=2011-03-7> accessed 6 November 2014.

<sup>442</sup> Majid al-Alawi himself came from a background of opposition, as one of several exiled leaders of the Bahrain Freedom Movement, a London-based opposition group that was particularly involved in the 1990s Uprising. Al-Alawi returned to Bahrain during the early 2000s reconciliation movement initiated by King Hamad and was appointed a minister in the 2006 Cabinet reshuffle, which brought several members of previously marginalised groups into government.

<sup>443</sup> A particularly infamous event, Jawad Storm, where security cameras captured the participation of Bahraini policemen in the looting of Jawad Business Group-owned convenience stores is covered in Chapter Four, but Al Jazeera Stream covered the boycotts in Al Jazeera (The Stream), "A Bahrain Boycott on Sectarian Lines," (2011) <https://storify.com/ajstream/businesses-in-bahrain> accessed 6 November 2014; See owner Faisal Jawad refuting rumours that one of their companies, 24 Hours Market, was providing free food to protesters in Tom Hanratty, "We Were Not Involved..." (5 May 2011) <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=305331> accessed 6 November 2014; and criticism from a Bahraini loyalist in Gulf Daily News, "Arrogance Amazing!" (5 March 2011) <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=301114> accessed 7 November 2014.



elite provides strong incentives to mobilise in support of the state, especially where protests targeted the business elite alongside the ruling elite, other variables (such as sectarian identities and informal connections to existing opposition communities) also shape the political attitudes and mobilisation of business elites.

### ***Active Supporters in Popular Mobilisations: Counter-Protests***

Active supporters are not limited to the traditional business and tribal allies of the ruling elite; there exists, in all three states, active support from broader society mobilised in response to 2011 unrest. In Bahrain and Oman these active supporters formed counter-protests and publicly decried reformist movements that challenged the state. Soon after the Omani Spring erupted, for example, Omani loyalists held a rally in Muscat, chanting: “No to violence, yes to unity” and other slogans aimed at, as *Muscat Daily* termed them: “the group of people who were spoiling Oman’s image”.<sup>444</sup> Omanis also publicly affirmed their loyalty to Sultan Qaboos and denounced the protesters, characterising them as misguided or offending the Omani ‘peaceful tradition’. Najma al-Zidzaly, a linguist at Sultan Qaboos University, described her reaction to the Omani Spring to *The New York Times*:

As the government was doing damage control, and as Omanis were trying to grasp what was going on, I kept answering my overseas friends’ e-mails, explaining that Sohar was an anomaly, a lapse in judgment, a momentary loss of control. Then a sense of shame swept over Oman. We do have problems, we all agreed. But doesn’t everybody? What country doesn’t suffer from unemployment? Censorship and monopoly control are also problems in many nations. But the bigger question was this: Is this how we as Omanis try to effect change — vandalism and shootings? And after 40 years of living in peace and prosperity, is this what we want to broadcast to the world? Is this how we repay the wise leader who has done so much for Oman and its people?<sup>445</sup>

Her response, though aimed at an international audience, was not uncommon among Omani active supporters, many of whom strongly condemned the protests or, at most, admitted that some *early* demands for reform might have been necessary (although the manner in which they were pursued was not accepted), but maintained that the state had been generous in its response, both materially and non-materially.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Shaddad al-Musalmy, “We are Proud to be Omani,” *Muscat Daily* (2 March 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/We-are-proud-to-be-Omani> accessed 7 November 2014.

<sup>445</sup> Najma Zidzaly, “From Oman, With Love,” *The New York Times* (7 March 2011) [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/08/opinion/08al-zidjaly.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/08/opinion/08al-zidjaly.html?_r=0) accessed 7 November 2014.

<sup>446</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

Movements on social media also reflected active support across Omani society. A Facebook page entitled: “Support Nobel Peace Prize for His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said” (hereafter Nobel for Qaboos), which has received more than 76,000 ‘Likes’ since its creation in March 2010,<sup>447</sup> was quick to weigh on the debate, with its founder asking:

When I created this page[,] I stood for country defined by its politeness and reserve. I believed that Oman is peaceful and I know after turning the pages of 40 years that HM is great leader and icon of peace, he gave Father love to all its children’s. I want to ask young Omani & university graduate, you are pride of Oman, future of Oman then why these protests. Allah protect Oman.<sup>448</sup>

Another early expression of support was loyalist messages circulated via text message and Blackberry Messenger (BBM), particularly one quoted by Najma al-Zidzaly as: “Stop! We clearly have problems but let us not forget that after 40 years of building our country, we have to ask not just what our country can do for us, for it has done a lot, but, as John F. Kennedy eloquently stated decades ago, what we also can do for our country”.<sup>449</sup> Also mirroring the JFK quote, the Nobel for Qaboos page posted an “I love Oman” video on 6 March 2011, stating: “Love Oman, Love Peace, Love HM Sultan Qaboos, Love its People. Respect Oman & its Culture. Don’t ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”.<sup>450</sup> Commenters clearly connected the post with their views on the 2011 unrest, with responses such as:

Oman great national we shall not be divided inshalleh, Long life HM Sultan Qaboos.

– Arfy Alli Fley

OMAN my LOVE.

– Shaima Al Harthy

Omani’s at this moment should respect and admire and support HM The Sultan. They must not be misled by what they see in the [M]iddle [E]ast.

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<sup>447</sup> The page is primarily in English, yet a large number of its supporters are clearly Omani, and post in both English and Arabic.

<sup>448</sup> Support Nobel Peace Prize for His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, “When I Created This Page,” *Facebook* (29 March 2011) <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/sultanqaboosbinsaid/posts/10150128641056161> accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>449</sup> Zidzaly, “From Oman, With Love”.

<sup>450</sup> Support Nobel Peace Prize for His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, “I Love Oman,” *Facebook* (6 March 2011) <https://www.facebook.com/sultanqaboosbinsaid> accessed 15 November 2014.

Perhaps one of the strongest expressions of active support is the following vehement condemnation of an article by Marc Valeri that urged the “de-sacrelisation of Qaboos” and explored protest and state responses since 2011,<sup>452</sup> written by Raya al-Kharusi:

In this context you made reference to the ‘Oman Spring’ – this is a misnomer as we have no such thing because the West’s reference to what happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Jordan have no comparison to the very few misfits who are ungrateful for all that has been done for them – educationally, health, free plots of land at only One Rial Omani per square meter, overseas scholarships, overseas government paid medical treatment and the list goes on.

The basic point is that these people don’t know what is good for them and they think that by ridiculous statements, tweets, graffiti etc. that they are being effective. They are not and the overwhelming majority of Omanis do not support them...

Oman is continuing to flourish and advance and Omanis are contented with their beloved ruler – may Allah bless and give Sultan Qaboos good health and the forbearance to deal with those who are never satisfied.<sup>453</sup>

Critical to the response above is al-Kharusi’s reference to the material distributions from state to society, and condemnation of those who would challenge the state-society relationship despite receiving these distributions as ‘ungrateful’ (and it’s worth noting that the comments on the Arabic translation of the same article were even more critical).<sup>454</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, this rhetoric reflects a common state narrative of reformist movements and represents strong defence of the rentier bargain.

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid. The nationality of these commenters cannot, for obvious reasons, be confirmed, but the sentiment was strongly shared by Omani loyalist interviewees, and it can be reasonably expected that the commenters were Omani nationals (al-Harthy, for example, is a notable Omani tribe).

<sup>452</sup> Marc Valeri, “‘Qaboos Can Make Mistakes Like Anybody Else’ – The Sultan of Oman De-Sacrilised,” *Jadaliyya* (18 November 2012) [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8430/%E2%80%9Cqaboos-can-make-mistakes-like-anybody-else\\_-the-s](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8430/%E2%80%9Cqaboos-can-make-mistakes-like-anybody-else_-the-s) accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>453</sup> Raya al-Kharusi, commenting in response to Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> The Arabic translation of Valeri’s article received comments such as ‘vapid article’, claims the author did not understand the true feeling Omanis had for Qaboos and attacks on the scientific veracity of the research. Interestingly, it also received one or two supportive comments, including one that said simply: ‘The people want the end of the nightmare’ (al-sha‘ab yurīd inha’ al-kābūs), a play on the similarity between the word ‘kābūs’ (nightmare) and Oman’s Sultan Qaboos. See Marc Valeri, “naza’ al-qadāsa ‘an sūltān ‘ūmān,” *Jadaliyya* (26 November 2012) <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8621/%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86> accessed 7 August 2016.

In Bahrain too, active supporters mobilised in response to 2011 unrest, vehemently condemning the opposition and organising counter-protests. One of the most violent of these occurred on 11 March 2011 and resulted in over 700 injured between loyalist and opposition protesters.<sup>455</sup> Key to this particular event was the decision by the more radical groups within opposition to march towards the Royal Diwan, located in strongly loyalist neighbourhood Riffa.<sup>456</sup> Explained a moderately pro-government Bahraini:

I remember my Sunni friends, they said ‘no, no. That’s it. They [the demonstrators] had to protest in Manama, they were going and protesting in other places, but coming to protest in Riffa? That’s a no-no’...A lot of Sunnis think the government is lenient, despite everything. They think that the government is lenient with the Shia. So that is why they said: ‘If the government is going to allow them, we are not going to allow them’... ‘And this is our area and it’s not only their country; it’s also our country. We are not allowing them to come and protest here’...

So Thursday night [the night before the protest] in Riffa I see a lot of mainly youth walking around with sticks and I thought: ‘Wow, they are prepared from now’. And even my friend, he opened his trunk for me and he showed me the sticks and everything that he had prepared. And even though he lives in Isa Town, he said: ‘tomorrow I’m going to Riffa and I am going to defend Riffa and,’ according to him, ‘I’m going to be a martyr tomorrow’.<sup>457</sup>

Of importance here is that Bahraini active supporters and opposition generally aligned along sectarian schisms in society, whereas, in Oman, active supporters were spread across sect, region, and class-based divisions.<sup>458</sup> The quote also highlights the active engagement of loyalists with public debate, policy, and counter-protests. In some cases this engagement extends to direct participation in negotiations over state-society relations, as in Bahrain where members of the Bahraini Chamber of Commerce and Industry (representing the business elite) and other active supporter groups participated directly in the National Dialogue process.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> CNN Wire Staff, “Hundreds Injured During Clashes Between Rival Groups in Bahrain,” *CNN International* (12 March 2011) <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/11/bahrain.clashes/> accessed 8 November 2014; see coverage of earlier loyalist demonstrations in Gulf News, “Loyalists Also Take to Streets in Manama,” (23 February 2011) <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/loyalists-also-take-to-streets-in-manama-1.766170> accessed 8 November 2014.

<sup>456</sup> Haq and Wafa organised this particular march, while al-Wefaq and leftist groups like Waad called for the march’s cancellation amid fears it would worsen sectarian tensions.

<sup>457</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>458</sup> The implications of sectarianism in the Bahraini Spring is a theme throughout this thesis but discussed specifically in terms of its fragmentation of the opposition in Chapter Four and the implications of the Shi’ite Crescent narrative in Chapter Six.

<sup>459</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “BCCI Visions to the National Dialogue Made Available at [www.bcci.bh](http://www.bcci.bh),” (2 July 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/463349> accessed 30 January 2016.

As in Oman, active supporters in Bahrain express their message through social media and attempt to delegitimise the protests by describing them as sectarian, violent, and engineered by disloyal citizens beholden to foreign powers (read: Iran). YouTube users “4Bahraini2all”, “4dever”, and “The Real Voice of Bahrain” for example, all upload videos purporting to show violent and sinister intentions of Bahraini protesters, most memorably a video by 4dever claiming to reveal the true “taqiyya”<sup>460</sup> intent of protesters by waving flags with twelve white points (ostensibly representing the twelve Imams of Ithnā‘ashariyya, or ‘Twelver’ Shi‘ism) instead of the official five points (representing the five pillars of Islam).<sup>461</sup> The actual flags in the video, of course, were simply older versions of the official Bahraini flag, yet the role of these active supporters should not be overlooked. Most critically, they offer contrasting narratives of protest movements that simultaneously legitimise repressive state responses and delegitimise opposition demands, thus attempting to perpetuate the existing state-society relationship.

Even in Qatar, active supporters demonstrated loyalty to the state and publicly condemned those who expressed reform demands. When Dr. Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, for example, published a book entitled *al-Sha‘ab Yurīd al-‘Islāh fī Qaṭar ‘Aydān* (The People Want Reform in Qatar Too) in 2012, his strongest critics were not state officials (who remained silent) but active supporters in society.<sup>462</sup> Explained one Qatari interviewee:

The funny thing is that the main opposition to the book didn’t come from the government. The government stayed quiet about it. The *people* rose up against the book...Qataris looked at it as – first of all, who is this person to speak for Qataris? Nobody said anything about this. Second of all, we like our government. We’re happy with it. We don’t want democracy. We don’t want all that fuss around nothing that’s happening in Kuwait, for example. We’re very happy with the government giving us a lot of money and a lot of rights and the new building springing up every now and then and our sons going to the best universities and the best

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<sup>460</sup> Taqiyya refers to a practice in Shia Islam in which it is acceptable to conceal your religion where there is threat of persecution, yet is often used by sectarian agents to denote deceitfulness and treachery.

<sup>461</sup> 4dever, “The Truth About the Flags Used in Bahrain Protests,” *YouTube* (26 March 2011) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCF59857WzE> accessed 7 August 2016; The Real Voice of Bahrain, “Today’s Protest 13/03/2011,” *YouTube* (13 March 2011) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_kRI3TDR4g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_kRI3TDR4g) accessed 7 August 2016; 4Bahraini2all, “markez al-salmāniya al-ṭubbī 2011-03-09,” *YouTube* (26 March 2011) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZ2WcynChUw> accessed 7 August 2016.

<sup>462</sup> This book and Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari are discussed further in Chapter Four as it represents one of the most direct calls for democratisation in Qatar.

schools and we're quite happy with it and you don't have the right to speak for the Qatari people.<sup>463</sup>

To delegitimise al-Kuwari's views, active supporters described al-Kuwari's work as inaccurate, outdated, or not reflecting the opinions of most Qataris.<sup>464</sup> They were also very effective at stifling public discussion of reform. A Qatari reformer described the effect these active supporters had on expression of his own views: "A lot of us had to stay quiet on Twitter, not because we were afraid of what the government was going to do; we were afraid of our own followers because basically people were very agitated about this. And if you came out supporting Dr. Ali Khalifa, you'd get hammered".<sup>465</sup>

To explain their personal loyalty to the state in interviews, active supporters emphasised a sense of responsiveness from the state, often linked with their historically preferential access to the ruling elite. If this sense of responsiveness disappeared, so too did the loyalty of the active supporter, as was the case with several Shia elite families in Bahrain after 2011. A member of one Shia business family described in an interview how a longstanding symbiotic relationship with the Bahraini state had deteriorated since 2011:

There was [traditionally] a benefit between us and them [the Al Khalifa] and we were doing – as I said, we were – I mean, we did our part as a Bahraini. And we look at them as our rulers. We respected them and they were showing us respect and we were showing them respect... We know that there are so many things they are doing bad. But for us, we are a business... We left politics for the politicians and we concentrated on our business. Until now, we are in business. We don't interfere into politics but when it comes that something will hit us, we have to stand up to protect ourselves.<sup>466</sup>

What the interviewee was referring to above was the move by the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) to strip two Shia board members, Adel al-Aali and Ibrahim al-Duaisy, of their membership, in response to – according to the interviewee – government pressure to demonstrate loyalty,<sup>467</sup> and the BCCI's pro-government stance

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<sup>463</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>464</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>465</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>466</sup> Author interview with member of business elite, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>467</sup> Other interviewees concurred with this position, including some Sunni members of the BCCI. It is worth noting that al-Aali and al-Duaisy were later reinstated, yet the position of the BCCI towards the protests has remained unchanged.

since then.<sup>468</sup> Notably absent, for example, has been criticism of the persecution of BCCI members perceived to be sympathetic to opposition. To the contrary, the BCCI instead has been making “calls for greater national unity”, but identifies protest movements as responsible for widening schisms in society, thus conforming to the government narrative of the Bahraini Spring.<sup>469</sup> Importantly, the material distributions received by the interviewee had not altered – it was the removal of non-material aspects of their preferential relationship that caused their shift in political loyalty.

### ***Reform Demands from Active Supporters***

Active supporters mobilised against opposition in the post-2011 period, but this does not mean they did not have policy demands of their own. Many of these demands, due to the prevalence of informal linkages between these groups and the state, are not expressed in the public domain, yet two key strands are identifiable since 2011. The first, opposition to state economic policy, allows active supporters to condemn political unrest while simultaneously placing their own policy constraints on the state. The second stems from loyalist groups with ideological interests that differ from those of the ruling elite, such as Sunni Islamists in Bahrain, who are key allies of the state in combatting the largely Shia opposition, but also have non-material interests of their own. In both cases, overlapping interests between active supporters and the ruling elite is critical: it means loyalists can ally with *factions* within the state to challenge other state groups and more effectively press for change.

The Bahraini business community, for example, generally benefits from economic liberalisation programs, especially those that ease restrictions on the import of foreign labour. Part of Crown Prince Salman’s economic reform program initiated in 2006, however, was the creation of the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) and Tamkeen, semi-autonomous agencies designed to support the training and employment of Bahraini nationals, particularly in the private sector. Since 2008, the LMRA has been tasked with collecting a fee (BHD200 initially, and BHD10 monthly thereafter) for each expatriate worker, which is used to fund Tamkeen’s training programs that are in turn aimed at improving Bahraini citizen skills and phasing out the need for expatriate

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<sup>468</sup> Mohammed Al Jayousi, “Dismissal of Chamber of Commerce Board Members Creates Controversy in Bahrain,” *Al-Shorfa* (5 May 2011) [http://al-shorfa.com/en\\_GB/articles/meii/features/business/2011/05/05/feature-03](http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/business/2011/05/05/feature-03) accessed 14 November 2014.

<sup>469</sup> See Bahrain News Agency, “BCCI Calls for the Need to Restore National Unity,” (27 December 2011) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/486698?date=2012-01-14> accessed 14 November 2014.

employment.<sup>470</sup> Bahrain's business community has regularly opposed the fee, drawing on their strong ties with Prime Minister Khalifa (who, as noted earlier, was already opposed to the Crown Prince's reform program), as well as occasional support from MPs. In April 2010, for example, after several protests in front of the National Assembly by Bahraini businessmen, an unusual cross-section of MPs sent an official letter to Shaikh Khalifa calling for the immediate 12-month suspension of the BD10 monthly fees. Supporters included the leader of al-Wefaq, Shaikh Ali Salman, and traditionally loyalist MPs, such as Salafi Ibrahim Busandal, from al-Asalah Islamic Society (jam'iyat al-aṣāla al-islāmiyya, hereafter al-Asalah) and Shaikh Abdullatif al-Shaikh, from Bahrain's Muslim Brotherhood society, al-Minbar Islamic Society (jam'iyat al-minbar al-waṭanī al-islāmī, hereafter al-Minbar), signifying the potential for concerted action where common interests are identified, at least before relations between political societies worsened after 2011.<sup>471</sup> Ultimately, the turning point for the LMRA fee debate was in 2011, when escalating unrest meant the state needed to reinforce the loyalty of the business elite, and the business elite successfully claimed that the negative economic impact of the unrest necessitated a (temporary) suspension of the fee. The levy was first suspended for six months, then for an additional twelve, until it was finally reintroduced in August 2013, albeit at a reduced level for those enterprises employing fewer than five expatriate workers.<sup>472</sup> Yet the implication was clear: the business elite supported the state on political matters, but was willing to challenge policy that impacted their interests, particularly where they could exploit an existing division between state groups.

This phenomenon was not limited to Bahrain; it is reminiscent of opposition to similar initiatives in other Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia's Nitaqat program, which links business incentives and penalties to the percentage of Saudi workers employed in an enterprise.<sup>473</sup> In Oman, too, the business community generally supports the state on

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<sup>470</sup> A simultaneous purpose of the fee is to decrease the salary disparity between similarly skilled Bahrainis and expatriate workers. Interview with representative from Tamkeen, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>471</sup> Trade Arabia, "Bahrain MPs Call for Suspension of LMRA Fees," (7 April 2010) <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Bahrain+MPs+call+for+suspension+of+LMRA+fees.-a0224375149> accessed 29 January 2016.

<sup>472</sup> Trade Arabia, "Bahrain Traders Demand Labour Fee Suspension," (16 June 2011) [http://www.tradearabia.com/news/EDU\\_200548.html](http://www.tradearabia.com/news/EDU_200548.html) accessed 29 January 2016; Trade Arabia, "Bahrain to Lift Fee Freeze on Expat Workers," (28 August 2013) [http://www.tradearabia.com/news/LAW\\_241718.html](http://www.tradearabia.com/news/LAW_241718.html) accessed 29 January 2016; Mandeep Singh, "Extend LMRA Fees Freeze," *Labour Market Regulatory Authority Media Centre* (17 June 2012) <http://blog.lmra.bh/en/2012/06/17/extend-lmra-fees-freeze/> accessed 29 January 2016.

<sup>473</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The Gulf State in the International Political Economy* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 184.



political matters but openly criticises economic policy where it is viewed as contrary to their interests. The Omani private sector, referring not only to the five elite families mentioned earlier but also the wider (national) business community, holds annual debates that discuss economic sustainability in policymaking, Omanisation, and the role of the private sector in job creation. The 2011 Oman Debate asked: “Is creating 50,000 jobs in one year the solution to the unemployment problem or are there structural issues like changes in the education system, making people employable, training etc that need to be looked at?” and “Is this a watershed moment in Oman’s socio-economic history where everything that was held as sacred needs to be questioned and redefined?”<sup>474</sup> Active supporters interviewed (some of whom had participated in the Oman Debates) were often highly critical of development performance and, when asked what they would personally like to see changed, emphasised issues of transparency, efficiency, and accountability. For example, an interviewee from Oman’s business elite – who strongly condemned the 2011 protests – highlighted several economic changes he believed were necessary for Oman, including: revisiting and expanding the training courses available to Omanis; balancing the need for greater Omanisation with simplistic quotas that negatively affect private sector enterprises; and, ultimately, the need for “real” change, including the establishment of a Prime Minister.<sup>475</sup> The convergence of the latter demand with those of Oman’s reformist elite – only some of whom openly call for a Prime Minister – reveals the potential for multi-directional pressure on the state: from a reformist elite through public demands for reform, and from informal lobbying by traditionally loyalist groups, who believe that an individual with greater day-to-day involvement in the affairs of state would help to ensure the accountability of Cabinet, which in turn encourages greater efficiency, responsiveness, and transparency in state-society relations.<sup>476</sup>

Public criticism of economic policy was also evident in Qatar, where active supporters, particularly those in the private sector, questioned the sustainability of rentier distributions. Consider, for example, the following response to the 2011 public service wage increase from the founder of the popular iLoveQatar (ILQ) website, Khalifa Saleh al-Haroon:

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<sup>474</sup> Oman Economic Review, “Stage Set for Oman Debate 2011,” (August 2011) 49.

<sup>475</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>476</sup> Author interviews with members of business elite and reformers, Oman 2013 – 2014.

As a citizen, it's great to know that the government is there to take care of it's [sic] people. It's nice to feel that my country cares about government officials so much ...

However as someone who works in the private sector, I'm left thinking, "What about me?" I studied hard. I went to university to get my degree. I came back and worked in the private sector. I proved that I was a hard worker, dedicated, and was set to prove that Qataris are ready to make a difference in the world. So why aren't I being rewarded as well? In fact, are we giving the wrong message to the new generation? Come and get a cushy government job. Aren't we trying to build a knowledge-based economy? One that will encourage start ups, Qatari entrepreneurs, and see a growth in SMEs? Why would a youngster create his own businesses now when he can get a great salary working in a government job?<sup>477</sup>

Active supporters, then, are highly mobilised and willing to challenge the sustainability of the rentier bargain even while averring strong political loyalty to the state.

While the economic elite generally avoided framing their demands as political, other active supporters, particularly those drawn from political societies, held more overtly non-material demands – this is the second key strand of reform demands from active supporters. The Bahraini state, for example, has relied heavily on its Sunni allies in society and notably on an alliance with Islamist political societies al-Asalah, al-Minbar, and the umbrella group National Unity Gathering (NUG, *tajammu' al-wahda al-waṭaniyya*).<sup>478</sup> These groups have effectively opposed calls for reform from the Shia opposition but also have demands of their own, as the following paragraphs demonstrate.

While al-Asalah has traditionally been, since its establishment in 2002, strongly pro-government and fiercely critical of the Shia opposition, the intensifying violence in Syria has created some friction with the Bahraini state, which is well-aware of the potential for religious radicalisation and views citizen-engagement in foreign conflicts with serious concern.<sup>479</sup> Al-Asalah clerics, such as Shaikh Adel al-Muawada, frame the Syrian conflict as a core threat to Islam, and have campaigned to raise funds to procure

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<sup>477</sup> Khalifa Saleh al-Haroon (as Mr. Q), "My Thoughts on the Salary Increases for (Some) Qataris," *Mr. Q: A Qatari's View* (26 September 2011) <http://blog.iloveqatar.net/2011/09/my-thoughts-on-the-salary-increases-for-some-qataris/> accessed 23 October 2014.

<sup>478</sup> In mid-2013 the NUG also started going by the 'National Unity Assembly', but this thesis will refer to them by the name by which it is most commonly known, the NUG.

<sup>479</sup> Al-Asalah traditionally benefited from personal meetings with senior members of the Bahraini ruling elite. See Bahrain News Agency, "HRH Premier Receives Al Asalah Islamic Society Board Members," (31 May 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/458790> accessed 10 November 2014.

weapons for rebel fighters.<sup>480</sup> Other Salafi clerics, such as Shaikh Adel al-Hamd, Imam of a mosque in Riffa, publicly called for Bahraini security forces to travel to Syria during their service holidays and train the local Syrian opposition,<sup>481</sup> and al-Hamd's son Abdulrahman was one of the first Bahrainis killed fighting for Jabhat al-Nuṣra in Syria.<sup>482</sup> Ahead of November 2014 elections, a senior member of al-Asalah and former MP, Ibrahim Busandal, made a more overt criticism of the political system, denouncing Bahrain's parliament as "powerless" and claiming: "Our reasonable share in decision-making is being denied, which seriously calls for thinking in terms of a boycott".<sup>483</sup> Al-Asalah remains a primarily loyalist body, yet this does not preclude them from pursuing independent interests that occasionally clash with those of the state.

Al-Minbar, Bahrain's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) movement, also remains very loyalist, closely linked to the ruling elite, and boycotted the 2011 National Dialogue to protest "the Shiite opposition's 'silence' about acts of violence that erupted during the second anniversary of the country's 2011 uprising".<sup>484</sup> Yet their support comes at a significant cost for the state, which must tread carefully between maintaining support from al-Minbar, and relations with Saudi Arabia, which in early 2014 designated the MB a terrorist group.<sup>485</sup> Tellingly, despite heavy pressure from Saudi Arabia, the Bahraini state has refused to label the MB a terrorist organisation, differentiating between transnational and domestic incarnations of the MB, and noting that al-Minbar has not violated any domestic Bahraini laws.<sup>486</sup> There is also a secondary implication of the state's reliance on Sunni Islamist groups such as al-Minbar: the limitation of state

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<sup>480</sup> Shaikh Adel al-Muawada, speaking in alqallaf911, "medīnat ḥamad/ 'ādel al-mu'āwadah yurūwī tajrabitih ma'a al-jaysh al-hurr." *YouTube* (4 August 2012) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AH7-oqSINVg&list=UUj31BoPMH9ueX6LW\\_YJtVMw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AH7-oqSINVg&list=UUj31BoPMH9ueX6LW_YJtVMw) accessed 14 November 2014.

<sup>481</sup> Audio of his statement is available (in Arabic) at jama' al-nosof, (May 2013) <http://alnosof.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/jonood.mp3> accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>482</sup> Husain Marhoon, "Bahraini Salafists in Spotlight," *Al-Monitor* (18 June 2013) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/bahrain-jihadists-syria-salafism.html#> accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>483</sup> Beatrice Thomas, "Former MP Slams Bahrain Parliament as 'Powerless,'" *Arabian Business* (3 June 2014) <http://m.arabianbusiness.com/former-mp-slams-bahraini-parliament-as-powerless--552664.html> accessed 29 January 2016.

<sup>484</sup> Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "The Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf: Prospects for Agitation," *The Washington Institute* (10 June 2013) <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-in-the-gulf-prospects-for-agitation> accessed 11 November 2014.

<sup>485</sup> Reuters, "Saudi Arabia Designates Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Group," (7 March 2014) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/07/us-saudi-security-idUSBREA260SM20140307> accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>486</sup> Al Jazeera, "al-bahraīn lā ta'tabr al-'ikhwān jumā'a 'irhābiyya," (20 March 2014) <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2014/3/20/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9> accessed 15 November 2014.

autonomy when it attempts to offer concessions to Shia opposition groups. As Gengler notes: “The government, many Sunnis feel, cannot have it both ways: If the Shi‘i threat is grave enough to require steadfast support for the regime, it must be grave enough to preclude state compromise with the opposition or cave-ins to international pressure on matters of national security”.<sup>487</sup> While groups such as al-Minbar are critical allies of the state during a time of popular pressure, their support comes with significant trade-offs, and does not necessarily ensure state autonomy on political matters.

The NUG and its splinter group, the al-Fateh Youth Coalition (i’tilāf shabāb al-fāteḥ, or al-Fateh Youth), provide the most revealing example of the complex nature of Sunni political activism in Bahrain. The NUG itself is a coalition of three Sunni groups – al-Asalah, al-Minbar and a non-parliamentary group, the Shura Islamic Society (jam‘iyyat al-shūra al-’islāmiyya) – and was formed on 19 February 2011 under the central leadership of Abdulatif al-Mahmoud, a Sunni cleric. It enjoyed positive relations with the state from its inception, stating upon meeting with PM Khalifa bin Salman in early 2011 that they: “vowed to remain active commending HRH the Prime Minister’s wisdom and statesmanship...[and] praised HRH the Premier’s keenness to directly reach out to citizens’ needs”.<sup>488</sup> Their first major public demonstration – a rally aimed at countering unrest by Shia groups – was held at the al-Fateh mosque in Juffair and attracted, according to their own estimates, over 300,000 participants.<sup>489</sup> Many of their demands were overtly material and thus constitute a clear exchange of rent allocations for active demonstrations in support of the regime: Isa town residents, for example, demanded cancellation of debts, salary increases and housing units.<sup>490</sup>

Yet the NUG also, as Frederic Wehrey argues, represents growing Sunni disenfranchisement from the regime, particularly as it draws support from lower-income

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<sup>487</sup> Gengler, “Bahrain’s Sunni Awakening”.

<sup>488</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “HRH Premier Praises National Unity Gathering” (4 March 2011) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/451562?date=2011-04-7> accessed 11 November 2014. Relations were still positive several years later, see Bahrain News Agency, “Deputy Premier Receives Chairman of the National Unity Gathering,” (26 February 2013) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/548400?date=2013-02-28> accessed 11 November 2014.

<sup>489</sup> Al-Fateh Youth Coalition, “Manifesto,” (30 June 2013) <http://alfateh21february.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/fycmanifesto.pdf> accessed 15 November 2014. A video of Abdulatif al-Mahmoud’s speech during this first presentation is available at Old4Old, “tajammu’ al-muwāṭanīn al-bahrayniyyīn ’amām markez aḥmed al-fāteḥ” *YouTube* (21 February 2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efRwSoA9qwY> accessed 11 November 2014.

<sup>490</sup> Basma Mohammed, “Residents of Isa Town Draw up List of Demands,” *Gulf Daily News* (28 February 2011) <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=300715> accessed 15 November 2014.

Sunnis from Muharraq, Riffa and Isa town.<sup>491</sup> This became particularly clear when a group of Sunni youth, feeling the NUG was too closely tied to government, splintered from the NUG and formed the al-Fateh Youth Coalition.<sup>492</sup> According to their manifesto, their coalition was specifically formed to combat sectarianism (in their view driven by Bahrain's Shia opposition), and much of their rhetoric focuses heavily on national unity, similar to most loyalists.<sup>493</sup> However, they also made clear political demands, including: widening political representation so that the elected Majlis al-Nuwwab has legislative control; greater judiciary independence; a two term limit for the position of Prime Minister; greater transparency in government financial transactions; free press; and freedom to form political parties, civil society organisations, and unions.<sup>494</sup> The al-Fateh Youth Coalition, then, fluctuates between active support and opposition. They strongly oppose groups like al-Wefaq, which they view as loyal to Iran and intent on creating societal discord, and in doing so benefit the state, which can portray the Bahraini Spring as a societal conflict between Sunni and Shia groups. Yet, simultaneously, al-Fateh Youth make wide-ranging demands for non-material transformations that would significantly alter the state-society relationship in Bahrain, suggesting they are also willing to challenge the prevailing state-society relationship.

Though Sunni mobilisation is dynamic and complex, what is particularly clear is that Sunnis have become increasingly politically active in Bahrain since 2011. As Gengler noted in 2012, when Shia opposition cries: *al-sha'ab yurīd isqāt al-nizām!* (the people want the fall of the regime), Bahraini Sunnis now respond: *al-sha'ab yurīd Khalifa bin Salman!* (The people want Khalifa bin Salman).<sup>495</sup> Their active support has been critical to the perpetuation of the rentier bargain in Bahrain, even if they simultaneously hold independent interests of their own.

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<sup>491</sup> Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 79-81.

<sup>492</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the name al-Fateh carries political and historical weight in Bahrain. Al-Fateh Youth Coalition claims the name came from the largely Sunni 1923 movement by Abdulwahhab al-Zayani, Shaikh Ahmed bin Rashid bin Lahej and Abdulrahman al Bakir to counter the British administrative reforms.

<sup>493</sup> Their first listed two values are: "Bahrain is an independent Arab and Islamic country protected by its people with all its sects, components, and national powers" and "Rejection of external interference which compromise with national sovereignty by any regional or international power". See Al Fateh Youth Coalition, "Manifesto".

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Gengler, "Bahrain's Sunni Awakening".

## **Conclusion: Implications for RST**

Direct rent distributions could not, on the basis of the evidence presented in this chapter, be considered the *primary* determinant of political loyalty. Likewise, indirect distributions – rent-funded projects such as Katara, the Museum of Islamic Art, and Souq al-Waqif, for example – were listed to justify loyalty to the Qatari state, yet it was their role as demonstrations of responsiveness that was considered key, not their largesse.

This suggests that the *balance* of RST requires revision. That is, the extant theory does not adequately account for the interaction between incentives to press for reform and incentives to remain politically quiescent that impact the attitudes and actions of state and societal groups. These incentives differ in type and strength across the Gulf: tribal and sect-based identities shape political mobilisation to a greater extent in Bahrain, whereas nation-building programs and nationalist myths are particularly critical in Qatar and Oman. Yet all of these variables link back, ultimately, to a sense of responsiveness and rentier wealth can play only a supporting – if significant – role in this relationship.

The political mobilisation of those who viewed the state as responsive to their interests, and were thus more likely to support the state, was shaped, to a large extent, as a reaction to the incidence of public opposition to the state. This holds in Bahrain and Oman, where widespread opposition protests incited counter-demonstrations by loyalists, but also in Qatar, where active support for the state emerged most avidly in response to Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari's edited volume, *The People Want Reform in Qatar Too*. Historically preferential relationships between societal groups and the state also encouraged active support, yet the loyalty of these groups is not automatic, nor is it inevitably assured by large distributions from state to society. Crucially, these groups maintain independent interests and have proven adept at placing policy constraints on the state, particularly where they can capitalise on internal debate occurring between internal state factions.

Rents, then, can *enhance*, but not determine, political loyalty, even among those who defend state authority. While the Bahraini, Qatari and Omani states demonstrated *some* understanding of this reality, they nevertheless emphasised the transfer of wealth to society during times of popular pressure. As shall be discussed in the next chapter, the state has often expressed confusion or frustration toward groups in society that have

challenged state policy despite receiving rent distributions: these groups represent the most serious challenge to RST and the assumption that cooptation will preclude societal unrest.

## Chapter 4 - Opposition and Reform: Rejection of the Rentier Bargain

*Some* opposition is to be expected in any state, rentier or otherwise. Jocelyn Sage Mitchell, for example, found that, among surveyed Qataris, 13-29 percent expressed dissatisfaction about economic benefits, such as healthcare, education, and housing, distributed by the state.<sup>496</sup> This is certainly low by international standards (in 2009 *satisfaction* with healthcare among uninsured US residents, meaning those who rely on government services, was only 26 percent),<sup>497</sup> but also indicates that even one of the most rent-abundant states in the world cannot completely avoid dissatisfaction. Her findings aligned with interviews obtained for this research, such as a Qatari who claimed: “I am happy with government, but we need higher quality of healthcare, of education, of infrastructure”. Other Qataris even suggested they would prefer to pay taxes if it made it easier to demand higher quality government services, not the typical reaction expected within RST.<sup>498</sup>

Mitchell’s work highlights an important point: there remains a widespread assumption within the RST literature that the mere existence of distributions is sufficient to coopt citizens, and inadequate attention has been paid to both the quality and the perception of these rent-based benefits.<sup>499</sup> However, what is not clear from Mitchell’s work, and even less so from the broader RST literature, is if *dissatisfaction* with benefits is sufficient to motivate political action. That is, would individuals dissatisfied with benefits simply rent-seek for greater and higher quality distributions, or might their dissatisfaction precipitate political opposition? More critically, might a citizen who does receive significant benefits mobilise against the state for other reasons? This chapter focuses on these questions, examining reformist and opposition movements across the three case studies to question why these individuals have mobilised to demand reform, despite the ostensible incentives to accept the rentier contract and refrain from political action.

The most important distinction this chapter draws is between *rent-seeking* and what is termed a *political challenge*. If ‘opposition’ movements since 2011 are solely demands for greater rent allocations and benefits, then the fundamental logic of the rentier state –

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<sup>496</sup> Mitchell, “Beyond Allocation,” 86.

<sup>497</sup> Government of the United States, *The Economic Report of the President* (New York: Cosimo, 2010) 191.

<sup>498</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2014.

<sup>499</sup> Mitchell, “Beyond Allocation,” 82-86.



the exchange of political loyalty for rent distributions – remains upheld. If, however, citizens have made *political challenges* – demands to shift political power from state to society despite cooptation mechanisms being in place – then this signifies at least a partial rejection of the supposed rentier bargain and contravenes RST. Rent-seeking, of course, is often a rational attempt to improve material living conditions, and the use of the term in this chapter – necessary to speak to the broader literature on RST – is not intended to carry a negative connotation.<sup>500</sup> Rather, its use is designed solely to differentiate between those who are interested in obtaining primarily material outcomes, which RST depicts as a natural feature of a rent-rich state (or of any state, for that matter), from those whose demands place political constraints on the state, which, in a perfect rentier state, should not occur.

As the first section of this chapter discusses, most movements since 2011 demonstrate elements of rent-seeking *and* a political challenge. In Qatar, for example, the country’s widest political mobilisation occurred on Twitter and was almost entirely a rent-seeking movement. This is contrasted with protests by a radical youth group in Bahrain, and with Omani regional demonstrations in Sohar and Salalah, which were dominated by unemployed youth and made both rent-seeking demands of, and political challenges to, the state.

However, in all three case studies there emerged political challenges, often from what is termed in this thesis a *reformist elite*. Their existence is a critical challenge to RST: they represent members of society who have made organised and clear political challenges despite receiving significant benefits from the state. Many of them placed their privileged financial position in jeopardy by participating in public demonstrations, and the chapter discusses individual examples that challenge RST at the micro-level as well as broader macro-level opposition movements that highlight the continued relevance of societal opposition in rentier states. The level and nature of reformist groups differed

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<sup>500</sup> The term, unfortunately, does have negative connotations, though many movements defined as ‘rent-seeking’ are in fact justifiable attempts to redress low wages, inequality, and lack of economic opportunity. Even within the economic literature, rent-seeking is often equated with corruption or otherwise linked to low productivity, since it means the use of resources and distortion of the political system to redistribute existing wealth, rather than the creation of new wealth (the traditional example being tariff protections for companies as a result of political lobbying, which provides these companies with a financial advantage that has little to do with their productivity). See Kevin M. Murphy, Andrei Shleifer, and Robert W. Vishny, “Why is Rent-Seeking so Costly to Growth?” *The American Economic Review* 83:2 (May 1993) 409-414; Ragnar Torvik, “Natural Resources, Rent Seeking and Welfare,” *Journal of Development Economics* 67 (2002) 455 – 470; DiJohn, *From Windfall to Curse?* 78.

substantially between the case studies, and the chapter contrasts political challenges that emerged from a reformist elite in Qatar, who advocated reform through public discussion and negotiation with the regime, with widespread and organised demonstrations in Bahrain, where opposition is often antagonistic to the Al Khalifa regime.

The question then becomes: why did political challenges emerge? What political, social, or economic variables have demonstrated the potential to overpower rentierism? In what circumstances were rent-seeking motivations prevalent, compared to when political challenges dominated? Focusing on the dynamics most commonly referenced by opposition interviewees asked to explain their personal motivation to press for reform, this chapter discusses how the use of repressive tactics by the state can drive political challenges and overwhelm rent-based incentives to remain loyal to the regime. Inequality is also an important motivator, particularly as it has generated both rent-seeking *and* political challenges, and the chapter discusses types of inequality relevant to societal mobilisations in Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. There were also several forces related to changes *in* society over time: these are discussed within the framework of *dynamic reformism* and include the emergence of open spaces for public debate online and through social media in the globalised era, the reduced effectiveness of rent distributions over time as citizens start to view them as rights rather than gifts, and the transfer of political activism through personal, often familial, networks from one generation to another.

While these variables have demonstrated potential to overwhelm rentierism, this does not necessarily mean society will radically revise the rentier contract. In all three states, reformist groups remain highly fragmented and unable or unlikely to form a cohesive national opposition movement. This is partly a result of rent distributions that encourage vertical clientelist links with the state over horizontal cooperation,<sup>501</sup> but is also a consequence of historical state limitations on civil society and the skillful exploitation of existing societal schisms. While fragmentation remains a serious obstacle to revision of the state-society relationship, the final section of the chapter discusses informal linkages within and between reformist groups that indicate the potential for wider mobilisation in future movements. Overall, the chapter highlights the continued

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<sup>501</sup> Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*.

activism of society, contravening typical RST depictions of rentier societies as passive, unmotivated, and uninterested in political or economic reform.

### **Rent-seeking and Political challenges**

It is first important to differentiate societal demands that indicate rent-seeking – expected by RST – from challenges to the rentier contract itself. As rent distributions are not uniform across the state and because, as is discussed in Chapter Five, economic policy does not always operate as intended on paper, some nationals may be left out of the cooptation process and thus would not act as ‘coopted’ citizens. Others have received distributions but make rent-seeking demands disguised as opposition to the state. These first two groups are discussed in this chapter, but do not present a challenge to RST, in that the exchange of political loyalty for material benefits may still be effective. However, a third group – nationals who have actively opposed the regime *despite* receiving significant distributions – does present a fundamental challenge and requires explanation. That is, if mobilisations in the post-2011 period are simply rent-seeking movements, attempts to extract additional benefits from the state in exchange for political loyalty, then RST logic has been upheld. If, however, mobilisations represent a political challenge, then RST must be revised to explain why and how this has occurred.

What, then, should be considered a rent-seeking movement versus a political challenge? The intention behind a political challenge is ideally a shift in power from state to society, the most substantive example being democratisation. Yet demands for change to individual policies, such as abolishing coeducation in public schooling, are also considered partial political challenges because, in effect, society has still sought to place a policy constraint on the state. Rent-seeking, by comparison, is an engagement with the state for the primary purpose of extracting material benefits and opportunities, where *engagement* includes not only traditional channels such as formal lobbying, but also social media movements and public demonstrations. Demands for more jobs, salary increases, more scholarships, or greater medical coverage, then, would be examples of rent-seeking and not necessarily indicate a wider challenge to the rentier regime. Demands that would *not* be considered rent-seeking because they signify a challenge to the rentier structure include: overthrow of the regime, expansion of political powers (in general, or for specific groups), and greater transparency in policymaking.

It is also crucial to note that within protest movements, the motivations and intentions of individuals may differ: the *majority* of protesters in a demonstration might be rent-seeking, but there may be a minority of political challengers whose absence from the public sphere is not because they are satisfied but because public support for reform is weak, or has waned after the state responded to material demands, and the drawbacks of protest now outweigh the likelihood of success. This was, as will be discussed, the case among several movements in Oman in 2011.

With this theoretical discussion in mind, even a cursory glance at practical examples of societal demands in the Gulf reveals that they cannot simply be characterised as rent-seeking *or* a policy challenge; they often embody elements of both. A protest decrying government corruption, for example, could certainly be motivated by frustration that some other actor has captured an inequitable share of rents. Yet addressing corruption also clearly implies greater government accountability – a political challenge. This was apparent in calls among demonstrators in Sohar for the removal of Ahmad bin Abdulnabi Makki, then Minister of the National Economy, which spread both among activists that, upon being interviewed, expressed rent-seeking motivations, as well as among activists seeking political reform.<sup>502</sup> It is more useful, then, to consider rent-seeking and political challenges as two ends of a spectrum rather than categories.

### ***Rent-seeking and Qatari Twitter Activism***

A practical example is revealing. Qatar's widest citizen mobilisation since 2011 focused not on demanding greater political rights, but on frustration with the major state-owned telecom company, Qatar Telecom (Qtel, rebranded as Ooredoo in early 2013).<sup>503</sup> Unlike movements in Bahrain and Oman, it did not occur in the streets of the capital but on social media, culminating in a Twitter campaign using the hashtag #Qtelfail in early 2011. One of the organisers, Raed al-Emadi, described it in a personal blog as Qatar's "first civil movement, in the frame of effective citizenship, to address consumer

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<sup>502</sup> The exact expression of motivation varied between interviewees, but was generally along the lines of 'I joined the protests because I was frustrated at not being able to find a job' for rent-seekers and 'I joined the protests because I think Omanis need more political rights' for political challengers; see also Nour Malas and Angus McDowall, "Oman Removes Powerful Economy Minister," *Wall Street Journal* (8 March 2011) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703386704576186422382605668> accessed 12 February 2015.

<sup>503</sup> The Chairman of Ooredoo is H.E. Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saudi Al Thani, who, as of December 2014, is also CEO of the Qatar Investment Authority. The state owns 52 percent of Ooredoo directly, with another 17 percent ownership through various government entities. See Ooredoo, "Ooredoo at a Glance," (2015) <http://www.ooredoo.com/en/section/investor-relations/ooredoo-at-a-glance> accessed 12 February 2015.

rights”,<sup>504</sup> and in a Tweet as “a civil movement against a monopolistic telecom sector”, decrying “Outrages [outrageous] fees, low network coverage and bad customer service”.<sup>505</sup> Avid Twitter commentator from the UAE, Sultan al-Qassemi, went even further, claiming: “#QTelFail is Qatar’s version of the Arab Spring. Described as the country’s ‘first ever civil society campaign’ in @abdeerallamFT’s column”.<sup>506</sup>

Another of #Qtelfail’s proponents, who asked to remain anonymous, linked the movement to new channels of engagement with government:

*Interviewee:* There isn’t really two-way communication between the people and the government but I can see this starting to appear – through social media and indirect channels –

*Author:* Like what?

*Interviewee:* Twitter, for example. There are cases that are related on Twitter and you’ve seen the government take an action from the other side. I wouldn’t say I consider this as a direct action from the government, but it has its impact and the people are starting to use Twitter as a channel to communicate their concerns...or vent, I would say.

*Author:* Is that what you would do? If there were an issue that you were particularly passionate about, would you put it on Twitter or how would you convey it to the government?

*Interviewee:* We actually, in 2011, we participated in a campaign called #QtelFail. You know what Qtel is?

*Author:* Yeah, it’s Ooredoo now, right? [The campaign] was called #QtelFail?

*Interviewee:* Yeah. That was the hashtag on Twitter. We set a date...7<sup>th</sup> of July 2011, at 7pm. It was 7-7-7-2011. At that time, if you agree to the campaign, switch off your phone and all the services you get from Qtel for an hour, just as a sign of showing them that you’re rejecting their services.

That actually was interesting, you see they all called us as a group – the campaign leaders – and they listened to us, listened to our demands and what we wanted...at that time, the Arab Revolutions or the Arab Spring was at its peak and they were worried that this – I think, my explanation is this – they

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<sup>504</sup> Raed al-Emadi, “Topic: Responses I have heard about my involvement with #QtelFail,” *KalimatKum* 22 July 2011) <http://www.kilmt.com/?p=1176> accessed 6 January 2014.

<sup>505</sup> @Ra\_ed, “@7ooree [i]t’s a civil movement against a monopolistic telecom sector,” *Twitter* (10.05pm, 20 July 2011) [https://twitter.com/Ra\\_ed/status/93909412879663104](https://twitter.com/Ra_ed/status/93909412879663104) accessed 15 Feb 2016.

<sup>506</sup> @SultanAlQassemi, “QTelFail is Qatar’s version of the Arab Spring,” *Twitter* (10.23am, 19 July 2011) <https://twitter.com/SultanAlQassemi/status/93370366508019712> accessed 15 February 2016.

were worried that this could develop into something different; they were trying to put it off before it grows.<sup>507</sup>

What, then, was the #Qtelfail campaign? Was it Qatar's very modest Arab Spring? Did it represent a political challenge or rent-seeking, and what does it reveal about Qatar's state-society relationship? The demands, including better network coverage, lower prices, and improved customer service, were material, and the campaign targeted the monopoly of a state-owned enterprise, not reform of the regime itself, suggesting rent-seeking motivations.<sup>508</sup> Although the *Financial Times* reported that: "many users, fearing retribution, were reluctant to publicly condemn the company or worried about being mistaken for challenging the regime", campaign organisers clearly distinguished between political and material dissatisfaction. "We are happy with the political setup," said al-Emadi. "We are not happy with the service".<sup>509</sup>

The outcome of the campaign was also material: Qtel temporarily lowered local and international call rates and announced plans to improve internet connection speeds.<sup>510</sup> Although the hashtag #Qtelfail is still in use (often as a humorous way to document Qtel/Ooredoo's shortcomings), there have been no large-scale movements since the July 2011 campaign to reassert consumer rights. To the contrary, Qtel's rapid response to the campaign resulted in the emergence of a new hashtag, #BravoQtel, in late July 2011, although it never achieved comparable levels of popularity to #Qtelfail.

Although the movement is thus almost entirely a rent-seeking movement, it was also the first mass-scale, locally-driven campaign for consumer rights and suggests that Qataris will still mobilise to demand higher quality services, even when the state already offers extensive social benefits. Abdullah al-Athbah, a campaign participant, noted: "Qataris have a reputation for being complacent...[yet] with everything going [on] around us in the region, people feel they can be a part of pushing for a change in the attitude of service providers, customers' rights, a strong regulator and a quality service for the

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<sup>507</sup> Author interview with Qatari participant in the #Qtelfail movement, Qatar 2013.

<sup>508</sup> Some criticism of government bodies did emerge as part of the campaign, such as a call to deregulate all ICT bodies in the GCC, but were not a focus of the movement.

<sup>509</sup> Quoted in Abeer Allam, "Qataris Vent Frustrations on Telecoms Group," *Financial Times* (19 July 2011) <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/54888140-b209-11e0-a06c-00144feabdc0.html> accessed 6 January 2015.

<sup>510</sup> Chris V. Panganiban, "Consumers Claim Victory Against Qtel," *The Peninsula* (30 July 2011) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/160629/consumers-claim-victory-against-qtel> accessed 6 January 2015.

price they pay”.<sup>511</sup> Qataris involved in the movement described a sense of empowerment and, crucially, suggested they would mobilise to demand improvement of other issues (the examples given were primarily material, but some included political reforms) if they felt it necessary.<sup>512</sup>

The #Qtelfail is only one of several popular movements that have emerged since 2011. There were other Qatari campaigns of smaller scale that, as discussed later in this chapter, focused more on political rather than material welfare. Overall, the most clear potential for political challenges in Qatar – apparent in various campaigns against expatriate-oriented events and services – stems from a conservative backlash against the rapid development of Qatar since 1995 that has entailed major demographic and social transformations. However, these campaigns hesitated to directly challenge the regime, and instead generally operated as negotiation within the system to re-evaluate individual policies. Even smaller groups that *do* present a political challenge, such as calls from Qatari academic Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari’s majlis to expand political participation, have not been able to elicit widespread public support for their campaigns; in fact, as discussed in Chapter Three, they have faced public criticism from active supporters. It is significant, then, that Qatar’s broadest mobilisation since 2011 focused far more on rent-seeking than on, say, the repeated delay of Majlis al-Shura elections. Relative to more political challenges that emerged in Oman and Bahrain, the focus on material dissatisfaction in Qatar’s largest popular campaign (and broader quiescence of society) suggests that rentierism has not been overpowered by other forces in the domestic political economy, at least not for the majority of citizens.

### ***Rent-seeking and the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition***

If the largest political mobilisation in the 2011 period in Qatar represented more rent-seeking than political challenge, what of Bahraini movements? While mobilisations in Qatar tended towards individual campaigns formed through informal majālis or social media networks, Bahraini demonstrations were orchestrated by large, active, and organised opposition networks. The demands of each group varied, as did the individual motivations of each participant, yet rent-seeking was revealed to some extent in all movements. Consider, for example, Bahrain’s Coalition Youth of the 14<sup>th</sup> February Revolution (i’tilāf shabāb thawra 14 febrāyir, hereafter 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition), formed

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<sup>511</sup> Abdullah al-Athbah, quoted in Allam, “Qataris Vent Frustrations on Telecoms Group”.

<sup>512</sup> Author interviews with Qataris involved in the #Qtelfail campaign, 2013-2014.

in early 2011 on the forums of Bahrain Online and Facebook.<sup>513</sup> It functions as an umbrella for decentralised youth street movements that aim to “overthrow the regime” as “efforts to reform and coexist with the regime have become impossible”.<sup>514</sup> Their official demands are:

1. Overthrowing the tribal al-Khalifa regime, which has lost its legitimacy, and bringing its heads and officials to trial, including Hamad the dictator, for the crimes against humanity that they have committed against our people.
2. Ensuring the people’s right to self-determination and ability to choose the political system that meets their ambitions and aspirations.
3. Dismantling the current state security agencies and rebuilding them along modern standards that ensure safety and security for all citizens.
4. Forming an independent and fair judiciary.
5. Reinforcing the principle of separation of powers (Legislative, Executive and Judiciary).
6. Maintaining national unity, preserving the social fabric, promoting justice and equality, and prohibiting any form of discrimination against citizens.
7. Finding a realistic and fair solution to the problem of systematic political naturalization that has been created by the regime to change the original identity and demographics of the country.
8. Preserving the Islamic and Arab identity of Bahrain.
9. Forming a national body to oversee the election of a Constituent Assembly that will write a new constitution for the country after the fall of the Al-Khalifa regime.
10. Ensuring the fair distribution of wealth while protecting national resources and gains for future generations.<sup>515</sup>

Of these ten demands, only the last discusses material welfare directly, although the sixth potentially incorporates rent-seeking if it is intended to include economic

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<sup>513</sup> See an overview of the movement in Toby C. Jones and Ala’a Shehabi, “Bahrain’s Revolutionaries,” *Foreign Policy* (2 January 2012) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/02/bahrain-revolutionaries/> accessed 10 January 2015.

<sup>514</sup> I’tilāf shabāb thawra 14 febrāyir, *maythāq al-lu’lu’ lil-thowra al-rabi’ ‘ashar min febrīār* (3 February 2012) 3.

<sup>515</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition Youth activist, quoted in Toby Jones, “Bahrain’s Revolutionaries Speak: An Exclusive Interview with Bahrain’s Coalition of 14<sup>th</sup> February Youth,” *Jadaliyya* (22 March 2012) <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4777/bahrain-revolutionaries-speak-an-exclusive-interv> accessed 9 January 2015; Another, more formal, statement of demands was even more focused on political reforms and is reported in Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 65-66.



discrimination. Based on their official demands, then, the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition *seems* more interested in a political challenge than rent-seeking. However, interviews conducted with members of the movement suggest that, among rank-and-file members, it was material concerns that motivated their political mobilisation, at least initially. One activist, when asked why he had joined the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, said: “I want a better future for my family”, and described inequality in the distribution of scholarships and corruption in the royal family that lessened the benefits given to society.<sup>516</sup> Two others echoed these concerns, outlining frustration that the state is oil-rich and yet nothing filters down to citizens.<sup>517</sup>

It is worth noting that the activists interviewed tended *not* to have received significant state support, beyond free healthcare and public schooling: one, for example, had been waiting for a block of land since the late 1990s, had not received a scholarship for university, and worked in a small shop in the private sector for what he described as a “very low wage”.<sup>518</sup> Others were still in high school when protests first emerged – one even described needing to wait for a parent to return from work so he could be driven to Pearl Roundabout – or were university students, but few had received scholarships and most that did noted it had been suspended since 2011. Due to the anonymous nature of its membership, it is not possible to determine whether the interviews conducted with members of the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition for this research are representative of the broader movement. However, the Coalition is commonly depicted as a movement that attracts supporters from the poorer, predominantly Shia areas; if rentierism is a dynamic that intensifies based on the value of material benefits transferred from regime to citizen, then the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition represents, in part, a section of society that has been relatively left out of the rentier bargain.

Yet to portray the motivation of this group as based purely on personal material distributions is to overlook their highly politicised nature. 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activists operate in an environment in which their entire community has, in their view, been discriminated against, threatened, and attacked.<sup>519</sup> Protests tend to be located in poorer, Shia-majority villages such as al-Dair, Bani Jamra, and Sitra, or on the Budaiya Highway, a major motorway that runs past many villages, providing visible

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<sup>516</sup> Author interview with 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>517</sup> Author interview with 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activists, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>518</sup> Author interview with 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>519</sup> See posts describing this view in i'tilāf shabāb thawra 14 febrāyir, *Facebook* (n.d) [https://www.facebook.com/Coalition14th/timeline?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/Coalition14th/timeline?ref=page_internal) accessed 10 August 2016.

demonstrations of inequitable development. The police presence in and around the villages is highly militarised, with armoured vans and riot gear, cementing the impression, expressed by multiple interviewees, that the state (particularly the Khawalid faction) is intent on violently suppressing the rights of Bahraini youth.<sup>520</sup> As discussed later in this chapter, repression can overwhelm incentives to remain complacent within a rentier system. Even if individuals originally joined the movement for rent-seeking reasons, it is unlikely they would now be satisfied by material distributions. An activist who expressed rent-seeking motivations for originally joining, for example, rejected the idea that salary increases and stable employment might cause him to refrain from joining future demonstrations, even rejecting any possibility of dialogue: “I don’t support dialogue because police are still entering houses, there are too many martyrs, and the trials are very harsh and unfair. If we want real dialogue, they should free all political prisoners, stop crackdowns, [and] bring police officers to a fair and independent court”.<sup>521</sup> Even if their personal material situation improved, then, 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition youth may still protest discrimination against their friends, family, and neighbours, alongside a wider sense of political persecution and inequality. Ultimately, an interviewee from the Coalition argued that Bahraini opposition, particularly the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, mostly desire economic rights and might have been satisfied with them, except that there was no trust left in government to deliver them. The only way to establish trust, in his view, was for the state to address the movement’s non-material demands.<sup>522</sup> As a movement, then, the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition revealed not only rent-seeking motivations, but also, due to the radicalised and politicised atmosphere in which the movement emerged, elements of a political challenge.

The 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, of course, is but one of a myriad opposition movements to emerge during the Bahraini Spring. There is not space for an in-depth analysis of every group’s rent-seeking and political challenge motivations here, but, broadly speaking, when asked to explain why they joined opposition, Bahraini interviewees aligned with

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<sup>520</sup> Author interviews with 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activists, Bahrain 2014. Upon my own attendance at an Al Wefaq protest in Sitra in mid-January 2014, I counted at least 16 police vehicles – the majority typical white and blue police cars with wire mesh-covered windscreens, but also at least two black armoured jeeps and an armoured van – waiting outside the town borders to intervene when the state-sanctioned demonstrations ended and youth activists – the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition – started to agitate. Inside the village, young Bahraini children – I estimated their ages as between 7 and 11 – set up road blocks and spikes to deter the police vans.

<sup>521</sup> Author interview with 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>522</sup> Author interview with 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist, Bahrain 2014.

the formal political societies such as moderate Islamist al-Wefaq (jam‘iyyat al-wefāq al-waṭanī al-islāmiyya) and secular leftist Waad (wa‘ad, or jam‘iyyat al-‘amal al-waṭanī al-dīmūqrātiyya) expressed political motivations, whereas poorer youth protesters affiliated with street movements like the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition emphasised material discrimination. There remain, of course, elements of rent-seeking within the formal societies, just as there are elements of a political challenge in the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition. The Manama Document, released 12 October 2011 by five formal opposition societies (al-Wefaq, Waad, al-Tajamua al-Qawmi (jam‘iyyat al-tajamu‘ al-qawmī), al-Tajamua al-Watani (jam‘iyyat al-tajamu‘ al-waṭanī al-dīmūqrātī), and al-Ikhāa (jam‘iyyat al-ikhā’ al-waṭanī), outlines their demands and justification for political opposition. The justification for political action is almost entirely focused on material dissatisfactions: inequality in infrastructure, housing shortages and overcrowding in Bahrain’s only public hospital, for example. The proposed *demands*, however, present a significant political challenge, including an elected unicameral parliament with legislative power, an independent judiciary, and the power to withdraw confidence in the Prime Minister and Cabinet “should they fail in their duties”.<sup>523</sup> The document reveals the interplay between material and non-material demands; as Abulnabi Alekry, a member of Waad, noted, many Bahrainis view political reform as the “door” to reforming the broader system and tackling other problems “like a fair distribution of wealth”.<sup>524</sup> When a former member of al-Wefaq was asked what he felt were the main motivations of the 2011 unrest, he listed political concerns such as inspiration from other Arab Spring movements and a desire for political rights, but also more material concerns such as lack of transparency in government over financial transactions, and sectarian discrimination affecting recent university graduates’ employment prospects.<sup>525</sup> However, as shall be discussed further shortly, almost all interviewees from formal Bahraini political societies explained their personal decision to joining opposition by reference to non-material motivations, including experiences with repression, frustration with stalled political reform, comparison between their civil rights at home and in countries where they had studied abroad, and a family and community history of political activism.

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<sup>523</sup> Bahrain Justice and Development Movement, “Manama Document,” (13 October 2011) <http://www.bahrainjdm.org/2011/10/13/manama-document-english/> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>524</sup> Author interview with Abulnabi Alekry, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>525</sup> Author interview with former al-Wefaq MP, United Kingdom 2013.

Other Bahraini opposition groups that reject formal political engagement, such as Haq (ḥarakat ḥaq: ḥarakat al-ḥuriyyāt w-al-dīmūqrāṭiyya), Wafaa (tayyār al-wafā' al-islāmī), and Amal (jam'iyat al-'amal al-islāmī, a Shirazi faction), are difficult to categorise, particularly since, at the time this research was conducted, their leadership was almost entirely imprisoned or exiled. However, there are several reasons to suggest these groups preference political reforms and would not be satisfied with material distributions. First, all these movements emerged from historically political bodies: Haq from al-Wefaq; Wafaa from al-Wefaq, Haq and a number of politicised Shia clerics; and Amal from a militant group active in the early 1980s, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB).<sup>526</sup> Second, their leadership has repeatedly faced arrest and other repressive responses from the state that, as discussed later in this chapter, are likely to overwhelm rent-based incentives to remain loyal. For example, Hassan Mushaima, the leader of Haq, was sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court on 22 June 2011, Abdulwahhab Hussein (leader of Wafaa) was arrested on 17 March 2011, and the government of Bahrain arrested all of Amal's leaders and dissolved the party in June 2012.<sup>527</sup> Third, as a result of these arrests, groups such as Haq and Wafaa now primarily operate abroad. Based largely out of London, these groups collaborate with human rights groups such as the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), and previously exiled groups, such as the Bahrain Freedom Movement (ḥarakat aḥrār al-baḥraīn al-islāmiyya, hereafter BFM),<sup>528</sup> which was active in the 1990s Uprising and with whom Haq and Wafaa formed the Alliance for the Republic (al-taḥāluf min ajl al-jumhūriyya) in March 2011. For example, Ali Mushaima (son of Hassan Mushaima and also a member of Haq), Saeed al-Shehabi (BFM) and, prior to her arrest in 2014, Maryam al-Khawaja (BCHR) have all participated in London marches against the Al Khalifa regime since 2011.<sup>529</sup> Moreover, interviewees from the BFM, and human rights

<sup>526</sup> The Telegraph, "Wafa': A New Shia Rejectionist Movement," US Embassy Cable 09Manama609 (18 February 2011) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/bahrain-wikileaks-cables/8334607/WAFA-A-NEW-SHIA-REJECTIONIST-MOVEMENT.html> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>527</sup> Project on Middle East Diplomacy, "Bahrain Weekly – November 29: Sentences for Amal Leaders Reduced; Al-Wefaq Leader Reiterates Non-Violent Approach," (29 November 2012) <http://pomed.org/regional-news-digests/bahrain-weekly-november-29-sentences-for-amal-leaders-reduced-al-wefaq-leader-reiterates-non-violent-approach/#Amal> accessed 14 February 2015; Human Rights Watch, "Bahrain: Protest Leaders Arbitrarily Detained," (18 March 2011) <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/03/18/bahrain-protest-leaders-arbitrarily-detained> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>528</sup> Note the word 'Islamic', as in Bahrain Islamic Freedom Movement, is dropped from their English name, a move assumedly intended to downplay their religious heritage to an English-speaking audience.

<sup>529</sup> The Free Bahrain, "Saeed al-Shehabi Speech in Marble Arch Central London Protest," *YouTube* (11 February 2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVvuvhO2rfk> accessed 14 February 2015; BBC News, "Bahraini Embassy Roof Protester Threatens to Jump," (16 April 2012) <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-17734116> accessed 14 February 2015.

activists, both independent and associated with the BCHR, justified their political mobilisation almost exclusively in non-material terms, and their demands focused heavily on political challenges; it is reasonable to expect that political demands would spread amongst cooperating groups.<sup>530</sup>

Overall, then, in comparison to Qatar, there was only limited expression of rent-seeking among Bahraini opposition movements. Even if they had originally mobilised for rent-seeking reasons, 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activists claimed they would not be willing to exchange political loyalty for material satisfaction. Rents remain highly relevant to the political mobilisation of these opposition groups, but the politicised atmosphere, repressive response by the state, and interaction with political challengers has encouraged Bahraini opposition groups to make sustained and organised political challenges to state authority.

### ***Rent-seeking and Omani Regional Demonstrations***

In Oman, the motivations of protesters differed more based on region than in geographically tiny Bahrain. In general, demonstrators interviewed in Sohar, Salalah, and other regional areas expressed more rent-seeking motivations relative to Muscat, home to a wider spectrum of political views and a highly educated reformist elite. A young Omani from the Dokum area, for example, said he had joined 2011 street demonstrations that blocked roads and obstructed traffic purely to protest the lack of employment and low salaries for Omanis, not with the intention of demanding wider political reform.<sup>531</sup> In Jalan Bani Bu Ali, approximately 100 activists marched through the streets on 8 May 2011, well after government had announced the creation of 50,000 new jobs in February, chanting: “[w]here are the jobs?” Hamed Abu Suroor, one of the demonstrators, claimed: “[t]hese jobs went to graduates in the big cities and towns. The government has ignored people in the smaller towns like ours”.<sup>532</sup> As James Worrall notes, rent-seeking movements were often “bandwagoning on the demands for higher wages, allowances and subsidies”, such as a student protest at the University of Nizwa demanding higher allowances, and strikes in the aviation (OmanAir), finance (Oman

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<sup>530</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain and the United Kingdom, 2013 – 2014.

<sup>531</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>532</sup> Quoted in Saleh al Shaibany, “Six Arrested in Oman as Jobs Protests Turn Violent,” *The National* (10 May 2011) <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/six-arrested-in-oman-as-jobs-protests-turn-violent> accessed 11 January 2015.

International Bank), and industrial (Ruhayl Industrial Area) sectors.<sup>533</sup> As is discussed in Chapter Five, there are very valid reasons related to the state's economic development strategy to demand better working conditions, higher wages, and to protest widespread unemployment, yet these movements could not, in themselves, be described as political challenges.

The strongest evidence for rent-seeking motivations emerged among interviewees who participated in the first three days of demonstrations in Sohar (before a highly-educated reformist elite arrived from Muscat) and were, in general, young, unemployed, high school graduates. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with a youth protester, who was among the original group of approximately 25 youths<sup>534</sup> that initiated demonstrations in Sohar:

After I finished high school, I kept looking for work, maybe for three years, from 2006/7 until February 2011, when all those events started occurring. So when we gathered together, as youth, we came to demand our rights. For four or five years, we couldn't find any work and we didn't know where we are supposed to go. Where do we go? Until we organised, we didn't know how to demand our rights...we didn't know anything...so we kept talking, discussing amongst ourselves, 15 people, 20 people, [asking] 'when and how are we going build our future when there are no jobs and no salaries?'<sup>535</sup>

As this protester indicates, demonstrations in Sohar focused heavily on employment, originating amongst a group of unemployed youth who went to the Sohar branch of the Ministry of Manpower to request help finding work. They claim they were assured of a meeting with Saif bin Muhammad al-Busaidi, then Director-General of the Directorate-General of Manpower in the Batinah region, but upon returning at the appointed time, he was absent and they were jeered at by the employees.<sup>536</sup> Frustrated and alienated, they staged a sit-in in Sohar's Globe roundabout, soon renamed Mīdān al-'Iṣlāḥ (Reform Square).<sup>537</sup> On 26 February, an estimated 500 Omanis had gathered at the

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<sup>533</sup> James Worrall, "Oman: The 'Forgotten' Corner of the Arab Spring," *Middle East Policy Council* 19:3 (Fall 2012) <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/oman-forgotten-corner-arab-spring> accessed 23 January 2015.

<sup>534</sup> Estimates of how many youths initiated demonstrations vary: Sohari interviewees maintained the initial group numbered 15 – 25, whereas other published works suggest it was between 30 – 40 youths from cities neighbouring Sohar. See Marc Valeri, "The Ṣuḥār Paradox: Social and Political Mobilisations in the Sultanate of Oman Since 2011," *Arabian Humanities* 4 (2015) <http://cy.revues.org/2828> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>535</sup> Author interview with youth protester from Sohar, Oman 2014. Translated from Arabic.

<sup>536</sup> Author interviews with Sohari youth protesters, Oman 2014.

<sup>537</sup> The Dohar protests are covered in greater detail in Chapter Five. For a detailed narrative of events and analysis of Sohar demonstrations, see Valeri, "The Ṣuḥār Paradox".

roundabout and by 27 February 1,000 to 2,000 protesters amassed, blockading LuLu Hypermarket, clashing violently with police and resulting in the death of 36 year old Abdullah al-Ghamlasi.<sup>538</sup> The violence sparked immediate intensification of unrest across the country, including at a second site near Sohar along the Muscat-Dubai motorway that allowed demonstrators to block access to the Port of Sohar.<sup>539</sup> Prominent activist Ismail al-Makbali, described his reaction to the government crackdown in Sohar:

I was really angry because I am from Sohar. My family and some of my relatives were actually there in the roundabout...I felt that the government was not doing the right thing. Also, the people here [in Muscat], they are not understanding how difficult the situation is [in Sohar]...I knew the people there. I know how the people are aggressive. Not because they are aggressive, just because they are desperate. If you go to Sohar – When I used to go there, I see many youth guys, they are sitting outside their houses doing nothing because they don't have – They haven't completed maybe their study or they have completed [it] and they have got low scores so they couldn't join any university and they have no jobs. If you go there, maybe five in each house they are unemployed.<sup>540</sup>

Sohar demonstrations, then, were originally driven by high youth unemployment and local economic inequality, but quickly intensified as a result of violent confrontations between protesters and police. The list of official demands submitted to the government on 27 February reflects the original rent-seeking intentions of protesters, as well as anger with repressive state responses. They issued 43 demands, of which the first five relate to ending repression and opening public space for peaceful demonstrations. From the remaining 38, only 9 represent political challenges; the rest are overwhelmingly rent-seeking demands, including wage increases, unemployment benefits, reduced prices for public services, and forgiveness of all citizen debts.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> CCN reported 1,000 protesters, while Reuters reported 2,000. See CCN Wirestaff, "2 Dead as Protesters, Police Clash in Oman, Witnesses Say," *CNN International* (27 February 2011) <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/02/27/oman.protests/> accessed 23 January 2015; Saleh al-Shaibany, "Oman Police Kill Two Protesters," *Reuters* (27 February 2011) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/27/us-oman-protests-idUSTRE71Q0U420110227> accessed 23 January 2015; Laura Collins, "Family Mourns 'Accidental Martyr', Abdullah al Ghamlasi," *The National* (16 March 2011) <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/family-mourns-omans-accidental-martyr-abdullah-al-ghamlasi> accessed 23 January 2015.

<sup>539</sup> Jason Benham and Saleh al-Shaibany, "Oman Protests Spread, Road to Port Blocked," *Reuters* (28 February 2011) <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/02/28/uk-oman-protests-idUKTRE71Q0UB20110228> accessed 23 January 2015; the Sohar protests are also covered in an expatriate blog, Dan and Jillian's International Teaching Adventures, "The First of Many?" (26 February 2011) <http://danandjillian3.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/first-of-many.html> accessed 23 January 2015.

<sup>540</sup> Author interview with Ismail al-Makbali, Oman 2014.

<sup>541</sup> Demands 13, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 26, 27, and 32 have been identified as partial or full political challenges. Demands 41-43 are related to the publication of the list of demands and have not been

However, as with the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, the use of repression transformed peaceful rent-seeking demands into a wider political challenge. Sohari interviewees reported clashing violently with state forces, and several had been imprisoned and tortured after the government crackdown in May 2011.<sup>542</sup> After this point, their demands shifted from primarily rent-seeking to political challenges – demanding an end to repression and holding the state accountable for injuries and mortalities. The violence on 27 February also drew a reformist elite to Sohar, joining protests and spreading awareness of civil and political rights; even the list of 43 demands was drafted with contributions from this reformist elite, perhaps explaining some of the more political demands.<sup>543</sup> Most revealingly, perhaps, is that despite the cessation of large-scale protests after the regime crackdown in May 2011, occasional small-scale clashes between Sohari protesters and police still occur, and Soharis interviewed in early 2014 claimed their demands still had not been met and that they would continue to advocate until they were.<sup>544</sup> The Sohar protests, then, were still *primarily* a rent-seeking movement, in that rent-seeking demands took precedence over wider calls for greater political participation, yet also exhibited elements of a political challenge.

Another Omani demonstration, which emerged in the southern region of Dhofar, also reveals the interplay between rent-seeking and political challenges. Demands from the southern city of Salalah – where numbers peaked at 10,000 during a sit-in from February to May 2011 – also focused on rent-seeking, although political aspects were also apparent.<sup>545</sup> As a Salalah-based journalist pointed out:

If you looked at the list of demands...most of the demands were economic. [They said]: ‘We want jobs. We want cheaper airfare between Muscat and Salalah. We want, you know, we want schools to be segregated again. We don’t want boys with girls. We want this. We want the government to cancel debts. We don’t want interest on housing loans.’

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included in this count. See Said Sultan al-Hashimi, ed., *al-Rabī' al-'Umānī: qarā'at fī al-sīyyāqāt w-al-dalālāt* (Beirut: dār al-fārābī, 2013) 365 – 367.

<sup>542</sup> Al Jazeera, “Protesters Defy Crackdown in Oman,” (28 February 2011) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/20112288422610894.html> accessed 16 February 2015; Amnesty International, “Omani Activists Sentenced as Crackdown on Free Speech Continues,” (17 July 2012) <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/omani-activists-sentenced-crackdown-free-speech-continues-2012-07-17> accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>543</sup> Author interviews with reformist elite and original Sohari protesters, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>544</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2014.

<sup>545</sup> Muscat Daily, “Salalah Protests Enter Sixth Week,” (4 April 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Salalah-protests-enter-sixth-week> accessed 25 January 2015.



It was all money. Every single list of demands basically was money and ‘we want the government to fire all corrupt ministers who are stealing money’. It wasn’t really ‘we want freedom of speech’...

[Admittedly], they were holding up posters saying: ‘we want freedom’, ‘we want democracy’, but when you look at the actual list of demands that were raised to the Sultan, it was all jobs and now after the protests, things have calmed down. Most of the people at the square [in Salalah] were jobless people and they are still jobless, but the government has been paying them 150 riyals a month [in unemployment benefits].<sup>546</sup>

The official demands from the Salalah sit-in, printed on a banner and fastened to the gates of the State Minister’s (and Governor of Dhofar’s, since Mohammed Marhood al-Maamari fills both roles) office, included several political demands such as: create an administratively and financially independent body to investigate corruption by state officials; expand the powers of the elected Majlis al-Shura; and abolish co-education between the sexes. Rent-seeking demands, however, greatly outnumbered political demands, including: establish large state-owned factories and companies to employ Omani youths; create a billion-dollar, interest-free fund to support youth projects; raise minimum wages, social security payments, and unemployment benefits; forgive all citizen debts; reduce customs duties and the cost of public services; and, as the interviewee above noted, lower the price of airline tickets for domestic travel.<sup>547</sup>

There was, then, a strong element of rent-seeking apparent in Dhofari demonstrations. However, depicting the Omani Spring as a purely rent-seeking movement is reductive. As Said Sultan al-Hashimi, a prominent reformer, argues:

It is clear that the Omani people’s awareness of their rights and duties has deepened, along with their desire for a comprehensive programme of constitutional, economic, social, and political reform. It is not the case, as suggested by some corrupt elements, that the demands they were making were concerned merely with pay rises and job opportunities.<sup>548</sup>

Al-Hashimi’s comment certainly has some truth to it. There were many indications that Omani calls for reform are not purely rent-seeking but also demonstrate political challenges to the regime: these are discussed in the next section. The comment also highlights an important point, particularly as al-Hashimi represents a Muscat-based, highly-educated reformist elite: there was a clear difference in motivation between the

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<sup>546</sup> Author interview with Salalah-based journalist, Oman 2013.

<sup>547</sup> The full list of demands is published in al-Hashimi, ed., *al-Rabī‘ al-‘Umānī*.

<sup>548</sup> al-Hashimi, “The Omani Spring: Toward the Break of a New Dawn,” 5.

reformist elite and ‘rank-and-file’ demonstrators. That is, interviewees from the reformist elite, who participated in demonstrations across the country but remain a small minority, expressed almost entirely non-material motivations for demanding reform.<sup>549</sup> By comparison, the majority of demonstrators, in the view both of individual ‘rank-and-file’ demonstrators and of political commentators, were motivated more by material interests. As the Salalah-based journalist cited earlier noted:

Most people, I felt, from the protests, particularly the ones here in the south of Oman, there would be, you know, hundreds of people there in the square all wanting jobs. They’re uneducated high school graduates who are just desperate for something from the government and being in the square protesting was giving them something to do and they felt that they were getting somewhere because the government was actually responding...

...But in each gathering of protesters there would be a handful of actual political activists, people who are fighting to rewrite the constitution, people who have advanced political ideas. So they would be up on the podium talking into loudspeakers and these boys would be listening...and each group was depending on the other. So the people, the well-spoken writers and thinkers were there talking and they had all the masses there to support their ideologies, but at the same time the masses, all they wanted is money.<sup>550</sup>

Most Omani reformers from Muscat, Sohar, and others from Salalah agreed with the above depiction of the protests. “A small minority feel the governance issue is a point of concern and they try to make a remark and communicate their discomfort on that account,” said a Muscat-based commentator, “[however], the majority are motivated by financial issues and unfairness and lack of opportunities”.<sup>551</sup> While not understating the politicisation of Omani youth that has occurred since protests emerged in 2011, there was, overall, less evidence of widespread political challenges in Oman than in Bahrain, where opposition groups are established, and even economic inequality viewed as a political attempt to suppress a specific section (the Shia) of Bahraini society.

Importantly, the Omani government responded to 2011 demonstrations not simply with rent distributions, but also with limited political reforms and, in several cases, repression. Some demonstrators were appeased by the political and distributional changes. A Muscat-based former activist explained that while she had initially taken part in demonstrations out of frustration with corruption and lack of free speech, by

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<sup>549</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>550</sup> Author interview with Salalah-based journalist, Oman 2013.

<sup>551</sup> Author interview, Oman 2014.

mid-2011 she had shifted her position and advocated cessation of protests because: “it felt like the government was really trying seriously to resolve the problems, and find solutions and I felt like at least 60 percent of the reasons that made people come out to protest have been addressed by the government”.<sup>552</sup> Quieting the Salalah sit-in took, in mid-May 2011, an announcement of plans for a new national public university (a key demand of protesters), and the forceful break-up of the sit-in and arrest of over 350 demonstrators.<sup>553</sup> However, while mass mobilisation on the streets may have ended, there was, at the time this research was conducted, still considerable frustration with the slow pace of reform evident among Dhofari interviewees.<sup>554</sup>

Moreover, while mass demonstrations had waned as of mid-2011, the reformist elite continued to advocate for change. As political societies are banned in Oman, most of these individuals operate informally or underground, but notable public groups include the Omani Group for Human Rights (OGHR), founded by Ismail al-Maqbali, Habiba al-Hanai, and Yacoub al-Kharousi, and a youth group that held public debates at the Elixir Cultural Saloon in Sohar until its forced closure by authorities in September 2014.<sup>555</sup> The Omani Society for Writers and Literati (OSWL), chaired by former Omani Ambassador to the United States, Sadiq Jawad Sulaiman, also holds public discussions and, in practice, operates as a forum for reformers to discuss their views in an open and scholarly environment.<sup>556</sup> This indicates that, while it is possible to employ a mix of strategies – rent distribution, limited political reform, and repression – to curb mass

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<sup>552</sup> Author interview with participant in Muscat demonstrations, Oman 2014.

<sup>553</sup> Muscat Daily, “Operation Salalah, Army Arrests Protesters,” (14 May 2011)

<http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Operation-Salalah-army-arrests-protesters> accessed 25 January 2015; Muscat Daily, “Protesters Freed from Salalah Prison,” (22 May 2011)

<http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Protesters-freed-from-Salalah-prison> accessed 25 January 2015; Khaleej Times, “Oman to Decentralise Power, Implement Reforms,” (4 May 2011)

([http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?col=&section=middleeast&xfile=data/middleeast/2011/May/middleeast\\_May52.xml](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?col=&section=middleeast&xfile=data/middleeast/2011/May/middleeast_May52.xml)) accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>554</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013. Some of the frustration was related to a perception that the government was making promises but taking too long to deliver, such as with slow payment of unemployment benefits. One individual claimed that their brother had been told he would receive one of the 50,000 or so positions promised by government, but six months later nothing had eventuated and he was still struggling to pay basic living costs.

<sup>555</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Oman: Letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” (25 September 2014)

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/24/oman-letter-ministry-foreign-affairs> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>556</sup> The meetings since 2011 are organised informally, but see an earlier example of a forum on Omani Women funded by Tawasul in Tawasul, “Achievement Report,” (2010) 48; see also Oman Tribune, “Writers [sic] Body Calls for Release of Detainees,” (n.d.)

<http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=news&id=121592&heading=Oman> accessed 14 February 2015; Sunil K. Vaidya, “Activists’ Pictures in Prison Uniform Irk Omanis,” *Gulf News* (14 July 2012) <http://m.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/activists-pictures-in-prison-uniform-irk-omanis-1.1048809> accessed 16 February 2015.

demonstrations, there will always exist individuals and movements that cannot be coopted.

### **Rejection of the Rentier Bargain**

In all three case studies, there exist individuals who have actively campaigned for reform despite benefiting substantially from the rentier state. Their motivations, actions and demands are difficult to depict purely, or even primarily, as rent-seeking. Rather, they have made clear political challenges, defying traditional RST logic. Many of these individuals disagreed *specifically* with the suggestion that citizens might exchange material welfare for political loyalty. “This is about dignity and freedom – it’s not about filling our stomachs,” said Ibrahim Sharif, the prominent Bahraini leader of leftist Waad who was arrested on 17 March 2011 and sentenced to five year’s imprisonment in June.<sup>557</sup>

Sharif’s personal story reveals the weakness of materially-focused explanations for Bahraini political loyalty. Born into a Huwala Sunni family in Muharraq in the late 1950s, he conforms to neither rentier nor sectarian depictions of the Bahraini Uprisings. His politicisation occurred within the leftist and pan-Arab atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s, which was particularly influential in Muharraq, and he participated in the 1965 BAPCO Uprisings against the British while still a primary school student.<sup>558</sup> At the American University of Beirut in the mid-1970s, Sharif formally joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG, the leftist precursor to Waad), returning to Bahrain in 1980, at which point he was detained for two weeks by the Bahraini regime. For the following decade, a period of decline in the popular appeal of leftist movements and increasing influence of Islamist politics, he worked in the private sector, and even his return to political activism did not prevent his rise to the position of Managing Director at Bank al-Taib by the late 1990s.<sup>559</sup> In 2002, within the context of Hamad’s reformist opening, Sharif helped to form Waad, eventually becoming its General Secretary. He ran for Majlis al-Nuwwab elections in 2006 and 2010 but never won, yet demonstrated an ability to “galvanize the street in an

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<sup>557</sup> Thomas Fuller, “Bahrain’s Promised Spending Fails to Quell Dissent,” *The New York Times* (6 March 2011) [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/middleeast/07bahrain.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/middleeast/07bahrain.html?_r=1&) accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>558</sup> Omar al-Shehabi, “Bahrain’s Fate: On Ibrahim Sharif and the Misleadingly-Dubbed ‘Arab Spring’,” *Jacobin* 13 (2014) <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/bahrains-fate/> accessed 14 January 2015.

<sup>559</sup> TAIB Bank, “Annual Report,” (1999)

<http://www.romanthayer.com/Art/PDFs%20for%20Site/Taib/taib99ed.pdf> accessed 20 January 2015.

unprecedented manner”.<sup>560</sup> In 2011, Sharif was one of the first high-profile opposition figures to lead a (predominantly Shia) funeral procession, and quickly became a powerful symbol for the cross-sectarian potential of Bahraini demonstrations.<sup>561</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, Sharif was arrested alongside several other prominent demonstrators in the early hours of 17 March 2011, kept in solitary confinement and tortured for two months, before being sentenced to five years imprisonment for “conspiring to overthrow the government during street demonstrations”.<sup>562</sup> In an indirect but nonetheless transparent move, Bahrain’s Telecommunications Regulatory Authority announced on 22 March it was revoking all licenses held by telecommunication company 2Connect – of which Sharif was a founding board member and major shareholder – for “unspecified security reasons”.<sup>563</sup> Repressive responses by the state did not reduce Sharif’s reformist aspirations. As his wife, Fareeda Ghulam, reported in late 2011:

He’s inside [prison] now, but whenever we talk to him he’s alert and he still has his ideas. Of course he misses his freedom, but he says ‘if it takes me five years to challenge the government and serve the people, then five years is nothing. Look at Nelson Mandela and the price he paid. Five years is nothing if this will contribute to progress of Bahraini people.’<sup>564</sup>

Sharif, then, came from an activist background and never displayed an inclination to exchange political loyalty for material welfare. His wealth was earned in the private sector, not as a public sector bureaucrat, but while other Huwala in the private sector allied with the regime, Sharif remained firmly committed to leftist secular reform. The official announcement of his arrest in 2011 described him as a leader of a “sedition ring

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<sup>560</sup> Al-Shehabi, “Bahrain’s Fate”.

<sup>561</sup> Sharif was usually the first example Bahraini opposition from all political groupings gave when asked their views on state depictions of the Uprisings as sectarian. See also Bntb7ron, “Ibrahim Sharif Supporting Bahraini People, 15 February 2011,” *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN0mZkfK5k0> (accessed 20 January 2015).

<sup>562</sup> See a translated statement by Sharif describing his arrest and detention at Free Ibrahim Sharif, “Ebrahim Sharif’s Account of his Arrest, Torture, and a Visit by the National Institute of Human Rights (Translated),” *Free Ebrahim Sharif* (2 August 2011) <https://freesharif.wordpress.com/2011/08/02/ebrahim-sharifs-account-of-his-arrest-torture-and-a-visit-by-the-national-institute-of-human-rights-translated/> accessed 20 January 2015; Lara El Gibaly and David Jolly, “8 Bahrain Activists Get Life Sentences,” *New York Times* (22 June 2011) [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/middleeast/23bahrain.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/middleeast/23bahrain.html?_r=0) accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>563</sup> Gulf Daily News, “Telecom Regulator Pulls the Plug on 2Connect,” (22 March 2011) <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=302276> accessed 20 January 2015; Ben Flanagan, “Bahrain Closing Down 2Connect,” *The National* (23 March 2011) <http://www.thenational.ae/business/telecoms/bahrain-closing-down-2connect> accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>564</sup> Quoted in Matthew Cassel, “Two Weeks in Bahrain’s Military Courts,” *Al-Jazeera English* (2 December 2011) <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/20111016145759140585.html> accessed 20 January 2015.

who had called for the downfall of the regime and had intelligence contacts with foreign countries”,<sup>565</sup> yet it seems more convincing that his arrest was motivated by his position as a wealthy, secular Sunni who symbolically and actively challenged regime depictions of the Bahraini Spring as sectarian, Islamist, and violent. As Gengler put it, Sharif became one of “the most dangerous men in Bahrain” to the regime for “break[ing] ranks with the government’s Sunni ethnic constituency to join those calling for reform”.<sup>566</sup>

Sharif might be considered an exception were there not a plethora of similar examples from all three case studies, indicating that there will always remain individuals within rent-rich societies who will challenge the state regardless of rent-distributions. Other high profile examples from Qatar and Oman include Qatari academics Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari and Dr Hassan al-Said, Omani lawyer Basma al-Kiyumi, and former Majlis al-Dowla employee and writer Said Sultan al-Hashimi, all of whom have pressed for reform despite benefiting from the rentier system.<sup>567</sup> For example, Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari (whose 1974 doctorate, interestingly, focused on the allocation of oil revenues in the Gulf) has enjoyed a successful career in public sector academia and consulting on oil and gas development in Qatar, even while advocating transfer of power from state to society.<sup>568</sup> Unlike protesters who expressed rent-seeking motivations, the political activism of these individuals cannot be connected to personal material dissatisfaction.

Rejection of the rentier bargain is not confined to the ranks of the reformist elite, yet before discussing broader examples of political challenges, it is important to note that the intensity and intent of opposition varies greatly between the three case studies. This thesis identifies movements that are notable *for that country*, as this represents a challenge to the rentier bargain within the context of that state. Bahrain, of course, has

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<sup>565</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “And Those Who Do Wrong will Come to Know by what a (Great) Reverse They will be Overturned,” (17 March 2011) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/450115> accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>566</sup> Justin Gengler, “The Most Dangerous Men in Bahrain,” *Religion and Politics in Bahrain* (5 June 2011) <http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.com.au/2011/06/most-dangerous-men-in-bahrain.html> accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>567</sup> Peter Salisbury, “Insulting the Sultan in Oman,” *Foreign Policy* (19 October 2012) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/19/insulting-the-sultan-in-oman/> accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>568</sup> Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, “Curriculum Vitae,” (n.d.) <http://dr-alkuwari.net/node/425> accessed 16 February 2015; Jenan Amin, “Interview with Dr. Ali Khalifa Al Kuwari, author of “The People Want Reform... In Qatar, Too,” *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* (3 March 2014) <http://lb.boell.org/en/2014/03/03/interview-dr-ali-khalifa-al-kuwari-author-people-want-reform-qatar-too-statehood> accessed 16 February 2015; the first chapter of *al-Sha‘ab Yurīd al-‘Islāh fī Qaṭar ‘Aydān* has been translated to English by Robin Moger and is available in Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, “Qataris for Reform,” in *al-Sha‘ab Yurīd al-‘Islāh fī Qaṭar ‘Aydān*, ed. Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari (Beirut: Al-Maaref Forum, 2012) <http://dr-alkuwari.net/sites/akak/files/qatarisforreform-translation.pdf> accessed 16 February 2015.

had the most active opposition since 2011, where citizens demanded a complete overhaul of the political system. In Oman, activists interviewed were uncomfortable with even the term ‘opposition’ as they felt it implied antagonism towards Sultan Qaboos; rather, these reformers desired change *within* the existing system, holding up banners proclaiming their loyalty to Sultan Qaboos even while challenging corruption within Cabinet. By comparison, movements to initiate uprisings in Qatar via social media were entirely unsuccessful. Writes one researcher of Qatar’s calls for protest on Facebook: “when the time came, the car park designated as the meeting point was empty, save for this author, curious to see if any Qataris would turn up”.<sup>569</sup> Qatari reformers generally declined to directly challenge the state itself, instead focusing on altering specific policies. Only groups such as Dr. Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari’s Monday Meetings have outlined a clear manifesto for political reform, and they represent more a reformist elite than a social movement with widespread public support.

More broadly among opposition interviewees, there was no clear correlation between those who had received direct distributions from the state – scholarships for study, public service employment or even payments in 2011 – and their political loyalty. Many reformers had previously or currently held public sector employment, some had received scholarships for overseas or domestic study, and all had benefited from broader benefits such as subsidised healthcare, education, and public services. The sub-sections below provide additional analysis of reform movements and political challenges in the three case studies.

### ***The Omani Reformist Elite***

In Oman, an economist employed in the public sector, who described himself as materially satisfied, argued: “yes, freedom has advanced in Oman but there are still limitations. Citizens are not equal. The law is not equally applied, especially to ministers who seem to be above the law”. Prosecuting graft was a step in the right direction, he noted, but laws still need improvement. “It’s an opportunity to really combat corruption,” he argued. “Omanis need a constitutional relationship between citizen and government, not a personal one. We need accountability above all else”.<sup>570</sup> Another, a former public servant, noted that the 2011 reforms had replaced *people*, not *institutions*, and had transferred some, but not nearly sufficient, power to the Majlis al-

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<sup>569</sup> David Roberts, “Qatar: Domestic Quietism, Elite Adventurism,” in *What Does the Gulf Think About the Arab Awakening* (European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2013).

<sup>570</sup> Author interview, Oman 2014.

Shura. “Without accountability, nothing will change,” he averred.<sup>571</sup> A senior member of the Majlis al-Dowla, speaking in a personal capacity, agreed with this sentiment, noting that there have been many changes since 2011, but “sometimes it’s just figures being shuffled around”.<sup>572</sup>

The Omanis quoted above had not participated in 2011 demonstrations, although they were actively pushing for reform in other ways.<sup>573</sup> Among participants in the 2011 demonstrations, many felt personally materially satisfied yet still made political challenges. “I don’t have any problem with the Sultan”, explained a Muscat-based activist who had held steady public service employment until 2011, when she claims her activism prompted her dismissal, “just a problem with corruption, and I want him to be serious about the future of Oman, about succession and sustainability and women’s rights”.<sup>574</sup> The Director of a microbiology program in the Omani Health Service, Dr. al-Azri, also joined demonstrations, claiming: “I was just trying to educate people about their rights...what is happening in Oman [referring to the torture of political activists] is against human rights”.<sup>575</sup> “What started off as a small protest organised by the unemployed and underpaid”, wrote Susan al-Shahry, a Dhofar-based Omani blogger, “has become a gathering of thousands from all walks of life. Doctors, writers, religious leaders, lawyers, students, unemployed young men, and even Majlis al-Shura candidates have joined the protesters”.<sup>576</sup>

Omani demonstrations, for the most part, did not call for the overthrow of the regime, but, rather, sought to reform the existing system. The demands of the reformist elite and their followers in Muscat, for example, focused on the transformation of the Majlis al-Shura into a directly elected and fully empowered legislative body, ensuring the accountability of ministers, opening space for public debates and the formation of independent civil society, checks to the internal security apparatus, and addressing issues of economic mismanagement, joblessness, and misalignment between the labour

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<sup>571</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>572</sup> Author interview with senior member of Majlis al-Dowla, Oman 2013.

<sup>573</sup> These included, for example, privately pushing reform initiatives from within government, or speaking at formal lectures on the importance of reform. Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>574</sup> Author interview with Omani reformer, Oman 2013.

<sup>575</sup> Dr. Al-Azri, quoted in Gulf Centre for Human Rights, “Torture in Oman,” (29 January 2014) <http://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/20> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>576</sup> Susan al-Shahri, “Salalah Protests Gear Up for the Long Haul,” *Susan al-Shahri Blogspot* (7 March 2011) <http://susanalshahri.blogspot.com.au/2011/03/salalah-protests-gear-up-for-long-haul.html> accessed 24 January 2015.



market and education system in a transparent, public and open manner.<sup>577</sup> These groups, notably the OSWL, continue to organise debates and lectures on contemporary issues in the post-2011 climate. Although the lectures themselves are not particularly contentious, reformers in attendance often use the post-lecture discussion as an opportunity to initiate political debate on domestic issues; the lectures thus form a rare open space for Omanis to engage in independent political discussion over reform, development, and change.<sup>578</sup> That these meetings have occurred even as attendees and organisers reported harassment from the state security apparatus,<sup>579</sup> reveals that Omani reformers will remain an important group within the Omani state-society relationship.

These reformist elements, however, are still very much a minority, and, like al-Kuwari's group in Qatar, have faced active opposition from society.<sup>580</sup> Ultimately, opinions on reform were very divided in Oman, captured well by the following interview excerpt:

Some people will say 'Omanis are passive. They are not interested in, you know, political debate or anything. All they want is more money, more land, more cars, more free life, no tax, more oil, that kind of thing'. Whereas other people will tell you: 'No. Omanis are ready for democracy. Omanis want more freedom of speech. Omanis want a parliament. Omanis don't want the Sultan anymore. It's time he gave up power, he is controlling too much,' etcetera, etcetera...so there are two sides of the discussion.<sup>581</sup>

While there was some indication of rejection of the rentier bargain in Oman, particularly among the small, albeit active, reformist elite, rent-seeking was still widely apparent in public demonstrations. This suggests that, for most Omanis, the incentives to remain politically quiescent, to mobilise in support of the state, or to rent-seek, have overpowered incentives to demand political reform.

### ***Reformers and Political Challenges in Qatar***

Although there is no Qatari 'opposition', in terms of an organised society that campaigns publicly against the state, there have been several instances of non-material reform demands emerging from individual citizens and private majālis. The most

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<sup>577</sup> Author interviews with Omani reformers, including attendees at OSWL meetings, 2013-2014.

<sup>578</sup> Author interviews with attendees at reformist meetings, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>579</sup> Owners of cafes and other venues that had hosted meetings had allegedly received 'informal' phone calls and visits from individuals claiming to be members of internal state security, reminding them that hosting public lectures was against their commercial licenses and that they would be closed if it occurred again. Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>580</sup> This was evident in the vehement criticism of reformist groups among loyalist interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>581</sup> Author interview with Omani from Dhofar, Oman 2013.

prominent of the majālis is a group of 60 Qataris headed by Dr. Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, who in 2012 published the edited volume, *al-Sha‘ab Yurīd al-Iṣlāḥ fī Qaṭar Aūdān* (The People Want Reform in Qatar Too).<sup>582</sup> His “Monday Meetings”, held from 14 March 2011 to 6 February 2012,<sup>583</sup> inspired the volume, which included the following demands:

- Transparency in public finance and publicly-owned assets, including the state budget
- Transparency in major public policy decisions, including criticism of the opaque manner in which education, health, and constitutional reform have been implemented
- Freedom of opinion and media
- Greater separation between public and private interests and independence of public administration
- Rectification of the population imbalance between expatriate and Qatari citizens, including specific reform of the Nationality Law of 2005
- Effective economic diversification to increase long-term economic sustainability
- Transition to a democratic political system (in a specific, step-by-step, manner)
- The creation of a democratic GCC-wide union to enhance Qatar’s security

The volume is, for Qatar, unusually direct in its call for wide-reaching political reform, representing a clear political challenge. Al-Khalifa’s other publications also express reformist sentiments, such as a 2012 article regretting that both Qatar’s *2030 Vision* and the *Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016* omit any discussion of political reform and another from 2010 arguing that the political system in Qatar was autocratic both before and after the ratification of the Permanent Constitution in 2004.<sup>584</sup> Other participants in the meeting are also well-known reformers, such as Hassan al-Sayed, an associate professor of constitutional law at Qatar University and al-Sharq columnist

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<sup>582</sup> See for example Amin, “Interview with Dr. Ali Khalifa Al Kuwari, Author of ‘The People Want Reform...In Qatar too’”; Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, ed., *al-Sha‘ab Yurīd al-Iṣlāḥ fī Qaṭar Aūdān* (Beirut: Al-Maaref Forum, 2012).

<sup>583</sup> Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, “al-Laqa’ al-Ithnayn,” (n.d.) <http://www.dr-alkuwari.net/mondaymeeting> accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>584</sup> Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, “The Visions and Strategies of the GCC Countries from the Perspective of Reforms: The Case of Qatar,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5:1 (January – March 2012) 86-106; Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari, “Hālat al-Dīmūqrātiyya fī Qaṭar: Qarā’at Dīmūqrātiyya fī Disātīr al-Duwal al-‘Arabiyya,” *Idafat* 13:3 (2011) [http://www.caus.org.lb/Home/electronic\\_magazine.php?emagID=221&screen1](http://www.caus.org.lb/Home/electronic_magazine.php?emagID=221&screen1) accessed 16 February 2015.

who campaigns against the continued delay of elections for Majlis al-Shura. “There is no excuse for postponing the elections or extending the term of the current Shura Council,” he argued in an article for Qatari English-language newspaper *The Peninsula* in 2013, and in earlier articles noted that decisions to extend the Advisory Council’s term had previously been issued over 10 times since 1982, yet “none of these decisions clarified what was the public interest they intended to serve”.<sup>585</sup>

On a more individual basis, moderate calls for reform emerged in local media. Qataris particularly highlighted limitations to civil society, although rarely through direct criticism of government policy.<sup>586</sup> Others decried the lack of transparency and consultation regarding major development projects, such as the following, which focuses on frustration with education reforms:

Why should there be so much anger at projects in the education sector, in particular? The reason is that there is a wide gap between the society and the Supreme Education Council and the Ministry of Education. Citizens are not made partners in these projects and informed about plans. The same is true of the health sector, where there is need for more communication before the implementation of projects, not after the projects are started or when there are delays. Tens of projects across the country are not completed on schedule. The completion dates of these projects are changed more than once.<sup>587</sup>

Online movements against specific policies and regulations also continued, such as the #BoycottQAirways or #porkinQatar campaign, formed on 22 November 2011 to protest Qatar Distribution Company, a Qatar Airways-owned store in Abu Hamour, making pork meat available for purchase to residents with alcohol permits.<sup>588</sup> While the vast majority of demands avoided any criticism of the ruling family, several individuals – notably Sultan al-Khuleifa and Mohammed Ibn al-Deeb al-Ajami – published online

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<sup>585</sup> Hassan al-Sayed, “Why Do We Fear an Elected Council?” *The Peninsula* (13 June 2013) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/dr-hassan-al-sayed/241138/why-do-we-fear-an-elected-council> accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>586</sup> Khalid al-Sayed, “Civil Societies in the Gulf and Future Vision,” *The Peninsula* (12 September 2013) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/khalid-al-sayed/252794/civil-societies-in-the-gulf-and-future-vision> accessed 7 August 2016; Mariam al-Saad, “Advisory Council’s Civic Role and Duty,” *The Peninsula* (3 May 2010) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/mariam-al-saad/1821/advisory-councils-civil-role-and-duty> accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>587</sup> Jaber Al Harami, “Lack of Transparency Angers Public,” *The Peninsula* (19 September 2013) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/jaber-al-harami/253714/lack-of-transparency-angers-public> accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>588</sup> #BoycottQairways, *Twitter* <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23boycottQairways&src=typd> accessed 16 February 2015; #PorkinQatar, *Twitter* <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23PorkinQatar&src=typd> accessed 16 February 2015.

letters and poems deemed highly offensive to the Emir and were imprisoned.<sup>589</sup> Others, such as journalist Faisal al-Marzooqi, who published an article alleging there was widespread corruption in the Museum of Islamic Art (the chair of which is H.E. Shaikha al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, sister of Emir Tamim), were threatened with legal action but not imprisoned.<sup>590</sup>

The vast majority of public demands for reform in Qatar challenge specific policies but generally do not directly call for reform of the wider political system. By far the greatest issue driving political challenges, discussed by interviewees and apparent in repeated public campaigns and articles, is concern over the rapid globalisation of Qatar and its effect on the Qatari identity. The following interviewee best captures this sentiment:

I mean, personally, I'm adamantly against the way the things are run when it comes to this Western influence...All the museums now are governed by these Westerners who know absolutely nothing about our history, who are not even trained in Islamic history or the area's history. The people who used to work at the Louvre and all these prestigious places are brought here to determine what Qataris should consider to be their history and what kind of artefacts are important to us, and what we would like to display to the world as our heritage.

I'm very unhappy personally about the fact that we become second-class citizens to Westerners because of the powers-that-be and how they view this thing. I participate whenever I can in these campaigns we run in Twitter or anywhere else against these atrocities committed against our culture.<sup>591</sup>

This sentiment has driven numerous public campaigns and was a notable factor in many others. Switching the language of instruction at Qatar University from Arabic to English, for example, was seen as emblematic of wider state policies that favoured Westernisation over traditional Qatari culture and came under heavy pressure to revert back to Arabic.<sup>592</sup> A related issue was frustration with education reforms implemented

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<sup>589</sup> Sam Bollier and Stefanie Dekker, "Qatari Poet's Sentence Reduced to 15 Years," *Al Jazeera* (25 February 2013) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/02/201322511513435579.html> accessed 24 April 2013; Conservative blogger Sultan Al Khalifa was arrested on 2 March 2011 and released on 1 April 2011 without charge after publishing material criticising book censorship in Qatar.

<sup>590</sup> The Peninsula, "QMA Clarifies, Threatens Legal Action Against Local Daily," (28 August 2013) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/250627/qma-clarifies-threatens-legal-action-against-local-daily> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>591</sup> Author interview with Qatari reformer, Qatar 2013.

<sup>592</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014; D.D. Guttenplan, "Battling to Preserve Arabic from English's Onslaught," *New York Times* (11 June 2012) [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/world/middleeast/11iht-educlde11.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/world/middleeast/11iht-educlde11.html?_r=0) accessed 16 February 2015; Doha News Team, "English vs. Arabic: Qatar University Decision Continues to Stir

under the guidance of RAND Corporation, which interviewees claimed were too harsh and implemented with little warning or community consultation.<sup>593</sup> More direct criticism of expatriate influence was evident in campaigns against the consumption of alcohol on the Pearl island development, dress codes at Qatar University and various art installations deemed culturally inappropriate, the most notable being a statue of footballer Zinedine Zidane's infamous headbutt that was installed on the Corniche.<sup>594</sup> These campaigns do not reject the rentier bargain directly – in that they do not call for greater political rights or a systematic shift in policy – but they do challenge a key state directive and reveal the limits of state autonomy.

The state response to these demands demonstrates the proactive nature of state-society relations in Qatar. The absence of any response to al-Kuwari's call for political pluralisation contrasts distinctly with state action on individual issues, often in sudden and unexplained shifts of policy. The alcohol ban in the Pearl, for example, was enforced almost overnight, the statue of Zinedine Zidane was moved only weeks after it had been installed, and the language of instruction – which had been, in some cases, shifted to English with only two weeks notice – was switched from English to Arabic at Qatar University in September 2012, after an announcement in late January.<sup>595</sup> The shifts certainly resulted in frustration among expatriates, but Qataris viewed the moves as exemplifying state responsiveness. Wrote Tofol al-Nasr in March 2011:

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Controversy,” (29 January 2012) <http://dohanews.co/english-vs-arabic-qatar-university-decision-continues/> accessed 16 February 2016.

<sup>593</sup> Dominic J. Brewer et al., “Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education Reform in Qatar,” *RAND Corporation* (2007); Christina Maria Paschyn, “Zig-Zagging in Education Leaves Qatari Students Behind,” *Al-Fanar Media* (25 October 2013) <http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2013/10/zig-zagging-education-policies-leave-qatari-students-behind/> accessed 16 February 2015; Maha Ellili-Cherif and Michael Romanowski, “Education for a New Era: Stakeholder's Perception of Qatari Education Reform,” *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership* 8:6 (November 2013) 1-17; Author interviews, Qatar, 2013-2014.

<sup>594</sup> Many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with what they termed “inappropriate attire” at universities in Education City. See also Amzat Haroon, “QU Issues New Dress Code for Students,” *The Peninsula* (13 September 2012) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/207968/qu-issues-new-dress-code-for-students> accessed 16 February 2015; Courtney Trenwith, “‘We Won't Reverse Alcohol Ban': Pearl Qatar,” *Arabian Business* (5 June 2014) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/-we-won-t-reverse-alcohol-ban-pearl-qatar-552748.html#.VOFINrCUf9s> accessed 16 February 2015; Raynald C Rivera, “Culturally Progressive Step,” *The Peninsula* (12 October 2012) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/256711/culturally-progressive-step> accessed 14 February 2015.

<sup>595</sup> Victoria Scott, “QMA Moves Zinedine Zidane Statue Head-Butt Statue from Corniche to Mathaf,” *Doha News* (28 October 2013) <http://dohanews.co/qma-moves-zidane-head-butt-statue-from-corniche-to-mathaf/> accessed 16 February 2015; Jenifer Fenton, “Qatar's Impromptu Alcohol Ban,” *The Arabist* (15 January 2012) <http://arabist.net/blog/2012/1/15/qatars-impromptu-alcohol-ban.html> accessed 16 February 2015; Courtney Trenwith, “Alcohol Ban Lifted for New Hotel on The Pearl-Qatar,” *Arabian Business* (5 November 2014) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/alcohol-ban-lifted-for-new-hotel-on-pearl-qatar-570594.html> accessed 16 February 2015; The Peninsula, “Arabic vs English,” (27 January 2012) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/181279/arabic-vs-english> accessed 16 February 2015; Paschyn, “Zig-zagging in Education Policies Leave Qatari Students Behind”.

There is certainly vast room for development, progress, and improvement, which is called for by the country's modern, moderate, educated elite. Those are the legitimate demands of a minority, which will grow at the same pace that the country grows. And the government, with its hands on the pulse, will likely continue to maintain its stride a few steps ahead.<sup>596</sup>

Although Qatar has not, then, experienced any widespread political opposition since 2011, much of this may be due to the state's proactive approach to societal concerns, responding quickly to individual complaints while forestalling wider political reform. Nevertheless, individual and concerted campaigns do reveal that Qataris regularly make non-material demands of the state, and a reformist elite makes political challenges. That this has occurred in the wealthiest – in terms of GDP per capita – rentier state in the world suggests RST must be revised to better reflect these state-society relations.

### ***Bahrain: Active Opposition and Rejection of the Rentier Bargain***

Of the three case studies, Bahrain reveals the most widespread evidence of political challenges. Bahraini demonstrations attracted youth frustrated with the absence of economic opportunities, but also many Bahrainis who held skilled, high-wage employment as engineers, lawyers, doctors, and public servants. It is difficult to explain the participation of medical professionals in 2011 demonstrations, for example, without reference to political challenges and the mobilising effect of repression.<sup>597</sup> Their participation in the demonstrations – at a far lower level than that alleged by government but nonetheless documented in the BICI report – was a response to the pre-dawn clearing of Pearl roundabout on 17 February, a repressive act by the state, and their primary demand was the removal of the Minister of Health, Faisal al-Hamar, for failing to prevent attacks on medical personnel.<sup>598</sup> Their participation, then, was driven primarily by political considerations, and by demonstrating they placed their financial

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<sup>596</sup> Tofol Jassim al-Nasr, "Leading the Pack to Democracy," *The Peninsula* (29 March 2011) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/tofol-jassim-al-nasr/147299/leading-the-pack-to-democracy> accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>597</sup> See extensive coverage of the participation and treatment of medical professionals in Chapter Five of Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*; Physicians for Human Rights, "Medics on Trial in Bahrain," (n.d.) <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/issues/persecution-of-health-workers/bahrain/medics-on-trial-in-bahrain.html> accessed 29 January 2015.

<sup>598</sup> Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 172; see also Ababdulla, "Muḏāhira l-il-Ṭāqem al-Ṭubbī fi al-Salmāniyya," *YouTube* (17 February 2011) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrT\\_2HFICFY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrT_2HFICFY&feature=related) accessed 16 February 2015; bh7ur, "Thowra al-Bahrayn/Itiṣām al-Kāder al-Ṭubbī," *YouTube* (17 February 2011) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEGnByITVCo> accessed 16 February 2015; Al Jazeera English, "Protests at Bahrain's Salmaniyah Hospital," *YouTube* (17 February 2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkufTYgKtTQ> accessed 16 February 2015.

position in jeopardy: many were fired, demoted or prevented from working in private clinics as a result of their involvement.<sup>599</sup> Repression has not resulted in their exit from the political sphere; medical professionals such as Rula al-Saffar and Nabeel H. Tammam, both arrested in 2011 but subsequently acquitted, remain visible presences at demonstrations as of 2014, calling for the release of jailed medical professionals such as Dr. Ali Alekry and Ibrahim al-Demestani, and for greater protection of medics from state security.<sup>600</sup>

**Figure 6: Rula al-Saffar and Nabeel H. Tammam at al-Wefaq Demonstration, January 2014**



Source: Author's own image.

Many interviewees from other fields had also lost their employment after participating in demonstrations, a phenomenon well documented in the BICI report.<sup>601</sup> Most claimed they were aware of this risk before participating in demonstrations, but that this had not deterred their reformist demands. “Everybody wants dignity”, explained a member of al-Wefaq, “and your dignity is not taken when you are poor...lack of democracy drives

<sup>599</sup> See examples of this in Physicians for Human Rights, “Doctors in Bahrain: In Their Own Words,” (n.d.) <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/multimedia/doctors-in-bahrain-in-their-own-words.html#alekri> accessed 29 January 2015.

<sup>600</sup> Both Saffar and Tammam were arrested as part of the Salmaniya health worker arrests in 2011, and later acquitted of all charges. Saffar was initially sentenced to 15 years under felony charges, whereas Tammam was charged with misdemeanour. Ibrahim al-Demestani was released in June 2015, while Alekry is not due to be released until 2017.

<sup>601</sup> Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*.

change; it's not about salaries".<sup>602</sup> "To be honest", averred founder of online opposition forum *Bahrain Online*, Ali Abdulemam, "I wish that they will take tax, but give me my dignity". When asked what changes he wanted to see in Bahrain, Abdulemam's examples were heavily political, from "upholding human rights as enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights", to the ability to "choose my own government, and for that government to have a say. Citizens should have power equal to the government".<sup>603</sup>

Asked if they thought the Bahraini demonstrations were motivated primarily by economic or political concerns, the vast majority of opposition interviewees immediately rejected the former motivation. "We don't need money, we need dignity", said an independent activist.<sup>604</sup> "It wasn't about the economic [desires]," argued a senior member of Waad. "I think it is more complex of an issue. It is that the people's aspirations was – as the government had stipulated in the [National Action] Charter – for a real constitutional monarchy, but this was not fulfill[ed]. So it is not only economic. Economic, yes in theory, but it is [also] about freedoms, about the discrimination, about naturalisation".<sup>605</sup> Rent-based distributions are all a strategy to keep society loyal, argued another Bahraini academic sympathetic to the opposition: "Government will do anything to keep people satisfied and away from demanding political rights, but they've been unsuccessful. This is the reason for the unrest".<sup>606</sup>

Further, the vast majority of Bahraini opposition interviewees described their personal motivation for pushing for reform in a non-material way. That is, when asked why they had decided to join demonstrations in 2011, they referred to a desire for greater political influence, instances of repression against themselves, their family or community, or the authoritarian and unresponsive nature of government. Tellingly, these interviewees did not mention material concerns, such as job shortages, or even economic inequality, until specifically prompted to discuss economic reform demands. Their responses stand in contrast to the members of the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition or Sohari demonstrators, who answered the same question by reference to economic inequality and personal material dissatisfaction.

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<sup>602</sup> Author interview with member of al-Wefaq, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>603</sup> Author interview with Ali Abdulemam, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>604</sup> Author interview with independent activist, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>605</sup> Author interview with Abdalnabi Alekry, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>606</sup> Author interview with Bahraini academic, Bahrain 2013.



Consider, for example, the motivation Jawad Fairouz, a former member of al-Wefaq, gave for joining opposition. He outlined three major reasons: his experience studying in the US and noticing the disparity between democracy in the US and the political system in Bahrain; the oppression and discrimination he noted of friends, neighbours, and family members under the Al Khalifa monarchy; and the politicised atmosphere – a result of fallout from the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Gulf War – in which he grew up. “You are breathing politics, living politics”, he explained. Fairouz contributed to the 1992 and 1994 petitions calling for political reform and, when the 1994-1999 Uprising began, entered opposition life more completely before joining al-Wefaq upon its founding in 2002.<sup>607</sup>

Another member of al-Wefaq also linked his political mobilisation with the highly political atmosphere of 1980s and 1990s Bahrain. He had received a government scholarship for study abroad – and thus had materially benefited directly from the rentier system – but, similar to Ibrahim Sharif, joined opposition while at university and was arrested upon his return to Bahrain. Asked to explain why he had joined opposition, he responded that it was “in his blood” – claiming links to a prominent activist family<sup>608</sup> – and that it was “not easy to accept that ‘The Family’ [the Al Khalifa royal family] has all the power”. Absent from his and Fairouz’s motivation was any discussion of material welfare, even of economic discrimination, an oft-discussed reform demand from al-Wefaq. He outlined five key demands: first, an elected executive power, including an elected Prime Minister; second, an elected and fully authorised legislative power; third, a one man-one vote electoral system, or a fairer voting system including an end to gerrymandering of districts; fourth, an independent judicial authority; and fifth, security reform to protect all Bahraini citizens.<sup>609</sup>

Depicting the motivation or demands of these individuals as rent-seeking would be greatly reductive, even inaccurate. Contrary to the view held by some members of government noted earlier, Bahraini opposition activists claimed material responses would not resolve the demonstrations. “Even if human development, social development was high, there will still be protests,” claimed another member of al-

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<sup>607</sup> Author interview with Jawad Fairouz, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>608</sup> Name of the family has been removed to protect the identity of the interviewee.

<sup>609</sup> Author interview with member of al-Wefaq, Bahrain 2013.

Wefaq.<sup>610</sup> For these individuals, substantive political reform is necessary to redress the disparity in power between state and society.

A final element worth considering is the response of Bahrainis towards the 2011 direct distribution – where government offered BHD1,000 (approximately USD2,650 in 2011) to every Bahraini family. In Qatar, similar rent-based distributions – the 2011 salary increase, for example – were widely lauded across society, even among reformers.<sup>611</sup> In Bahrain, however, the move was ridiculed within opposition. A former member of al-Wefaq vehemently rejected the idea that the 2011 distribution could change people’s attitudes towards the government: “You are giving me 1,000 Dinar and you are taking my dignity, you are taking my job, you are taking my children’s future, and you didn’t even pay for it, it wasn’t out of your pocket!”<sup>612</sup> “We know it’s a game”, explained another activist formerly aligned with Waad, noting that demonstrators were involved in protests before and after receiving the money.<sup>613</sup> “Poor people took the money, but are still insisting on getting political reform”, said Abduljalil Khalil, a member of al-Wefaq, arguing the distribution does not address the central demand of demonstrations – democracy. “They [the regime] are throwing slogans to absorb the anger of the people...but the core of this is political, not financial”.<sup>614</sup> Two young Bahraini participants in the 2011 demonstrations laughed when asked about the BHD1,000 distribution. “There were jokes among the protesters about that”, explained a Bahraini formerly aligned with Waad. “The first one was: ‘lā alf ’aw ’alfayn, mū‘adnā yūm al-ithnayn!’ [Not 1,000 or 2,000, our appointment is on Monday!] The second joke was that the king funded the lu’lu’a [Pearl] protests, because many protesters received it and then donated it to the protests, buying food or other things for demonstrators”.<sup>615</sup>

Certainly, government interviewees did not claim they thought the BHD1,000 distribution would be enough to ensure political loyalty – and it is worth keeping in mind that Bahrain has a much lower cooptive capacity relative to extreme rentiers like Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE. Yet that the 2011 payment was so openly rejected reflects a wider characteristic of Bahraini state-society relations: opposition, both formal and informal, does not display an inclination to exchange political loyalty for material

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<sup>610</sup> Author interview with member of al-Wefaq, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>611</sup> Author interviews with reformers, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>612</sup> Author interview with former al-Wefaq MP Ali Al Aswad, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>613</sup> Author interview with Bahraini activist, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>614</sup> Quoted in Fuller, “Bahrain’s Promised Spending Fails to Quell Dissent”.

<sup>615</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

welfare.<sup>616</sup> Ultimately, perhaps the most revealing challenge to Bahrain’s rentier bargain is displayed in the following image, in which an anti-regime slogan – yasqāt Hamad min ’ajal al-shuhadā’ [Overthrow Hamad for the sake of the martyrs] – is emblazoned onto the outer wall of a state-financed housing development, a traditional tool of rentier regimes.

**Figure 7: Opposition Graffiti on Government Housing Development**



Source: Author's own image.

Rent distributions, then, cannot guarantee an absence of opposition, particularly not in states with a long and established history of political opposition or where other political dynamics have overwhelmed the incentives offered to remain quiescent.

### **State Responses to Political challenges in Bahrain**

The state, despite the understanding of the non-material relationship with society evinced in Chapter Three, does not deal well with individuals who have challenged the regime despite receiving rent-based distributions. This was particularly evident in Bahrain, where demonstrators who had been detained and interrogated in 2011 reported that their interrogators specifically asked why they had opposed the government despite receiving scholarships, employment, or other material benefits. A doctor who participated in the demonstrations, for example, claims he was asked: “Why do you do this – your salary is 4,000, 5,000 BHD – so why are you *really* protesting?”<sup>617</sup> Ali Abdulemam, too, said his torturer asked why he opposed the government despite

<sup>616</sup> The potential exception to this based on extant work is Bahrain’s Sunni community, as discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>617</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

benefiting materially. “Your salary is better than mine”, Abdulemam reported his torturer as saying, “Why are you opposing?”<sup>618</sup> “They ask everybody about this...they aren’t thinking away from these material things”, said Mohammed al-Tajer, a Bahraini human rights lawyer who was detained in al-Qurain prison for over two months in 2011. “They thought that people has risen because they want their salary, they want to be better paid...they never thought that our revolution was because we want freedom, we want democracy, we want a kind of share...in managing the country”.<sup>619</sup> Another interviewee told a story of a relative who had been imprisoned and who had held a high-earning position for the previous half-decade. According to this interviewee, the interrogator pointed to two other protesters who were also being questioned, both of whom were poor, and said: “I understand why they are protesting, but why are you? ... Your salary is higher than mine, why are you out in the streets?”<sup>620</sup>

State media also focused on wealthy or prominent individuals who had joined demonstrations. On 30 May 2011, Saeed al-Hamad’s *Bahrain Television* show accused three doctors from Salmaniya of being terrorists.<sup>621</sup> *Bahrain TV* also targeted prominent athletes – notably footballers A‘ala and Mohammed Hubail – publishing their pictures and branding them “stray hyenas” and “traitors” to the regime.<sup>622</sup> The *Al-Rased* (al-rāṣed) show and *al-Wasal Television* (al-waṣāl) questioned those who had benefitted from the rentier system and yet challenged the state, such as an *al-Rased* episode on 11 May 2011 focused on Salmaniya doctors and medical staff.<sup>623</sup>

<sup>618</sup> Author interview with Ali Abdulemam, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>619</sup> Author interview with Mohammed al-Tajer, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>620</sup> Author interview with participant in demonstrations, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>621</sup> See B4hrain, “Ḥuwār Maftuḥ ma‘ Sa‘īd al-Ḥamad Telefīziyūn al-Bahrayn 30 Māyū 2011,” *YouTube*, (30 May 2011) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEDC\\_H\\_2C7Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEDC_H_2C7Q) accessed 16 February 2015; Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 206.

<sup>622</sup> B4hrain, “BTV Show on Sport Violations,” *YouTube* (4 April 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXd6UQ5MAds> accessed 28 January 2015; Dave Zirin, “Bahrain Cracks Down on Protesting Footballers,” *Al Jazeera English* (15 April 2011)

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/04/2011413132952273777.html> accessed 28 January 2015; Hugh Tomlinson, “Sportsmen Feel Heat From Bahraini Regime,” *The Australian* (8 April 2011) <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/sportsmen-feel-heat-from-bahraini-regime/story-e6frg6so-1226035590743?nk=01f0f2b749e3672865b131917dd8eb0f> accessed 28 January 2015. It is worth noting that ‘name and shame’ campaigns were also directed at government loyalists by opposition who published names of journalists and accused them of receiving government payoffs. See Bahrain’s List of Shame, *Facebook*, <http://ar-ar.facebook.com/BahrainListOfShame> accessed 28 January 2015; and Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 380-381.

<sup>623</sup> B4hrain, “al-rāṣed Wezāra al-Ṣaḥa wa al-Salmāniyya,” *YouTube* (11 April 2011) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCO-BL\\_6swU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCO-BL_6swU) accessed 16 February 2015. See also Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 39, 206, 394.

Although Chapter Three established that members of the state do not, in general, believe that material distributions alone will preclude political opposition, they likely found it strategically useful to portray demonstrators who have accepted state support as ‘ungrateful’. As explained in Chapter Three, this rhetoric was widespread amongst active supporters and enhances divisions between loyalist and opposition segments of society.

Government attitudes towards rentier logic aside, the existence of reformers despite continuing rent distributions begs the question: what dynamics overwhelmed the rentier effect? The following sections highlight the three most common explanations for political mobilisation expressed by interviewees, suggesting these are dynamics that can overwhelm rent-based incentives to remain politically inactive.

## **Repression**

Repression was the most common explanation for political mobilisation among opposition interviewees. This was particularly apparent in Bahrain, where repressive tactics have been most intensely utilised. Ali Abdulemam, for example, traced his involvement in politics back to 1991, at age 13, where he saw friends and neighbours in Bahrain being badly treated or tortured. “I need justice”, he said, claiming that being jailed for his activism only hardened his resolve.<sup>624</sup> “When you come from a Shia family, you have a family member in jail”, said a civil rights activist, who linked his personal motivation for political mobilisation to the imprisonment of his uncle.<sup>625</sup> Another activist, now operating out of the US, traced his political activism to his father’s arrest and repressive tactics against friends and family.<sup>626</sup> As a Bahraini citizen who had grown up in the UK but started campaigning for Bahraini civil and human rights straight out of university put it: “Everyone in Bahrain is political. Even breathing the air, the tear gas, is a political act”. She linked her personal motivation for aligning with opposition – in her case the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition – with the persecution of her extended family, including the detainment of her cousins for their participation in 2011 unrest.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> Author interview with Ali Abdulemam, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>625</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>626</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>627</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

There was also evidence that repressive tactics had solidified existing opposition and could cause the transformation of rent-seeking into political opposition. It is notable, for example, that participants in the Sohar demonstrations described their motivation for joining demonstrations in 2011 as almost entirely rent-seeking, whereas they expressed a mix of political and rent-seeking demands during interviews in 2013 and 2014; they linked this change to government crackdowns on demonstrators and their personal experiences with repression. In Bahrain, a 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist claimed he was strongly against any acts of violence – his example was a recent bomb attack involving police cars in Sitra – but that regime repression had legitimated the use of Molotov cocktails, fake bombs, and tyre burning. “Shaikh Isa Qasem announced that we could use Molotov cocktails to protect women and children and dignity...protect our family”, he claimed, describing his participation in burning tyres in the streets behind the Bahrain Formula One track as an attempt to ensure that international media coverage would have smoke in the background, an indication that all was not well in Bahrain. “We want to show that things are wrong in Bahrain,” he explained, “it’s not about hurting people”.<sup>628</sup> Whether the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition should be considered a peaceful movement is debatable, yet the key point is that repressive actions by the state have lent legitimacy to more radical opposition.

Another Bahraini claimed he usually considered himself politically neutral but after the crackdown Pearl Roundabout on 17 February 2011 felt he had to choose a position. “No doubt [I chose] the people, they were unarmed,” he explained, while emphasising he still didn’t agree with everything opposition said and did. In Oman: “I don’t see myself as a politician”, said an Omani activist involved in organising 2011 demonstrations, “I’m a humanitarian who has just been forced into politics”.<sup>629</sup> Several other Omanis and Bahrainis who identified as human rights activists explained their involvement in 2011 demonstrations in similar terms, claiming repression from the state had resulted in their politicisation.<sup>630</sup>

For Mohammed al-Tajer, a prominent Bahraini human rights lawyer: “There is no way that anybody who work[s] in these cases will not work as a human right[s] defender, because of the violation [of human rights], because of the wide use of torture, because of the wide distance between the fair trials and the way the trial is going on here in

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<sup>628</sup> Author interview with member of 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>629</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>630</sup> Author interviews, Oman and Bahrain, 2013-2014.

Bahrain”.<sup>631</sup> Al-Tajer himself is well experienced in state repression; he was arrested in mid-2011 and stated to the Bassiouni Commission that he was abused while in custody.<sup>632</sup> “I found myself with my clients, Abdujalil al-Singace and Hassan Mushaima, in al-Qurain military prison”, said al-Tajer, joking that at least they would have better access to legal advice. Al-Tajer also claimed that in early 2011 his home was bugged and he began receiving threats to release an explicit video of him and his wife being intimate unless he desisted from all political and human rights activities.<sup>633</sup> Al-Tajer continued his activities, and the video was released on pro-government website, *Bahrain Forum*, on 31 May 2012.<sup>634</sup> “I’ve been chased, replaced, repressed, every form of intimidation”, he said in 2014, but argued that this had only hardened his resolve to continue. In Oman, too, prominent reformer Said Sultan al-Hashimi, upon being asked for his reaction to his personal arrest and torture, said: “the price of speaking out just made me more determined to push for reform”.<sup>635</sup> In Bahrain and Oman, then, repressive tactics may have driven mass demonstrations underground, but on a personal level they often solidified and in some cases radicalised opposition.

In Qatar, the state has not widely used repression against society since 2011, although of course it also has not faced such intense public opposition as in Oman or Bahrain. Qatar’s historical state-society relations suggest the state is willing to use repressive tactics when opposition does emerge. A notable example of this was the 2005 announcement by Emir Hamad revoking the Qatari citizenship of over 5,000 members of the al-Ghafran clan of the al-Murrah tribe, ostensibly because they held dual citizenship with Saudi Arabia, but more likely because of the alleged role of several members in the 1996 counter-coup attempt.<sup>636</sup> The order was rescinded several months later, but, as of 2012, at least 100 individuals had yet to have their nationality returned.<sup>637</sup> Interestingly, due to Law 38 of 2005 on the Acquisition of Qatari Nationality, al-Murrah whose citizenship has been returned join the ranks of naturalised

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<sup>631</sup> Author interview with Mohammed al-Tajer, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>632</sup> Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 306-307; see also Human Rights Watch, “Bahrain: Defense Lawyer Detained After Night Raid,” (16 April 2011) <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/16/bahrain-defense-lawyer-detained-after-night-raid> accessed 31 January 2015.

<sup>633</sup> Author interview with Mohammed al-Tajer, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>634</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, “Bahrain: Prominent Human Rights Lawyer Mohammed al-Tajer Targeted Due to his Human Rights Activities,” (5 June 2012) <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5303> accessed 31 January 2015.

<sup>635</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>636</sup> Kamrava, *Qatar*, 111.

<sup>637</sup> Amnesty International, *Annual Report: Qatar (2012)* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/qatar/report-2012> accessed 31 January 2015.

Qataris and those whose families arrived after 1930 – impacting their ability to vote, run for office, and receive other benefits. Kamrava claims: “the state’s efforts at marginalizing the al-Murrah have ironically led to their increasing self-awareness and, at times, expressions of grievance against the state”.<sup>638</sup> Here too, then, the use of repression can solidify, rather than reduce, opposition.

It is worth remembering that citizenship in Qatar, as an extreme rentier state, includes not only political and residency rights, but also an exceptional set of economic benefits including preferential state employment, higher wages, land and home packages, and scholarships. The vast majority of Qatari citizens are also employed in the public service, whereas much of the labour class is outsourced to migrant workers from India, Nepal, the Philippines, and Bangladesh.<sup>639</sup> From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that the working class-based activism that gave rise to political liberalisation in other contexts is weaker in Qatar, leaving only a minority of reformers who are vulnerable to targeted repression from the state or, more likely, from active supporters in society.<sup>640</sup> Supporting this contention, Qatari interviewees, on the whole, were far more hesitant than Omanis or Bahrainis to criticise the state, and unlike in those countries, most Qatari reformers asked to keep their identities confidential.<sup>641</sup> The memory of the state’s response to supporters of the 1996 attempted coup contributes to a widespread perception among Qatari reformers that public demands for political reform (less so economic reform) could result in their termination from public employment, or other loss of benefits. “In order to go to the streets”, noted one Qatari reformer, “you need to

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<sup>638</sup> Kamrava, *Qatar*, 111.

<sup>639</sup> These four countries make up some three quarters of migrant labour in Qatar in 2013. See Gulf Research Centre, “Gulf Labour Markets and Migration: Estimates of Non-Nationals by Country of Citizenship and Migration Status (Selected Nationalities),” (26-30 September 2013) <http://gulfmigration.eu/estimates-of-non-nationals-by-country-of-citizenship-and-migration-status-selected-nationalities-qatar-26-30092013/> accessed 7 August 2016.

<sup>640</sup> The weakness of middle class interests in favour of the capitalist elite in extreme rentier states such as the UAE forms the focus of Herb, *The Wages of Oil*. More generally, the role of class interests in political liberalisation remains hotly contested, see for example Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53:1 (March 1959) 69-105; Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>641</sup> In Qatar, almost all reformers asked to keep their identity confidential, as opposed to the vast majority of Bahraini reformers, many of whom were part of a public and vocal opposition. Oman fell into the middle, where most reformers agreed to be identified but emphasised that they viewed reform as in line with the Sultan’s proclaimed wishes, and explicitly asked *not* to be described as ‘opposition’. The interviews conducted for this study cannot be assumed to be nationally representative, but these findings do align with a broader trend towards open opposition and conflict in Bahrain, hesitant reform movements in Oman, and the near absence of public political challenges in Qatar.



be ready to lose those things. And for a Qatari, there's really a lot to lose".<sup>642</sup> The costs of political activism in Qatar, then, are considerably higher than the perceived benefits, particularly when active supporters are so widespread in society. Not only does this highlight the continued relevance of rent distributions (even if RST itself require some revision), it may also explain, in part, why the most vocal political challengers in Qatar – one of the only groups that directly calls for political liberalisation – are formed under an established academic and member of the politically powerful al-Kuwari tribe.

## **Inequality**

Inequality also emerged as a dynamic with the potential to overwhelm rent-based incentives to remain loyal to the state. That is, rents have cooptive power, but *relative* deprivation and *relative* inequality can very quickly undermine the benefits of rent-based cooptation.<sup>643</sup> Inequality – broadly defined so as to encompass both material inequality, such as income disparities, and non-material inequality, such as differences in political power – demonstrated the potential to foment both rent-seeking *and* political challenges. Material inequality, for example, can drive rent-seeking demonstrations, and also encourage reformist elites to open discussion on wider political inequalities: this is essentially what happened in Sohar in 2011. Chapter Five discusses the link between economic inequality and political protest in greater detail, but it is worth outlining some potential sources of inequality-driven popular dissatisfaction in the three case studies here.

In Bahrain, there were three sources of inequality repeatedly referenced by interviewees. The first was inequality between the regime and society, represented in widespread criticism of government corruption and calls to redress the imbalance in power between the regime (particularly members of the royal family) and society. "The royal family pays nothing", claimed a political rights activist, speaking of various fees

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<sup>642</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>643</sup> This is not unique to rent-rich states. A broad literature on 'horizontal inequality', or inequality between societal, usually ethnic or religious, groups, has already established a link between inequality, political mobilisation, and violent conflict. See for example Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Sorede Ditsch, "Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison," *American Political Science Review* 105:3 (August 2011) 478 – 495; Frances Stewart, "Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and some Hypotheses," in *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*, ed. Frances Stewart (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Gudrun Østby et al., "Population Pressure, Horizontal Inequality and Political Violence: A Disaggregated Study of Indonesian Provinces, 1990 – 2003," *Journal of Development Studies* 47:3 (2011) 377 – 398; Rosemary Thorp, Corinne Caumartin, and George Gray-Molina, "Inequality, Ethnicity, Political Mobilisation and Political Violence in Latin America: The Cases of Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25:4 (October 2006) 453 – 480.

for public services. “It’s all about who you know...the country works on *wasta*”.<sup>644</sup> Bahrain is a wealthy country, but very corrupt, explained a human rights activist. “If government revenue in the European Union was \$10, \$2 would go to corruption and \$8 to the people. In Bahrain, if the revenue is \$10, all of it goes to corruption and they ask you to contribute another \$2!”<sup>645</sup>

The second source of inequality, between Sunni and Shia Bahrainis, was ubiquitous within Bahraini Shia opposition. “I think Sunnis have captured everything and anybody from [one of their families] will be a judge from the day he finish[es] law school and be a doctor from the day he finish[es] medicine school”, said a Shia human rights activist.<sup>646</sup> A member of al-Wefaq claimed that “discrimination is a hidden policy by the ruling family”, and estimated that Shia formed at most a tiny minority of the security apparatus.<sup>647</sup> This reflects a widespread perception amongst Bahraini Shia that the government discriminates against them in terms of employment, particularly for military or security positions. Though no official breakdowns of security employment by sect (or nationality) are available, two surveys conducted in 2009, by the BCHR and an independent political researcher, respectively, found higher levels of Sunni than Shia representation in security positions such as the police and armed forces.<sup>648</sup> The BICI report, too, documented widespread sectarian-oriented abuse during state crackdowns on protesters, stating: “many of the security forces directed verbal abuse and insults at both the arrested individuals and members of their family. With few exceptions, all of the arrested individuals were Shia. The verbal abuse generally involved insulting religious and sectarian beliefs and symbols”.<sup>649</sup>

Bahraini Shia also claimed the government discriminated against Shia in distributing scholarships for university study. Although, as with the security apparatus, there is no official evidence available to confirm or reject these claims, it is the *perception* of inequality that is relevant to political mobilisations. One interviewee said his son had attended an interview for a government scholarship and was asked three questions:

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<sup>644</sup> *Wasta*, transliterated *wāsta*, loosely translates to ‘connections’, denoting the practice of using informal connections and contacts to obtain benefits, employment, cut through red tape, etc. Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>645</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>646</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>647</sup> Author interview with member of al-Wefaq, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>648</sup> Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*, 57.

<sup>649</sup> Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 271.

1. What do you want to study?
2. What are your hobbies?
3. Are you originally from Sharjah? (i.e. are you Shia?)<sup>650</sup>

“For Shia it’s a done deal – they’ve already decided not to give you a scholarship”, said a member of the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition.<sup>651</sup> Another, a civil rights activist who identified as politically independent, disagreed, noting that while Shia had difficulty securing government scholarships, “poor Sunni families without close connections to the royal family are just as likely to miss out”.<sup>652</sup>

This final point is of relevance to the third source of inequality identified in interviews – between Bahraini-born citizens and recently naturalised Bahrainis of foreign origin. The naturalisation of Bahrainis from the wider Middle East and sub-continental Asia has fomented much opposition in Bahrain, especially since naturalisation implies extension of the same rent-based benefits as Bahraini-born citizens receive.<sup>653</sup> There was a strong sense that naturalised Bahrainis were favoured over Bahraini-born citizens, a prominent complaint of Sunni reform movements. As one interviewee noted:

Sunnis are discriminated against too, because they also have unemployment, also they have housing issues – like, for example, my Uncle. He’s working with an agency since he was 18. Now he’s 40+, okay? And he’s married. He has three kids...And even though he applied for housing since he married...until today he’s living in a flat that he rented and does not have a house. At the same time, Yemenis, Pakistanis, whatever, that came to Bahrain after him, they got houses from the government because they are working in the military.<sup>654</sup>

These inequalities have been referenced repeatedly in public protest and other forms of opposition since 2011; inequality has clearly motivated opposition to the state and overwhelmed rent-based incentives for these individuals to remain quiescent.

In Qatar, there were two primary sources of inequality that emerged repeatedly in interviews. The first, inequality between Qatari citizens and expatriate workers based in Qatar, attracted broad condemnation among Qatari interviewees. “Qatar today is not the

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<sup>650</sup> Author interview with Bahraini academic, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>651</sup> Author interview with member of 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>652</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>653</sup> Aryn Baker, “What Lies Beneath: Bahrain’s ‘New Citizens’ Fuels Unrest,” *Time Magazine* (11 March 2011) <http://world.time.com/2011/03/11/what-lies-beneath-bahrains-new-citizens-fuel-unrest/> accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>654</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

Qatar we love”, lamented one interviewee, discussing the influx of foreigners from varied backgrounds. They’re just coming here to make lots of money, he said, and “getting drunk at night”.<sup>655</sup> These tensions, of course, are not new, nor are they unique to Qatar; most states in the Gulf have needed to rely heavily on expatriate labour, although Qatar and the UAE are at the extreme end of this reliance.<sup>656</sup> The demographic imbalance between nationals and non-nationals, however, has been a source of continued public debate, and played into almost all Qatari calls for reform, particularly those concerning Qatari identity and globalisation.<sup>657</sup> Some Qataris have even suggested the imbalance might be a deliberate attempt to reduce the political power of citizens:

Although these are old issues that have been discussed and highlighted since the early 1970s, the continuity and permanence of the unbalanced population structure and the ignorance about this problem in some GCC states – particularly Qatar and the UAE – might provide sufficient evidence that the imbalance is not a consequence of poor government planning but rather a result of government adoption of such a policy to reduce citizen influence.<sup>658</sup>

Inequality between Qataris and expatriates, then, is a central source of citizen frustration and has already demonstrated the potential to precipitate public calls for reform, although not yet in the form of a systematic and direct political challenge to the regime.

The second source of inequality identified in interviews was not between Qatari citizens and the broader population, but within the Qatari citizenry. When asked if there was any sense of inequality in Qatar at all, one interviewee responded:

There is. There are two types of Qataris. This is a new thing...There are original Qataris, then there are not so much original Qataris. Original Qataris are those whose families were here in Qatar before 1936, I think...they were here when the country was very poor and people had to work in a very harsh condition and they stayed here and they didn’t complain...so anybody whose family was not here in the 1930s was considered a not-so-much original Qatari and the main and only difference [un]til now is that original Qataris get a piece of land – 1,200

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<sup>655</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>656</sup> Nakhleh, “Labor Markets and Citizenship in Bahrayn and Qatar,” 143-156.

<sup>657</sup> Many examples of this have already been discussed but see another in James M. Dorsey, “Alcohol Debate Shines Light on Divisions in Qatari Society,” *Your Middle East* (16 March 2012) [http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/columns/article/alcohol-debate-shines-light-on-divisions-in-qatari-society\\_5489](http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/columns/article/alcohol-debate-shines-light-on-divisions-in-qatari-society_5489) accessed 10 February 2015.

<sup>658</sup> Duha al-Kuwari, “Mission Impossible? Genuine Economic Development in the Gulf Co-operation Countries,” *Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States* 33 (September 2013) 8.

square metres outside Doha...and the not-so-much original Qataris don't get a piece of land.<sup>659</sup>

The quote above refers to Law 38 of 2005 on the Acquisition of Qatari Nationality, which replaced the 1961 Nationality Law and distinguishes between Qataris whose families arrived before 1930 and maintained consistent residence in Qatar, and all other citizens. This means that families who left Qatar during the economic crises in the 1940s and subsequently returned would *not* be considered full citizens. Considering that Qatar's population was estimated at 16,000 or less in 1949 – and not all of those residents would have been Qatari – this is a significant limitation; current estimates suggest the law affects at least a third of Qatari citizens.<sup>660</sup> The law also distinguishes between the economic and political rights of Qatari nationals and 'naturalised Qataris', meaning those who have obtained citizenship through Emiri decree. It states: "Naturalized Qataris shall not be equated with Qatari nationals in terms of the right to work in public positions or work in general until five (5) years after the date of naturalization. Naturalized Qataris shall not be entitled to participate in elections or nominations or be appointed in any legislative body".<sup>661</sup>

Although there are no published guidelines on how housing allotments are determined,<sup>662</sup> there was also a common perception among interviewees that naturalised Qataris were less likely to obtain economic benefits and housing rights. "So now we have Qataris in two different economic statuses," explained one interviewee, "Qataris with houses, and Qataris with very bad houses".<sup>663</sup> The law means, wrote Zahra Babar in 2014, that: "naturalized Qatari citizens are, both in essence and in law, second-class citizens who do not enjoy full political rights and have limited socioeconomic rights".<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>660</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 117. Neil Partrick, "Nationalism in the Gulf States," *Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States* 5 (October 2009) 20-21; Al Kuwari, "Qataris for Reform," 15; Mitchell, "Beyond Allocation," 148.

<sup>661</sup> State of Qatar, Law No. 38 of 2005 on the Acquisition of Qatari Nationality, <http://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=2591&language=en> accessed 3 February 2015. The Explanatory Memorandum on the same law also clarified that naturalised Qataris did not have the right to stand for election or be appointed to any legislative body, in accordance with Article 80 of the Constitution, "which stipulates that members of the Shura Council be of Qatari origin". See State of Qatar, "Explanatory Memorandum to the Provisions of the Qatari Nationality Law," <http://www.almeezan.qa/ClarificationsNoteDetails.aspx?id=7870&language=en> accessed 3 February 2015.

<sup>662</sup> Nor are there ever likely to be, considering the propensity of the state to maintain discretionary control over politically sensitive matters such as this.

<sup>663</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>664</sup> Zahra Babar, "The Cost of Belonging: Citizenship Construction in the State of Qatar," *Middle East Journal* 68:3 (Summer 2014) 414.

This is certainly far from the inequalities apparent in Bahrain or Oman, but has nevertheless enforced a schism in Qatari society and excited societal debate.<sup>665</sup> Wrote al-Kuwari in 2012:

The new Nationality Law from 2005, of dubious constitutionality, paves the way for this transformation of citizens into inhabitants who enjoy none of their rights of citizenship. It does this by permanently depriving citizens who have acquired Qatari citizenship (about a third of all citizens) and their descendants of all political rights.<sup>666</sup>

It is important to note that the 2005 law was the first time there was a clear pathway to citizenship for long-time residents (although the law allows only 50 applicants to obtain citizenship per year), and some differentiation between new and existing citizens is unsurprising considering the value of material benefits offered to Qatari citizens. Yet, in practice, the law has created a sense of inequality within the Qatari populace that previously, according to interviewees, did not exist. Said a Qatari who would be considered naturalised under the 2005 law: “Qataris cannot really differentiate between the two groups...I mean everybody’s very surprised when I say: ‘I don’t have this one.’ It’s not something that’s common knowledge. You have people from same family. That part of the family was here before and this part of the family is new”.<sup>667</sup>

This inequality has already excited societal debate and some condemnation. In 2007, when it emerged that seven candidates for Central Municipal Council would not be able to stand for election because of the changes, Qataris criticised the electoral law as “against the constitution” and “creating discontent”.<sup>668</sup> “Lots of people are talking about the way the government is dealing with is as a very racial way of doing it and usually, societies get past that. They don’t revert to it”, said one Qatari interviewee when asked about the law.<sup>669</sup> Others described it as: “shameful, in this day and age...Qatar has plenty of wealth, I am ashamed to see that a neighbour who arrived 50 years ago does not have citizenship”.<sup>670</sup> One Qatari noted the Nationality Law was starting to have a social impact on Qatari marriages:

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<sup>665</sup> Hassan al-Sayed, “The Constitutional Nature of the Legislation’s Provisions of Qatari Nationality and its Effects on the New Issued Law of Nationality,” *Kuwait University Journal of Law* 32:3 (2008).

<sup>666</sup> Al-Kuwari, “Qataris for Reform,” 8.

<sup>667</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>668</sup> Barbara Bibbo, “Qatari Electoral Law is ‘Against the Constitution’,” *Gulf News* (29 March 2007) <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qatari-electoral-law-is-against-the-constitution-1.168500> accessed 3 February 2014.

<sup>669</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>670</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2014.

Qataris [with full citizenship] would be hesitant to give his daughter away to a Qatari [with non-original status] for...well the financial reason first of all... It means that [non-original Qataris] would have to pay more attention towards where we go to ask for hands of marriage, because you'd feel a little ashamed to go to a house of a Qatari [with full citizenship] asking for the hand of their daughter, and they're asking you 'well, do you get this land?' and you'd say, 'Well, no'. We stop marrying within each other's realms.<sup>671</sup>

Some interviewees posited that the state would soon respond by altering the law: "I think this will change soon", speculated one Qatari, "because it's creating some sort of a discrimination and raise a question mark now. Why is there this discrimination? If you're expecting us as Qataris to do our duty towards our nation, our country, then we should be equal in our rights".<sup>672</sup> "I wouldn't be surprised to see this thing change automatically overnight in two or three years", surmised another.<sup>673</sup> Ultimately, argued a Qatari senior advisor at Maersk Oil, citizenship encourages loyalty, so citizenship should be expanded and given as a reward for those who have been loyal to Qatar for a long time.<sup>674</sup> At the same time, noted Babar, extending citizenship to the wider community in Qatar entails a significant financial burden on the state, especially considering the exceptional (rent-funded) financial benefits distributed to nationals.<sup>675</sup>

It is important to note that while inequality exists, few interviewees felt it would be sufficient to motivate political opposition. Inequality between citizens and expatriates has certainly driven public expressions of dissatisfaction, yet it is questionable whether it could generate sustained, widespread, and public opposition in Qatar.

In Oman, there were three sources of inequality that repeatedly emerged in interviews. The first, inequality between the Cabinet and regular citizens, was a major factor behind the demonstrations of 2011, particularly allegations that certain Omani Ministers were corrupt and unaccountable to society. The second, inequality between Omanis and expatriate workers, who comprise the majority of the Omani labour market, was also prevalent in 2011 demonstrations.<sup>676</sup> The third, regional inequality, was more contested,

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<sup>671</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>672</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>673</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>674</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2014.

<sup>675</sup> Peter Kovessy, "The (Narrow) Path to Qatari Citizenship," *Doha News* (9 October 2014) <http://dohanews.co/path-qatari-citizenship/> accessed 3 February 2015.

<sup>676</sup> The attack on the Lulu Hypermarket in Sohar discussed earlier in this chapter is one example, but dissatisfaction with the level of expatriate workers in Oman was widespread.

with the majority of Omanis based in Muscat maintaining it was irrelevant and the majority of Omanis based in Sohar, Salalah, and other regional centres claiming it played a part in their decision to join the 2011 demonstrations.<sup>677</sup>

However, unlike in Qatar or Bahrain, economic inequality in Oman was usually *not* considered the result of deliberate state policy, but, rather, the work of corrupt individuals. Of course most development projects are focused on Muscat, where 40 percent or so of Omanis reside, explained an Omani state official, but it has been clear for over a decade that the government wants development to be equal in Oman.<sup>678</sup> “There is equality across society because the regime doesn’t discriminate”, agreed a Muscat-based reformer, “but society sometimes does. Personal attitudes can filter into the system and allow discrimination. So there’s not official discrimination or inequality in Oman but it does exist”.<sup>679</sup> Said another interviewee, an Omani economist:

For a while, I think, Muscat was getting most of the things. Regional-wise, Muscat was receiving too much attention from the government...but I am from a village outside Muscat by maybe 200km or more. And in my village – a small village with 2,000 people – we have a school, we have roads, electricity, everything, and a healthcare centre. So you feel that the fruits of development are everywhere in Oman.<sup>680</sup>

He went on to describe how the state’s response since 2011 had further reduced inequality: “since al-rabī‘ al-‘umānī [the Omani Spring], I think also more attention has been given to people who are not well-off and poor people, in that they receive a higher assistance from the government”.<sup>681</sup> A former demonstrator from Dokum agreed, surmising that if there hadn’t been protests, nothing in Dokum would have changed. After the protests, he claimed, the government focused a lot of attention on Dokum and on providing jobs, development, and other material benefits.<sup>682</sup> In Salalah too, interviewees claimed they previously felt inequality between the south and north of Oman, but that the state had made a noticeable effort to remedy this since 2011:

Most of the big changes in Salalah, they fix up the roads, highways, et cetera, has just been in the past two years. All the big tourist projects, you know, like Salalah Beach...it went up so fast, it was like telling Salalah:

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<sup>677</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014.

<sup>678</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>679</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>680</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

<sup>682</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.



‘okay, calm down, we are investing some money in you now. Relax, some of the money is coming towards the south.’

There was a lot of resentment, I feel, just from talking to people, that all the money was being pushed into Muscat, into turning the North of Oman into this beautiful modern image of a state, whereas the rest of the country wasn’t receiving any of it.<sup>683</sup>

Oman’s responsiveness to inequality follows a traditional focus on redistributing material benefits to restive areas discussed in Chapter Two, and which has been effective since the 1970s. However, there are some important emerging shifts in Omani society that suggest rent distributions may be less effective in ensuring political loyalty in the long-term.

### **Dynamic Reformism: Activist Families, Social Media, and Generational Change**

Reformers across all three case studies tied their justification for making political challenges to longer processes of development and change. In particular, rising education levels, increasing globalisation, and the emergence of social media have had a substantive impact on state-society relations since RST first emerged in the 1970s. While dynamics of change have influenced societal attitudes towards the rentier bargain, the historical context – specifically, the history of protest – has also played a critical role in determining whether a citizen chooses to make a political challenge. That is, if individuals were politically active in previous protests, or closely linked with those who were, they were much more likely to have participated in 2011 political challenges. This section discusses how change over time has influenced societal demands for reform. In the interest of space, the section discusses one example from each case study, although all dynamics were relevant to some extent.

#### ***Activist Families in Bahrain***

In Bahrain, opposition is often very much a family exercise, and many activists linked their political mobilisation in 2011 to their family’s participation in previous demonstrations. It is notable, for example, that the Editor in Chief and founder of Bahrain’s only opposition-oriented newspaper, *al-Wasat* (al-wasaṭ) is Mansoor al-Jamri, the son of Bahraini Shia cleric Abdulmir al-Jamri, who was a leading figure in the

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<sup>683</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

1990s Uprising.<sup>684</sup> One of Abdulmir al-Jamri's daughters, Afaf al-Jamri, also married Abduljalil Khalil, a prominent member of al-Wefaq opposition society; Afaf herself is also a gender activist.<sup>685</sup> The Khawaja family is also well-known for its human rights activism: Abdulhadi al-Khawaja first protested against the Al Khalifa regime as a student in the UK in 1979 and established the BCHR upon his return to Bahrain in 2002.<sup>686</sup> Al-Khawaja was arrested on 9 April 2011 along with his two sons-in-law, Wafi al-Majed and Hussain Ahmed Hussain for participating in the Bahraini Spring.<sup>687</sup> Two of al-Khawaja's daughters, Maryam and Zainab, have also been arrested for their human rights activities since 2011.<sup>688</sup>

Bahrain's history of repeated protests contributes to the emergence of activist families. For many Bahraini demonstrators, participation in the Bahraini Spring was part of a natural cycle of protest that has occurred approximately every 10 to 15 years since the 1920s.<sup>689</sup> Former protesters passed on their political activism and ideals to younger generations. One interviewee who had participated in Pearl roundabout rallies in 2011, for example, noted that his mother was a feminist activist, and his father had been active in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (a subset of the PFLOAG) before joining leftist secular opposition group Waad, and contributing to the popular petitions calling for political reform in 1992 and 1994. After the regime reneged on promises in the 2001 NAC that would have made the elected Majlis al-Nuwwab the main legislative body,<sup>690</sup> his father left Waad to join Haq, before finally leaving Haq in early-2011 because he disliked the "takeover of the party by Islamists". This interviewee, then,

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<sup>684</sup> Abdulmir Al Jamri was also a member of Bahrain's 1973-75 Assembly and served as a judge in the Jaafari courts from 1977 to 1988. See Al Wasat, "al-Shaykh Abdulmir Mansoor al-Jamri," (27 January 2009) <http://www.alwasatnews.com/2335/news/read/171853/1.html> accessed 6 February 2015.

<sup>685</sup> The Telegraphy, "Some Potential New Leaders in Bahrain's Chief Shi'a Opposition Party," US Embassy Cable 08Manama336 (18 February 2011) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/bahrain-wikileaks-cables/8334536/SOME-POTENTIAL-NEW-LEADERS-IN-BAHRAINS-CHIEF-SHIA-OPPOSITION-PARTY.html> accessed 6 February 2015.

<sup>686</sup> See their website at Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, "BCHR News and Statements," (2016) <http://www.bahrainrights.org/> accessed 6 February 2015.

<sup>687</sup> Amnesty International, "Urgent Action: Bahrain Continues to Detain Protesters," (11 April 2011) <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE11/017/2011/en/e8a103c8-4b20-4a8e-8340-e798ad731646/mde110172011en.html> accessed 6 February 2015.

<sup>688</sup> Samia Errazzouki, "Maryam al-Khawaja, the Inconvenient Activist," *Foreign Policy* (4 September 2014) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/04/maryam-al-khawaja-the-inconvenient-activist/> accessed 16 February 2015; Amnesty International, "Bahrain: Maryam al-Khawaja Remains Defiant After In Absentia Prison Sentence," (1 December 2014) <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/bahrain-maryam-al-khawaja-remains-defiant-after-absentia-prison-sentence-2014-12-01> accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>689</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain 2013-2014.

<sup>690</sup> These were discussed in Chapter Two, but the most important change was that the appointed Majlis al-Shura and the elected Majlis al-Nuwwab would have legislative power, contrary to promises made in the lead-up to the national referendum that the appointed Majlis al-Shura would be purely a consultative body.

grew up in a highly politicised environment and now identifies as independent of the organised political societies, but strongly aligned towards opposition. “Politics is the bread and butter of the house”, he explained.<sup>691</sup>

Family activism also highlights the long-term impact of repressive tactics. For example, one interviewee, a Bahraini human rights activist, was born while her father was in exile in Iran for his participation in 1980s demonstrations and returned to Bahrain with her mother in the 1990s, living apart from her brothers and father for a decade. Although her father’s citizenship was restored in Hamad’s 2001 amnesty, she claimed the family struggled financially upon their return due to continuing discrimination and persecution:

So that created a sense of a desire to work for this field. Then in 2011 I participated in the revolution that happened...in May [of 2011] my brother got arrested, our house was raided and there were many masked men with guns. They raided our house at two in the morning and my brother got arrested and he disappeared for two weeks. We did not know anything about him till the emergency state was declared by the king. And then here it was the spark for me to officially work in this field.<sup>692</sup>

This has several implications for RST. First, it underscores the importance of contextualising rentierism: Bahrain’s many previous uprisings have shaped a politically mobilised and active society accustomed to demanding reform. Second, it suggests that personal networks influence the likelihood that a citizen will make a political challenge. Most importantly, it indicates that society is never ‘passive’ even where public protest is absent. Rather, opposition continues to operate underground and through informal networks, and can transfer from one generation to another even when public protest is absent. This feature of the political economy is not unique to Bahrain (the political activism of Shaikh Nimr al-Nimr and his informal networks is a good example from Saudi Arabia), nor even to rent-rich states.<sup>693</sup> Yet in order for RST to remain convincing as an explanation for state-society relations, it must allow theoretical space for the impact of these family networks on popular mobilisation and the transfer of political activism between generations.

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<sup>691</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>692</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>693</sup> Jocelyn S. Viterna, “Women’s Mobilization into the Salvador Guerrilla Army,” in *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015); Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann, “Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers,” *Mediterranean Politics* 17:2 (2012) 139 – 159; Irene Bloemraad and Christine Trost, “It’s a Family Affair: Intergenerational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52:4 (December 2008) 507 – 532.

## *Social Media in Qatar*

Social and online media has been critical to the formation of demonstrations in the Middle East since 2011.<sup>694</sup> In Oman, noted one interviewee, it allowed information to escape the control of the economic and security elite.<sup>695</sup> It was not simply a tool of activist networks, but actually created a public space that previously existed only in the private sphere. Omanis, for example, turned to online newspapers like *al-Zaman* and web forums such as *al-Harah al-Omaniya* and *Sabla Oman* to discuss political dissatisfactions and call for protests. The state evinced frustration with these methods of organisation, blocking sites where possible and arresting key bloggers and activists – yet the anonymous nature of online activism has allowed a widening of political space.<sup>696</sup> In Bahrain, demonstrators used social media such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook as well as forum sites, such as *Bahrain Online*, to organise and publicise their cause, and to spread information about police blockades and protest locations quickly.<sup>697</sup> Social media was not automatically a reformist tool; in Bahrain, as in other countries, the state and anonymous active supporters used online media and sites such as *Bahrain Forum* to harass opposition.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>694</sup> Just how important ICTs have been to recent unrest across the Middle East is contested, but most works accept that it allowed for faster dissemination of information about protest gatherings, and images of state repression that excited societal protest. See Alasdair Hynd, “Deconstructing the Revolution 2.0: Narrative of the Tunisian and Egyptian Uprisings,” in *Revolution or Reform: The Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Adel Abdel Ghafar, Brenton Clark and Jessie Moritz (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2014).

<sup>695</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>696</sup> See details from Oman local news in Muscat Daily, “Al-Harah Website Blocked for not Cooperating with Investigation,” (30 April 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Al-Harah-website-blocked-for-not-cooperating-with-investigation> accessed 15 February 2015; Riyadh Abdul Aziz, “Recording IP Addresses,” *Muscat Daily* (8 May 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Recording-IP-addresses2> accessed 7 February 2015; Sabla Oman, <http://avb.s-oman.net/forumdisplay.php?f=2&s=83cd036e434aca2519e06d87dfe206b0> accessed 9 February 2015; on arrests of bloggers and activists, see Mohammed Saif al-Rahbi, “Oman Cracks Down on Troublemakers,” *Al Monitor* (13 June 2012) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/06/omani-general-prosecution-rumor.html#> accessed 9 February 2015; and the closure and arrest of Editor in Chief of *al-Zaman* for “insulting the Minister of Justice and his secretary” in Muscat Daily, “Citizens Seek Freedom of Expression in Azzaman Case,” (29 September 2011) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Citizens-seek-freedom-of-expression-in-Azzaman-case> accessed 15 February 2015.

<sup>697</sup> Each village tends to have its own page on Facebook or Twitter account. Specific details about protests, unsurprisingly, are generally shared only via private social media, such as WhatsApp or by SMS. Author interviews, Bahrain 2013-2014.

<sup>698</sup> The anonymous Hareghum Twitter account is the most infamous attempt to ‘name and shame’ opposition. See @7areghum, *Twitter*, <http://twitter.com/#!/7areghum> accessed 7 February 2015; Marc Owen Jones, “Social Media, Surveillance, and Social Control in the Bahraini Uprising,” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 9:2 (April 2013) 71-94.

Yet, overall, interviewees described social media as contributing to an opening of political space and an additional avenue to press for political reform. In Qatar, one interviewee noted social media had opened new channels of engagement with the state. “The Minister of Foreign Affairs”, he said, “he has a Twitter account, and sometimes he gets approached by people – especially about the guy [Dr Mahmoud al-Jaidah, a Qatari citizen being held] in the UAE. People have been talking to him directly on Twitter, you know: ‘when are you going to do something?’ [and] arguing with him, which is quite a change”.<sup>699</sup>

The size of Qatar’s citizenry also enhances the effectiveness of social media as a tool to engage with the state. Said a reformist interviewee:

Qatar is a very small society. Twitter works with that kind of society because if you follow maybe 10 people who are the pillars of Qatari society on Twitter then you get the same hashtags going back and forth. So every time there’s an issue, immediately one of us has to initiate the hashtag and you’d get into this small lobbying exercise where you actually send private messages to people and say, “just initiate the hashtag about that issue, so let’s rally people...

The good thing about Twitter is there’s an avalanche factor, which means that nobody can be pin-pointed – it’s very difficult to determine who started the thing. It’s very difficult to determine if the person who started the thing actually wanted it to go in that direction, so it’s very safe to write in that sphere. Until now, the government has not done anything to indicate that it will use force against people.<sup>700</sup>

This is, of course, only true as far as moderate reform demands are concerned: the treatment of Mohammed Ibn al-Dheeb and Sultan al-Khuleifa suggest the state is less tolerant towards direct criticism of the royal family. Qatar is also the only Gulf state that has *not* cracked down on online expressions of peaceful discontent since 2011 in a widespread manner, though legally there is little protection for online dissenters should the state change strategy in future.<sup>701</sup>

For the moment, however, social media offers a relatively free space for political expression in Qatar. Qatari journalists, for example, recommended following their Twitter accounts rather than their newspaper articles because it did not require the same

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<sup>699</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>700</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>701</sup> Nicholas McGeehan, “Control, Halt, Delete: Gulf States Crack Down on Online Critics,” *Al Monitor* (8 August 2013) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/gulf-states-online-critics-crackdown-cybercrime-social-media.html#> accessed 16 February 2015.

level of self-censorship.<sup>702</sup> A Qatari columnist differentiated between publishing on social media and in traditional print media:

Writing for a newspaper, for example, you have a lot of red tape and you'd get this call from your editor saying, 'you know what, I'm taking out this sentence, it's very harsh'. There are a lot of issues that you cannot even imagine speaking about...So, going on Twitter means that you can actually say whatever you want.<sup>703</sup>

Other interviewees agreed that this was true to a certain extent, although all felt that direct criticism of senior state officials was still very sensitive. Recent revisions to Qatar's media law and introduction of a cybercrimes law have been unpromising, receiving heavy criticism from media and human rights groups.<sup>704</sup> Yet, if social media has opened up new avenues of communication with the state, this is especially relevant to youthful societies, such as those in the Middle East. Qatar may not have experienced street protests since 2011, but many interviewees felt Qatari youth were more actively engaged with the state, and more likely to demand political reform than previous generations. Qatar society is changing, said one interviewee, especially among Qatari youth "who are more motivated to have a positive impact in their community. They are more active, more willing to speak, criticise, demand reform if unhappy. A lot of youth are also now entering the private sector and this will affect their values".<sup>705</sup> "We are the new generation", said a young Qatari who expressed strong support for the Emir but also hoped to see broadening of political rights in Qatar in the future.<sup>706</sup>

### ***Generational Change in Oman***

RST, although often treated as a set of static state-society relations, does allow for the reshaping of state-society relations as new players emerge or the oil industry develops.<sup>707</sup> Rentier theorists such as Crystal did predict, for example, that over time:

As welfare functions become the norm, as services become legitimate claims on the state, they are seen less as examples of the rulers' largesse, and more as rights that citizens, not subjects, can claim from the state

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<sup>702</sup> Author interviews with Qatari journalists, Qatar 2013-2014.

<sup>703</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>704</sup> Reuters, "Qatari Draft Criticized by Rights Group," (30 October 2012) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/30/us-media-qatar-idUSBRE89T17620121030> accessed 24 April 2013; Amnesty International, "Qatar: New Cybercrimes Law Endangers Freedom of Expression," (18 September 2014) <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/qatar-new-cybercrimes-law-endangers-freedom-expression-2014-09-18> accessed 15 February 2015.

<sup>705</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>706</sup> Author interview, Qatar 2013.

<sup>707</sup> See for example Gray, "A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf".

because of nationality (or as arrangements that clients, through *wasta* connections, can claim from patrons). These policies thus transform the citizens' notions of right, obligation and interest toward the state and the regime.<sup>708</sup>

However, Crystal's point was that, as citizens began to view distributions as rights, rather than largesse, the reduction of distributions in times of economic hardship – as occurred in Qatar and Kuwait in the late 1980s – would result in societal dissatisfaction. To date, few works have posited that citizens might begin to make political challenges *even when rent distributions remain high* because existing distributions are now viewed as rights rather than gifts. Yet this is essentially what has occurred in Oman and to some extent in all three states.<sup>709</sup>

In Oman, Sultan Qaboos's development program initiated in the 1970s was intended to exchange material welfare for political loyalty: it was a legitimacy-building program.<sup>710</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, early development focused heavily on infrastructure and establishing basic government services, including education, healthcare, and electricity. The massive investment in public resources under Sultan Qaboos was certainly a prominent factor shaping citizen loyalty and was repeatedly referenced by loyalist interviewees. Yet there was also considerable evidence that Omanis who had grown up with rent-financed development now felt it necessary to push for political reform.

A prominent Omani reformer, for example, separated societal attitudes to reform between three generations. In his opinion, the first generation, Omanis born well before Sultan Qaboos began his development program in the 1970s, were primarily concerned with the establishment of education and infrastructure – political rights were not a high priority. The second generation he labelled the “Hesitating Generation”. They receive good medical care, economic opportunities, were able to travel and might see the difference between political rights in Oman compared with other countries, “but they don't have a loud voice to push the government to reform. They're trying to be a moderate middle class”. The third and most recent generation, however, are likely to push for reform. “They've grown up with travel, a good education, good health, in a

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<sup>708</sup> Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 191.

<sup>709</sup> In Qatar, for example, Qataris commonly refer to economic benefits as ‘rights’. See Mariam al-Saad, “Where Are Our Rights as Citizens?” *The Peninsula* (19 April 2011) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/mariam-al-saad/149550/where-are-our-rights-as-citizens> accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>710</sup> Valeri, *Oman*.

time of peace and prosperity. They therefore think of these things as rights and are more ready to talk about dreams of reform, transparency, and accountability”, he claimed.<sup>711</sup>

His views align with a recent survey of Omani youth, where the following quote reflected the political demands of the new generation:

If one receives a good education, lives in a safe and stable environment and in a prosperous era, one covets an executive authority expressing one’s prospects and character and satisfying one’s ambitions. One covets a political system that expresses this young character, born in this blessed era. The character expects to have a functional council; a real technocrat government that rewards well-doers and punishes failures; an independent, sovereign, judicial system, practicing its authority consciously without intervention.<sup>712</sup>

It also aligned with interviews obtained for this research. Said an interviewee who participated in the 2011 demonstrations:

My mum used to tell me ‘we have electricity, we have water, we have food’. I mean my mom lived in the two different eras where it was totally different. So her vision of life was totally different than mine for example because I was born [when] electricity is there, education is there. It was very, I can’t say [it was a] *luxurious* life, but it was average or above the average. I had internet, I had Facebook I had everything, but basically that was not enough for me. Your standards really get higher.<sup>713</sup>

Another interviewee agreed, rejecting the common loyalist mantra that Sultan Qaboos brought Oman into the modern era and therefore should not be challenged. “People say: ‘But look where we came from!’ I say: ‘Great, but why should we stop here?’”<sup>714</sup> Despite the changes since 2011, this interviewee argued, the Omani Majlis al-Shura is still advisory and to date doesn’t have any legislative power. “They can question ministers and some have been using that prerogative well and asking serious questions. But in the end, laws are implemented by Ministers who can do as they see fit. Majlis and Ministers are not on an equal playing field”.<sup>715</sup> The following excerpt from an interview conducted in Salalah is also instructive:

Author: In your opinion, if the economic demands of Omanis were met – for example were people offered jobs, reasonable salaries, houses and

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<sup>711</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>712</sup> quoted in al-Farsi, *Democracy and Youth in the Middle East*, 202-203.

<sup>713</sup> Author interview, Oman 2014.

<sup>714</sup> Author interview with Omani reformer, Oman 2014.

<sup>715</sup> Ibid.



good healthcare, education, et cetera – do you think there would be any pressure for political change?

Interviewee: Of course. Absolutely. The world isn't isolated anymore. Everyone knows what is happening in other countries. The internet is here, the age of information, you can't just say 'okay I have my little job and my salary and everything is fine in my world'...I mean once you have covered the basics like health, food water, et cetera, you move onto the next level of needs, you know, intellectual needs.<sup>716</sup>

Rents, ironically, were critical to the emergence of these views. Oil provided the opportunity to build Oman's education system, noted an Omani reformer, and education encourages understanding about citizenship rights and political participation.<sup>717</sup> "The youth today are pushing for real citizenship...society is much more active", he said.<sup>718</sup> "A culture of opposition doesn't exist now", admitted one Omani reformer, but claimed that education and increasing awareness of the importance of reform over time is encouraging Omanis to start having more open discussions and participate more in politics.<sup>719</sup> Previously, said another reformer active on Twitter, Oman had a small population, and a political system that exchanged loyalty for material rewards might have been effective, but this is no longer the case. Omani youth today are very concerned with the sustainability of the country, he argued, and in the age of social media, the "economic and security elite" will not be able to hide corruption.<sup>720</sup> Another interviewee agreed that there had been a generational shift in political activism. "Hopefully", he said, "the government will be able to cope with the change, be aware of that change in the society and they will be able to be more open, more transparent".<sup>721</sup>

Interviewees particularly drew a division between pre- and post-2011 Oman. The Arab Spring "broke the fear, politicised Omanis, and spread ideas about reform. Oman is

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<sup>716</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>717</sup> The link between education and political liberalisation (or, more specifically, democratisation) remains contested within the academic literature. See for example Ryan Wells, "The Effect of Education on Democratisation: A Review of Past Literature and Suggestions for a Globalised Context," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 6:2 (2008) 105 – 117.

<sup>718</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013. This aligns with a broader literature on the link between education, poor labour market outcomes, and political violence. See James Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review*, 27:1 (1962) 5-19; Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, *Le Rendez-vous des Civilisations* (Paris: Seuil, 2007); Marcus Noland and Howard Pack, *The Arab Economies in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute, 2007); Filipe R. Campante and Davin Chor, "Why was the Arab World Poised for Revolution? Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26:2 (Spring 2012) 167 – 187.

<sup>719</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>720</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>721</sup> Author interview, Oman 2014.

changing now”, said one reformer.<sup>722</sup> 2011 was “a shock to the system...nobody expected this in Oman”, said an Omani public servant. He believed Omanis are now expressing more aspirations for democracy and political participation, and some within government are helping to push for reform, while others are resisting. Change is inevitable, he said, and Omani citizens have realised they have the power to influence the direction of the country.<sup>723</sup> Ultimately, said another interviewee: “al-dawla ray‘iyya taghayyir ilā dawla muwaṭana” (the rentier state is turning into a citizen-state).<sup>724</sup>

## **Fragmentation in Opposition**

Although the dynamics discussed thus far encourage challenges to state authority, this does not necessarily mean that the state-society relationship will be radically reshaped. In many cases, reformist groups remain highly fragmented and unable to effectively engender reform. Fragmentation of both state and society – due to, among other things, the rentier bargain – reinforces the position of rentier elites and hinders the formation of a cohesive opposition.

The RST literature has made some previous comment on the role of rents in enhancing societal and state fragmentation.<sup>725</sup> The most in-depth coverage of rent-driven fragmentation in the Gulf states is Hertog’s *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*, discussed in Chapter One. In this work, Hertog noted that the availability of rents encourages bureaucratic fragmentation within the state and discourages “horizontal” cooperation among societal groups.<sup>726</sup> However, his primary focus was on the implication of these schisms for bureaucratic efficiency, not on societal political activism; where societal activism was discussed, political mobilisation was rationalised as a result of pre-oil state-society relations, not as a process likely to occur where the rentier state dominates. This is, as this section will discuss, a little reductive; it cannot explain why political challenges might emerge where cooptation remains active and rents high, as in Qatar, or how rent-seekers and political challengers interact to place demands on the state, as in Oman. This section discusses the organisation and fragmentation of political societies in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, with a particular focus on reformist groups active since 2011. The disorganisation of these groups, this section

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<sup>722</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>723</sup> Author interview, Oman 2014.

<sup>724</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>725</sup> Dirk Vandewalle, *Libya Since Independence: Oil and State-building* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 25-26; Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” 334.

<sup>726</sup> Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*, 275.

contends, is largely the result of historical state limitations to civil society and has compromised the opposition's capacity to bring about political change. Though fragmentation remains an obstacle, this section also discusses informal linkages between reformers that may indicate potential for cohesive opposition in the future.

### ***Fragmentation in Oman***

Omani demonstrations in 2011 were clearly inspired by one another, but organisationally fragmented. There was no coordinated national movement demanding reform from the state. Rather, the protests were geographically isolated, often making region-specific demands, such as lowering the cost of airfares between Muscat and Salalah. Regional fragmentation contrasts with ideological divisions, which were present but less relevant: protesters in Dhofar, for example, reported that in the Salalah demonstrations, Islamists, Marxists, and students mixed together outside the Governor's office, and all contributed to the formal list of demands.<sup>727</sup>

As with many Arab Spring movements, at inception there was no formal group managing demonstrations. A demonstrator from Sohar described the organisation of protests as *ad hoc*, based on the individual charisma of participants but with no formal 'committee' or structure, particularly during the first few days. Later, he admitted, there was some organisation to arrange speeches on the stages, hear citizen demands, and draft formal petitions to the government, yet this was still done by a heterogeneous group with members shifting in and out depending on their availability; it could not be described as a cohesive opposition.<sup>728</sup>

Even among Oman's more organised groups – such as Oman's reformist elite – there are numerous and intersecting schisms that have affected its performance since 2011. Some of these are a result of regional developments: the 2013 coup in Egypt is a revealing example. Said a Muscat-based activist: "Morsi's presidency and his fall divided activists in Oman between those who support or don't support the Ikhwān [Muslim Brotherhood]. It even created a problem for me because I'm not with [Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-]Sisi but also not against him".<sup>729</sup> According to this interviewee, the 2013 Egyptian military coup divided Omani activists to the point that

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<sup>727</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>728</sup> Author interview, Oman 2014.

<sup>729</sup> Author interview with participant in 2011 demonstrations, Oman 2014.

they no longer cooperated with one another.<sup>730</sup> The reformist elite is also divided from the youth street activists, even as prominent reformers such as Said Sultan al-Hashimi and Basma al-Kiyumi made an effort to visit sites of protest around the country.<sup>731</sup> The real movers of the Omani Spring, argued an Omani human rights activist, were anonymous young men in Sohar, whereas al-Hashimi and the reformist elite joined later, “when it looked like the movement might actually achieve something”. While there are certainly more links between the street and reformist elite after the 2011 demonstrations, “the problem for them is that they’re not in the field. There’s a big gap between them and the Omani people”.<sup>732</sup> A member of the reformist elite agreed, but for different reasons:

His Majesty cleverly used oil rents to unite the country, but he didn’t use rents to build a new generation; rather he used them on infrastructure, education, health...Even now, all these things are grants from the Sultan; they are not genuine rights...Propaganda makes it very difficult to change popular perception. This is why we [reformers] are now clashing with society. They think we are jealous of their rights.<sup>733</sup>

There was also a widespread perception among reformist interviewees that the regime encouraged fragmentation, although, as with allegations regarding the composition of Bahraini security forces, these claims are difficult to substantiate. Said one activist:

The government attacks your reputation. Once a colleague of mine was sitting in a coffee shop, and some young men asked to join him. Soon they started bad mouthing activists and spreading lies about me. They were being paid to say bad things about me...the new trap is spreading doubt about your loyalty, like a rumour that I am working with the Ministry of Interior. It’s meant to break the trust between activists.<sup>734</sup>

Another reformer, Ismail al-Maqbali, noted that upon the arrest of 12 activists – including himself – who had formed a WhatsApp group to organise and discuss protests, they were moved to 12 separate police stations following the hearing to prevent them having contact with each other.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Author interview with reformer, Oman 2014.

<sup>731</sup> Amnesty International, “Oman: Activist Arrests Threaten Freedom of Expression,” (16 June 2012) <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/28938/> accessed 16 February 2015; Salisbury, “Insulting the Sultan in Oman”.

<sup>732</sup> Author interview with Omani activist and participant in 2011 demonstrations, Oman 2014.

<sup>733</sup> Author interview with reformer, Oman 2013.

<sup>734</sup> Author interview with activist, Oman 2014.

<sup>735</sup> Gulf Centre for Human Rights, “Torture in Oman”.

Fragmentation within reformist groups is symptomatic of the wider disorganisation of Omani political society. This is hardly surprising; following conflict with the Imamate in the 1950s and the Dhofar rebellion in the 1970s, the state concentrated on removing any remaining support for groups like the PFLOAG and cementing central control. Until today, political parties and platforms are banned in Oman, and even public gatherings require prior government approval.<sup>736</sup> Efforts to stymie the development of an independent civil society – which could potentially challenge the state – have left tribes as the dominant organisational structure in society, with the partial exception of business elite organisations such as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

This is particularly clear within Oman’s Majlis al-Shura, where members are elected as independents and, in practice, do not form organisational groups beyond their working committees.<sup>737</sup> One interviewee, who had previously served in the Majlis al-Shura, described an attempt to create a regional grouping with the Majlis to work on common policy issues. It was successful for a short time, he said, but fell apart after the main organiser left the Majlis. He argued that the culture within the body is very independent and that some members see the Majlis as a tool to channel material benefits to their tribe or region: these members are colloquially referred to as ‘uḍa al-khadamāt or abū khadamāt (‘Services Member’ or ‘Father Benefits’).<sup>738</sup> A current representative agreed, noting government often encouraged this practice “because they don’t want the members to talk about policy and watching the performance [of the Cabinet]. And they say ‘Okay. What do you want? Come to the Ministry and we will try to fulfill your needs for your constituency and this will get you votes so you are re-elected’”.<sup>739</sup> He noted, however, that Majlis al-Shura members also face pressure from constituents who view the Majlis as a rent-seeking institution:

This is the first term after the new authority of power [has been] granted. We are in a transitional period. It’s very difficult when somebody calls me and he says: ‘look, my son did not get the scholarship.’ To tell him: ‘look, this is not my job’. How can I go to the Minister and tell her ‘give me a scholarship’ and the next day I fire her because of her performance?<sup>740</sup>

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<sup>736</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2012 – Oman Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012).

<sup>737</sup> Author interview with current member of Majlis al-Shura, Oman 2013.

<sup>738</sup> Author interview with former member of Majlis al-Shura, Oman 2013.

<sup>739</sup> Author interview with current member of Majlis al-Shura, Oman 2014.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

At the same time, there are indications of change within Omani electoral politics. Consider, for example, a societal group's efforts to encourage the election of candidates on a non-tribal basis in Dhofar and to appeal to what they described as the 'middle electorate'. They used a pre-selection process, whereby a central committee receives CVs, rates candidates, using a transparent scoring mechanism (for example, a Masters degree earns 20 points, a Doctorate earns 30 points), and questions the candidates about exactly how they would approach different policy issues if elected. Once the candidate has been selected, the full group is called in to approve and to campaign for their election. This group succeeded in having at least one of their candidates elected in 2003, 2007, and 2011, and described their goal as "promoting policy for *all* Omanis...not only those of a certain tribe or group".<sup>741</sup> While this group does indicate the potential for political organisation in contemporary Oman, they remain, for the moment, an exception.

### ***Fragmentation in Qatar***

In Qatar, reform demands stemmed from private societal groups, not public opposition. As in Oman, political parties are banned and there are few independent civil society organisations capable of, or likely to, challenge the state. Since 2011, there has been no national opposition movement, nor widespread calls for political reform; the reformist demands that did occur drew from small, private, but organised groups. Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari's majlis, for example, was a forum where like-minded Qataris could meet and discuss social, political, and economic reforms. Members of this majlis, as discussed earlier, regularly engage in public debate over policy issues. Other prominent rent-seeking and political movements – #Qtelfail and the push to remove the Zinedine Zidane statue from the Corniche, among others – were initiated on Twitter but drew on prominent Qataris who already 'followed' each other online and, in some cases, attended the same majlis.<sup>742</sup> However, there were few discernable links between these 'Twitter reformers' and al-Kuwari's majlis; they are, in general, from different generations, and few from al-Kuwari's group are active on social media.

This means that, in practice, reform demands in Qatar are often formulated in the private sphere through social networks, forming fragmented forums of debate across

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<sup>741</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

<sup>742</sup> Author interviews, Qatar 2013-2014.

society. While these reformist groups did not organise joint calls for change – and in any case were interested in very different types of reform – it is notable that both had informal links to Qatari public servants in islands of efficiency or to other reform-oriented members of government.<sup>743</sup> This is hardly surprising, considering that, as of 2012, over 90 percent of Qataris active in the labour market are employed in the public service,<sup>744</sup> yet it does indicate that reformist societal groups in Qatar have strong informal connections to like-minded individuals embedded within the state. Despite the fragmentation of reformist movements in Qatar, then, the small size of Qatar’s citizenry and high levels of employment in the public sector mean reformers have informal access to the state, though only when their movements achieve wide levels of popularity has the state publicly responded to their demands.

### ***Fragmentation in Bahrain***

Bahrain is the only case study where formal political societies – which in practice function as political parties – are permitted, although the three month ban imposed on the Bahrain’s largest opposition society, al-Wefaq, less than a month prior to the November 2014 Majlis al-Nuwwab election casts doubt over the true extent of Bahrain’s political liberalisation.<sup>745</sup> As in other Gulf states, however, there were multiple schisms within society and state that affected the cohesion of opposition.

The first of these divisions, between Sunni and Shia, has been the most visible and widely reported in media and academic coverage of the Bahraini Spring. Since 2011, confessional symbols – mosques, for example – have served as easy targets for repressive state responses,<sup>746</sup> and for active supporters seeking to condemn Shia political activism. In June 2011, for example, a billboard erected by Sunni youth group shabāb al-ḥidd al-ashāwes (The Brave Youth of Al-Hidd) read: “We demand of the government.. maximum punishment. No Amnesty for the leaders of sedition and

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<sup>743</sup> As many of these individuals asked to keep their identities confidential, specific examples cannot be provided here.

<sup>744</sup> Qataris employed in the private sector as a fraction of Qataris active in the labour market stood at 9.25 percent in 2012. Qatar Statistics Authority, <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/index.htm> accessed 15 February 2015.

<sup>745</sup> Gianluca Mezzofiore, “Bahrain Bans Shi’ite Opposition Al-Wefaq Party Ahead of Key Election,” *International Business Times* (28 October 2014) <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/bahrain-bans-shiite-opposition-al-wefaq-party-ahead-key-election-1472098> accessed 15 February 2015.

<sup>746</sup> US Department of State, “Bahrain: 2012 Report on International Religious Freedom,” (2012) <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2012/nea/208384.htm> accessed 15 February 2015.

deviants”.<sup>747</sup> Security forces have also been filmed reportedly vandalising or removing banners commemorating the Shia celebration of ‘āshūrā’<sup>748</sup> and, in A‘ali, a statue of Shia-venerated Imam Hussein. In November 2011, the Ministry of the Interior called in Shia clerics who “delivered politicized sermons and chanted in a way that negatively provoked the crowd”.<sup>749</sup> Clerics in Bahrain *do* make politicised sermons: Shaikhs Isa Qasem and Ali Salman both focused on political demands in their sermons in the lead-up to 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011, including calls for a constitutional monarchy and redrafting of the constitution to fulfil the promises of the 2001 NAC.<sup>750</sup> However, while the majority of clerics detained for incorporating political rhetoric into sermons were Shia, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs also transferred Sunni cleric Shaikh Adel Hassan al-Hamad out of his mosque after he decried the government’s donation of land for a new Catholic church.<sup>751</sup> Their response contrasts distinctly with their silence after loyalist group National Unity Gathering (NUG) held a mass rally at al-Fateh mosque, signifying that it is the expression of opposition that is of concern, not the confluence of religious space and politics.

Conflict between Bahraini Sunni and Shia since 2011 is driven not by an intractable religious dispute, but, rather, by political and socioeconomic concerns.<sup>752</sup> Said one interviewee: “I think the recent uprising raised it to a whole new level in which people stopped trusting each other. Just because you are Sunni or you are Shia, khalāṣ [that’s it], I stopped trusting you”.<sup>753</sup> The exploitation of sectarian divisions has been an effective tool for the Bahraini regime, enabling them to frame the conflict as occurring between elements of society, rather than between state and society.<sup>754</sup> The threat of an

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<sup>747</sup> Bahrain Mirror, “Ma‘karāt al-Huwār: Telefīziyūn Yunsher al-Karāhiyya wa Shāra‘ Muftaten bil-Qūl: Lā ‘Afū!” (22 June 2011) <http://bahrainmirror.com/news/1163.html> accessed 10 February 2015.

<sup>748</sup> Ashura is held on the tenth day of Muharram and commemorates the martyrdom of Husaīn bin ‘Alī at the battle of Karbala in 680AD. In Bahrain, processions march through Shia villages to commemorate and mourn the events of the battle, and include a variety of re-enactments, sermons, and public expressions of grief.

<sup>749</sup> Bahrain Ministry of the Interior, “Religious Events Marred by Political Sermons,” (18 November 2012) [http://www.policemc.gov.bh/en/news\\_details.aspx?type=1&articleId=15478](http://www.policemc.gov.bh/en/news_details.aspx?type=1&articleId=15478) accessed 10 February 2015; Marc Owen Jones, “Bahrain Government Targets Ashura Amid Ongoing Security Crackdown,” *Marc Owen Jones personal blog* (19 November 2012) <https://marcowenjones.wordpress.com/tag/reform/> accessed 10 February 2015.

<sup>750</sup> Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 67.

<sup>751</sup> US Department of State, “Bahrain”.

<sup>752</sup> Geneive Abdo, “The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi’a – Sunni Divide,” *Brookings Analysis Paper* 29 (April 2013).

<sup>753</sup> Author interview with a Bahraini half-Sunni, half-Shia youth, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>754</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, the al-Bandar report alleged a faction within the state was deliberately fomenting sectarianism. See Bahrain Center for Human Rights, “‘Al Bander Report’: Demographic Engineering in Bahrain and Mechanisms of Exclusion,” (30 September 2006) <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/528> accessed 15 February 2015.



aggressive Iran has been consistently emphasised in state media, delegitimising the protests as a violent, foreign-driven, security threat. King Hamad's justification of a repressive response to unrest in Bahrain rested on this characterisation of the demonstrations, claiming: "the legitimate demands of the opposition were hijacked by extremists with ties to foreign governments in the region", a clear reference to Iran.<sup>755</sup> *Bahrain News Agency* similarly described the brutal security operation on 16 March 2011 as an "evacuat[ion of] all the outlaws who had terrorised citizens and residents and harmed the national economy", while Bahraini daily papers labelled al-Wefaq as: "the Bahraini Hezbollah".<sup>756</sup>

The skillful construction of a sectarian narrative in Bahrain has effectively marginalised protests in Bahrain, alienated Sunni reformers from Shia demonstrators, and cemented loyalty to the regime, resulting in a fragmented opposition.<sup>757</sup> While some Sunni were present in significant numbers early in the Bahraini Spring – demonstrators in Pearl Roundabout even wore badges with the slogan "No Sunni, No Shi'a, Just Bahraini" – the vast majority of participants identified as Shia.<sup>758</sup> Moreover, as demonstrations continued, polarisation between Sunni and Shia groups increased, especially as many younger Shia activists rejected moderate (or, in their view, coopted and ineffective) leadership from al-Wefaq. Conversely, many reform-oriented Sunnis were reluctant to cooperate with Shia opposition, fearing the imposition of a religiously conservative state. Sunni reformist interviewees, who initially participated in demonstrations, cited both the state narrative *and* the use of religious rhetoric by Shia demonstrators (such as 'Yā Ḥusāin!' in reference to Twelver Shia's reverence of Ḥusāin bin 'Alī as a martyr against oppression), to explain their alienation from the Uprising: this suggests that the demonstrators themselves, by employing divisive rhetoric, are partially responsible for the breakdown of cross-sectarian demonstrations.<sup>759</sup> Regardless, the outcome in terms of fragmentation is clear: as of early 2016, Sunni reformers, such as the al-Fateh Youth

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<sup>755</sup> Al-Khalifa, "Stability is prerequisite for Progress".

<sup>756</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "Bahrain Defence Force General Command," (16 March 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/450034> accessed 23 April 2013; Al Jazeera, "Bahrain Accuses Foreign Media of Exaggeration," (3 May 2012) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/20125220628139601.html> accessed 28 April 2013.

<sup>757</sup> Abdo, "The New Sectarianism".

<sup>758</sup> See debate between activists over why Sunnis have been less involved in protests in Al Jazeera, "Bahrain: The Stories that Aren't Being Covered," (6 May 2012) <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/05/2012568151358932.html> accessed 28 April 2013.

<sup>759</sup> Author interviews with moderate Sunni reformers, Bahrain 2013-2014; Geneive Abdo, "The New Sectarianism," 14.

Coalition, were unlikely to cooperate with the Shia opposition, despite their political demands being very similar.

The second major fragmentation of Bahraini opposition is between *formal opposition*, meaning licensed organisations that regularly contest elections and participate in other forms of formal politics, and *street opposition*, groups without official permission to operate and who reject formal engagement with the state. The formal opposition includes licensed political societies such as al-Wefaq, Waad, al-Tajamua al-Qawmi, al-Tajamua al-Watani, al-Ikhaa and al-Minbar al-Taqaaddumi (a leftist group which should be kept distinct from al-Minbar Islamic Society, the Muslim Brotherhood loyalist society discussed in Chapter Three).<sup>760</sup> The street opposition, by comparison, includes Haq, al-Wafaa, and acephalous youth movements such as the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition.<sup>761</sup> Groups focused on human rights advocacy, it should be noted, generally align with the street movements, not formal opposition. The BCHR, for example, has cooperated with Haq since 2005,<sup>762</sup> but reportedly left another human rights organisation, the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO), because the formal opposition became involved.<sup>763</sup>

Although in early 2011 these groups congregated at Pearl Roundabout, divisions quickly emerged between the street opposition, who advocated radical, rapid change to overturn what they viewed as an unresponsive system, and the formal opposition, who advocated gradual change through engagement with the state. The formal opposition's initial reluctance to join public demonstrations – they did not officially join until 1 March 2011 – alienated the street opposition. “They were dining with the King on February 14<sup>th</sup>”, said an activist aligned with the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition.<sup>764</sup> Conversely, the street opposition's determination to pursue radical tactics frustrated the formal opposition. “You don't throw out dusty water unless you have clean water”, argued a youth activist aligned with Waad, referring to the street groups' intention to overthrow

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<sup>760</sup> International Crisis Group, “Popular Protests in the Middle East and North Africa (III): The Bahrain Revolt,” *Middle East/North Africa Report* 105 (6 April 2011) 14-17. The ICG report classifies Amal as part of the formal opposition, yet considering its co-operation with street opposition and formal dissolution after 2011, it is considered here more as a ‘street’ society.

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-20.

<sup>762</sup> Al Akhbar, “Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street: Wifaq and Haq,” US Embassy Cable 08Manama593 (n.d.) <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/973> accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>763</sup> Author interview with member of Bahrain Human Rights Observatory, Bahrain 2014. This is accurate for most, but not all, human and civil rights groups: Chapter Six discusses the links between different human rights organisations and Bahraini opposition in greater detail.

<sup>764</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

the Al Khalifa monarchy.<sup>765</sup> This schism became clearly apparent after the street movements, led by Haq, decided to leave the Pearl roundabout and march into loyalist neighbourhood Riffa on 11 March 2011 to demonstrate in front of the Prime Minister's office, the King's Palace and the King's Court. The formal societies disagreed, and asked their followers to remain near the roundabout.<sup>766</sup> Demonstrations outside the King's court turned violent, especially as loyalist Bahrainis emerged to combat opposition on the streets and since those first few weeks of the Bahraini Spring, relations between the formal and street opposition have been at best fragmented, and at worst antagonistic. Cohesion, said an independent reformer, was "demolished with the lu'lu' [Pearl] monument".<sup>767</sup> Even if they wanted to cooperate, "there's no one for al-Wefaq to organise with", said a former al-Wefaq MP, citing the arrest or exile of the leaders of Haq and Wafaa since 2011.<sup>768</sup>

Although, or perhaps *because*, opposition leadership is fragmented, followers of these groups fluctuate from one group to another. A 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist, asked to describe how the movement was organised, said:

In reality, there are 2-3 committees controlling the street: the 14<sup>th</sup> Movement, established parties like al-Wefaq and Waad, and groups like Haq and Wafaa. The 14<sup>th</sup> Movement and Haq are doing faster reform, kind of doing it the hard way. Al-Wefaq is about slower, more manageable change. Sometimes I agree with them, sometimes I don't...

The fact that there are three groups to follow actually makes it confusing sometimes – I'm not always sure which leader to follow. I try to listen to all of them and make different decisions for each event.<sup>769</sup>

There have, of course, been several attempts to bridge divides within Bahraini society since 2011. Prominent examples include Huda al-Mahmood, the Sunni President of Bahrain's Sociologist Society, who drove the *Bahrain Unites Us* initiative attempting to reduce sectarian tensions,<sup>770</sup> and Ali Fakhro who heads *al-Laqa' al-Watani* [the

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<sup>765</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>766</sup> Frederik Richter and Lin Noueihed, "Bahrain Police Block March on Royal Palace," *Reuters* (11 March 2011) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/11/us-gulf-protests-bahrain-idUSTRE72A1U320110311> accessed 15 February 2015.

<sup>767</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>768</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>769</sup> Author interview with member of 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>770</sup> Al-Mahmood also participated in the National Dialogue process in 2011. See Bahrain News Agency, "More than 300 Organizations have Register [sic] at Bahrain's Historic National Dialogue," (3 July 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/463412> accessed 15 February 2015; Bahrain Information Affairs Authority, "10 Bahraini NGOs Kick Start an Initiative to Reunite Bahrainis," (27 February 2012) <http://iaa.bh/pressReleasedetails.aspx?id=137> accessed 15 February 2015.

National Meeting], also a cross-sectarian group held through the al-Oruba Club in Juffair.<sup>771</sup> As Abdunabi Alekry, a senior member of Waad, explained: “There are about 350 personalities who made visits to Sunni, Shia, to opposition, to loyalists, and they tried to bring them to agree on national programs. There are also other initiatives in regional [areas], like in Hamad Town...in Isa Town”.<sup>772</sup> Alekry claimed he had personally attended the majālis of Sunni opposition groups in an attempt to bridge the sectarian gap:

I myself went to Muharraq to the majlis of [a prominent Sunni Bahraini] just one month ago...First there was a strong rejection for me, by Twitter: ‘this is a traitor’, ‘how do you invite him?’ and then he decided [to invite me anyway] and I attended. And I heard voices [which are] unprecedented in Muharraq. They said: ‘where did we benefit? Muharraq area has been doubled [but] we didn’t get even a house, in this whole metropolitan development!’...‘What is the corruption going on in the country?’

A Bahraini Shia cleric and head of the Bahrain Interfaith Center, Shaikh Maytham al-Salman, described a similar experience, highlighting the role of active supporters in preventing cross-sectarian linkages:

The government wants to build a Berlin wall between Shias and Sunnis. And I actually attempted to visit some [Sunni] figures in an attempt to destroy the wall. Just imagine: one of them, he told me – this is just a month and a half ago – so I went over to his home and I said: ‘we have to sit, we have to deal with each other. We cannot allow these sectarian tensions’. And he agreed with me. But before leaving, he requested [of] me, he said: ‘please do not visit me again.’ I asked him ‘why?’ He said: ‘because the loyalists will see you. And I will be in trouble’.<sup>773</sup>

Cross-sectarian cooperation remains problematic, then, in post-2011 Bahrain. It is worth noting, however, that although divisions remain between, for example, the street and formal opposition, there are many informal connections between groups *within* each bloc. Consider the connections between the following prominent opposition activists, part of a group of 14 prominent Bahrainis arrested in early 2011:

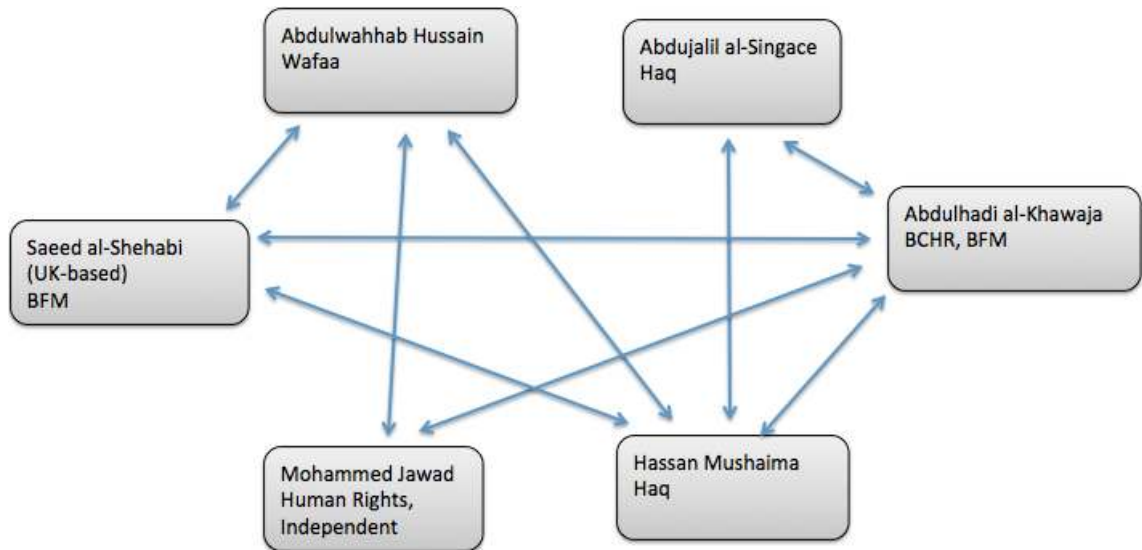
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<sup>771</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain. See also Mike Diboll, “The ‘National Encounter’: A New Way Forward to Rebuild the Political Centre in Bahrain?” *Dr Mike Diboll Personal Blog* (31 January 2012) <https://mikediboll.wordpress.com/2012/01/31/the-national-encounter-a-new-way-forward-to-rebuild-the-political-centre-in-bahrain/> accessed 15 February 2015.

<sup>772</sup> Author interview with Abdunabi Alekry, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>773</sup> Author interview with Shaikh Maytham al-Salman, Bahrain 2014.

**Figure 8: Bahrain Opposition Informal Linkages**



Source: Author's image, based on author interviews, Bahrain and the United Kingdom, 2013 – 2014.

In Figure 8 above, arrows signify an informal linkage active since 2011 that has allowed collaborative organisation of political challenges. This linkage is not necessarily direct; Abdulhadi al-Khawaja's connection to Saeed al-Shehabi, for example, is based in part on the regular cooperation between the BCHR and the BFM, but also on the connection through al-Khawaja's daughter, Maryam al-Khawaja, who regularly attended protest meetings in London organised by al-Shehabi, at least until her arrest in 2014. None of these individuals – who comprise much of the leadership of the street opposition – are separated from each other by more than one individual, and all cooperated in early 2011 to organise demonstrations. While there remains wider fragmentation within Bahrain's opposition, then, were cooperation to re-emerge, it could rapidly mobilise Bahrain's society.

### **Conclusion: Implications for RST**

Despite RST's assumption of societal passivity, then, citizens in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman remain actively engaged with the state and were in many cases willing to reshape the state-society relationship. These political mobilisations highlight the importance of examining alternative variables that can have a critical effect on political outcomes, overpowering rent-based incentives for political quiescence. To some extent, this is the result of a natural disconnect between theory and practice: RST, though it is often treated as a holistic explanation of state-society relations, cannot explain a polity in its entirety, nor should it be expected to.

Yet the repeated occurrence of political challenges and conscious rejection of rent-based cooptation efforts also suggests that, if RST is to have continued relevance to the modern Arab states of the Gulf (or other rent-rich countries), it needs to allow greater theoretical space for an important political outcome. That is: *cooptation can fail*, especially when it coincides with more influential variables such as repression or inequality.<sup>774</sup> Shifting the focus to examine where rentierism *does not* predominate, compared to the more general assumption that it is universally effective, generates interesting questions that will help to strengthen the literature's explanatory power, such as: in what circumstances does rent-seeking prevail, compared to when political challenges dominate the political scene? Answering this question, considering the complex interaction between rentierism and other variables, and the diverse motivations of individual and group political mobilisation, requires a detailed sub-national analysis, such as the qualitative account offered in this chapter. The dynamics identified in this chapter were based on those referenced most commonly by interviewees; they are far from the last word on the subject but suggest that, at least in the case of those interviewed, certain political variables can overpower the incentives created by rent-based cooptation. Namely: where a citizen is part of the reformist elite, often denoting an ideological commitment to political and social reform, they were likely to make political challenges even when they had received significant material benefits from the state. Repression enhanced this relationship, incited widespread and more radical opposition (even if, due to crackdowns, they remained underground), and also encouraged the transformation of rent-seeking movements into political challenges. The connection between repression and informal kinship networks with political dissidents was also important: repression against a relative or close affiliate drove many Bahrainis and Omanis to make political challenges in 2011, and, once politicised, their families and personal networks tended to mobilise with them.

The two other dynamics discussed under the section on dynamic reformism were not *motivations* for political mobilisation, exactly, but did demonstrate a weakening of obstacles to political action. With globalisation, for example, came the spread of social media, enhancing opportunities for reformers to network and organise political challenges, and allowing documentation and dissemination of corrupt and repressive governance practices by the state. Further, there was some evidence that existing

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<sup>774</sup> These variables themselves have some links to rent-influenced governance. The link between rent-driven development policy and inequality is discussed in Chapter Five, and the extant literature on rents and repression is discussed in Chapters One and Six.

distributions decline in effectiveness over time: the state may be able to encourage political loyalty temporarily (even for several decades), but rising expectations mean that it is ultimately an unsustainable governance strategy.

Relative inequality, by comparison, motivated both political challenges and rent-seeking. Inequality is particularly significant, moreover, because it demonstrated a capacity to mobilise not only traditionally oppositional groups (such as Shia Bahrainis), but also sections of society that have historically leaned towards loyalism (such as lower-income Sunni Bahrainis). Ironically, economic development in rentier states can, as the next chapter explains, *contribute* to the emergence of societal opposition, if it results in a sense of inequality. The following chapter turns to an evaluation of economic policy, revealing that, while Gulf states do not confirm to classic RST's depiction of rentier states as devoid of development policymaking, they have implemented development strategies that neglected domestic labour and focused on large-scale development projects that have become, in the 2011 period, visible demonstrations of inequality and excited societal unrest.

## Chapter 5 - Development Policy, Inequality, and Rentier Effectiveness

As Chapter Four established, rent-seeking demands and political challenges can emerge where there is a strong sense of inequality – at a local, group, or national level. The incidence of material inequality, in particular, was an influential factor behind 2011 demonstrations in Bahrain and Oman, especially rent-seeking demonstrations. Yet it is also important to discuss *why* economic inequality emerged, and how it is related to rent-driven economic development strategies. This chapter forwards three arguments related to RST and the impact of development on the emergence of societal opposition since 2011. First, rent-rich states in the Gulf have clearly articulated development strategies, aligning closer to Gray’s late-stage rentierism and challenging the classic RST depiction of rentier states as devoid of development policy planning. While some of the typical development traps described in classic RST remain relevant, modern Gulf states have pursued development in an innovative and sophisticated manner that is not well captured within classic RST.

Second, these development plans contributed to improvements in many areas but in some cases failed to address rising inequality of wages, employment, and living standards. Every GCC state has measurably improved in terms of the availability of healthcare, literacy, and basic infrastructure, yet certain groups tend to have received outsized benefits from this growth. Third, this relative inequality contributed to popular unrest in 2011. As discussed in Chapter Four, certain protesters cited these inequalities in 2011 as a key motivational factor for their decision to participate. Material inequality was not necessarily the *primary* motivation for opposition: the participation of Bahraini medical professionals in 2011 demonstrations, for example, was motivated more by a response to repression than economic inequality. Yet in areas such as Sohar in Oman, amongst 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition demonstrators in Bahrain, and other groups that expressed primarily material dissatisfaction when asked why they had first joined protests, inequality was a crucial element shaping their opposition to the state.

This chapter, then, examines one of several key motivations for political action, one that also provides an opportunity to re-evaluate RST’s claims about economic development and inequality. It argues that the rentier state, through the implementation of a rent-



driven development strategy that exacerbates (or at least fails to effectively address) inequality, has, in essence, created the conditions for its own opposition. This differs significantly from classic RST, under which “the blatant inequalities of income and wealth may create frictions, but not as much as in other countries since exploitation of a resource rather than the direct exploitation of the people is the main source generating the disparities”.<sup>775</sup> The majority of extant RST works, particularly within the classic literature, operate under the assumption that if there is a functioning rentier relationship between state and society *overall* – in terms of macroeconomic indicators such as low national unemployment, rapid GDP growth, and continued welfare funded by high oil prices – then rentierism remains effective in preventing societal discontent; Luciani even went so far as to argue that inequality is “not relevant for political life”.<sup>776</sup> This chapter disagrees with this assumption and advocates viewing this relationship at the micro- and meso-level to highlight how sub-national inequalities impact the effectiveness of the rentier bargain. Gwenn Okruhlik, for example, highlighted inequality in rent distributions as critical to the emergence of dissatisfaction in Saudi Arabia’s eastern provinces, among Hejazi merchants, and in the southwest, particularly Najran. For Okruhlik:

Wealth generated through oil receipts is a catalyst for opposition to the state, rather than a tool to placate dissent, for two reasons. It is distributed inequitably (given in abundance to some and withheld from others), and it provides potential dissenters with the resources necessary for mobilization against the regime. In short, the state engenders its own opposition.<sup>777</sup>

More recent works within RST and related literatures have similarly emphasised the mobilising effect of rent inequalities.<sup>778</sup> “[T]hrough the inequalities created by oil led development appear to be at about the same levels as in non-oil states with similar incomes,” wrote Terry Lynn Karl in 2007, “people in oil exporting countries may experience these inequalities very differently because they occur in what is widely perceived to be a rich country.” Moreover, she argued, “[t]he visibility of oil wealth may compound the problem”.<sup>779</sup> This chapter furthers this line of inquiry by examining

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<sup>775</sup> Mahdavy, “The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States,” 437.

<sup>776</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States,” 74.

<sup>777</sup> Okruhlik, “Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition,” 295-395.

<sup>778</sup> Mitchell, “Beyond Allocation”; Mitchell and Gengler, “What Money Can’t Buy”; Mary Ann Tétreault, “Stuff is Not Enough: Resources and Governance in the Middle East,” in *Governance in the Middle East and North Africa: A Handbook*, ed. Abbas Kadhim (New York: Routledge, 2013) 38-39.

<sup>779</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, “Oil-Led Development: Social, Political, and Economic Consequences,” *Encyclopedia of Energy* 4 (2004) 666.

how these inequalities have emerged even in states that have pursued entrepreneurial state capitalist development, usually viewed as a more enlightened and sophisticated development strategy. It focuses particularly on groups that cited inequality to explain their mobilisation in 2011, to highlight the politicisation of individuals who have – or perceive they have – benefited less or even been cut out of the rentier bargain.

In doing so, this chapter offers another lens through which to examine domestic variation in political loyalty. The chapter focuses particularly on the experience of Oman, and specifically on the city of Sohar, to illustrate how the late rentier strategy, in practice, contributed to unrest in 2011. Not only is inequality highly relevant to political life, but poor development performance can, even in times of high oil prices and continued rent distributions, result in the rentier state fostering the very forces that will ultimately seek to challenge it.

### **Late Stage Rentierism, Expatriate Labour, and Omani Development**

While classic RST, as discussed in Chapter One, argued that rentier states do not formulate “anything deserving the appellation of economic policy” and instead rely on expenditure policy,<sup>780</sup> revisionist RST offers greater nuance. The GCC states are still *oil-driven* economies, wrote Gray in 2011, but “seemingly are spending their rentier wealth more intelligently to develop their economies and societies, diversify away from their strong reliance on oil, build new international images and roles for their cities and states, and even change the state’s relationship with society”.<sup>781</sup> Particularly since the early 2000s (or earlier in some states), development strategies and rent distributions only partially conform to classic RST, in that there remain serious challenges to effective diversification, inflated bureaucracies encouraging reliance on public sector employment, and many cases of myopic decision-making, yet these states have simultaneously made strong progress in pursuing a partial opening to the forces of globalisation, controlled liberalisation of investment and trade laws, and creating new educational and business opportunities for both citizens and expatriates.<sup>782</sup> That is, Gulf rentier states have, with varying levels of success, attempted to use oil and gas rents to support a limited but nonetheless critical diversification of their economies.

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<sup>780</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States,” 70-74.

<sup>781</sup> Gray, “A Theory of ‘Late Rentierism’ in the Arab States of the Gulf,” 2.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid, 15.

There is great variation in the effectiveness and outcomes of these strategies across the Gulf. Bahrain, for example, is one of the most diversified GCC economies, where oil and gas contributed only 19 percent to GDP in 2012. However, it grapples with oil dependence, with oil revenues as a share of government revenue increasing from 67 percent in 2002 to 87 percent in 2012, and in 2013, the hydrocarbon sector drove more than half of total GDP growth.<sup>783</sup> Qatar is capital rich, benefiting from phenomenal gas revenue over the past decade and using this wealth to invest in tourism, infrastructure, and new cultural and social facilities for its residents. Yet, in part as a result, citizens remain heavily dependent on public sector employment, with over 90 percent of economically active Qataris employed in the public sector between 2006 and 2012.<sup>784</sup> By comparison, Oman is a late developer with limited petroleum wealth relative to the rest of the GCC (excluding Bahrain), however oil and gas revenue as a percentage of government revenue rose to 84.4 percent in 2011 from 77.4 percent in 1995, despite a key objective of the Oman *2020 Vision* being to decrease this to 60 percent by 2020.<sup>785</sup>

Examining the goals and nature of Omani development since the accession of Sultan Qaboos in greater detail is instructive, particularly as regime change occurred just before the influx of oil rents from the 1970s oil boom: this means that Qaboos's nation-building project reveals most clearly a state shaped by oil-led development. In Oman, as in other Gulf states, the state invested first in education, infrastructure, and basic services, all areas where the influx of rent-derived capital provided a significant advantage for development. As basic infrastructure needs were met, the focus transferred to large-scale projects (such as Dokum Dry Dock and Sohar Port and Freezone) designed to shift Oman's GDP away from oil and capitalise on opportunities in tourism, natural gas, and other areas, often through partnerships between the state and private sector companies, domestic and foreign. In partnership with Dubai-based Majid al-Futtaim conglomerate, for example, the Omani government launched construction on The Wave complex in 2006, a luxury freehold development, spread along six kilometres of coastline and worth at least USD2.5 billion.<sup>786</sup> Aimed largely at expatriate residents,

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<sup>783</sup> Bahrain Economic Development Board, *Bahrain Economic Yearbook* (2013) 79.

<sup>784</sup> Data drawn from Qatar Statistics Authority, <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/index.htm> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>785</sup> Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Major Economic and Social Indicators*, (February 2015); Government of Oman, *The Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020* (1995) 131; 1995 figure calculated from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2014) 322.

<sup>786</sup> Majid al Futtain, "The Wave Muscat," (n.d.) <http://www.majidalfuttaim.com/en/article/majid-al-futtaim-properties/communities/the-wave-muscat.html> accessed 23 March 2015; The Wave, Muscat, "About The Wave," (n.d.) <http://www.thewavemuscat.com/about-the-wave/> accessed 23 March 2015;

The Wave exemplifies Oman's focus since 1994 at creating an open and attractive destination for foreign investment, through liberalisation of foreign ownership laws, entrance into the WTO in 2000, and a mid-1990s push for privatisation in water, electricity, and telecommunications.<sup>787</sup> The state also recognised the importance of knowledge and human capital building, and in 2003 inaugurated the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, a technology park and incubation centre designed to support research and development. Similarly, the state supported the expansion of technical training colleges.<sup>788</sup> To manage various industrial estates, the first of which was built near al-Rusayl in 1983, the state created the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE) in 1993. The PEIE manages the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, al-Mayzunah Free Zone, and seven industrial estates spread across the country. Alongside other initiatives, the latest being the al-Raffd Fund, the PEIE aims to encourage entrepreneurialism, particularly among small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In doing so, Oman challenges both the 'rentier mentality', and classic RST depictions of rentier states as unlikely to take action to mitigate the resource curse.<sup>789</sup>

Oman has also attempted to ensure that citizens are included in private sector growth, and to mitigate reliance on public sector employment. Omanisation has been pursued since 1988, and in 2003, Sultan Qaboos set a number of Omanisation requirements for the private sector, depending on profession, ranging from 60 percent for transport, storage and communications, to 15 percent for contracting, and only 9 percent for senior level management in IT services.<sup>790</sup> Unsurprisingly, public sector Omanisation has been particularly successful, rising steadily from 78.6 percent in 2002 to 87.3 percent in 2013.<sup>791</sup> SOEs have similarly intensified efforts to hire nationals and demonstrate their commitment to expanding the skills of the Omani workforce. ORPIC (Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries), for example, which operates the Sohar oil refinery, several aromatics and polyethylene plants, and another refinery in Muscat,

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Times News Service, "My City Centre Sur to Boost Shopping Options in Oman," *Times of Oman* (13 March 2015) <http://www.timesofoman.com/News/48701/Article-My-City-Centre-Sur-to-boost-shopping-options-in-Oman> accessed 23 March 2015; Andy Sambidge, "Oman's \$3.5bn Wave Launches Sales of New Apartments," *Arabian Business* (10 November 2013) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/oman-s-3-5bn-wave-launches-sales-of-new-apartments-525793.html#.VQ-UHDSUf9s> accessed 23 March 2015.

<sup>787</sup> Valeri, *Oman*, 220-224.

<sup>788</sup> Although, as noted later in this chapter, training of nationals to meet labour market demands remains problematic.

<sup>789</sup> As discussed in Chapter One; See also Ross, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse," 307.

<sup>790</sup> Oman Ministry of Manpower, "Omanisation per Sector,"

<http://www.manpower.gov.om/portal/en/OmanisationPerSector.aspx> accessed 30 August 2015.

<sup>791</sup> Valeri, *Oman*, 206; 2013 figure calculated from National Centre for Statistics and Information, "Statistical Yearbook," (2014).

claimed 73 percent Omanisation as of 2013, and runs a training program for Omani graduates.<sup>792</sup>

Yet Oman's continued efforts to support economic diversification and create the conditions for sustainable economic growth should not imply the absence of development issues that have impacted the effectiveness of the rentier bargain. Many of these are common to the region and already well-documented within RST, but, broadly speaking, they include: *ad hoc* or piecemeal implementation of development programmes, often arising from a lack of accountability measures or government factionalism; skill mismatches between the education sector and the labour market; bottlenecks in policymaking and in management; incentives that encourage public, rather than private, sector employment, including a bloated public bureaucracy with inflated wages; duplication in government services leading to confused and inefficient implementation of support programs; and the tension between short-term policy pressures and longer term development goals, particularly in those states that have faced societal protest.<sup>793</sup>

Despite the state's Omanisation efforts, for example, the broader trend in Oman has been massive growth in expatriate labour, particularly since Sultan Qaboos took power in 1970. While in 1970, foreigners represented 7 percent of the public and private sector workforce, by 2010 they comprised 59.6 percent, a comfortable majority.<sup>794</sup> Some level of expatriate growth is to be expected, considering the expansion of Oman's economy since the 1970s, the investment in infrastructure that necessitated, for example, the import of thousands of construction workers, and the time needed to build up Omani skills and education levels to a point where they could replace expatriate workers, ideally in high value-added industries. The expansion of expatriate labour in the last

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<sup>792</sup> Sohar Port and Freezone, "Petrochemicals,"

<http://www.soharportandfreezone.com/en/industries/sectors/petrochemicals> accessed 5 September 2015; and Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company (ORPIC), "Orpic People Section," (last updated 2013) <http://www.orpic.om/careers-people/people> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>793</sup> See for example Steffen Hertog, "Benchmarking SME Policies in the GCC: A Survey of Challenges and Opportunities," Eurochambres, Brussels, Belgium (2010); al-Kuwari, "The Visions and Strategies of the GCC Countries from the Perspective of Reforms"; Omar Bizri, "Research, Innovation, Entrepreneurship and the Rentier Culture in the Arab Countries," in *The Real Issues of the Middle East Arab Spring: Addressing Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, ed. Thomas Andersson and Abdelkader Djeflat (New York: Springer, 2013) 198-203.

<sup>794</sup> Valeri, *Oman*, 201; Crystal Ennis, "Between Trend and Necessity: Top-Down Entrepreneurship Promotion in Oman and Qatar," *The Muslim World* 105:1 (January 2015) 118.

decade is also less extreme in Oman than in Qatar, Kuwait, or the UAE.<sup>795</sup> Over four decades on from Sultan Qaboos's ascension to power, however, it is worth questioning why expatriate levels remain so high in the Omani workforce, (and why the growth rate of expatriate labour increased significantly in the early 2000s). Problematically, Oman's dependence on expatriate labour, itself caused by several issues emblematic of Oman's wider development problems, has hindered state efforts to encourage Omani movement into the private sector. Focusing on the emergence of expat-citizen inequality in Oman, moreover, provides not only a microcosm of larger issues that have impacted Omani economic development, but was also repeatedly referenced by Omani demonstrators who claimed their participation in 2011 demonstrations was entirely or partly motivated by a sense of material inequality.<sup>796</sup>

The Omani SME sector makes for an illustrative example.<sup>797</sup> Having recognised SMEs as critical both to broader economic growth and to citizen entrepreneurship, Gulf states have invested billions in support programs and incentives designed to encourage citizen employment in the private SME sector.<sup>798</sup> The purpose of their attentions is not simply to increase SME growth but to encourage Omanis to join the private sector in leadership and high wage positions and reduce the public sector employment burden; the Omani government even guarantees a full year's salary to public sector employees who resign to become entrepreneurs.<sup>799</sup>

However, as of March 2014, Ministry of Manpower (MOM) figures reported only 217,578 Omanis working in the private sector compared with 1,597,552 expatriates,

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<sup>795</sup> Martin Baldwin Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," *Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance, and Globalisation in the Gulf States* 15 (March 2011) 10.

<sup>796</sup> Author interviews, particularly among interviewees from Sohar, Salalah, and Dokum, 2013-2014.

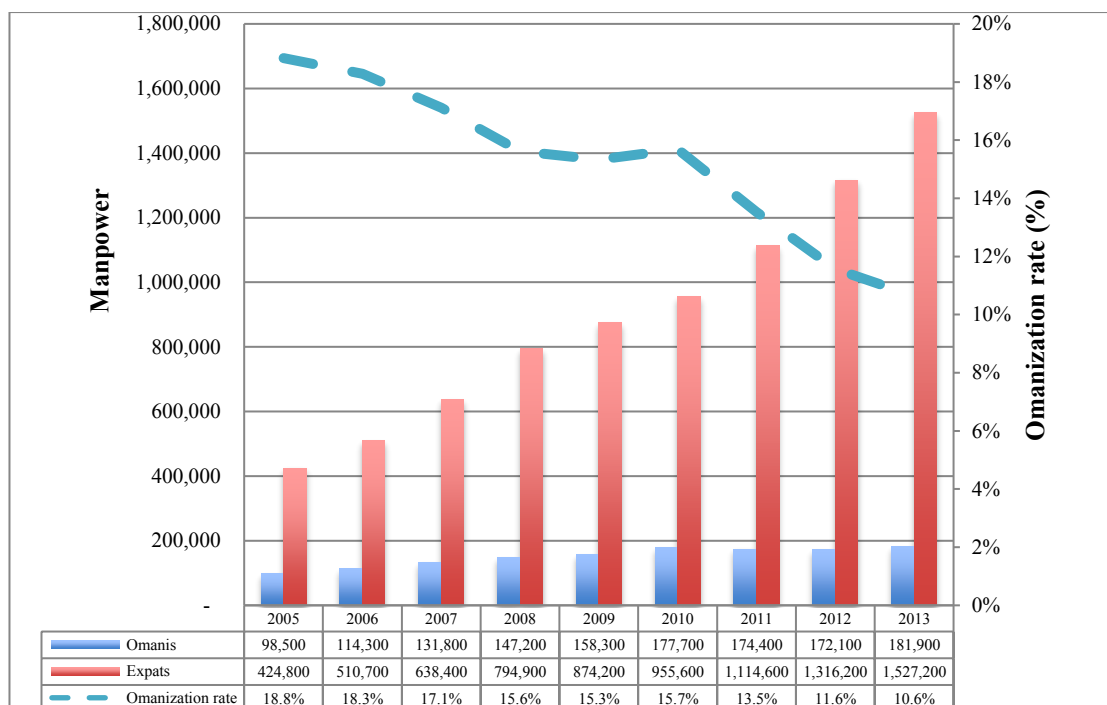
<sup>797</sup> SMEs have varying definitions in the Gulf but this thesis followed the Oman Ministry of National Economy's definition: they are those enterprises with less than 100 employees. See Hertog, "Benchmarking SME Policies in the Gulf," for regional comparisons.

<sup>798</sup> Support to Omani SMEs includes business incubators and training from the National Business Centre, policy management and training from the Public Authority for SME Development, incubation and connection to funding bodies through the Knowledge Oasis Muscat and the Sharakah Fund for Development of Youth Projects, public-private partnerships to encourage entrepreneurialism such as Shell's Intilaaqah Program, a host of funding schemes such as al-Namaa Fund, financial support from the Oman Development Bank, and a 2013 Central Bank of Oman decree that at least 5 percent of commercial bank lending must go to SMEs. See further details in Jessie Moritz, "Rents, Start-ups, and Obstacles to SME Entrepreneurialism in Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar," in *Employment and Career Motivation in the Arab Gulf States: The Rentier Mentality Revisited*, ed. Annika Kropf and Mohamed Ramady (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2015).

<sup>799</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy Review: Oman* (Geneva: United Nations, 2014) 22.

meaning Omanis form just under 12 percent of the private sector workforce.<sup>800</sup> Consider Figure 9 below, which plots Omani and expatriate private sector employment and Omanisation using data from the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI).

**Figure 9: Omani and Expatriate Private Sector Employment, 2005-2013**



Source: Calculated from data available in National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2014). Rounded to nearest hundred.

Since 2005, when Omanisation reached a peak of 22.5 percent according to the MOM, or 18.8 percent based on PASI data, Omanisation has fallen precipitously.<sup>801</sup> Even fewer Omanis work in high skilled positions (a reflection of Oman’s late-developer status) and in April 2014, 60 percent earned less than OMR300 in basic monthly wages, despite the government announcement of OMR325 as the minimum wage in early 2013.<sup>802</sup> More concerning is the de-Omanisation of the private sector since 2005 and particularly notable between 2011 and 2013, when Omanisation dropped from 13.5 percent to 10.6

<sup>800</sup> Elham Pourmohammadi, “Why Private Sector Lags in Omanisation,” *Times of Oman* (6 April 2014) <http://timesofoman.com/article/32592/Oman/Why-private-sector-lags-in-Omanisation> accessed 14 June 2015.

<sup>801</sup> There is a disparity between MOM and PASI data on Omani and citizen employment (as well as that of other ministries such as the now defunct Ministry of National Economy, which was dissolved in 2011). PASI’s figures, for example, for March 2014 counted only 186,112 Omanis and 1,535,861 expatriates in the private sector, or 10.8 percent Omanisation, significantly lower than the Ministry of Manpower figure cited earlier. However, as MOM figures are only occasionally available, this thesis will rely on the regularly published figures available from the NCSI, which uses PASI data to document employment of nationals in the private sector. See National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Bulletin* (May 2014).

<sup>802</sup> It should be noted this proportion has since decreased significantly, although Omani wages in the private sector remain skewed towards lower levels – see Figure 20 at the end of this chapter.

percent, and Omanis in the private sector (as a percentage of Omanis employed in the labour market) decreased from 52.3 percent to 50.2 percent (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Biennial Omani and Expatriate Employment in the Public and Private Sectors, 2007-2013.**

<b>2007</b>		
	<i>Omanis</i>	<i>Expatriates</i>
<i>Public Sector</i>		
Total Employed	124,405	22,503
Omanisation %	84.7%	
<i>Private Sector</i>		
Omanis registered with PASI	131,775	
Expatriate Labour Cards		638,447
Omanisation %	17.1%	
% of Omanis in Private Sector	51.4%	
<b>2009</b>		
	<i>Omanis</i>	<i>Expatriates</i>
<i>Public Sector</i>		
Total Employed	136,622	22,916
Omanisation %	85.6%	
<i>Private Sector</i>		
Omanis registered with PASI	158,315	
Expatriate Labour Cards		874,245
Omanisation %	15.3%	
% of Omanis in Private Sector	53.7%	
<b>2011</b>		
	<i>Omanis</i>	<i>Expatriates</i>
<i>Public Sector</i>		
Total Employed	159,258	25,182
Omanisation %	86.3%	
<i>Private Sector</i>		
Omanis registered with PASI	174,441	
Expatriate Labour Cards		1,114,590
Omanisation %	13.5%	
% of Omanis in Private Sector	52.3%	
<b>2013</b>		
	<i>Omanis</i>	<i>Expatriates</i>
<i>Public Sector</i>		
Total Employed	180,737	30,392
Omanisation %	85.6%	
<i>Private Sector</i>		
Omanis registered with PASI	181,860	
Expatriate Labour Cards		1,527,241
Omanisation %	10.6%	
% of Omanis in Private Sector	50.2%	

Source: Calculated from data available in National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2014).

Not only were more expatriates than Omanis being hired in the private sector, but Omanis themselves displayed a stronger preference for public sector employment than had been the case since at least 2007. This preference is even stronger among unemployed youth, who in 2008 formed just under 50 percent of all unemployed



Omanis.<sup>803</sup> A National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) survey published in 2015, for example, found that 95 percent of unemployed Omani youth would prefer public sector employment *even* if it paid less than the private sector.<sup>804</sup>

Despite decades of rhetoric and billions in state investment, then, Omanis still display a preference for public sector employment. The result is the increasing dominance of the private sector (and the labour market more generally) by expatriate workers. Moreover, when high levels of expatriate labour coincide with high levels of citizen unemployment, the presence of expatriate workers can reinforce an acute sense of inequality among nationals, especially when they are concentrated in key areas, as has been the case in Oman. The continued dependence on expatriate labour is thus noteworthy not only for its economic implications, but also for the state-society relationship and popular unrest since 2011.

The critical question, then, is *why* expatriate numbers have increased so rapidly, particularly in the last decade, and whether this has impacted Omani citizen unemployment. If one of the key functions of a rentier state is to provide employment opportunities, it is worth questioning how the state's development strategy has, in practice, failed to address (or in some cases contributed to) these disparities. First, however, it is important to explore trends in the unemployment rate of Omani citizens in the lead-up to 2011.

## **Estimating Omani Unemployment**

As detailed statistical data on unemployment rates are rarely published in the Gulf, it is exceedingly difficult to estimate unemployment. Where published, there is often no differentiation between citizens and expatriate workers, artificially reducing the unemployment rate. An exception is Qatar, which publishes both the unemployment rate of Qataris (estimated at 3.1 percent in 2012) and non-nationals (estimated at 0.3 percent in 2012).<sup>805</sup> However, as Crystal Ennis noted, the Qatar 2010 Census revealed

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<sup>803</sup> Said Sultan al-Hashimi, *Umān: al-Insān wa-l-sulṭa* (Beirut, markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya, 2013) 182.

<sup>804</sup> See Muscat Daily Staff Writer, “Most Job Seekers Prefer Public Sector, Shows Latest NCSI Study,” (8 March 2015) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Most-job-seekers-prefer-public-sector-shows-latest-NCSI-study-3vy8> accessed 3 June 2015.

<sup>805</sup> Qatar Statistics Authority, “QSA Labour Force Sample Survey 2012 Indicates that Unemployment has Dropped by 3.1% in the State of Qatar,” (2012) <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/News/2012/related/2012%20Labor%20Force%20Sample%20Survey-Eng.pdf> accessed 5 September 2015.

that only 46 percent of Qatari youth are employed, with many considered ‘not economically active’ and excluded from unemployment estimates.<sup>806</sup> Further, Al Masah Capital’s 2011 report on unemployment in the GCC estimated Qatar’s *youth* unemployment at 17 percent, considerably higher than overall unemployment.<sup>807</sup> The challenge of accurately estimating unemployment is well covered by existing studies of the Gulf, even inspiring an article discussing its impossibility based on published data in Bahrain.<sup>808</sup>

While the Omani government only rarely publishes the unemployment rate, on occasion it details job creation and, rarely, the number of ‘jobseekers’ in the Sultanate. In April 2015, for example, the government victoriously announced that unemployment had fallen in the Sultanate, from 14.4 percent in 2003, to 11.75 percent in 2010.<sup>809</sup> Independent estimates of unemployment are higher, such as a 2010 International Labor Organization (ILO) estimate of 15 percent overall and up to 33 percent among youth.<sup>810</sup> Comparatively, a 15 percent unemployment rate would place Oman among the highest in the GCC, equal to Al Masah Capital’s estimate for Bahrain but far higher than its estimate for Qatar, at 0.5 percent.<sup>811</sup> That Oman and Bahrain have the highest unemployment rates in the Gulf and were also among those facing intense protests in 2011 is notable, though it is also worth remembering the importance of non-material motivations for unrest covered in Chapter Four.

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<sup>806</sup> See Crystal Ennis, “Between Trend and Necessity,” 118;

<sup>807</sup> Al Masah Capital Limited, “MENA: The Great Job Rush,” (2011) 12.

<sup>808</sup> Michael Miller and Seth Epstein, “The Challenges of Assessing the Output of Emergent Economies: The Case of Bahrain,” *Chinese Business Review* 10:12 (December 2011) 1138-1147.

<sup>809</sup> Muscat Daily, “Unemployment Rate in the Sultanate Touches 11.75%,” (8 April 2015) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Unemployment-rate-in-the-sultanate-touches-11.75-3yp0> accessed 27 June 2015.

<sup>810</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Sultanate of Oman: Decent Work Country Programme 2010-2013* (June 2010) 10; Al Masah Capital, “MENA: The Great Job Rush,” 12.

<sup>811</sup> Al Masah Capital, “MENA: The Great Job Rush,” 12.

**Figure 11: Recent Unemployment Estimates for Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and Selected Comparisons**

Country/Region	Source	Year of Estimate	Unemployment (overall)	Unemployment (youth)
Oman	Government	2010	11.75%	Not available.
	Al Masah Capital	2011	15%	19.6%
	ILO	2010	15%	(up to) 33%
Bahrain	Government	2013	4.3%	Not available
	Al Masah Capital	2011	15%	20.7%
Qatar	Government	2012	0.5%	Not available
	Al Masah Capital	2011	0.5%	17%
Kuwait	Al Masah Capital	2011	2.2%	23.3%
Saudi Arabia	Al Masah Capital	2011	10.8%	25.9%
UAE	Al Masah Capital	2011	2.4%	6.3%
Middle East region (average)	Al Masah Capital	2011	10.3%	25%

Source: Various.<sup>812</sup>

All of the estimates discussed thus far, however, are inclusive of expatriate workers, whose residence in the country is typically dependent on their active employment. Far more relevant to state-society relations in Oman would be an estimate of the unemployment rate of *Omani nationals* and how it has changed since 2011 when the government made repeated claims that it would increase job creation and address citizen concerns that emerged during protests.<sup>813</sup> In 2010, for example, the NCSI *Characteristics of Jobseekers* (khaṣā'iṣ al-bāḥathīn 'an 'amal) report revealed 24.4 percent unemployment of Omani nationals in 2010, with significant regional variation (see Figure 18). This critical report is discussed in detail later in this chapter, yet it is also necessary to explore *trends* in Omani unemployment rates over time, particularly since 2011. Making such an estimate, however, is complicated by the absence of

<sup>812</sup> Ibid; ILO, *Sultanate of Oman: Decent Work Country Programme*; Muscat Daily, "Unemployment Rate in the Sultanate Touches 11.75%"; QSA, "QSA Labour Force Sample Survey 2012 Indicates that Unemployment has Dropped by 3.1% in the State of Qatar"; Bahrain's estimate is only for Quarter 4, 2013, see Bahrain News Agency, "Labour Minister: 4,888 Job-seekers Recruited in Q4/2013," (2 February 2014) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/600461> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>813</sup> The promised creation of 50,000 new jobs and an OMR150 per month unemployment benefit announced in February 2011 are clear examples. See Maher Chmaytelli, "Oman Protests for Jobs, Pay, Representation Enter Third Night," *Bloomberg Business* (1 March 2011) <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-02-28/omani-protesters-maintain-sit-in-doubting-sultan-s-promise-after-clashes> accessed 5 September 2015.

reliable and publicly available statistical data on unemployment, poverty, and other politically sensitive topics.

At this point, it is important to differentiate the conventional international definition of unemployment (number of unemployed divided by the total labour force), from the discussion of *citizen* unemployment (number of unemployed citizens divided by the total number of citizens in the labour force) that follows.<sup>814</sup> Oman also bases its estimation of unemployment not on a measure of the number of *unemployed*, exactly, but on the number of people registered as ‘jobseekers’ (bāḥath ‘an al-‘amal, pl. bāḥathīn ‘an al-‘amal) with the MOM, or, after 2011, the Public Authority of Manpower Register (PAMR, or Manpower Register). This is a critical distinction, because jobseekers have two key issues that make their use as an estimate for Omani unemployment problematic.

First, not all jobseekers are Omani nationals.<sup>815</sup> Although the Manpower Register is clearly aimed at nationals, expatriates are not explicitly prohibited from registering (though assumedly only those whose visas allowed them to stay in the country while unemployed would be able to register in practice), complicating the use of raw jobseekers numbers as an estimate of citizen unemployment. However, when the Omani government published the percentage of jobseekers who hold Omani citizenship in 2015 (but discussing 2010 census data), citizens comprised over 98.9 percent of all jobseekers; thus the presence of small numbers of expatriates on the jobseeker registry should not greatly impact an unemployment estimate.<sup>816</sup>

Second, and far more problematically, an individual can join the jobseeker register *even if they currently hold a job*.<sup>817</sup> That is, an Omani who is currently working in the private sector but wants to find a job elsewhere (in the public sector, for example) can join register and have job opportunities arranged for them. In part, then, the jobseeker registry is a measure of *employment dissatisfaction*, but the presence of individuals who are not functionally unemployed is understandably problematic for an accurate

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<sup>814</sup> Because of the difference in definition, it will not be possible to make international comparisons using the citizen unemployment rate.

<sup>815</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Science, Technology, and Innovation Review: Oman*, 35.

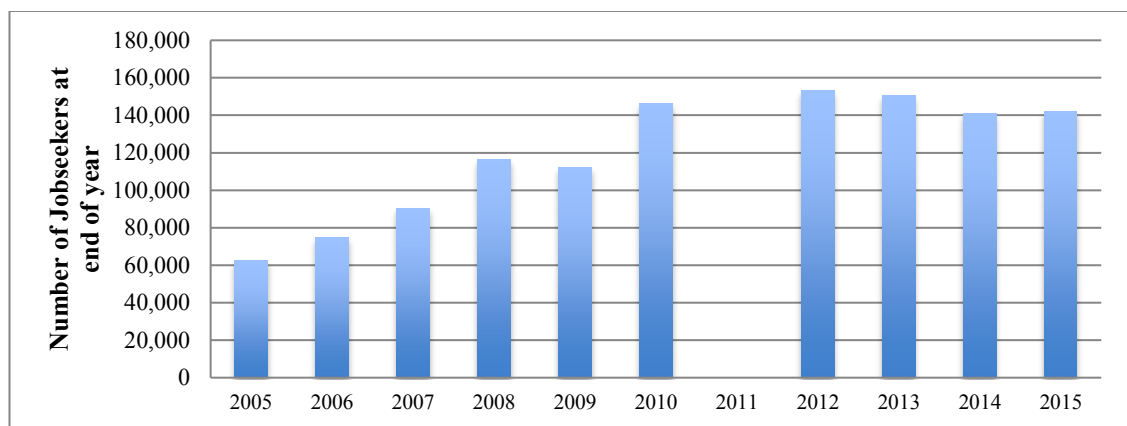
<sup>816</sup> Muscat Daily, “Unemployment Rate in the Sultanate Touches 11.75%”.

<sup>817</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Science, Technology, and Innovation Review: Oman*, 35.

unemployment estimate. Though some public statements suggest the number of these ‘inactive’ jobseekers is high,<sup>818</sup> the only time it was reliably measured, in 2007, ‘inactive’ jobseekers constituted about 8.5 percent of the total number of jobseekers, or just fewer than 8,400 people from a total 90,500.<sup>819</sup> This is significant, but assuming this breakdown remains reasonably static, should not skew conclusions drawn about trends in the number of jobseekers over time.

Ultimately, while the number of jobseekers does not perfectly correlate with the number of unemployed Omanis, it is the best – and only – measurement available in the gap between Omani censuses. As a sensitive statistic, the number of jobseekers in the Sultanate of Oman is rarely published, thus the data in Figure 12 below is drawn from a wide variety of sources (though all link back, ultimately, to the MOM and PAMR).

**Figure 12: Jobseekers in the Sultanate of Oman, 2005 - 2015**



Source: Various. 2011 figure not available.<sup>820</sup>

According to this data – and it important to note that the 2014 and 2015 data were available only for January and May, respectively, and are therefore incomplete – there is a clear positive trend in the raw number of jobseekers from 2004 until at least 2010, and

<sup>818</sup> In 2005, Oman’s Manpower Minister Jumaa bin Ali al-Jumaa claimed thirty percent of Omani jobseekers were “not serious” but this was not an official measurement, nor did he define whether “not serious” meant they were not functionally unemployed, or “not serious” in some other sense. See Sunil K. Vaidya, “Lack of Seriousness Among Jobseekers a Major Challenge Facing Omanisation,” *Gulf News* (29 March 2005) <http://m.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/lack-of-seriousness-among-job-seekers-a-major-challenge-facing-omanisation-1.282494> accessed 13 July 2015.

<sup>819</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Science, Technology, and Innovation Review: Oman*, 35.

<sup>820</sup> 2005-2009 jobseeker data drawn from Ibid; 2010 figure reported in National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā’iṣ al-bāḥathīn ‘an ‘amal*, 23; 2012 jobseeker figure drawn from Sunil K. Vaidya, “Oman’s Unemployment Rate ‘Not Worrysome’,” *Gulf News* (11 December 2012) <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/oman-s-unemployment-rate-not-worrysome-1.1117165> accessed 5 September 2015; 2013 and January 2014 figures drawn from Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin*, (February 2014); 2015 figure available only for May 2015, see Oman Observer, “142,000 Omanis are Seeking Employment,” (3 May 2015) <http://omanobserver.om/142000-omanis-are-seeking-employment/> accessed 7 August 2016.

a potential negative trend from at least 2012, though this cannot be confirmed without data for 2011 and incomplete data since 2014. If the number of jobseekers has remained fairly steady or decreased since 2011, this may indicate the impact of the government's efforts since 2011 to address unemployment as a reaction to the protests, though, again, without final data for 2014 and 2015 it is impossible to determine whether their efforts have resulted in more than a marginal decrease in the raw number of jobseekers.

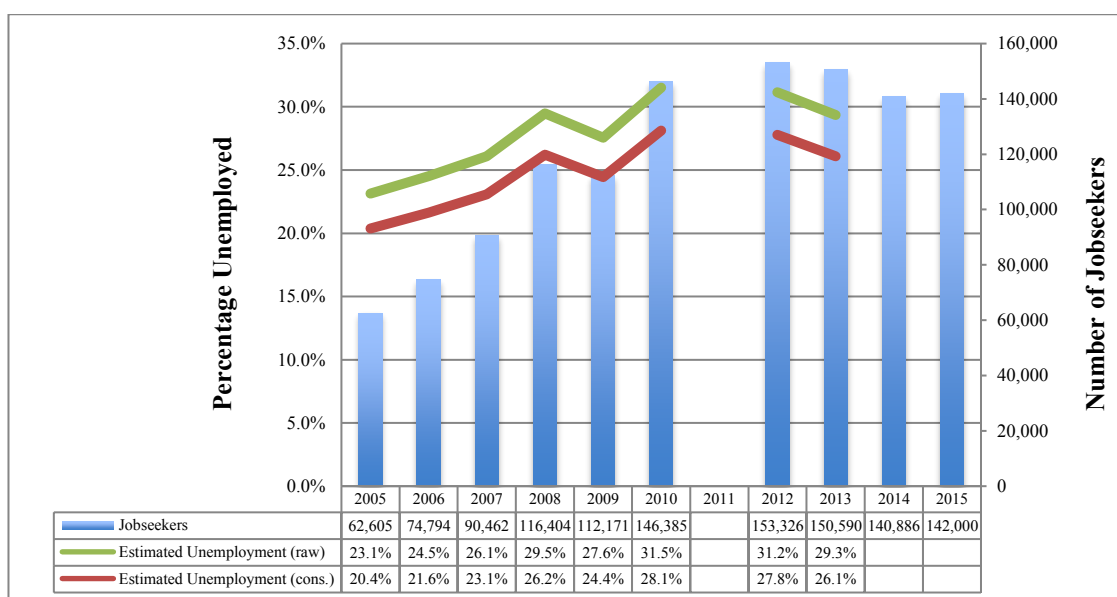
The *Characteristics of Jobseekers* report, drawing from the 2003 and 2010 Censes, attributed the rise in the number of jobseekers to a growing workforce, particularly growing numbers of migrant workers, but emphasises that the overall unemployment rate decreased.<sup>821</sup> Certainly, if the total workforce is growing, an increase in the raw number of jobseekers could coincide with a *decrease* in the unemployment rate. However, this is a little misleading, particularly considering that the vast majority of jobseekers are Omani citizens. If total unemployment has decreased because of an influx of migrant workers, this doesn't necessarily mean anything for *citizen* unemployment. It could actually be the case – and in fact has been the case in Oman – that the influx of migrant workers has artificially decreased the overall unemployment rate even as the citizen unemployment rate has increased, obscuring serious and systemic obstacles Omanis face when trying to find work. Nowhere is this clearer than in Figure 18, where Omani citizen unemployment in 2010 was 24.4 percent, yet overall unemployment only 11.75 percent when expatriates were included. Since the influx of migrant workers is a central aspect of Oman's development strategy, these increases in expat workers are not *ad hoc* but a direct product of Oman's late-rentier development strategy.

Using NCSI data on the number of Omanis working in the public and private sectors to provide an estimate of the Omani labour force, Figure 13 below plots the number of jobseekers with the total estimated Omani labour force to create a citizen unemployment rate:

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<sup>821</sup> National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā'is al-bāḥathīn 'an 'amal*, 24-25.

**Figure 13: Estimated Citizen Unemployment and Jobseekers in Oman, 2005-2015**



Source: Various.<sup>822</sup>

The higher citizen unemployment rate, ‘Estimated Unemployment Rate (raw),’ is a raw estimate, assuming *all* registered jobseekers are both Omani citizens and functionally unemployed. The lower rate, ‘Estimated Unemployment Rate (cons.),’ assumes 15 percent error between the number of jobseekers and the actual number of functionally unemployed Omanis, a conservative estimate that should account for the presence of inactive jobseekers and expatriates on the Manpower Register, especially considering there may be unemployed Omanis who have not registered with the PAMR.

Immediately apparent from Figure 13 is a steady increase in citizen unemployment since at least 2005. Citizen unemployment is significantly higher than overall unemployment, well over 20 percent since 2005 and almost 30 percent in 2010. In the

<sup>822</sup> Final data on the number of Omanis in the workforce for 2014 and 2015 have not yet been released, so these years have been omitted. There are a number of important assumptions made to create this estimate, including: 1) The breakdown of active-inactive and Omani-expatriate jobseekers in 2010 has remained static over time; 2) The number of jobseekers has not been impacted by other exogenous variables not discussed here; and 3) The NCSI data on the number of Omanis currently employed in the public and private sectors is accurate. As noted earlier, there is a disparity between MOM and PASI data on private sector employment, where PASI data potentially underestimates total private sector manpower. These alternate data sources have affected the unemployment estimate; the NCSI Characteristics of Jobseekers Report, for example, estimates Omani unemployment at 24.4 percent in 2010, versus the 28.1 percent estimated here. However, as the MOM only occasionally releases in-depth workforce estimates, Figure 13 has relied on the regularly published PASI estimates for the private sector. Since the same data source was used for Omani labour between 2005 and 2013, the shifts in citizen unemployment over time should still provide a reasonably accurate indication of unemployment *trends* in Oman. Another key issue is the diversity of sources from which ‘jobseeker’ figures were drawn: in the absence of regularly published government data, it was not possible to use exactly the same source for every year. However, since all link back, ultimately, to the MOM and the PAMR, it seems reasonable that they provide at least a crude estimate of jobseeker numbers for the respective year. 2005-2013 Omani employment estimates drawn from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook*, 2014; source for jobseeker figures as indicated in Figure 12.

same year the Omani government touted a decrease in the overall unemployment rate to 11.75 percent, then, citizen unemployment was at its highest, at over 28 percent. Citizen unemployment may have decreased since 2010, yet as of 2013 it remained significantly higher than 2005 levels, highlighting the urgent nature of this challenge for Omani development. To place this in historical perspective, al-Qudsi estimated Omani (overall, not citizen) unemployment in 1971 as less than 6 percent, just under 15 percent in 2001, and 17 percent in 2002.<sup>823</sup> As in other Gulf states that pursued a late rentier strategy, unemployment rates increased markedly after 1990, with the GCC average for 1981-1990 doubling from 5.3 percent to 12.9 percent from 1991-2001.<sup>824</sup> Falling oil prices and a contraction of international trade, coupled with debt problems (largely in the resource-poor Middle Eastern states) likely contributed to rising unemployment in the 1990s, yet this was also when structural obstacles to employment of citizens had started to emerge.

The characteristics of Omani jobseekers are also critical to an understanding of Omani unemployment, the labour market, and the protests that emerged in 2011. Jobseekers are overwhelmingly youth who have not previously held employment. Referencing a 2011 Majlis al-Dowla report, al-Hashimi stated of Omani unemployment: “the largest percentage of unemployed are youth who have not previously worked, numbering 84.7 percent, or 90.2 percent of women and 81.5 percent of men. These high figures illustrate the extent of the youth overcrowdedness problem, which could reignite at any moment”.<sup>825</sup> In 2010, the median age range of jobseekers was 20-24, and in most regions over 80 percent of jobseekers were between 15-30 years old, such as in the Muscat area, where 84.2 percent of jobseekers were below the age of 30, and 42.1 percent were between the ages of 20-24. Unsurprisingly, considering their youth, jobseekers are also overwhelmingly new entrants to the workforce: in 2010, over 95 percent of jobseekers had never worked before.<sup>826</sup>

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<sup>823</sup> Sulayman S. al-Qudsi, “Unemployment Evolution in the GCC Economies: Its Nature and Relationship to Output Gaps,” *Centre for Market Research and Information, Labor Market Study no. 22*. (Dubai: TANMIA, 2006).

<sup>824</sup> Ibid.

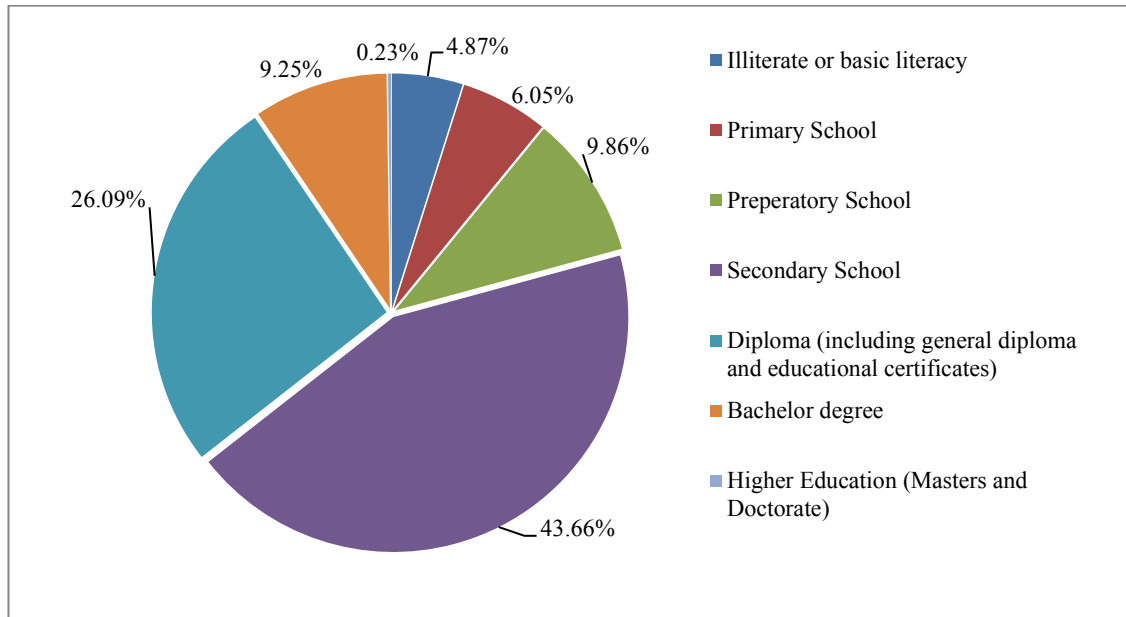
<sup>825</sup> al-Hashimi, *Umān*, 182.

<sup>826</sup> Drawn from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā’iṣ al-bāḥathīn ‘an ‘amal*, 36.



Their educational characteristics are also revealing, as displayed in Figure 14:

**Figure 14: Jobseekers by Educational Status (2010)**



Source: Drawn from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā'ish al-bāḥathīn 'an 'amal*.

In 2010, almost 44 percent of jobseekers had completed secondary school but not gone on to tertiary education. Approximately another 26 percent have done some post-secondary training, such as a general diploma or education certificate, but not gone on to obtain a Bachelor or higher level degree. The remainder are those who have completed at least one university degree (9.5 percent) or, on the other end of the spectrum, those with less than high school education (20.8 percent).

Almost 70 percent of jobseekers in 2010, then, had obtained a high school certificate but not continued to complete a university degree (though they may have done technical training or general certificates). As almost all of these were new entrants to the labour force, it is reasonable to expect a similar number (approximately 102,000, of whom 64,000 graduated from high school, and around 38,000 from technical colleges or received general education diplomas) to matriculate and register as jobseekers with each passing year, *ceteris paribus*. The government's 2011 announcement of the creation of 50,000 additional new jobs for citizens, while it will have a positive impact, must be understood within this context.

Omani citizen unemployment, then, is heavily skewed towards those with high school or graduate certificates, between the ages of 15 and 29, and likely affects between 20-30

percent of economically active Omanis. Revealingly, the characteristics of jobseekers reflect those of Omanis who reportedly participated in the 2011 demonstrations, particularly in regional areas, such as Sohar and Salalah.<sup>827</sup> As discussed in the next section, their unemployment stems from a number of structural employment issues Oman faces, not only highlighting the link between Oman's rent-based development and the 2011 demonstrations, but also debunking the common loyalist depiction of these demonstrators simply as "failures" or lazy youths who hadn't seriously attempted to find work.<sup>828</sup>

## **Development and the Structural Causes of Omani Unemployment**

The *Characteristics of Jobseekers* report highlights multiple, interlinked, and structural causes of Omani unemployment. The first, and most obvious, is a fundamental mismatch between the education sector and the Omani labour market. That is, there is a structural imbalance between the skills and training of the national population, and the jobs created in the private sector. Omani and expatriate employers alike, for example, noted that despite their efforts to hire nationals, the vocational training model in Oman was not effective, and they usually had to invest significant resources in retraining Omanis after they emerged from training.<sup>829</sup> This mismatch is not unique to Oman – it is a common issue across the Middle East – but Oman's failure to effectively address the problem has nonetheless affected Omani employment levels.<sup>830</sup> Part of the issue, as some Omani economists have already noted, is that population growth in Oman has outstripped the capacity of the education and private sectors to train and absorb graduates.<sup>831</sup> This has occurred despite the multi-billion dollar investments and rhetorical service regarding the skill gap by state actors. During the Oman Debate 2011,

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<sup>827</sup> Without survey or other mass data on the characteristics of Omani protesters, it is not possible to confirm whether they conform to the characteristics of Omani jobseekers. However, both Omani media and materials and interview data obtained during fieldwork support this characterisation of Omani protesters as primarily young, unemployed, and high school educated.

<sup>828</sup> See for example Sultan al-Saraai, "Too Early for Omani Unemployment Expression," *Oman Observer* (15 February 2014) <http://omanobserver.om/too-early-for-omani-unemployment-expression/> accessed 5 September 2015; these characterisations were also common in loyalist and some government interviews.

<sup>829</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014. This was a particularly strong view among the Omani business elite, notable as they tended to emphasize their personal efforts to increase Omanisation more strongly, suggesting they feel a stronger social and nationalist pressure to hire Omanis over expatriates.

<sup>830</sup> Allen Consulting Group, *Skill Gaps Research Study: Final Report – A Future Strategy for Bahrain (2009-2016)* (2009); Deloitte, "Wanted: A National Labour Force. Labour Policies and Youth Unemployment in the Gulf Region," *A Middle East Point of View* (November 2010) 12-17; Crystal A. Ennis and Ra'id Z. al-Jamali, "Elusive Employment: Development Planning and Labour Market Trends in Oman," *Chatham House Research Paper* (September 2014); al-Qudsi, "Unemployment Evolution in the GCC Economies".

<sup>831</sup> Dhafir Awadh al-Shanfari, "Entrepreneurship in Oman: A Snapshot of the Main Challenges," (paper presented at the Meeting on Enterprise Development Policies: Capacity-building in Science, Technology and Innovation, Geneva, 16-18 January 2012).

when government representatives, private sector leaders, development experts and members of the public openly discussed Omani development, economist and academic Dr. Hatem al-Shanfari made several relevant points regarding education and the labour market:

**Dr Hatem [al-Shanfari]:** Education is an enabler; it does not solve the problem... We had been channeling a huge amount of money in the education sector, but its impact has not been equally effective as we have been trying to address the quantity side of education in the past – the amount or number of Omanis who were able to enroll in higher education was proportionately very low in the past. This year [2011] we had an exceptional time as about 64 per cent of the high school graduates have been taken by higher education institutes inside and outside Oman.

The quality is another challenge. We have tried to address this issue by revising the curriculum and preparing the teachers better in the future but it has been a challenge....

**[Moderator] Tim:** So is there a political will to do that?

**Dr Hatem:** Officially, yes.

**Tim:** And in practice?

**Dr Hatem:** In practice you have to go beyond the commitment verbally and commit resources... This is an important prerequisite to be able to compete internationally. We have still a way to go.<sup>832</sup>

One of the key issues referenced above and also highlighted during the 2011 demonstrations was a shortage of opportunities for Omanis to obtain university-level education, particularly the paucity of state-funded scholarships. To address this issue, the Omani government announced in June 2011 that the number of publicly funded university scholarships would increase by more than 90 percent. It should be noted that a major expansion of the education sector had already been planned prior to the outbreak of unrest, yet the royal directive meant almost 60 percent of Omani university students would be supported with scholarships in the academic year 2011/2012, compared with 35 percent in 2010/2011.<sup>833</sup> By the 2012/2013 academic year, this fraction had passed 70 percent of Omanis enrolled in university.<sup>834</sup>

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<sup>832</sup> Oman Economic Review, "Need for a Paradigm Shift," (January 2012) <http://www.oeronline.com/php/2012/jan/cover1.php> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>833</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, "Oman: Further Reforms Directed at Youth Following Protests," (12 July 2011) <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=738293458&Country=Oman&topic=Politics&subtopic=Rec>

The move certainly creates more opportunities for higher education than has ever been the case before in Oman, and will expand access to higher wage employment in the public and private sectors. However, increasing education levels does not in itself decrease joblessness, except in the sense that some jobseekers may leave the labour force while they focus on improving their education. This buys the Omani government some time, but, unless systemic unemployment issues are overcome, will result in a similar level of joblessness once increased numbers of tertiary-educated Omanis graduate and re-enter the workforce. An excerpt from an interview with an Omani economist involved in consultation for the Oman 2040 Vision is instructive here:

Author: So one of the recent decisions has been to provide more scholarships to Omanis who finish high school-

Interviewee: It was already there, it just got expanded.

Author: So does that mean...in three or four years when those students return, when they finish university and re-enter the job market, is the government looking at making sure there are jobs available for them?

Interviewee: No.

Author: So what's going to happen then?

Interviewee: I don't know. Nobody knows. It's a serious challenge.<sup>835</sup>

In essence, this means Oman has delayed, rather than resolved, its skill mismatch, and highlights how myopic implementation of development policy has been central to Oman's development difficulties.

Misalignment between the education sector and the labour market is not solely a function of the education system or population growth, but also a direct outcome of the state's development policy that disproportionately created jobs suitable for expatriate, rather than national, workers. As Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Harthi, Chairman of the Oman Economic Association, noted in 2013:

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[ent+developments&subsubtopic=The+political+scene:+Further+reforms+directed+at+youth+following+protests](#) accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>834</sup> See comments of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education in Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Sarmi, "From One University to 54 Higher Education Institutions: The Experience of Oman in Higher Education," *QS Asia, Middle East, and Africa Showcase* (11 February 2014) <http://qsshowcase.com/main/from-one-university-to-54-higher-education-institutions-the-experience-of-oman-in-higher-education/> accessed 26 July 2015.

<sup>835</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

Is the problem that the skills are not matching the market requirements? Or is it the problem that when the government is doing their overall five-years planning, it's not matching their manpower capabilities? Because, I mean, maybe we are getting oil, we are spending a lot of things in a lot of projects, but do we need all these projects? Is it appropriate? We are creating new jobs. But we are not creating jobs [for nationals] – maybe 2/3rds of the new jobs we are creating – we are creating for non-Omanis.<sup>836</sup>

Shaikh al-Harthy highlights a key aspect of Omani (and more generally of GCC) development over the past two decades: the preference for rent-driven growth that prioritises private sector growth and a controlled, partial diversification without, in most cases, accounting for the type of employment created and whether citizens will be able to take up these new positions (and, additionally, whether these jobs will offer a living wage for Omani breadwinners). As the core argument of this chapter is that the growth in citizen unemployment and resulting sense of inequality between citizen and expatriate is closely related to Oman's development strategy, it is worth briefly highlighting some specific aspects of Oman's *2020 Vision* and five-year plans that have impacted this inequality.

The overarching objectives of Oman's *2020 Vision* were two-fold: to reposition the private sector as the primary engine of economic growth; and to generate more opportunities for employment of nationals. The oil sector, which in 1996 constituted 41 percent of GDP, was to fall to 9 percent by 2020, while the ratio of nationals in the private sector would increase from 7.5 percent to an ambitious 75 percent by 2020.<sup>837</sup> Prior to the Oman *2020 Vision*, Five-Year Development (FYD) plans had concentrated primarily on infrastructure projects, with the Fourth FYD (1991-1995) notably the first to include an Omanisation strategy.<sup>838</sup> Oman's Vision 2020 was first introduced through the Fifth FYD (1996-2000). While Omanisation rates in the private sector improved markedly under the Fifth and Sixth (2001-2005) plans, reaching 22.5 percent Omanisation in 2005, Figures 9 and 10 in this chapter document the declining Omanisation rate in the private sector since 2005. NCSI statistics also reveal Oman's continued dependence on hydrocarbons, with crude petroleum alone comprising 41.4 percent of GDP in 2013, reaching 45 percent if combined with natural gas

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<sup>836</sup> Author interview with Shaikh Mohamed bin Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Harthy, Oman 2013.

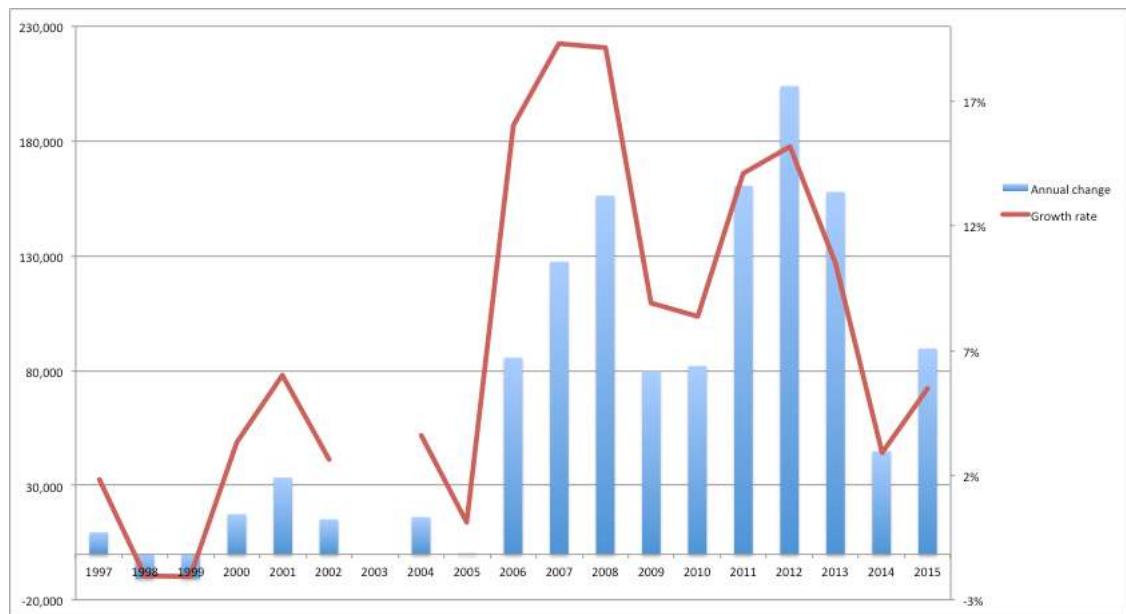
<sup>837</sup> Valeri, "Simmering Unrest and Succession Challenges in Oman," 6.

<sup>838</sup> Although an Omanisation program had started earlier, in 1988, this was the first time it had been included in the central development plan.

production.<sup>839</sup>

Particularly clear has been a shift away from Omanisation, which was the subject of the first chapter of the Sixth FYD plan, towards increasing migrant labour numbers under the Seventh FYD (2006-2010) plan. Combined with the influx of rents from 2003 – 2008 oil price boom, the annual growth rate of expatriate labour under soared, as shown in Figure 15 below:

**Figure 15: Phases of Expatriate Labour Growth 1997-2015**



Source: Calculated from data drawn from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook*, 2015 and 2009, and *Statistical Bulletin*, January 2016.<sup>840</sup>

It should be noted that Omanisation was still included in the Seventh FYD plan, and in 2007 several low-skill positions such as taxi drivers, cashiers, security officers, receptionists, and office clerks became reserved for Omani nationals.<sup>841</sup> The plans have also been successful in encouraging rapid economic growth, averaging 5.8 percent annually between 2001 and 2011.<sup>842</sup>

However, starting from 2006, there was a clear increase in expatriate labour numbers, and even in 2010 (when approximately 340,000 expatriates and 60,000 citizens were removed from the population count as a result of the 2010 census) expatriate labour

<sup>839</sup> Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2014) 301.

<sup>840</sup> Data for 2015 is for December, as annual information has not yet been published. Data for 2003 was an extreme outlier, potentially due to it being a census year, and has been removed.

<sup>841</sup> Ennis and al-Jamali, "Elusive Employment," 8.

<sup>842</sup> Reuters, "Oman Eyes Broader Role for Private Sector to Create Jobs, Diversify," *Gulf Business* (15 December 2012) <http://gulfbusiness.com/2012/12/oman-eyes-broader-role-for-private-sector-to-create-jobs-diversify/#.VbSajEKqqko> accessed 26 July 2015.

growth easily outstripped that of 2001-2005. The impact on the private sector labour force was clear: Omanisation decreased and left many Omanis with a sense of being passed over in favour of foreign workers – even if the salary for many of these jobs remain far below Omani expectations.

The increase in expatriate labour growth noted in Figure 15 also correlates with increasing citizen unemployment (Figure 13). A 2006 cross-country comparison of GCC unemployment summarised most accurately the connection between rent-driven development and unemployment:

Most of the temporal job creation has occurred in the private sector in low-skilled, low-wages occupations that do not attract nationals. Therefore, in the presence of a large pool of semi and low-skilled foreign workers and the inability of the government to create public sector jobs at rates commensurate with the growth of native labor force, unemployment of GCC citizens has been rising rapidly.<sup>843</sup>

In the case of Oman, al-Shanfari noted that despite economic growth and increasing wealth, the type of jobs created in the Sultanate were geared towards expatriates rather than citizens, linking this growing inequality directly to the 2011 demonstrations:

I think the young Omanis and the community in general is very reasonable and the events that have taken place in February and March despite its negative aspects showed that there is a lot of maturity and understanding. People are not insane in their expectations, people are aspiring for a better future; the fact is that they have been excluded from the benefit of the wealth that has been created and the economic growth plus the jobs that have been created in the past. Even though it has been growing at a very fast rate, it was not the right types of jobs that Omanis are aspiring for. It's the not the [type of] jobs that can create sustainability.<sup>844</sup>

Some of the central programmes touted to help citizens, for example, in reality host primarily expatriate-owned enterprises.<sup>845</sup> The Knowledge Oasis Muscat – specifically their Technology Park and Incubation Centre, designed to help SME start-ups – and the Sharakah Fund for the Development of Youth Projects, mandated to support entrepreneurialism and SME development, both primarily host expatriate-owned enterprises.<sup>846</sup> The Sharakah Fund, for example, claims they supported 10 start-up

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<sup>843</sup> Al-Qudsi, “Unemployment Evolution in the GCC Economies,” 38.

<sup>844</sup> Oman Economic Review, “Need for a Paradigm Shift”.

<sup>845</sup> A 2014 UNCTAD report also notes policy lapses regarding SME support programs, particularly the problem with assuming that such schemes will reduce youth unemployment. See United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Science, Technology, and Innovation Review: Oman*, 35.

<sup>846</sup> Knowledge Oasis Muscat, 2013 <http://www.kom.om/> accessed 7 August 2016.

projects and provided “over 40” new jobs for Omani nationals in 2010, yet overall two-thirds of their clients have been expatriates.<sup>847</sup>

Further, while programmes focused on increasing the number of citizen-entrepreneurs may, to some extent, ameliorate any incarnation of a ‘rentier mentality’, it is the SME sector that has had most difficulty with Omanisation. A 2011 survey of companies embedded in the Ruhail Industrial Estate revealed a divergence of opinion regarding Omanisation, dependent on company size, where representatives from most large companies – many of which are owned by Oman’s business elite families and already employ almost 80 percent of Omanis in the private sector – felt Omanisation was *not* detrimental to their ability to find labour, whereas most SME representatives felt it *was*.<sup>848</sup> Most SMEs, of course, create low-skill, low-wage jobs unlikely to attract Omani nationals, particularly since the Omani population has a comparatively low labour force participation rate (67.7 percent for Omani men, and 25.2 percent for Omani women, or 46.6 percent overall), thus many Omani workers are breadwinners who must earn enough to support large families.<sup>849</sup> Even where there exists a genuine intention to increase workforce indigenisation, skill mismatches remain relevant. Responding to a question on whether the private sector could do more to support Omanisation, Hani al-Zubair, Executive Chairman of Zubair Automotive Group said the following:

Has the private sector done enough? No. Are we taking our part in the creation of the 50,000 jobs? Yes. But there is also a limitation... We need to do more but we need to have the right people at the same time. It’s no good saying you need to take 20,000 more. But I need engineers or people who are at a certain level. But I can only have school leavers.<sup>850</sup>

The difficulty private sector employers face in meeting Omanisation targets is linked to the discussion earlier on falling Omanisation rates since 2005. As Ennis and Jamali posit, part of the reason for decreased success in Omanisation after 2005 may be that those positions that were easier to restrict to nationals – the public sector, clerical positions, and middle level management – had already been ‘Omanised’ by that

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<sup>847</sup> Sharakah Fund for Development of Youth Projects, “Sharakah’s History,” <http://sharakah.om/site/history.php> accessed 5 September 2015; Sharakah Fund for Development of Youth Projects, “Achievements,” <http://sharakah.om/site/acheivments.php> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>848</sup> Tyler Philip Eldridge McWilliam, “Made in Oman: Promoting Manufacturing and Export in the Sultanate of Oman,” *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, Paper no. 1038* (2011) 21; Ennis and al-Jamali, “Elusive Employment,” 10.

<sup>849</sup> National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā’iṣ al-bāḥathīn ‘an ‘amal*, 17.

<sup>850</sup> Oman Economic Review, “Need for a Paradigm Shift”.



point.<sup>851</sup> Successful Omanisation in the private sector, write Ennis and Jamali: “is associated with sectors with high capital investment and low labour intensity, where investing in expensive programmes and confining jobs to nationals is affordable. Given the obvious costs, there is little incentive to do the same elsewhere”.<sup>852</sup> That is, while large private sector enterprises may be able to absorb Omani employees with little trouble, SMEs, geared towards low capital investment and high labour intensity, have struggled to meet Omanisation targets.

It is also worth noting that, while a classic RST perspective claims an intangible ‘rentier mentality’ causes citizen preference for the public sector, Omani public servants claimed their personal decision was driven more by the flexible working hours, higher wages, and, in some cases, cultural sensitivities. Female Omani interviewees, for example, noted that teaching at public institutions allowed women from regional areas to remain near their families and was more socially acceptable within conservative communities.<sup>853</sup> As a result, in 2013, Omani women outnumbered Omani men in public sector teaching in all governorates, often by a factor of three or more.<sup>854</sup> For male jobseekers, over 55 percent of those who were unwilling to work in the private sector cited low wages as the main reason for their decision, followed by working hours.<sup>855</sup> This suggests that, while some interviewees – particularly loyalists and members of government – felt a rentier mentality remained relevant to the state-society relationship, the preference for public sector employment is not necessarily an indication of a rentier mentality but may instead be contingent on employment incentives, or social and cultural factors.

Low wages are also critical to both Omani dissatisfaction with development outcomes. As noted earlier, 60 percent of Omanis in the private sector earned less than OMR300 per month in April 2014, despite government efforts to raise the minimum wage to OMR325 in early 2013.<sup>856</sup> In December 2013, the average monthly salary for an Omani

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<sup>851</sup> For example, the public sector had increased from around 65 to almost 85 percent, top and middle management in banking reached 85.4 percent, 99.5 percent of clerical staff, and 100 percent for non-clerical staff. See Ennis and al-Jamali, “Elusive Employment,” 8-9.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>853</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2013-2014. These findings align with existing publications on Omani entrepreneurialism. See for example Ennis, “Between Trend and Necessity”.

<sup>854</sup> For example, there were 2,587 female teachers to 580 males in Dhofar’s public schools in 2013. Data drawn from Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2013).

<sup>855</sup> Oman Ministry of National Economy, *Manpower Survey* (2008).

<sup>856</sup> Figure calculated from Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin* (May 2014).

in the private sector was OMR382, and the median salary category was ‘Less than OMR325’. Figure 16 outlines monthly salaries of Omanis in the private sector in December 2013 and April 2014:

**Figure 16: Omanis by Salary Level in the Private Sector, December 2013 and April 2014.**

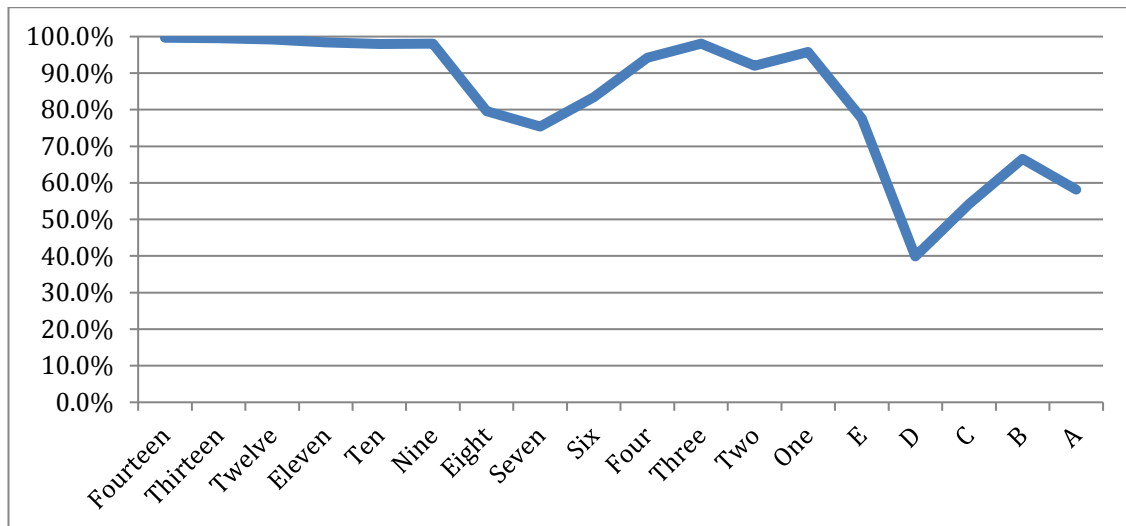
<b>Salary Category (R.O., monthly)</b>	<b>2014 April</b>	<b>2013 December</b>
Less than 325	114,295	118,786
325 to 400	31,969	25,807
400-500	12,015	11,121
500-600	7,204	6,412
600-700	4,908	4,567
700-800	3,552	3,066
800-900	2,428	2,247
900-1000	1,758	1,744
1000-2000	6,696	5,929
More than 2000	2,415	2,181
<b>Total workers</b>	<b>187,240</b>	<b>181,860</b>

Source: Data drawn from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin* (January and May 2014).

Even in the public sector, which, as noted earlier, achieved commendable Omanisation levels of over 85 percent since 2009, low-level salaries remain an issue. Far more Omanis than expatriates are employed in government overall, yet Figure 17 reveals the concentration of Omanisation at lower levels of public sector employment.<sup>857</sup>

<sup>857</sup> Government units are ranked from Fourteen to A (with corresponding increase in salary in this direction). Special grade refers to ministers, ambassadors, or other senior public roles, and has 100% Omanisation. It has been excluded from Figure 17, as it is highly unlikely an expatriate would ever be considered for such a role.

**Figure 17: 2012 Omanisation of Government Employees by Level**



Source: Data drawn from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2013).

Later sections of this chapter discuss government responses to low salaries: most notably, the marked increase in the median salary category in the private sector since April 2014 (see Figure 20). Yet, in general, Omani salaries remain geared towards lower-level employment, particularly in the private sector.

Government policy shifts since 2011 also reveal the complexity of responding to pressing societal demands without damaging long-term development priorities. The minimum wage increase of January 2013, for example, was intended to both respond to dissatisfaction among Omanis within the private sector and make that sector more appealing to nationals.<sup>858</sup> Less than 12 months later, however, the government reacted to a series of strikes by announcing the unification of all *public* service salaries – effectively increasing wages across the public service – thus counteracting the incentive for movement into the private sector. These changes come at high cost to the public purse, increasing the salary allocation section of the Omani government budget by a monumental 39 percent and costing an estimated OMR800-900 million annually.<sup>859</sup> During the Oman Debate 2011, al-Shanfari was asked whether the policy changes since 2011 had been properly considered or were reactive and *ad hoc*:

<sup>858</sup> Saleh al-Shaibany, Angus McDowall and Toby Chopra, “Oman Raises Minimum Wage to Avert Future Protests,” *Reuters* (9 February 2013) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/09/us-oman-employment-wage-idUSBRE91805A20130209> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>859</sup> Oman Observer, “Estimated to Cost Around RO 800-900m,” (12 November 2013) <http://omanobserver.om/estimated-to-cost-around-ro-800-900m/> accessed 5 September 2015; see also Saleh al-Shaibany, “Sunday Beat: Why Thousands of Omanis Quit Jobs in Private Sector?” *Times of Oman* (15 November 2014) <http://www.shabiba.com/news/42740/Article-Sunday-Beat-Why-thousands-of-Omanis-quit-jobs-in-private-sector?> accessed 19 May 2015.

**[Moderator] Tim:** Was it a knee-jerk reaction, actually?

**Dr Hatem [al-Shanfari]:** It is and there will be consequences of some of the decisions that we have taken to put people in jobs that are not productive. It will have negative consequences. We are just starting to see that almost every year we will have 50,000 job seekers. We have to find jobs for them and the government cannot take all of them on board. The private sector does not have that much capacity either. We have a dilemma, we have been able to accumulate wealth, have achieved excellent growth but that growth has not been inclusive.

The Omani state, then, through the implementation of a late-rentier development strategy, has contributed to the emergence of inequitable growth, which in turn contributed to societal unrest in 2011.

### **Industrial Estates, Regional Unemployment, and the Sohar Protests**

In order to evaluate how this has affected Oman on a sub-national level, this section investigates the impact of Oman's development program on Sohar, where the state has invested billions in the development of Sohar Port and Freezone, in companies like Sohar Aluminium and the Sohar oil refinery, and in basic infrastructure development, yet which nevertheless formed a significant arena of political protest in 2011.

The impact of state investment in Sohar has been enormous. In 1974, no part of Sohar had electricity, piped water, or telephone facilities, and local residents found it necessary to migrate to the northern Gulf to find work, particularly the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain. The first asphalted road, constructed through Sohar in 1973, as part of a wider project to connect Muscat to the UAE, brought some traffic, but the major change occurred in 1999, well into Oman's Fifth FYD, when Omani government officials negotiated an agreement with the Port of Rotterdam to initiate a 50-50 joint venture, Sohar Industrial Port Company (SIPC), to manage Sohar Port, one of the world's largest port development projects.<sup>860</sup> Under Royal Decree 80/2002, SIPC received a 25-year concession to develop and manage a 2,100-hectare area on the coast just north of Sohar. In 2007, the concession area was expanded to 4,500 hectares, in order to develop Freezone Sohar and several other commercial projects, and in the following years the concession was extended to 2043 and a new state-owned company, Sohar International

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<sup>860</sup> Valeri, "The Şuḥār Paradox".

Development Company (SIDC) was created to oversee the Freezone in partnership with the Port of Rotterdam, and Mumbai-based SKIL Infrastructure.<sup>861</sup>

Sohar Port and Freezone (SPF) capitalises on Oman's position at the centre of global trade routes between Europe and Asia, with close access to India as well as the major oil exporting countries of the Gulf. It also exemplifies the type of downstream investment of oil and gas reserves typical to late rentier states: it was intended as a base for heavy and energy-intensive industries, particularly those that could capitalise on oil and gas inputs, and the state invested in connecting Sohar to its existing oil and gas network as well as promoting transnational initiatives, such as the Dolphin gas project.<sup>862</sup> The Sohar oil refinery, for example, receives crude oil input via pipeline from Muscat, the methanol and urea plants receive natural gas, and an aromatics and polypropylene plant receives chemical feedstock from both the Sohar and Muscat refineries.<sup>863</sup> Other industries in the zone include an aluminium smelter, a formaldehyde chemical company, and steel and automobile parts manufacturing, among others.

Ownership structures in Sohar Port and Freezone reveal the centrality of state and business elite interests, such as the Sohar oil refinery and the aromatics and polypropylene plants, operated by state-owned ORPIC, the methanol plant, operated by Oman Methanol Company (30 percent owned by OMZEST (Omar Zawawi Establishment LLC), a holding of Sultan Qaboos's Special Advisor for External Affairs, Omar al-Zawawi), or other industries such as L&T Modular Fabrication Yard and Heavy Engineering, a joint venture between an Indian company, Larsen and Toubro,

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<sup>861</sup> Sohar Port Special Projects, "About Us," *Port of Sohar* (last updated 2010) <http://www.bulkjettysohar.com/about> accessed 5 September 2015; Oxford Business Group, *The Report: Oman* (2009) 176-178; Other major projects with international partners include a 2008 agreement with Brazil's VALE iron ore company to construct a pelletising plant and iron ore distribution centre as well as a long-term (20 year) lease agreement with state-owned Oman Shipping Company, and the Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC), a USD3.6 - 4 billion project that includes a steam cracker unit, two polyethylene plants, a gas extraction plant in Fahud, and construction of a gas pipeline between Fahud and Sohar. LPIC, owned and managed by ORPIC, is scheduled to start operations in 2018, following the award of the Engineering, Procurement and Contracting (EPC) contract to four largely foreign enterprises. See Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company, "Liwa Plastics Industries Projects," (2013) <http://www.orpic.om/orpics-business/projects/liwa-plastics-project> accessed 5 September 2015; Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company, "Bidding Underway for Construction of Orpic's New Plastics Complex," (9 August 2015) <http://www.orpic.om/media-center/latest-news> accessed 5 September 2015; Trade Arabia, "\$3.6bn Liwa Plastics Project EPC Award Likely in Q4," (22 February 2015) [http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IND\\_275970.html](http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IND_275970.html) accessed 16 August 2015.

<sup>862</sup> The Dolphin Gas project connects gas pipelines across the Gulf and since 2008 has allowed Oman to import Qatari gas for industrial projects.

<sup>863</sup> Sohar Port and Freezone, "Petrochemicals,"

<http://www.soharportandfreezone.com/en/industries/sectors/petrochemicals> accessed 16 August 2015.

and an Omani business elite company, Zubair Corporation.<sup>864</sup> Similar to other Omani industrial zones, joint ventures with foreign partners allow the state to draw from foreign investment while still fulfilling their development objectives. Sohar Aluminium, for example, was formed in 2004 as a partnership between SOE Oman Oil Company (40 percent), Abu Dhabi National Energy Company PJSC – TAQA (40 percent), and Rio Tinto Alcan (20 percent), and started production in 2008.<sup>865</sup> The company emphasises its commitment to Omani development goals, outlining its contribution to local downstream diversification and SME training programs, and describing Omanisation, calculated at 72 percent in 2015, as a “driving force within the organisation”.<sup>866</sup> On its ‘Company Profile’ webpage, it announces:

In many ways, Sohar Aluminium’s development mirrors the Sultanate of Oman’s own emergence onto the world stage – driving forward at a formidable pace, but all the while mindful and respectful of its cultural heritage and values. Sohar Aluminium intends to become a benchmark smelter while contributing to the sustainable development of Oman.<sup>867</sup>

The SPF project is thus tied directly to state development objectives. Oxford Business Group also claims Sohar Port and Freezone “breathed new life” into the Sohar Industrial Estate, which had first been established in 1992 alongside similar estates in Raysut, and earlier zones such as that in Rusayl (1983).<sup>868</sup> Other major projects emerged around the same time, notably Al Mazyunah Free Zone, and Industrial Estates in Sur and Buraimi, but SPF was by far the most ambitious in nature and scope, and its successes served as an inspiration for further industrial developments. By 2009, the Omani industrial estates (Rusayl, Raysut, Sohar, Nizwa, Buraimi, and Sur, as well as Al Mazyunah Free Zone and Knowledge Oasis Muscat) combined hosted more than 300 industrial manufacturing projects, around 35 percent of which were joint ventures with foreign partners, all under supervision of the PEIE.<sup>869</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> Valeri, “The Ṣuḥār Paradox”; Sohar Port and Freezone, “Overview,” <http://www.soharportandfreezone.com/en/about/overview> accessed 5 September 2015; Oman Methanol Company LLC, “About Us,” (2012) <http://www.omanmethanol.com/?q=about-us> accessed 5 September 2015; OMZEST, “Vision and Mission,” (2014) <http://www.omzest.com/about/vision-mission> accessed 5 September 2015; Larsen and Toubro, “About L&T Group: Sohar, Oman,” (2015) <http://www.larsentoubro.com/corporate/about-lt-group/facilities/mena/sohar-oman/> accessed 16 August 2015.

<sup>865</sup> Sohar Aluminium, “Company Profile,” <http://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/company-profile> accessed 16 August 2015.

<sup>866</sup> Ibid.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid.

<sup>868</sup> Oxford Business Group, *The Report: Oman* (2009) 200.

<sup>869</sup> Ibid, 176.

Yet for all the rhetoric around Omanisation and in-country value, it is important to remember that these industrial estates were designed primarily to promote economic diversification through foreign investment. The industrial projects and free zones that form a fundamental element of late rentier development are advertised to the international community as a way to *avoid* onerous Omanisation and local ownership requirements. SPF lists the following incentives for investors:

1. 100 percent foreign ownership
2. A corporate tax holiday for up to 25 years, guaranteed for at least 10 years.
3. Isolated bureaucracy and regulation; little interaction with Omani governmental institutions
4. No customs duties on imports or re-exports
5. No personal income tax for individuals working in the Freezone
6. Low capital requirements
7. “Relaxed” level of Omanization, ranging from a 15 percent minimum to increasing levels (25, 35 and 50 percent after 10, 15, and 20 years respectively) in order to ensure continued corporate tax break.
8. Free Trade Agreements with the US and Singapore.<sup>870</sup>

Other industrial estates require even lower levels of Omanisation, such as Al Mazyunah Freezone, which requires only 10 percent Omanisation (and increasing Omanisation over time is not linked to continuation of corporate tax breaks; businesses automatically receive a 30-year tax break).<sup>871</sup>

From a planned total investment of USD15 billion, the entire SPF project was originally envisaged to create 8,000 stable jobs and another 30,000 jobs indirectly within the Batinah region by 2015. By 2014, Andre Toet, CEO of SIPC, announced that SPF had created over 8,800 direct jobs, and H.E. Sultan al-Habsi claimed Omanisation rates ranged from 35 percent to over 75 percent (or over 3,000 jobs for Omanis), though his estimate includes state-owned enterprises and is thus not a true reflection of private sector job creation.<sup>872</sup> These Omanisation rates appear similar to those of other industrial estates, such as the Nizwa industrial estate, which in 2012 employed

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<sup>870</sup> Sohar Port and Freezone, “Incentives,” <http://www.soharportandfreezone.com/en/setting-up-business/incentives> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>871</sup> Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE), “Al Mazunah Free Zone: Incentives and Exemptions,” (2014) <http://www.peie.om/ESTATES/Al-Mazunah/Incentives-Exemptions/default> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>872</sup> Arabian Supply Chain Staff, “Sohar to create a further 430 jobs in Oman,” *Arabian Supply Chain* (30 June 2014) <http://www.arabiansupplychain.com/article-10044-sohar-to-create-a-further-430-jobs-in-oman/> accessed 23 August 2015; Oman News Agency, “Sohar Port Ready to Receive Businesses,” *Port of Rotterdam* (4 February 2014) <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/news-and-press-releases/sohar-port-ready-to-receive-businesses> accessed 23 August 2015.

approximately 900 Omanis from a total 2,400 employees, or 37.5 percent Omanisation.<sup>873</sup> Hilal bin Hamad Al Hasani, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE), claimed that across the industrial estates, Omanisation had reached approximately 41 percent by mid-2014, although again this includes SOEs.<sup>874</sup>

These rates are clearly complicated by the inclusion of public, or quasi-public sector companies, yet they do indicate a high level of Omanisation relative to the broader private sector. However, the problem emerges when these industrial estates are seen as drivers for private sector job creation. Despite reasonable Omanisation levels, government officials interviewed admitted privately that the projects had not created as much Omani employment as hoped; 8,800 jobs – or even the 27,000 (of which at least 10,000 will be for Omanis) the PEIE aims to create through the industrial estates – is still small relative to the size of Oman’s unemployment problem.<sup>875</sup> There is no data available on indirect job creation for Omanis as a result of the industrial estates and state investment; given the Omani government’s propensity to heavily publicise successes in employment creation, this suggests the indirect job creation has not been as effective as hoped. As a member of Oman’s Majlis al-Shura noted:

They were hoping these mega industries will hire more Omanis, will create jobs, will add value to the local society, will take responsibility – social responsibility. And the outcome was much less...And like any other Arab state, there was some effect [i.e. popular unrest] also here. So, the message was clear and one of the challenges was that there were a lot of young Omanis still looking for a job.<sup>876</sup>

This was particularly true in Sohar. In mid-2015, the Omani government published, for the first time, a regional breakdown of unemployment based on the 2010 Census, revealing a rare glimpse into inequalities in unemployment levels across Oman: the *Characteristics of Jobseekers* report. This data is displayed in Figure 18 below, and

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<sup>873</sup> Muscat Daily, “Official: Nizwa Industrial Estate to be Developed as Oil, Gas Base,” (25 March 2012) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Business/Official-Nizwa-Industrial-Estate-to-be-developed-as-oil-gas-base> accessed 16 August 2015.

<sup>874</sup> See interview with Hilal bin Hamad al-Hasani in *The Business Year*, “Estate of Affairs,” (2015) <http://www.thebusinessyear.com/publication/article/50/4946/oman-2015/estate-of-affairs> accessed 24 March 2015.

<sup>875</sup> Almost all government officials interviewed noted the type of employment creation as a key contributor to Oman’s development challenges. Those who did not tended to answer more conservatively to other questions; for example they argued that unemployment was not a problem in Oman and that most protesters in 2011 were youths suffering from the rentier mentality. See also Hassan Kamanpoori, “PEIE Aims to Generate 27,000 Jobs,” *Oman Observer* (31 March 2015) <http://omanobserver.om/peie-aims-to-generate-about-27000-jobs/> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>876</sup> Author interview with member of Majlis al-Shura, Oman 2013.



reveals that Omani citizen unemployment in Sohar prior to the 2011 unrest was over 25 percent, nearly 40 percent in Salalah, almost 30 percent in Liwa, and 37 percent in Dokum, all cities that have experienced significant unrest since 2011 and that are also major sites of state investment in mega-projects.<sup>877</sup> The Dhofar region fared particularly poorly, with Omani unemployment rates in every Wilayat over 35 percent, and as high as 73.2 percent in al-Mazyunah.<sup>878</sup> Lower unemployment rates are found in Nizwa, in the al-Dakhliya Region more generally, and across the Muscat region, the lowest being 11.9 percent in the Wilayat of Bawshar.

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<sup>877</sup> Some differences from the estimate developed in Figure 13 of this chapter should be immediately obvious. Comparing the citizen unemployment estimates for 2010 between Figure 13 and 18, it seems likely that some of the disparity is due to the Characteristics of Jobseekers report using MOM employment figures rather than the PAMR and NCSI data utilised in Figure 13. Depending on the accuracy of the labour force data (which is contested), the actual unemployment rate of Omanis in 2010 is likely between the estimates, yet Figure 18 is critical for understanding regional disparities in unemployment, and Figure 13 important to understand trends in citizen unemployment over time.

<sup>878</sup> Unemployment in al-Mazyunah is exceptionally high, even relative to the unemployment rates listed in Figure 18. Al-Mazyunah's outlier status is likely a product of its close proximity to the Yemeni border and Yemeni instability and the small size of the population in al-Mazyunah (8,039, of whom 7,127 were Omani according to the Oman 2010 Census) causing volatility in employment rates. See Government of Oman, *General Census of Population, Housing, and Establishments: Final Results* (2010).

Figure 18: Omani and Expatriate Unemployment according to the 2010 Census

Governorate	Wilayat	Expat	Omani	Total	Governorate	Wilayat	Expat	Omani	Total
Muscat	Muttrah	0.8	13.5	3.8	al-Dakhliya cont.	Izki	0.1	17.2	11.6
	Bawshar	0.4	11.9	3.1		Bid Bid	0.5	13.8	9.8
	Seeb	0.3	17.5	7.2	al-Sharqiyah	Sur	0.2	30.5	19.3
	al-Amrat	0.3	18.1	10.7		Ibra	0.3	20.9	11.6
	Muscat	0.3	18.1	9.4		Bidiyah	0.3	31.3	17.8
Qurayyat	0.1	17.9	10.5	al-Qabil		0.2	26.8	16.3	
al-Batinah	Sohar	0.2	25.2	10.8		al-Mudaybi	0.2	20.3	12.3
	Rustaq	0.2	22	16.3		Dima w'al-Taiyyin	0.2	19.8	13.5
	Shinas	0.3	25.2	23		al-Kamil w'al-Wafi	0.3	26.5	15.7
	Liwa	0.2	29.9	14.6		Jaalan bani bu Ali	0.1	23.7	14.8
	Saham	0.3	30.5	22.1		Jaalan bani bu Hasan	0.1	28.2	18.3
	al-Khaburah	0.2	30.2	22.3		Wadi bani Khalid	0.2	25.6	16
	al-Suwayq	0.2	28.2	18.9		Masirah	0.4	34.1	19.9
	Nakhil	0.4	17.8	14.2		Hayma	0.1	31.9	2.1
	Wadi al-Maawil	0.3	19.3	13.3		Muhut	0.1	40.6	22.3
	al-Awabi	0	17.9	9.6	Dokum	0	37	4.3	
	al-Musanah	0.3	25.6	14.1	al-Jazer	0.1	44.2	6.5	
	Barka	0.2	23.9	11.4	Dhofar	Salalah	0.5	37.4	16.3
	Musandam	Khasab	0.9	27.1		16	Thumrayt	0.6	47.8
Bukha		3.3	29.2	15.9		Taqah	0.2	40.8	28.1
Daba		1.4	32.3	14		Mirbat	0	52.9	35.1
Madha		3.2	30.3	13.8		Sadh	0.2	53.5	27.4
al-Dhahira	Ibri	0.1	23.2	12.1		Rakhyut	0.9	48.2	33.1
	Yanqul	0.1	24.6	15.7		Dalkhut	2.4	41.9	28.4
	Dank	0.1	30.7	19		Muqshin	0	35.9	13.2
al-Dakhliya	Nizwa	0.1	14.5	7.6		Shalim wa juzur al-Hallniyat	0	50	8.5
	Samail	0.2	14.8	9.9		al-Mazyunah	6.1	73.2	56.8
	Bahla	0.1	19.5	14.2	al-Buraimi	al-Buraimi	1.5	37.3	16.8
	Adam	0	26.5	6.4		Mahdah	0.2	42.8	12.7
	al-Hamra	0.4	16.7	13		al-Sunaynah	0	27.5	2.2
	Manah	0	15.4	9.6	<b>OMAN TOTAL</b>		0.4	24.4	11.8

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā'is al-bāḥathīn 'an 'amal*, 47-48.

There is no direct relationship discernable between regional or local unemployment levels and the intensity and nature of opposition since 2011. While there has been more unrest in Dhofar than al-Dakhliya, and this correlates with higher average unemployment levels in the former, this relationship does not hold between Sohar and al-Suwayq, nor explain why Salalah sustained thousands of protesters staging a peaceful sit-in for months whereas unrest in Dokum was limited to small, intense bouts of unrest despite similar levels of unemployment in 2010. Rather, this chapter contends that perceptions of inequality, driven by regional unemployment, benefits extracted by the rentier elite, and the influx of expatriates, was one of several important factors contributing to societal unrest in 2011.

Population growth between Omanis and expatriates is thus central to a perception of inequality. According to the 2010 Census, 89 percent of expatriates residing in Oman are active in the labour force.<sup>879</sup> When the expatriate population increases significantly in Omani regional areas, then, it is reasonable to assume this is due to work becoming available nearby. Figure 19 below outlines expatriate and Omani population growth between the 2003 and 2010 Census, as well as annual and total growth rates, in five Wilayats that are also close to major government investment projects:

**Figure 19: Omani and Expatriate Populations, 2003 and 2010.**

Wilayat and Region	Indicator	2003	2010
al-Dokum (al-Wusta Region)	Expat Pop.	839	7,397
	Omani Pop.	3,430	3,820
	Total Pop.	4,269	11,217
	% Expat	20%	66%
	Expat Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	36.50%	
	Omani Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	1.60%	
Salalah (Dhofar Region)	Expat Pop.	53,020	64,766
	Omani Pop.	103,510	107,804
	Total Pop.	156,530	172,570
	% Expat	34%	38%
	Expat Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	2.90%	
	Omani Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	0.58%	
Sohar (al-Batinah Region)	Expat Pop.	20,421	47,416
	Omani Pop.	83,891	92,590
	Total Pop.	104,312	140,006
	% Expat	20%	34%
	Expat Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	12.79%	

<sup>879</sup> National Centre for Statistics and Information, *khaṣā'is al-bāḥathīn 'an 'amal* (2015) 17.

	Omani Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	1.42%	
al-Liwa (al-Batinah Region)	Expatriate Pop.	2,776	8,546
	Omani Pop.	23,217	25,455
	Total Pop.	25,993	34,001
	% Expatriate	11%	25%
	Expatriate Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	17.43%	
	Omani Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	1.32%	
Nizwa (al-Dakhliya Region)	Expatriate Pop.	11,159	18,936
	Omani Pop.	57,626	65,592
	Total Pop.	68,785	84,528
	% Expatriate	16%	22%
	Expatriate Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	7.85%	
	Omani Annual Growth Rate 2003-2010	1.87%	

Source: Calculated from data available in Government of Oman, *General Census of Population, Housing, and Establishments: Final Results* (2010).

Of the Wilayats surveyed above, only in Nizwa was the numerical increase in Omani population between 2003 and 2010 larger than that of expatriates. In Liwa, Sohar, and Dokum, the expatriate population more than doubled over seven years, and in tiny Dokum the increase was so dramatic that it shifted the demography from a majority-Omani town to a majority-expatriate population. Even in Salalah, where the expatriate population grew only 4 percent, this still represented five times the annual growth rate of Omanis.

The influx of expatriate workers at the same time as citizen unemployment was increasing highlighted inequality and government corruption, particularly where wealth from mega-projects was seen to be accumulating among the ranks of the business and ruling elite. Writes Valeri:

As far as Suhar is concerned, it goes without saying that people welcomed the development of the port and free zone. However the transition within a few years from a semi-rural provincial town into the industrial capital of the country had dramatic effects on Suhar's social fabric...

The majority of the [Omani] Batina population did not benefit from the economic spin-offs. Many have actually experienced a fall in living standards. Inequalities have exploded, between pockets of wealth (including Blue City project...and luxury gated communities built in Ghadafan, Liwa and north of Suhar, reserved for the expatriate executives of industrial groups present on the port) and the rest of the area, which has been hard hit by all round cost increases (rents, equipment, consumption goods).<sup>880</sup>

<sup>880</sup> Valeri, "The Suhar Paradox".

During the Oman Debate 2011, H.E. Dr. Salem ben Nasser Al Ismaily, Chairman of the Public Authority for Investment Promotion & Export Development, noted the irony that Sohar, one of the main sites of state investment, was also one of the centres of protest in 2011, linking the development strategy directly with the unrest:

**HE Dr Salem:** We didn't expect that something like [the protests] will happen in Oman. Initially, we didn't think they were Omanis, when we discovered they were Omanis, we were still in denial. You know, over here, we live, eat and breathe conspiracy theories. So it was always somebody else doing it.

**Tim:** So it was all foreign inspired?

**HE Dr Salem:** That's what we felt, but they were Omanis. If you look at the city where it started in Sohar, ironically it had the largest investment of \$14bn and if you look at the unemployment rate for the youth it is 25 per cent. That is worse than [the] West Bank.

**Tim:** So the largest investment produced the largest unemployment?

**HE Dr Salem:** Absolutely. Something is incredibly wrong.<sup>881</sup>

As the discussion continued, another panelist attempted to claim that high unemployment in Sohar was a result of too many youth returning from work abroad, or that they were fisherman and thus adversely affected by the development of SPF. The moderator challenged this opinion, drawing out a more direct criticism of mega-projects such as SPF from Dr Salem:

**Tim:** Does that explain how the biggest investment produced the greatest unemployment?

**HE Dr Salem:** It could be one of the justifications but the real reason is that we started with capital intensive basic industries and they don't generate jobs and it takes time. Jobs creation happens once you start going into downstream industries.

Late rentierism relies on this type of development, the rationale being that it is most efficient to diversify into industries where petroleum provides a comparative advantage. The assumption, of course, is that downstream diversification into petrochemical and other industries will spur the development of linkages to other sectors of the economy.

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<sup>881</sup> Oman Economic Review, "Need for a Paradigm Shift".

Yet, as with SME development, the state's investment in capital-intensive basic industries has not yet resulted in the type or level of employment necessary to overcome barriers to Omani employment.

For Soharis, the practical outcome of Omani development strategies, particularly in the last decade, has been an influx of foreign workers, the establishment of major companies headed by state officials or private sector elites, often in partnership with international enterprises, at the same time as 1 in 4 Soharis active in the labour force have been unable to find work.<sup>882</sup> While the individual motivations for Sohari protesters were covered in Chapter Four, it is also worth highlighting that the three main sites of protest in Sohar were also symbolic sites of state investment and, to the protesters, inequality.

The first site of protest for the Sohari demonstrators was the Sohar branch of the Ministry of Manpower. As Chapter Four noted, demonstrations in Sohar focused heavily on employment, originating amongst a group of unemployed youth who went to the Sohar branch of the MOM to request help finding work. They claim they were assured of a meeting with Saif bin Muhammad al-Busaidi, then Director-General of the Directorate-General of Manpower in al-Batinah region, but, upon returning at the appointed time, he was absent and they were jeered at by the employees.<sup>883</sup> Feeling alienated by government, they staged a sit-in outside the MOM building: this was the first site of protest.

Upon being forcibly evacuated by police (at the branch director's request), the youths reorganised at the second site of protest, Sohar's Globe roundabout, opposite major supermarket chain Lulu's Hypermarket.<sup>884</sup> Lulu's Hypermarket was, to many protester, already a symbol of inequality in Oman. Yousuf Ali, an Indian national, was the managing director of Abu Dhabi-based EMKE Lulu Group, which owns the Lulu Hypermarket chain. The building and land where the supermarket was constructed was owned by Ali al-Maamari, then Minister of the Royal Office, who was one of three main government figures – the others being Ahmad bin Abdunabi Makki, then Minister

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<sup>882</sup> Another source of frustration among Soharis but also expressed at other sites of state investment, particularly Dokum, was the environmental impact of the SPF project, especially where it had required the relocation of village communities and traditional fishing industries. This issue is discussed in Valeri, "The Şuḥār Paradox".

<sup>883</sup> Author interviews with Sohari youth protesters, Oman 2014.

<sup>884</sup> Valeri, "The Şuḥār Paradox".

of the National Economy, and Maqbool bin Ali bin Sultan, then Minister of Commerce and Industry – denounced as corrupt during 2011 demonstrations. Sohari interviewees thus claimed the Lulu Hypermarket itself exemplified corrupt links between the merchant elite and the government, as well as highlighting inequality between expatriates and Omanis.<sup>885</sup>

On 26 February 2011, an estimated 500 Omanis gathered at the Globe roundabout, and by 27 February 1,000 to 2,000 protesters had amassed and clashed violently with police. The violence, particularly following the death of Abdulla al-Ghamlasi on 27 February, sparked immediate intensification of demonstrations across the country, and in Sohar spurred a blockade of the hypermarket, attacks on government buildings (including the Sohar branch of the MOM), and the emergence of protests at a third site along the Muscat-Dubai motorway.<sup>886</sup> This third site allowed demonstrators to block access to the SPF project.

Although wide-scale public demonstrations were halted by a crackdown in May 2011, unrest has continued in Sohar and occasionally smaller displays of dissatisfaction with poor living conditions and government corruption emerge, such as a June 2013 demonstration aimed at securing more jobs for Omanis at Sohar Port.<sup>887</sup>

The protests in Sohar thus centred around three symbols of state authority and inequality: first, the MOM and various Governor offices in Sohar and Liwa where, in the view of protesters, corrupt and ineffective government had resulted in high local unemployment; second, the Globe roundabout, not only a centrally-located space to gather but also located opposite the Sohar branch of Lulu Hypermarket, a symbol of inequality between Omanis and the expatriate and private sector elite; and third, the road and bridge leading out to Sohar Port, a site of massive state investment, yet which also formed a highly visible symbol of relative inequality. Far from these citizens of a 'rentier' state remaining complacent in the face of inequality, the disparity between citizens and expatriates, and between unemployed youths and well-connected ruling and business elites, has been a key aspect of Oman's post-2011 demonstrations.

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<sup>885</sup> Author interviews, Oman 2014.

<sup>886</sup> Saleh al-Shaibany, "Demands to Free Omani Activists," *The National* (3 April 2011) <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/demands-to-free-omani-activists> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>887</sup> See for example Mohammed al Belushi, "Sohar Job Seekers Want Preference in Hiring by Companies Near Port," *Muscat Daily* (2 June 2013) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Sohar-job-seekers-want-preference-in-hiring-by-companies-near-port-2azo> accessed 23 August 2015.

Comparing restive Sohar with the relative absence of unrest in Nizwa highlights not only lower levels of inequality, but also the importance of non-material factors. Nizwa did face small-scale student unrest around the university, including a highway blockade on 6 March 2011 to protest university fees, lack of textbooks, and poor facilities, but in general the Dakhliya region was quiescent relative to Dhofar, al-Batinah (or more specifically North Batinah, as the region in which Sohar is located became in 2011), and al-Sharqiyah (or specifically South al-Sharqiyah, also created in 2011).<sup>888</sup> Valeri posits that the relative absence of protests in interior Oman was due to the endurance of traditional social organisation, and better balancing of the frustrations of poorly managed modernisation. That Nizwa also has a burgeoning tourist industry with an emphasis on traditional crafts, and that the al-Dakhliya region in general has experienced lower levels of unemployment than the more restive regions has likely also contributed to the region's quiescence. Further, writes Valeri:

Both the mufti of Oman, who is an Ibadi from Dakhiliyah, and the Ibadi religious establishment are highly respected, and their statements since 1970, unfailingly in favor of the preservation of the social and political order, have hardly been contested. These factors, combined with the memory of the 2005 wave of arrests among Ibadi activists, help explain the absence of protests in Inner Oman. But in Sohar, Muscat, and elsewhere, the protests thrived, and the regime was forced to respond.<sup>889</sup>

Though, then, material inequality was a significant motivation for protesters in Sohar, non-material factors, such as the strength of existing social organisation, the attitudes of locally influential religious elites, and memories of previous crackdowns have served to preclude widespread unrest in al-Dakhliya region.

### **Conclusion: Implications for RST**

Oman is not unique in the Gulf in terms of late stage rentierism fostering structural issues that have impacted the effectiveness of the rentier bargain, though the state is less likely – in the view of both loyalist and reformist Omani interviewees – to deliberately discriminate between Omanis of differing religious, ethnic, or ideological backgrounds. In Bahrain, Louay Bahry claims: “it is clear that unemployment has disproportionately

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<sup>888</sup> Harvie9999, “Omani Student Protests Against the University of Nizwa March, 2011,” (7 March 2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zvn97F-EXI> accessed 23 August 2015; See also James Worrall, “Oman”.

<sup>889</sup> Marc Valeri, “Simmering Unrest and Succession Challenges in Oman”.



impacted the Shiite community, which did not benefit from the economic boom Bahrain enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s, when oil production was at its peak”.<sup>890</sup> In Saudi Arabia, the political activism of the Shia in the Eastern region is driven not only by a perception of social and religious repression, but also allegations of inequitable rent distribution, and in Kuwait, too, Farah al-Nakib documents how social and economic marginalisation of the *badū* (tribal Kuwaitis) led to their transformation from a traditionally loyalist body to the state’s main opposition.<sup>891</sup> The UAE and Qatar, though neither have faced widespread street protests since 2011, both experienced rumblings of discontent from conservative and Islamist groups concerned with the societal impact of the partial opening to globalisation central to late rentierism.<sup>892</sup> In all these cases, perceptions of inequality between citizens and expatriates, or between national groups, has fomented societal discord and revealed the potential to encourage political and material challenges to state authority.

In reaction to the threat of unrest in 2011, the Omani government – like all Gulf states – responded immediately to the expression of popular frustration. After creeping from a total disbursement of OMR 23.3 million in 2000 to OMR 37.7 million in 2010, government welfare payments more than doubled across the Sultanate between 2010 and 2011, and increased by another third between 2011 and 2012. Social security payments to Sohar, for example, grew from just under OMR 2 million in 2010 to OMR 4.6 million in 2011, and OMR 7 million in 2012.<sup>893</sup> The gradual implementation of Oman’s 2013 minimum wage increase had also started to produce results by late 2014, as displayed in Figure 20:

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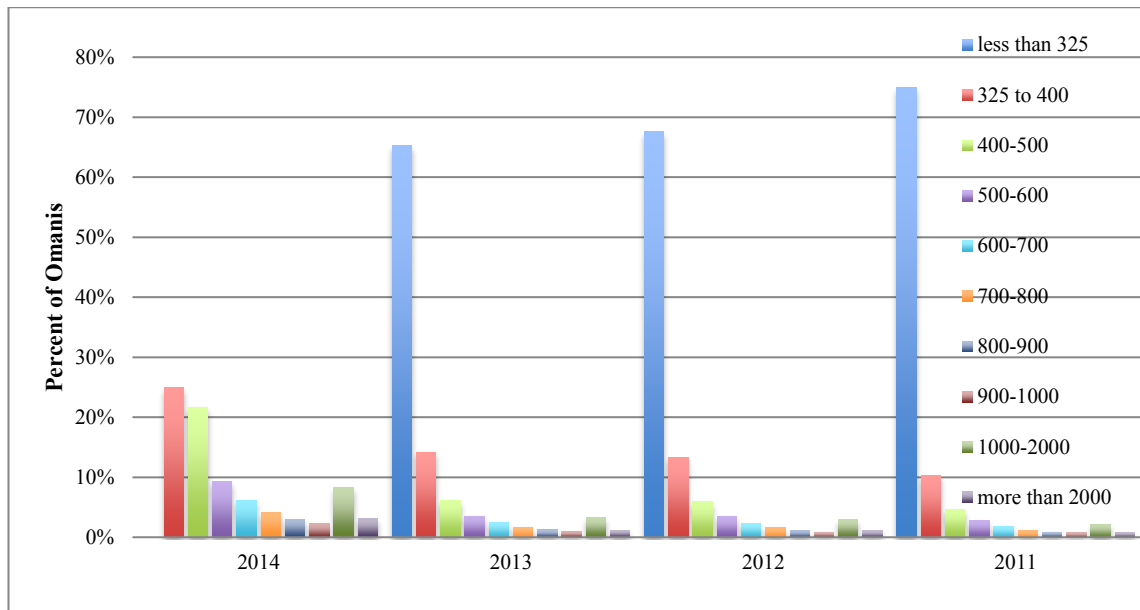
<sup>890</sup> Bahry, “The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain,” 137.

<sup>891</sup> Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*; Farah al-Nakib, “Revisiting Hadar and Badu in Kuwait: Citizenship, Housing, and the Construction of a Dichotomy,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014) 5-30.

<sup>892</sup> On the UAE, see Ingo Forstenlechner, Emilie Rutledge, and Rashed Salem al-Nuaimi, “The UAE, the ‘Arab Spring’ and Different Types of Dissent,” *Middle East Policy Council* 19:4 (Winter 2012) <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/uae-arab-spring-and-different-types-dissent> accessed 5 September 2015.

<sup>893</sup> See Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook* (2011 and 2014).

**Figure 20: Omani Private Sector Wage Levels, 2011 – 2015**



Source: Calculated from National Centre for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook*, 2013. Salaries shown in Omani Riyals.

Although Omanis remain concentrated at lower wage levels, the minimum wage increase has markedly affected the salary level of Omanis in the private sector, more than doubling the percentage within the OMR 400-500 salary range. The introduction of an OMR150 per month unemployment allowance is also a targeted distribution, intended to directly address the frustration of youths such as those who initiated protests in Sohar.

Yet, ultimately the rentier state – and specifically the late rentier development strategy – contributed to the emergence of Omani demonstrations. The government’s focus on infrastructure and mega-projects, a common strategy across the Gulf, did create employment, but not of sufficient quantity or type to overcome structural obstacles driving Omani unemployment. As a senior Omani economist noted: “Unless you direct your investment toward projects that require better skills and better training, you will have always a mismatch between your graduates who are aspiring for better jobs and your job opportunities that are being created”.<sup>894</sup>

Contrary to classic RST, then, inequality was critical to the emergence of popular unrest in Oman, especially in areas motivated more by rent-seeking than political challenges. That this inequality can be linked to the rent-driven development strategy is telling; this suggests that not only is inequality highly relevant to political life, but that the rentier

<sup>894</sup> Author interview, Oman 2013.

state can, over time, generate its own opposition. Though demonstrations motivated primarily by material inequality, such as those in Sohar, represent to a greater extent rent-seeking rather than a political challenge, they have nevertheless demonstrated a propensity to shift into the latter over time, and still require both political and material responses from the state. The state is thus not autonomous from such demands, and since 2011 Oman has made concerted efforts to alleviate the economic concerns of its citizens, as well as responding, albeit in a more limited way, to calls for political liberalisation.

Late rentierism requires a partial opening to globalisation that has not only contributed to the emergence of inequality, but also an increasing reliance on international 'branding' to support domestic economic development. Chapter Six turns to the international dimensions of the state-society relationship since 2011. State-society relations are not simply impacted by branding development strategies, but also affected by transnational forces, such as religious networks and transnational coalitions of human rights organisations. While Chapter Five has drawn especially from the experience of Oman, Chapter Six turns to Qatar and particularly Bahrain to examine how international pressure has impacted the domestic state-society relationship, revealing that rentier states are not nearly as insulated as traditionally suggested within the literature.

## Chapter 6 - The International Dimensions of State-Society Relations

RST does not adequately account for the international dimensions of state-society relations. This is especially problematic since, in some respects, rentierism leaves states *more* open to international variables; even those states that have created large sovereign wealth funds, or otherwise diversified their economy, remain dependent on global markets and foreign investment, particularly where they have diversified into financial services, tourism, or similar sectors.<sup>895</sup> The financial element of this dependence is not new; rentier states have long grappled with their exposure to volatility in international commodity markets, and weakening oil prices – causing the “fiscal crisis of the state”, as Luciani referred to it – is theorised as one of the few mechanisms that can cause a rentier state to reform.<sup>896</sup> Extant research on rents and international relations has also examined how rents enhance the state’s capacity to rapidly acquire sophisticated weaponry and fund an expansive security apparatus,<sup>897</sup> which impacts not only their foreign war-making capacity, but also the domestic state-society relationship.<sup>898</sup> The “repression effect”, as it was termed by Ross in 2001, has also proved an important element of strategies to strengthen international relationships, particularly with arms exporters such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.<sup>899</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War, and Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2013) 243 – 244.

<sup>896</sup> Luciani, “Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State, and Democratization”; More recent incarnations of this argument, for example, surround coverage of the recent fall in oil prices and implications for regime stability in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. See for example Steffen Hertog, “Oil Prices: Eventually the Gulf states Will Run Out of Power,” *LSE Middle East Center blog* (7 January 2015) <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2015/01/07/oil-prices-eventually-the-gulf-states-will-run-out-of-power/> accessed 2 January 2016; There is also still considerable debate over how, exactly, fiscal crisis affects a rentier state, see for example, Pete W. Moore, “Rentier Fiscal Crisis and Regime Stability: Business-State Relations in the Gulf,” *Comparative International Development* 37:1 (Spring 2002) 34 – 56.

<sup>897</sup> The GCC states combined have spent more than \$123 billion on arms from the US since 2010, making them a key destination for US arms exports. Not all purchases were aimed at external threats; in 2014 South Korea halted exports of tear gas to Bahrain amid allegations the misuse of tear gas to quell demonstrations had caused protester deaths. See BBC News, “South Korea Halts Bahrain Tear Gas Exports,” (8 January 2014) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25659108> accessed 3 January 2016; Roula Khalaf and James Drummond, “Gulf States in \$123bn US Arms Spree,” *Financial Times* (20 September 2010) <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ffd73210-c4ef-11df-9134-00144feab49a.html#axzz3mvvvMaOw> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>898</sup> Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change*, 220 – 224; F. Gregory Gause III, “Regional Influences on Experiments in Political Liberalization in the Arab World,” in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Vol. 1, Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

<sup>899</sup> Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?”; Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, 223 – 243; Giacomo Luciani, “Oil and Political Economy in the International Relations of the Middle East,” in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 85.

In a similar vein, extant research on the international political economy of oil has focused heavily on the link between oil wealth, external intervention, and violent conflict, with obvious implications for regime stability and state-society relations. Much of this literature draws from cross-national studies, or case studies of Sub-Saharan African states; in the Middle East, Iraq and Libya are considered key examples, whereas the Gulf states, perhaps due to their stability, remain less studied.<sup>900</sup> A recent trend in the literature, moreover, has been towards *debunking* the link between oil and conflict, finding that in some cases, especially those states with high resource wealth per capita (the category into which the GCC states fit), resource abundance actually *reduces* the likelihood of war.<sup>901</sup> This research represents an important attempt to bridge the gap between the oil-conflict argument from resource curse theory and RST, which emphasises the stabilising political effects of oil.<sup>902</sup>

While RST works focused on the Gulf region have, to some extent, highlighted the importance of transnational political and social networks,<sup>903</sup> the *consistent* role of external or transnational variables in shaping domestic state-society relations is only cursorily discussed; it is more often treated as a *deus ex machina* that intervenes in the domestic political economy on isolated occasions, as with the 2003 Iraq War and 2011 intervention in Libya, or as a product of the oil industry itself, as with the involvement of the UK and US in the oil-rich Middle Eastern states throughout much of the past century. The research on transnational networks, such as transnational Shia networks, is an important exception,<sup>904</sup> but, generally, Gause was correct in describing the literature

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<sup>900</sup> See for example James D. Fearon and David Laitin 2003, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97:1 (2003) 75 – 90; James D. Fearon, "Primary Commodities and Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:4 (2005) 483 – 507; Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2001); Collier and Hoefler, "Resource Rents, Governance, and Conflict"; Humphreys, "Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution"; Ross, "Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflict"; Hutchinson, "A Curse from God?"; Patey, "State Rules"; Philippe Le Billon, "Oil, Secession and the Future of Iraqi Federalism," *Middle East Policy* 22:1 (Spring 2015) 68 – 76.

<sup>901</sup> Christa N. Brunnschweiler and Erwin H. Bulte, "Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Resource Abundance, Dependence, and the Onset of Civil Wars," *Oxford Economic Papers* 61:4 (2009) 651-674; Jonathan DiJohn, "Oil Abundance and Violent Political Conflict: A Critical Assessment," *The Journal of Development Studies* 43:6 (2007) 961 – 986; Benjamin Smith, "Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960–1999," *American Journal of Political Science* 48:2 (April 2004) 232 – 246

<sup>902</sup> Matthias Basedau and Jann Lay's 2009 contribution was critical in this respect. See Basedau and Lay, "Resource Curse or Rentier Peace?" 774.

<sup>903</sup> Luciani, "Oil and Political Economy in the International Relations of the Middle East," 97; Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, 138 – 139.

<sup>904</sup> Jill Crystal's discussion of transnational Shia activism in Kuwait and Iraq following the 1978-79 Iranian Islamic Revolution is a good example of this. See Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 101 – 104.

on international relations in the Gulf as “rather meagre”.<sup>905</sup> Other regional cases, such as the overthrow of Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, with the aid of Western and Middle Eastern states (implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973), also highlight the centrality of international variables. As Altunışık argues:

[T]he Libyan case [specifically the overthrow of Qaddafi’s regime in 2011] also points to the importance of the international, a much neglected variable in RST. Although the uprising was widespread, it might not have been enough to topple the regime without external intervention. The Libyan case thus forces us to look for ways to incorporate the international into RST.<sup>906</sup>

Part of the issue stems from an inherent tension when trying to place oil rents as the formative variable of every aspect of state-society relations, while also taking adequate and consistent account of non-oil international and domestic variables. Currently, then, RST’s explanation of the impact of international and transnational variables is hindered by the core assumption that rents overpower any other political influence that exists within the rentier framework. The state-society relationship theorised within RST takes account of the potential for fiscal crisis caused by international commodity price volatility, but is hard pressed to explain the influence of transnational social and political movements, such as the Arab Spring.

This chapter addresses this gap, presenting three case studies of the role of international variables that were repeatedly referenced by citizen-interviewees asked to explain the international dimensions of their relationship with the state (or with society, if they were a public servant or member of the political elite). While Chapter Five focused primarily on Oman, this chapter draws two cases from the Bahraini Spring, and a further comparative case from Qatar, to evaluate both the transnational networks through which state and societal groups act at the international level, and how these activities are, or are not, effective in shifting domestic state-society relations.

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<sup>905</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 3.

<sup>906</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, “Rentier State Theory and the Arab Uprisings: An Appraisal,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 11:42 (Summer 2014) 85.

## **An Iranian Fifth Column? The Shi‘ite Crescent and GCC intervention in Bahrain**

One of the most visible recent examples of international variables impacting the domestic state-society relationship in the Gulf was the intervention of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) in the Bahraini Spring on 14 March 2011. These forces were ostensibly invited in response to a serious breakdown in law and order, yet their arrival also reflects state governance strategies designed to limit against potential foreign interference while simultaneously delegitimising the demonstrations as externally-driven and radical. Specifically, the GCC intervention represented a materialisation of the Shi‘ite Crescent ‘threat’, and highlights two conflicting narratives of the Bahraini Spring. The first, driven by conservative state factions and their loyalist allies, argues that the Bahraini Spring was fomented by Iran, through radical Bahraini opposition with ties to transnational Shi‘ite networks. As Kristin Diwan writes:

The GCC intervention changed the perception of the uprising. By the very act of intervening, it shifted the frame of reference from a domestic dispute to an international one, conveying plausibility to regime assertions of an Iranian threat. In the intervention was an implied conclusion: if the Saudi troops were needed to preserve the stability and security of the nation from a foreign threat, then those who supported uprising must be traitors.<sup>907</sup>

The second narrative is the response of Bahraini opposition to the first narrative, emphasising the indigenous Baḥārna identity and the domestic origins of the uprising. It primarily focuses on debunking the Shi‘ite Crescent idea, but also accuses the Bahraini government of pandering to Saudi Arabia by spreading sectarian rhetoric ultimately designed to portray Bahrain’s unrest as a conflict between Sunni and Shia, rather than a contestation between state and society for authority.

It is worth analysing these narratives in greater detail. From the state perspective, there were two major justifications for the intervention of GCC PSF. The first focused on the need to restore public order and limit violence.<sup>908</sup> There were, of course, very legitimate security concerns about the deterioration of law and order in 2011, particularly when

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<sup>907</sup> Diwan, “Royal Factions, Ruling Strategies, and Sectarianism in Bahrain,” 168.

<sup>908</sup> As examples of this justification, see Bahrain News Agency, “GCC Troops Arrive in Bahrain,” (14 March 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/449899> accessed 4 January 2016; Gulf Daily News, “GCC Backing for Bahrain,” (14 March 2011) <http://archives.gdnonline.com/NewsDetails.aspx?date=04/07/2015&storyid=301763> accessed 11 December 2015.

protests spread outside the Shia villages and Pearl roundabout into Riffa, a loyalist district and home to the royal family, and throughout Bahrain Financial Harbour (which houses, among other things, the Bahrain Stock Exchange). By 13 March 2011, demonstrators were camped at Pearl roundabout, at Bahrain Financial Harbour, and obstructing traffic on the King Faisal Highway, struggling violently with police when the thoroughfare was forcibly reopened.<sup>909</sup> There were also major clashes at the University of Bahrain; shops in al-Busaiteen, Jad Ali, Hamad Town, and Manama had been vandalised or forced to close; continued unrest at Salmaniya hospital; and reports of armed gangs roaming many areas of Bahrain.<sup>910</sup>

Yet Bahraini state media stressed that the PSF would protect key installations, particularly the oil fields in the south of the country, rather than participating in the crackdown on demonstrations that followed.<sup>911</sup> The initial force was also relatively small, consisting of around 1,200 units from Saudi Arabian royal guard, and 500-600 police from the UAE.<sup>912</sup> These features of the intervention suggest that, while instability may have prompted a symbolic show of unity from the GCC, the primary purpose of their arrival was not to restore domestic law and order, at least not directly.<sup>913</sup>

The second key justification for the GCC intervention from state and loyalist actors was to limit the possibility of Iranian involvement in fomenting unrest. This was an important motivation; the Peninsula Shield force was originally envisaged as a defence against an external, rather than internal, aggressor, and their mobilisation thus required emphasis on the external foundations of unrest.<sup>914</sup> As Commander of the GCC Peninsula Shield Forces, Mutlaq bin Salem al-Azima, explained to *Asharq al-Awsat*:

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<sup>909</sup> The narrative of events here is drawn from Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 123 – 143.

<sup>910</sup> The geography of Bahrain determined where many of these checkpoints lay. On 13 March 2011, for example, a checkpoint was set up at either end of Hamad town, one at Roundabout 22 just north of the University of Bahrain, and the other at Roundabout 5, near one of the western entrances to Hamad Town.

<sup>911</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “A Year of Testing, a Year of New Opportunities,” (20 March 2012) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/499676> accessed 4 January 2016; Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 386.

<sup>912</sup> The force later expanded to approximately 5,000, including Kuwaiti naval vessels monitoring activity off the coast of Bahrain, and additional units from the UAE and Qatar.

<sup>913</sup> See Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*.

<sup>914</sup> Ulrichsen notes the role of transnational religious networks, particularly al-Dawa and Shirazi Shia networks, in driving a cognitive shift in understandings of security, and highlights Gulf “awareness of the linkages between internal and external security”. See Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, “Internal and External Security in the Arab Gulf States,” *Middle East Policy Council* 16:2 (Summer 2009) <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/internal-and-external-security-arab-gulf-states>; Glenn P. Kuffel, “The Gulf Cooperation Council’s Peninsula Shield Force,” *Naval War College, Newport RI* (8 February 2000) 1 – 34.



We have repeatedly confirmed that our mission is to secure Bahrain's vital and strategically important military infrastructure from any foreign interference. Everybody knows that when a state becomes preoccupied with its internal security, this increases its need to secure its international borders... This is our role... [O]ur forces did not come [to Bahrain] due to the internal affairs in the country, but for a more important reason [to protect the borders].<sup>915</sup>

Likewise, in a press release by the Bahrain News Agency, GCC General-Secretary Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani justified the intervention by claiming: "The forces have been dispatched in Bahrain following the criminal plot, supported from abroad, to subvert Bahrain's security and stability and topple its legitimate political regime".<sup>916</sup> Loyalist interviewees also strongly subscribed to this narrative, claiming that protesters were heavily influenced by Iran, and that al-Wefaq "wants an Islamic state just like Iran" and "wants Bahrain to be within Iran's sphere of influence".<sup>917</sup>

It is difficult to appreciate the sense of threat that drove the GCC intervention without understanding the Shi'ite Crescent narrative itself. As noted in Chapter Three, the Shi'ite Crescent refers to the idea of a transnational Shia threat, where clerical leaders in Iran manipulate foreign Shia communities in order to support Iranian Islamic Revolutionary ideals and foment discord within Sunni-ruled states.<sup>918</sup> The narrative, of course, glosses over sub-sect differences, nationalist sentiments, and other cleavages that complicate the formation of a cohesive transnational movement.<sup>919</sup> A particular fear shaping the Bahraini-Saudi interpretation of the Shi'ite Crescent is the transnational Baḥārna (adj. Baḥrānī), community, indigenous to both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia's Eastern region, specifically the villages near Qatif, al-Ahsa, and Dammam. As noted in Chapter Two, the majority of the Baḥārna are Twelver Shia, although the community is as much an ethnic or indigenous community as a religious group. The distinction

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<sup>915</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, "A Talk with Peninsula Shield Force Commander Mutlaq bin Salem al-Azima," (28 March 2011) <http://english.aawsat.com/2011/03/article55247010/a-talk-with-peninsula-shield-force-commander-mutlaq-bin-salem-al-azima> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>916</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "Dr Al Zayani Slams Blatant Iranian Interference," (2 April 2011) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/451454> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>917</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain 2013 - 2014.

<sup>918</sup> See further information and a critique of this narrative in Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 40 – 49.

<sup>919</sup> A good example is the conflation of the Zaīdī Huthī rebel movement in Yemen with Iranian regional ambitions. This argument rests on the argument that the Huthīs are *pretending* to be Zaīdīs but are actually Twelvers. Debates over the Zaīdī or Twelver status of Huthīs is heated and occurs on the news pages of regional think tanks, personal pages, and in comments sections of academic articles. See an example of this rhetoric in Ali Saeed, "Houthis Look to Establish Shiite State Along Saudi Border," *Yemen Times* (11 February 2012) <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1524/report/369/Houthislook-to-establish-Shiite-state-along-Saudi-border.htm> accessed 4 January 2016.

between Baḥrānī and ‘Ajamī Bahrainis, Shia families of Iranian origin who migrated to the Gulf over the past few centuries, is also overlooked within the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative, since it is the link between Bahrain and Saudi Shia communities (and, assumedly, between both communities and Iran) that is of importance.<sup>920</sup>

The Shi‘ite Crescent is also as much – arguably more – a reflection of geo-political struggles between Saudi Arabia and Iran that intensified following the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. Certainly, the 2011 uprising was not the first time Iran has been accused of undermining the stability of states in the Arabian Peninsula, nor the first time Saudi Arabia has demonstrated a sense of security interdependence with Bahrain, particularly where it fears Bahraini unrest could spread into Saudi Arabia’s restive Eastern Province.<sup>921</sup> Iran’s historical claim to ownership in Bahrain, reiterated sporadically throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, has kept the Al Khalifa regime nervously alert to any Iranian interference.<sup>922</sup> The Iranian state officially dropped their claim to Bahrain in the 1970s following an UN-administered referendum, in which the vast majority of Bahrainis (Sunni and Shia alike) rebuffed Iran’s claim in favour of independence. Yet Iran has continued to voice an interest in Bahrain, and tensions occasionally re-emerge over provocative statements by independent clerics, officials in the southern states, or even public speeches by Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini.<sup>923</sup> Violent attacks by transnational Shia groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s, most notably a 1981 coup attempt in Bahrain by an Iran-linked Shirazi group, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB), represented to Bahraini loyalist and state groups a manifestation of the Shi‘ite Crescent, and has shaped narratives of the Shi‘ite Crescent as applied to Bahrain since then.<sup>924</sup> Yet, again, the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative

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<sup>920</sup> The Baḥārna narrative was covered in Chapter Two, and is related to a nativist interpretation of the 2011 uprisings, which describes the al-Khalifa family as ‘invaders’, and the Bahraini opposition as ‘natives’.

<sup>921</sup> See for example Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*; Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*; Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013); Laurence Louër, “Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36:2 (2013) 245 – 260.

<sup>922</sup> See a good history of Iranian interference in Bahrain in Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi‘a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006) 54.

<sup>923</sup> See for example Al Arabiya News, “Bahrain Summons Iranian Envoy in Protest of Supreme Leader’s Statements,” (23 November 2015) <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/11/28/Bahrain-summons-Iranian-envoy-in-protest-of-supreme-leader-s-statements-.html> accessed 3 January 2016.

<sup>924</sup> The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran coincided with multiple violent events from Gulf-based Shia transnational groups, including a series of bombing attacks in Kuwait, an uprising in and around Qatif in Saudi Arabia, and the attempted coup in Bahrain in 1981. Some of these events were linked to al-Dawa activism, a movement linked to Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq which spread through the Gulf in the 1960s and 1970s, and others to the Shirazi transnational movement, formed in the 1970s under the spiritual leadership of Muhammad Mahdī al-Shirazi. Interestingly, it was not Bahrain’s rural Shia

omits distinctions between different Shia transnational groups, and downplays the regular participation of Sunni and secular groups in protests throughout Bahrain's history. As Munira Fakhro, the Vice President of secular Waad, noted of the 1994-1999 unrest:

The authorities played their part intelligently by dividing the movement and giving it a sectarian complexion, thereby concentrating on the Shi'i element and ignoring Sunni participation...The authorities persisted in their accusations that there exists a Shi'i inspired plot to overthrow the regime, and insisted there is a Hezbollah underground organization in Bahrain. They also accused Iran of involvement in the plot by supplying the movement with arms and money. So far they have not produced the evidence to support the case.<sup>925</sup>

In a further challenge to the state narrative of the 1990s unrest, Fakhro also notes that, throughout the entire 1994-99 intifada, the 'Ajamī Shia community, which comprised 10 percent of Bahrain's population, "remained neutral and silent (perhaps based on advice from Iran), and this enraged the ethnic Arab Shi'i".<sup>926</sup> This highlights, again, the importance of keeping in mind cleavages within opposition that problematise notions of a cohesive movement intent on overthrowing the al-Khalifa monarchy and installing a regime loyal to Iran.

Despite the weaknesses of the Shi'ite Crescent narrative, it re-emerged as a prominent governance strategy during the 2011 Bahraini protests. As Matthiesen writes:

The regime tried very hard to link the 2011 protests to the 1981 coup plot, going as far as reading for hours on Bahrain television from clandestine publications from the 1980s to make the point that Iran together with the IFLB had plotted the 2011 'coup' for three decades...the regime even withdrew the citizenship of thirty-one Bahrainis in November 2012 under the pretext that they were still members of the IFLB, even though they were clearly activists from other Shia groups and not affiliated with the Shirazis.<sup>927</sup>

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villagers who initiated efforts to import the Iranian Revolution in 1979, but rather largely urban Shia who followed Hadi al-Mudarrisi, an Iraqi Shirazi cleric who was granted Bahraini citizenship in 1974. It was al-Mudarrisi's movement that formed the IFLB, which was responsible for the coup attempt in 1981. See Diwan, "Royal Factions, Ruling Strategies, and Sectarianism in Bahrain," 153; Hasan Tariq al-Hasan, "The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981," 607; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 41.

<sup>925</sup> Munira Fakhro, "The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment," in *The Persian Gulf at the Millenium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security, and Religion*, ed. Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 182.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid, 183-184.

<sup>927</sup> Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 41.

To counter the Shi'ite Crescent idea and support their own narrative of the unrest, opposition interviewees cited examples where the Bahraini state had demolished mosques, most notably the Amir Mohammed Mohammed Barbagi (al-Barbaghi) Mosque, bulldozed on 17 April 2011.<sup>928</sup> For Bahraini opposition, its destruction signified a symbolic retaliation to Shia political activism in the Pearl roundabout, and also highlights the contested nature of Baḥārna identity, al-Khalifa authority, and Bahrain's relationship with Saudi Arabia. As a Bahraini human rights advocacy group noted:

Built in 1549, al-Barbaghi stood as a symbol of Shia Islam's role in Bahrain's history and predated the arrival of the al-Khalifa family to Bahrain by more than 200 years. The mosque also held the tomb of Ameer Mohammed al Barbaghi, a historically important Shia religious scholar. Al-Barbaghi's location along the route from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain is significant, because some Bahrainis have suggested that the destruction of Shia mosques was encouraged by Saudi officials who wanted to erase Shia heritage from the most visible locations.<sup>929</sup>

Bahraini opposition interviewees also pointed to more indirect actions by the state that, they claim, reinforce a sectarian understanding of the Bahrain Uprising, such as the tolerance of conservative Sunni preachers at a time when Shia clerics were being detained for politicised sermons. On 14 January 2014, for example, PM Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman met with a group of Bahraini Twitter users and the Minister of State for Telecommunications, Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed al-Khalifa, and "praised the efforts of those who use modern technology and means of communication to defend Bahrain's ruling system and society", "call[ing] upon all twitter people to use social networks to defend Bahrain" against "those who allow themselves to be used by foreign sides against the nation".<sup>930</sup> Among the attendees was Khalid Burshaid, who tweets under the handle @KhalidBurshaid and has repeatedly used sectarian language, including, on various appearances on conservative show *Ṣafā*, referring to Bahrain's Shia community

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<sup>928</sup> This emerged repeatedly in interviews with members of all Shia-dominated political groups, but has also been covered in published works. See for example Maytham al-Salman, "Sectarian Tensions Rise in Bahrain Amid Mosque Attacks," *Bahrain Interfaith Center* (23 July 2013) <http://bahraininterfaith.org/wp/sectarian-tensions-rise-in-bahrain-amid-mosque-attacks/> accessed 3 January 2016.

<sup>929</sup> Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, *Apart in their own land: Government Discrimination against the Shia in Bahrain*, Vol. 1 (February 2015) 24.

<sup>930</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "HRH Premier Calls for the Need to Use Social Networks to Defend the Nation," (14 January 2014) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/597534> accessed 3 January 2016.

as “Bahrain’s Ku Klux Klan”.<sup>931</sup> Opposition also noted the disparity between the state’s inaction in response to calls for violence against protesters by Sunni politicians, such as a January 2012 tweet from former MP Shaikh Mohammed Khalid calling on Bahrainis to “run [protesters] over and keep going because you are in a country where the law allows you to strike and crush them”,<sup>932</sup> and the arrest of secular activist Nabeel Rajab over a tweet in which he claimed: “many #Bahrain men who joined #terrorism & #ISIS came from security institutions and those institutions were the first ideological incubator”.<sup>933</sup> “There has been an orchestrated campaign to promote the Sunni Salafi intolerance against Shia,” claimed an opposition interviewee, citing the example of a conference held in coordination with a Kuwaiti Salafi society which brought hundreds of speakers from different parts of the Islamic world to discuss “one message: that is, how to counter, they say, ‘Iran’, how to counter rāfiḍa.<sup>934</sup> Rejection, rāfiḍa means the rejectionists, that means the Shia. And this was covered on TV, it was covered in the media”.<sup>935</sup>

The hardening of sectarian rhetoric was thus not restricted to the elite level. New terminology, describing protesters as “Safawis”, a derogative reference to the Safavid Persians, and “al-fi’a al-ḍāla” (“the deviant sect”), previously used in Saudi Arabia to denote fundamentalists suspected of terrorism, was now employed regularly in Bahraini media, particularly in *al-Waṭan*, a paper associated with the al-Khawalid faction.<sup>936</sup> The

<sup>931</sup> See for example @Khalidburshaid, *Twitter* <https://twitter.com/khalidburshaid> accessed 4 January 2016; ṣafā al-fiḍā’ iyya, “ḥamala jund al-fārūq - ‘āshura’ fī al-baḥrayn bayn al-sh‘ā’er al-dīniyya w’al-waḥīf al-siyyāsī – khālid būrshayd,” *YouTube* (23 November 2013) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_jv4OjCO4U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_jv4OjCO4U) accessed 4 January 2016; Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, *Apart in their own land: Government Discrimination against the Shia in Bahrain*, Vol. 2 (September 2015) 18.

<sup>932</sup> Al-Akhbar, “Ex-Bahrain MP Tweets for Killing of Protesters,” (9 January 2012) <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/3162> accessed 7 August 2016. Far from distancing themselves from such comments, Mohammed Khalid maintains an ongoing relationship with the Bahraini regime, and was received alongside his son, Ammar Mohammed Khalid, by Deputy Premier Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa in August 2015. See Bahrain News Agency, “Deputy Premier Presented with Book,” (6 August 2015) <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/680724> accessed 4 January 2016; see also Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 60. Shaikh Mohammed Khalid himself tweets @boammar, see @boammar, *Twitter* <https://twitter.com/boammar?lang=en> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>933</sup> See Nabeel Rajab, “Why is Bahrain’s Government Afraid of a Tweet?” *Foreign Policy* (9 April 2015) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/09/why-is-bahrains-government-afraid-of-a-tweet-nabeel-rajab-arrest/> accessed 7 August 2016; The original tweet is available in @NabeelRajab, “Many #Bahrain Men Who Joined #terrorism & #ISIS Came From Security Institutions and those Institutions Were the First Ideological Incubator,” *Twitter* (28 September 2014 – 3.55am) <https://twitter.com/NABEELRAJAB/status/516179409720852480> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>934</sup> Rāfiḍa is a pejorative term implying the rejection of Islamic authority, typically used by conservative Salafis to refer to Shia Muslims.

<sup>935</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>936</sup> Diwan, “Royal Factions, Ruling Strategies, and Sectarianism in Bahrain,” 170; see for example the recurring columns by Sawsan al-Shaer, and other articles describing the “systematic Shia terrorism” in Sawsan al-Shaer, “shī’ a al-’imām. hal yakūnūn thumnā li’ltaqārib al-’irānī al-khalījī?,” *al-Waṭan* (4

reinvigoration of the Bahraini Sunni community, combined with deliberate efforts to incite sectarianism, such as the allegations made in the al-Bandar report (noted in Chapter Two), highlight the importance of these international dynamics. As Diwan notes, transnational influence from Saudi Wahhabi ideology was “no longer restricted to the personal agreements of the tribal elite, such as were managed by Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman. The Sunni counter-mobilization against the Pearl Uprising, nurtured by the Sunni empowerment strategy of the Khawalid, opened a broader conduit for influence through civil society”.<sup>937</sup> A government advisor affiliated with the CP faction iterated a similar view, noting that Sunni political societies were “not keen” on making political concessions during reconciliation processes, and that this, combined with the propensity for al-Wefaq to increase their demands every time an agreement looked promising, contributed to the failure of state-sponsored reconciliation negotiations.<sup>938</sup>

At the same time, to claim that there were no extant links between the Bahraini opposition and Iran would be misleading. Though they formed only a small minority, Shirazi supporters and other groups with links to Iran were present at the Pearl roundabout as part of Bahrain’s opposition. The most obvious example of this is Amal, the Shirazi society founded by followers of Iraqi cleric Hadi al-Mudarrisi and his brother Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi.<sup>939</sup> There was also evidence of a pro-Iranian Hezbollah group known as Khat al-Imam, which emerged out of the al-Dawa political movement.<sup>940</sup> In early 2011 Bahraini Shirazis projected video of Hadi al-Mudarrisi calling for revolution in Bahrain onto large screens in Pearl roundabout; his presence was later used by state media to emphasise Iran’s role in fomenting domestic unrest.<sup>941</sup>

There are also links between Shia transnational networks and the major opposition societies such as al-Wefaq. Shaikh Isa Qasem, for example, is associated with the Khat al-Imam strand of political activism, as are street opposition groups such as Haq and

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December 2013) <http://www.alwatannews.net/Document.ashx?ID=105691&CMD=view> accessed 4 January 2016; Hisham al-Zayani, “ḥāṣertem <<dā’esh>> wa’tarktem ’irhāb <<al-ḥuwwāsh>> 2,” *al-Waṭan* (30 July 2015) <http://www.alwatannews.net/Document.ashx?ID=205418&CMD=view> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>937</sup> Diwan, “Royal Factions, Ruling Strategies, and Sectarianism in Bahrain,” 171.

<sup>938</sup> Author interview, Bahrain.

<sup>939</sup> By 2001 they officially had no links with Hadi al-Mudarrisi, see Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*.

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>941</sup> *Ibid.*

Wefaa.<sup>942</sup> Shaikh Ali Salman, by comparison, was previously associated with the Bahrain Freedom Movement (ḥarakat ‘aḥrār al-baḥraīn al-islāmiyya, hereafter BFM, which also has roots in al-Dawa), yet has repeatedly called for Iran to stop meddling in Bahraini domestic affairs. Writes Matthiesen: “if one directly asks Wifaqis, they will respond that yes, I am originally Hizbullah or yes, I am originally al-Dawa”.<sup>943</sup> Yet, he cautions, “that does not mean that al-Wifaq’s agenda is firmly in line with Iranian regional ambitions, or that all of al-Wifaq is Hizbullah,” as the state narrative claims.<sup>944</sup>

State and loyalists commonly support the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative by claiming that the existence of links between Shia clerics and religious leaders in Iran means protesters ultimately follow Iranian clerical authority.<sup>945</sup> Yet, as Wehrey writes: “this exclusive focus on clerical authority as a determinant and driver of Shia activism, often mirrored in some outside analyses, is misplaced”.<sup>946</sup> For example, since 2011 the fragmentation between formal opposition and street activists (discussed in Chapter Four) has also impacted the appeal of Shia clerics such as Isa Qasem as sources of authority. Wehrey quotes a 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist explaining why many youth downplay Isa Qasem’s authority in favour of imprisoned leaders such as Hassan Mushaima (Haq), Abdulwahhab Hussein (Wafaa), and Abdulhadi al-Khawaja (BCHR): “I don’t like the clerics; they belittle the February 14 movement as just kids. These clerics say that ‘we [the clerics] own the streets.’ But actually the February 14 movement does”.<sup>947</sup> This rejection of clerical authority should not be taken as inevitable – Chapter Four quoted another 14th February activist citing one of Isa Qasem’s sermons as justification for why youth could use Molotov cocktails (i.e. violence) to ‘defend’ women and children – yet it does suggest that clerical authority is far from absolute, and underlines the importance of examining alternate sources of political unrest.

It is not only direct links to foreign clerics that supposedly signifies potential membership in Bahrain’s Fifth Column; the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative has also been used to depict the activism of a diverse range individuals as a cohesive campaign to spread violence and terrorism. In 2013, ‘Wanted’ posters were spread through social

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<sup>942</sup> International Crisis Group, “Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III),” 10.

<sup>943</sup> Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 45.

<sup>944</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>945</sup> The focus on clerical networks as evidence of Iranian involvement in the IFLB is the central argument in al-Hasan, “The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981”.

<sup>946</sup> Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 96.

<sup>947</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

media and posted throughout Bahrain by three government-oriented NGOs, grouping together individuals such as Maryam al-Khawaja (BCHR), Jalila al-Salman (Bahrain Teacher's Union), and Rula al-Saffar (a nurse from Salmaniya associated with advocacy for incarcerated health professionals), despite the goals and manner of their political activism being hugely different.<sup>948</sup> The Appendix includes two examples of these posters, revealing that the names and pictures of these individuals (and the others cited above) have been pasted onto identical posters, with no attempt to distinguish between their differing networks or nature of their political activism. "He is not a human rights activist!" one poster claims of Hussain Jawad, son of Mohammed Jawad (see Figure 8 in Chapter Four) and head of the European-Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR). "He is a political activist and a core part of the Bahraini opposition with their roots in extremist groups like the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain [IFLB], the Islamic Action Society and the Bahrain Freedom Movement".<sup>949</sup> It is worth examining these claims in greater detail to highlight how the Shi'ite Crescent has been used to delegitimise opposition. The link between Jawad and the IFLB, for example, is likely based on Jawad's connection to the BCHR and, through that, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. Al-Khawaja, in turn, was part of the IFLB in the 1980s, yet since his return to Bahrain has publicly eschewed violent and intervention by foreign nations in the politics of Bahrain.<sup>950</sup> More importantly, other members of the BCHR, such as Nabeel Rajab, are secular, and the BCHR overall espouses secular rhetoric focused explicitly on human rights abuses, not the type of revolutionary rhetoric or Islamist goals that characterised the IFLB.<sup>951</sup> The demands of the BCHR are framed by nationalist concerns, using the international language of the human rights community. This is not unusual for opposition societies in the Gulf. As Ulrichsen argues: "most Shiite organisations and parties in the GCC continued to regard the nation-state as their primary point of reference when articulating demands for reform. They thereby remained rooted in their domestic context and held a far more nuanced attachment to trans-national loyalties than supposed by suspicious ruling elites".<sup>952</sup> Ultimately, describing BCHR activities as driven by Iran, based on the former membership of a

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<sup>948</sup> See further coverage and a full list of targeted individuals in Gulf Digital News, "Push to Name and Shame 'Hate Peddlers'," (23 November 2013) <http://archives.gdnonline.com/NewsDetails.aspx?date=04/07/2015&storyid=365424> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>949</sup> See full document in the Appendix.

<sup>950</sup> Author interviews with members of Bahrain's human rights community affiliated with the BCHR, Bahrain and UK, 2013-2014.

<sup>951</sup> See examples of IFLB rhetoric in al-Hasan "The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981".

<sup>952</sup> Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf*, 44.



senior member in the IFLB, overlooks all of the BCHR's activities that *do not* fit the Shi'ite Crescent narrative.

Bahraini opposition interviewees, for their part, unilaterally rejected the idea that Iran was fomenting unrest in Bahrain, especially through the mainstream opposition groups. An opposition-aligned journalist did admit that there were probably some elements linked to Iran operating in Bahrain, but maintained they had no role in mainstream Bahraini opposition, and were not driving the uprising.<sup>953</sup> A 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition activist, too, scoffed when asked whether Iran had any involvement in their movement. "It's all a national Bahraini movement here", he said.<sup>954</sup>

Participants in the 2011 unrest argued their activism was part of a long history of opposition in Bahrain. "My grandfather was part of the reform movement in the 1950s", said Ali Abdulemam, stressing that this means demands for reform predate the Iranian revolution. "We have a history in Bahrain".<sup>955</sup> Interviewees also noted that state portrayals of unrest as externally-driven have a similarly long history, such as attempts during the 1950s movement to label protesters as communists and link them to external agents rather than, in the view of one interviewee, "admit Bahrainis could oppose their own government".<sup>956</sup>

Interviewees also emphasised their national identity and longstanding connection to Bahrain, drawing from nativist rhetoric based on the Baḥārna identity. This was not confined to any particular opposition group or faction but was a common trend across radical, mainstream, secular, and religious opposition groups. "My family has been here longer than the al-Khalifas", argued one interviewee, who described himself as politically independent and associated more with the human rights activists than any political society.<sup>957</sup> "We built the country", a Bahraini youth formerly aligned with Waad said. "You call us traitors...but we are the Bahrainis".<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>953</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>954</sup> Author interview with member of 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>955</sup> Author interview with Ali Abdulemam, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>956</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>957</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>958</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013. This interviewee later clarified he did not think the al-Khalifa family were *not* Bahrainis, since they had now lived in the country for over two centuries, but was rather frustrated at the lack of acknowledgement from the state that the Bahraini opposition was home-grown and that the origins of the unrest were domestic, not foreign.

Other Bahrainis criticised demonstrators who used symbols or made references to religious figures who could be linked with the Shi'ite Crescent narrative. Mansoor al-Jamri, editor-in-chief of *al-Wasat*, was particularly critical of the Shirazis and their broadcasting of Hadi al-Mudarrisi's views in Pearl roundabout. He argued: "The *shirazis* are not key in the protests, they represent a minority, but their political views and activities in the roundabout are divisive and – together with Hadi al-Mudarrisi's speeches from abroad – may well lead to a confrontation with the government".<sup>959</sup>

The mainstream opposition societies have devoted considerable effort to debunking the Shi'ite Crescent narrative. On 14 March, reports spread that al-Wafaq Secretary General Shaikh Ali Salman had claimed he would request Iranian assistance in response to the GCC intervention. On the same day, he issued a press release rejecting those claims as "fallacious and baseless", and declaring that he "rejected all forms of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of Bahrain".<sup>960</sup> The best summary of the mainstream opposition view on the Shi'ite Crescent emerges from the following excerpt from an interview with two Bahrainis, the first a moderate Shia cleric (Speaker 1) and the second a senior member of secular political society Waad (Speaker 2). When asked whether Iran had any involvement in the protests since 2011, they responded:

S1: This is something very important. And since I'm wearing a turban I think it's good to hear it from me. We refuse to have any intervention from Saudi Arabia or Iran. We are *Bahrainis*. However, we were Shias before the Iranians were!

S2: And we voted against joining Iran in 1970!

S1: And we voted against joining Iran.

S2: And this is still our position.

S1: And until today, if any voice calls [for joining Iran], the Shias have vowed to every standstead in this country to take a position for whoever says that Bahrain is part of Iran or part of any other country: We are Bahrainis and we refuse, I mean this frame is in itself the new sectarian insult to more the 50 percent of nationals over here. How can you tell us this? I mean, if I look at my history for instance, my father was in prison for calling for democracy in 1961. My uncle was imprisoned in the movement of 1954. My grandfather, my – [interviewee pauses and

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<sup>959</sup> Quoted in Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 39, see also 56. Another founder of *al-Wasat* was Abd al-Karim Fakhrawi, an Ajami Shia and businessman whose death in April 2011 was attributed by the BICI report to "torture while in the custody of the NSA [National Security Agency]". See Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 244f.

<sup>960</sup> Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 135.

continues quietly] – we’ve been calling for democracy for decades and decades in this land. Nothing has changed. But today the government sees that the best way to deal with this is to frame us in a sectarian frame, which is linked to Iran. Iran is not our role model. We are looking for a democratic civil state.<sup>961</sup>

And later in the same interview:

S1: There was absolutely no Iranian involvement [in the protests]. However, if you tell me that the Iranian media manipulates what’s happening in Bahrain for their own political agenda, that’s possible. But that does not mean that there’s Iranian – we refuse to have Iranian involvement in Bahrain. We are willing to shout that out, in front of everyone: ‘we refuse to have Iranian involvement in Bahrain.’ What else could we do? We’ve shown that we are free of their influence, and our Western friends believe that. But the problem is that the government needs to save itself, and one of their tactics is portraying us as manipulated by Iran.<sup>962</sup>

Ultimately, with little concrete evidence to substantiate the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative, but widespread and entrenched suspicion among loyalists, this thesis adopts the position taken in the BICI report, which thoroughly investigated both state and societal claims during the early 2011 protests and found no evidence of Iranian involvement in the 2011 unrest.<sup>963</sup> It is important to note that some government interviewees, particularly those associated with the reformist faction, did not personally ascribe to the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative. “That was clearly brought out in the Bassiouni report as well”, explained a senior government adviser. “Iran very clearly took advantage of the situation a number of weeks later, but it was *not* the prime instigator or the prime reason why [the uprising] happened”.<sup>964</sup>

After martial law was lifted on 1 June 2011, GCC forces began to depart later that month, and Bahrain entered a (brief) period of reconciliation.<sup>965</sup> Yet their intervention had a powerful impact on domestic state-society relations in Bahrain. “From 2011 we lost our sovereignty”, bemoaned an independent opposition interviewee, now living in the UK.<sup>966</sup> “Somehow Bahrain became a proxy for conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran”, said another interviewee upon being asked for his opinion on the GCC

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<sup>961</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>962</sup> Ibid.

<sup>963</sup> Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*.

<sup>964</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

<sup>965</sup> Kenneth Katzman, “Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service* (26 October 2015) 6.

<sup>966</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

intervention, maintaining that “a contentious relationship between actors in the region is good for no one”.<sup>967</sup> A Bahraini academic who declared himself neutral on the Bahraini Spring took a more philosophical view on the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative and its impact on Bahraini politics, noting that the social construction of the Bahraini Spring as a sectarian conflict could be a self-fulfilling prophecy, or, as he put it: “unreal things are real by their consequences”.<sup>968</sup>

Saudi support to the embattled al-Khalifa monarchy has also continued. In the wake of demonstrations in Oman and Bahrain, the GCC promised over USD20 billion to support development in those states, “a good share of which will have to be coughed up by Saudi Arabia”.<sup>969</sup> In exchange, Bahrain has consistently reiterated its close ties with Saudi Arabia.<sup>970</sup> “If Saudi Arabia sneezes, we feel it”, said a former senior Bahraini official when asked about relationship of dependency between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.<sup>971</sup> Within this context, the GCC intervention was a tangible expression of regional support for the al-Khalifa monarchy, against both domestic and international actors in opposition. It also elicited very strong responses from both loyalist and opposition societal groups, and was an important element of a major shift in the state’s attitude towards opposition, signifying the start of major crackdowns on dissent and demonstrations that would last until mid-July. Most critically, in terms of implications for RST, the GCC intervention highlights the importance of transnational dynamics in shaping domestic state-society relations in an internationalised Bahraini Spring.

## **A Transnational Opposition: Bahraini Human Right Networks in the International Sphere**

It is not only the state that draws from international relationships to reinforce its position in the domestic state-society relationship. Opposition has also targeted international human rights networks and used them to build a case for domestic reform. Positioning themselves as democratic reformers victimised by a repressive regime can build international legitimacy and encourage international pressure on the state. In so doing, opposition can, to an extent, compensate for their weaker position vis-à-vis the

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<sup>967</sup> Author interview, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>968</sup> Author interview with Bahraini academic, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>969</sup> Hertog, “The Costs of Counter-Revolution in the GCC”.

<sup>970</sup> See recent expressions of close Saudi-Bahraini ties in Bahrain News Agency, “HRH Premier Lauds Deep-Rooted Bahraini-Saudi Relations,” (14 March 2013) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/551397> accessed 26 April 2013.

<sup>971</sup> Author interview, Bahrain 2013.

state and also ensure greater, though still limited, protection for domestic dissidents.<sup>972</sup> The existence of an internationalised opposition community, formed largely of political exiles from previous uprisings and their extended families, helps to sustain these international advocacy networks and highlights the political influence of the Bahraini diaspora. What this means, from a theoretical perspective, is that opposition may have domestic roots, but it acts internationally. This is not a relationship typically captured within classic RST works, yet the use of international advocacy networks has been an important element of Bahraini state-society relations since 2011 (and would also be relevant to state-society relations in other rentier states with active exiled oppositions, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia). Just as the Bahraini state drew from an alliance with Saudi Arabia to reinforce its position domestically, the opposition utilises a network of international civil society alliances to maintain pressure for reform on the Bahraini regime.

Importantly, the division between the international and the domestic human rights community is not as distinct as often portrayed. Some members of Bahrain's opposition, for example, are also senior members of international human rights NGOs: a notable example is leftist intellectual, Abdunabi Alekry, who is simultaneously a senior member of Waad and also President of the Bahrain Transparency Society, a chapter of Transparency International.<sup>973</sup> Other Bahraini human rights activists described themselves as apolitical and not aligned with any of the political societies, yet the link between human rights and political reform is such that, when describing the changes they felt were necessary for Bahrain to improve its human rights record, the majority of their demands were political, including democratisation.<sup>974</sup> That is, domestic societal groups have used transnational advocacy networks and the rhetoric of the global human rights regime to promote not only human rights, but also political reform of the state-society relationship.

Further, international advocacy efforts do not only incorporate the human rights community, but also focus directly on relations with foreign states in an effort to generate pressure on Bahrain's key allies. Historically, Bahraini opposition groups have

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<sup>972</sup> Although activists also noted that campaigning at international conferences also comes with a higher risk of reprisal upon return to Bahrain. Author interviews, Bahrain and the United Kingdom, 2013-2014.

<sup>973</sup> See details of the Bahraini chapter in Transparency International, "Who We Are," (last updated 2015) [http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/contact/nc\\_bahrain/2/](http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/contact/nc_bahrain/2/) accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>974</sup> Author interviews with Bahraini human rights activists, various organisations, Bahrain and the United Kingdom 2013-2014.

operated in exile from Syria, Lebanon, Oman (during the Dhofar War), communist South Yemen, Iraq, Iran, and a host of Western states that accepted Bahraini dissidents as political refugees.<sup>975</sup> This section focuses on the latter, and particular how this has impacted Bahrain's relationship with the UK and the US, two of Bahrain's most critical allies. Challenging Bahrain's relationship with these states is a notable tactic, given the importance of foreign trade to Bahrain's economic development strategy and thus Manama's need to maintain a stable, positive reputation, especially with the West. It is difficult for Bahrain to preserve its 'brand' as liberal and stable when, for example, domestic and international groups repeatedly document and publicise Bahrain's human rights violations, decrying the regime as authoritarian, and highlighting on-going political instability.

The Bahraini Formula One (F1) Grand Prix provides a revealing example, since it is a key event for Bahrain's economic diversification strategy. Similar to efforts in other Gulf countries to attract major international sporting events, Bahrain invests in F1 as a critical opportunity to showcase Bahrain's business environment and attract international investment.<sup>976</sup> According to Formula Money, the industry monitor for Formula One, the Bahraini F1 race had an estimated local economic impact of almost USD300 million in 2015, by far the greatest of any event on the F1 calendar.<sup>977</sup> When an online petition calling on sponsors to boycott the 2011 Bahrain Grand Prix in response to human rights abuses against protesters garnered nearly half a million signatures and contributed to the cancellation of the 2011 race, then, this was a tangible demonstration of the power of transnational advocacy networks.<sup>978</sup> The cancellation alone was estimated to have cost the Bahraini economy nearly USD500 million,<sup>979</sup> and,

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<sup>975</sup> Clare Beaugrand, "The Return of the Bahraini Exiles (2001-2006): The Impact of the Ostracization Experience on the Opposition's Restructuring," (paper presented at the British Society for Middle East Studies annual conference, University of Leeds, 4-6 July 2008).

<sup>976</sup> Bahrain Economic Development Board, "EDB Chief Executive Hails the Positive Influence of the Formula One Race on Bahrain's Economy," (21 April 2015) <http://www.bahrainedb.com/en/news/press/Pages/EDB-Chief-Executive-hails-the-positive-impact-of-the-Formula-One-race-on-Bahrain%E2%80%99s-economy.aspx#.VnosRsB94y4> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>977</sup> Ibid; See also Roger Blitz, "Big Boost From Hosting F1 Races," *Financial Times* (24 September 2008) <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c33d9b36-8a82-11dd-a76a-0000779fd18c.html#axzz3v7NLRtAh> accessed 4 January 2016; and Arabian Business, "Has Bahrain got the Formula for Success?" (19 April 2013) <http://m.arabianbusiness.com/has-bahrain-got-formula-for-success--498643.html?page=0> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>978</sup> Andrew Benson, "Formula 1 Teams Demand Bahrain Grand Prix Cancellation," *BBC News* (7 June 2011) <http://www.bbc.com/sport/formula1/13689029> accessed 4 January 2016; Gary Meenaghan, "Bahrain Grand Prix a Fuel for the Economy of the Kingdom," *The National* (20 February 2012) <http://www.thenational.ae/sport/formula-one/bahrain-grand-prix-a-fuel-for-the-economy-of-the-kingdom> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>979</sup> Gary Meenaghan, "Bahrain Grand Prix a Fuel for the Economy of the Kingdom".

more problematically, the ensuing international media furore drew greater attention to the Bahraini Spring, severely damaging Bahrain's international brand.<sup>980</sup>

International human rights advocacy has also resulted in direct challenges to the regime and its neo-patrimonial networks, including court cases against members of Bahrain's royal family. In the UK, a Bahraini national, identified only as 'FF', has been calling for the arrest of Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad al-Khalifa, son of King Hamad, chair of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports as well as the Bahrain National Olympic Committee and Commander of Bahrain's Royal Guard, claiming the prince was aware of, and involved in, the torture of political prisoners detained in 2011.<sup>981</sup> The move reveals awareness of the UK's obligation to investigate and prosecute alleged war crimes by members of any nation while on British soil, hence why the case emerged specifically while Shaikh Nasser was in the UK for the 2012 Olympics. Shaikh Nasser has also been implicated in a proposal to create a committee to "identify dissident sports executives and athletes", although Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa, then head of the Bahrain Football Association and reported by state media as the leader of the committee, claims it was never formally established.<sup>982</sup> The UK case is unlikely to be prosecuted after Scotland Yard deemed there was insufficient evidence,<sup>983</sup> and the state has categorically denied the charges against Shaikh Nasser, claiming: "this is nothing more than a publicity stunt designed to coincide with Prince Nasser's visit to the UK", and that the case was simply an attempt "by opposition activists to exploit the British justice system to influence UK-Bahraini relations".<sup>984</sup> Yet, the pursuit of a legal challenge against a senior member of Bahrain's ruling elite in a foreign court highlights the use of major, international, highly publicised campaigns to challenge state authority, emblematic of the internationalisation of the Bahraini Spring.

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<sup>980</sup> As an example of a particularly critical article, see Martin Chulov and Paul Weaver, "Bahrain Gets Go-Ahead for Grand Prix as Rights Activists Condemn F1 Decision," *The Guardian* (4 June 2011) <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2011/jun/03/bahrain-grand-prix-formula-one> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>981</sup> Ahmed Aboulenein, "Bahrain Prince Does Not Enjoy Immunity Over Torture Claims, UK Court Rules," *Reuters* (7 October 2014) <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-britain-nasser-idUSKCN0HW0UB20141007> accessed 24 April 2016.

<sup>982</sup> James M. Dorsey, "Al-Khalifa's FIFA Bid Mired in Human Rights Allegations," *International Policy Digest* (3 November 2015) <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2015/11/03/al-khalifa-s-fifa-bid-mired-in-human-rights-allegations/> accessed 4 January 2016; see also James M. Dorsey, "Torture Investigation of Bahraini Prince Puts IOC and AFC on the Spot (Updated)," *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* (7 October 2014) <http://mideastsoccer.blogspot.com.au/2014/10/torture-investigation-of-bahraini.html> accessed 26 December 2015.

<sup>983</sup> See Jamie Merrill, "Human Rights Activists Demand Arrest of Prince Accused of Torture During Bahrain Uprising," *Independent* (21 March 2015) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/human-rights-activists-demand-arrest-of-prince-accused-of-torture-during-bahrain-uprising-10123504.html> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>984</sup> Ibid.

Although the Bahraini state is unsurprisingly frustrated with the attention paid to Bahraini opposition and human rights networks by foreign media,<sup>985</sup> the state's practice of exiling dissidents has, ironically, contributed to the emergence of these transnational coalitions. There are sizeable Bahraini opposition communities, for example, residing in the US, the UK, and spread across Europe, many of which were founded by Bahraini dissidents who were exiled or fled during previous periods of protest. These dissidents have established links with their host governments, which they use to place political pressure on the Bahraini state. It is no accident, for example, that Denmark makes repeated statements of concern over the human rights situation in Bahrain, since one of Bahrain's most prominent activists, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, is a Danish citizen, as are his daughters, Zainab and Maryam. The incarceration and trials of the al-Khawaja family are regularly covered in local Danish news,<sup>986</sup> and in 2012 the Danes requested custody of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, after he had spent nearly two months on a hunger strike to protest his detention.<sup>987</sup> More importantly, al-Khawaja's case provides a conduit for Denmark to criticise Bahrain's human rights practices more generally, and their delegations to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) regularly highlight their concern over the detention of human rights activists, and "urge Bahrain to release all arbitrarily detained persons and appropriately address all reports of ill-treatment and torture in detention facilities".<sup>988</sup>

Exiled communities have also contributed to the emergence of alternative news and media sources for Bahrainis, such as *Lualua Television*, founded in 2011 in response to the Bahraini Uprising, and which presents itself as an independent alternative to state-controlled television.<sup>989</sup> Located in an industrial estate in suburban London, *Lualua TV*

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<sup>985</sup> For example a 2008 US embassy cable claims that when King Hamad met with journalists on July 19 2008, he specifically "warned against activists appealing to 'foreign agendas'...an apparent reference to Haq and its contacts with Western human rights activists". See Al-Akhbar, "Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street: Wifaq and Haq".

<sup>986</sup> See for example The Local, "Danish Activist Sentenced in Bahrain," (2 December 2014) <http://www.thelocal.dk/20141202/danish-activist-sentenced-to-prison-in-bahrain> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>987</sup> Al Jazeera, "Bahrain Mulls Denmark Plan for Hunger Striker," (7 April 2012) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/04/201247171256798525.html> accessed 26 December 2015.

<sup>988</sup> Permanent Mission of Denmark to UN Geneva, "HRC30: Denmark Expresses Concern About a Range of Human Rights Situations During Item 4 Debate," (21 September 2015)

<http://fngeneve.um.dk/en/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=898b39bb-3e44-4b39-998d-25c446022f5b> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>989</sup> The actual neutrality of Lualua TV is debated, with some London-based Bahraini interviewees describing it as the "mouthpiece" for al-Wefaq, yet Lualua TV's director, Yasser al-Sayegh, is more closely associated with figures from the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), and other Bahraini



broadcasts news, talk shows, and entertainment programming, though its most popular content is critical political coverage of the situation in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.<sup>990</sup> The channel is available via satellite, a website, and a smartphone app, though satellite broadcasts have been repeatedly jammed, and its website and other sources of online streaming blocked within Bahrain.<sup>991</sup> In response, most of its content and a live streaming feed is now available on YouTube, which is logistically more difficult to block.<sup>992</sup> It is difficult to gauge to what extent *Lualua TV* is regularly accessible within Bahrain, although during fieldwork in 2013-2014 most opposition-oriented households visited had televisions tuned to the channel, with largely uninterrupted access.

The satirical current events program, *Maḥaṭāt*, presented by Lamees Dhaif, a Bahraini reporter who received asylum in the United Kingdom after fleeing Bahrain in 2011, reveals the transnational advocacy efforts of Lualua TV.<sup>993</sup> The program ran through 2013, and included interviews with Bahraini activists based in or visiting London, largely drawn from the human rights and street activist groups rather than the formal political societies. Exemplifying how exiled Bahraini communities appeal for international support, *Maḥaṭāt* also ran interviews with British political figures such as Lord Eric Avebury (d. 2016, discussed further below), asking how opposition might better exert political pressure on Bahrain's key international relationships, such as the United Kingdom.<sup>994</sup>

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interviewees working at the station stated a preference for groups such as Waad, or eschewing all political alignments and expressing scepticism that, for example, youth street activism would result in a stable political outcome. The content of Lualua's TV program also displays a variety of political allegiances, broadcasting speeches by senior (and religiously conservative) al-Wefaq figures, but also regularly interviews figures from the BCHR and other groups that, as discussed in Chapter Four, do not typically co-operate with al-Wefaq. Author interviews, United Kingdom, 2013.

<sup>990</sup> 'Most popular' has been determined by those videos most watched on their YouTube channel, and confirmed with Bahraini opposition interviewees who subscribe to the channel. See LuaLua TV, "Videos," *YouTube* (n.d.) <https://www.youtube.com/user/loulouatv1/videos?flow=grid&sort=p&view=0> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>991</sup> See written evidence from Lualua TV submitted to UK Parliament on the subject of signal jamming in LuaLua TV, "Written Evidence from LuaLua TV," *UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee Publications* (18 November 2012) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmcaff/88/88vw21.htm> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>992</sup> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "Bahrain: Blocking LuaLua TV's Website is Continual Devastation of Public Freedoms," 16 July 2015) <http://anhri.net/?p=146445&lang=en> accessed 4 January 2016; Author interviews, United Kingdom 2013.

<sup>993</sup> See an example of her program in LuaLua TV, "burnāmej maḥaṭāt al-ḥalqa 1-j-1," *YouTube* (18 May 2013) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L\\_-RiXOzgIY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_-RiXOzgIY) accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>994</sup> See the interview with Lord Avebury at Mahatat Lamees, "al-ḥalqa al-thāniyya min maḥaṭāt ma'a lamīs ḍayf," *YouTube* (26 May 2013) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbTH-S1juyU> accessed 28 December 2015.

Opposition does not uniformly seek support from international actors; the fragmentation of opposition discussed in Chapter Four is also relevant to how these groups act internationally. Rather than a cohesive block, the networks are best thought of as a set of interrelated, but ideationally and organisationally distinct transnational coalitions. Appealing to the international community is also not a new strategy; many of these coalitions have longstanding links to the international human rights community. The following paragraphs outline Bahrain's major transnational human rights groups, and how they interact with each other and with the international human rights community to place political pressure on the Bahraini regime.

A prominent example formed from Bahraini exile communities in the United Kingdom is the Bahrain Freedom Movement (BFM). The London-based group was founded by Saeed al-Shehabi and Mansoor al-Jamri in the early 1980s as a splinter group from Bahrainis associated with the al-Dawa strand of Shia activism.<sup>995</sup> Although Mansoor al-Jamri returned to Bahrain during the general amnesty in 2001 to found *al-Wasaf* newspaper, Saeed al-Shehabi refused the amnesty and remains based in London.<sup>996</sup> The movement started as a human rights organisation but over time became more of a radical opposition society aligned with other street activist groups, due largely to the cooption of the BFM by Haq after 2005.<sup>997</sup> Nevertheless, the BFM maintains very close relations with various UK and international human rights networks, and runs a very active website, the *Voice of Bahrain*, in English and Arabic.<sup>998</sup> The most prominent of their UK-human rights relationships is their association with Lord Eric Avebury, a Liberal Democrat and Joint Vice-Chair of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, who, until his death in early 2016, hosted regular conferences at the House of Lords emphasising the urgent need for reform in Bahrain.<sup>999</sup> These meetings are primarily organised by individuals from the BFM and Haq, though activists from all major Bahraini opposition societies have attended.<sup>1000</sup> The meetings bestow a level of

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<sup>995</sup> Beaugrand, "The Return of the Bahraini Exiles (2001-2006)" 6.

<sup>996</sup> See Al-Akhbar, "Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street: Wifaq and Haq". It is worth noting that al-Wasaf and Mansoor al-Jamri no longer have any affiliation with the BFM.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid.

<sup>998</sup> Voice of Bahrain, "Sawt al-bahrayn," <http://voiceofbahrain.org/>; Beaugrand, "The Return of the Bahraini Exiles (2001-2006)".

<sup>999</sup> It is unclear thus far what impact this will have on the BFM's access to UK parliamentary networks. As of April 2016, they have not held any further events at the House of Lords, but regular action by the All-party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, including a 10 March 2016 meeting with Bahraini parliamentarians to press for political reform suggests Bahrain remains a country of interest to the group. See All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, "10/03/16: Meeting with Bahraini Politicians," (30 March 2016) <http://appg-humanrights.org.uk/?p=1161> accessed 23 April 2016.

<sup>1000</sup> Al-Akhbar, "Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street: Wifaq and Haq".

legitimacy on the Bahraini exiled opposition, and allow groups to publicly pressure the UK government. The BFM is also very active in collecting and publicising information about the on-going unrest within Bahrain (and the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia). The language used in its newsletters is revealing. In the December 2015 newsletter, for example, the BFM wrote:

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November, Alkhalifa court issued sentences totaling 429 years against 36 native Bahrainis and revoked the citizenship of 13 of them. Three were sentenced to 15 years jail, ten others to 10 years each. In other case, sixteen native citizens were given 15 years and three sentenced to 10 years. Thirteen of these had their nationality revoked also.<sup>1001</sup>

And in a later publication:

Meanwhile Alkhalifa regime has intensified its repression ahead of the Martyrs Day commemoration on 17<sup>th</sup> December. Dawn raids on homes, torture, and outrageous trials and sentences have exposed a weak tribal regime that cannot tolerate dissent. Native Bahrainis will mark the occasion with protests and calls for ending the culture of impunity that has facilitated torture.<sup>1002</sup>

As these quotes illustrate, the BFM utilises the nativist rhetoric of the Bahrānī narrative to legitimise the Bahraini opposition, while simultaneously delegitimising the al-Khalifa regime as “tribal” and repressive. Though the extent of their popular base in Bahrain is contested (several opposition interviewees felt the BFM did not have much of a following in Bahrain but rather drew from Haq’s popularity), it played a critical role in international advocacy and ensuring that the Bahraini Spring continued to remain within the international public eye.<sup>1003</sup>

In addition to its affiliation with Haq and on-going co-operation with the BCHR,<sup>1004</sup> the BFM is also associated with another key exiled opposition group: the US-based Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), directed by Husain Abdulla, which also finances the UK-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD). Both BIRD and ADHRB were founded by members of Bahrain’s exile community.<sup>1005</sup> The geographical focus of the two organisations is slightly different:

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<sup>1001</sup> Bahrain Freedom Movement, “Saudis to Execute 55 citizens, Alkhalifa Revoke Citizenship of More Natives,” *Voice of Bahrain* 286 (December 2015) 2.

<sup>1002</sup> Bahrain Freedom Movement, “Germany Condemns Saudis as Bahrainis Commemorate Martyrs Day,” *Voice of Bahrain* (9 Dec 2015) <http://english.voiceofbahrain.org/?p=5002>, accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1003</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain and the United Kingdom, 2013 – 2014.

<sup>1004</sup> The links between the BFM, Haq, and the BCHR were discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>1005</sup> ADHRB, according to their own materials, was informally founded in 2002 by a group of Bahraini and Bahraini-Americans living in Mobile, Alabama, but only obtained NGO status in 2008, establishing

BIRD focuses almost exclusively on Bahraini issues, while ADHRB's focus is broader – it publishes on human rights issues not only in Bahrain but also Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, as well as GCC-wide issues.<sup>1006</sup> Yet to a large extent the two groups are branches of the same organisation: BIRD advocates in the UK and Europe, and ADHRB focuses primarily on the US, though Husain Abdulla regularly travels between the two organisations, and has functioned as part of the BIRD team in Geneva during UN events.<sup>1007</sup> The groups also co-author their major publications and collaborate on work with human rights and political activists from a variety of other organisations, noting:

A key function of ADHRB's advocacy work is its sponsorship of visiting delegations of activists, human rights defenders, and other relevant segments from Bahrain. These advocates share their experiences with US lawmakers, top government officials, and NGO leaders through meetings, panel discussions and other interactive event. Past delegations have included such prominent human rights advocates as Nabeel Rajab, Fatima Haji, Mohammed al-Maskati, Jalila al-Salman, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, Rula al-Saffar, Mohammed al-Maskati [sic], and Maryam al-Khawaja.<sup>1008</sup>

The individuals cited above include a broad spectrum of Bahraini activists, including the BCHR (Nabeel Rajab, Mohammed al-Maskati, and Abdulhadi and Maryam al-Khawaja), health professionals from Salmaniya hospital (Fatima Haji and Rula al-Saffar), and unionists associated with al-Wefaq (Jalila al-Salman).<sup>1009</sup> While they are primarily associated with groups like the BFM and BCHR, then, BIRD and ADHRB

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an office in Washington DC in 2012, after the inception of widespread protests in Bahrain. BIRD's membership is also centred around Bahraini exiled communities: for example, in early 2015, Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, director of advocacy at BIRD, was among the 72 Bahrainis stripped of Bahraini citizenship in a list that grouped together human rights activists, independent opposition figures such as Ali Abdulemam, and ISIL supporters, including the notorious Bahrain-born cleric Turki al-Bin Ali. See Jamie Merrill, "Exiled Bahrain Activist who Protested at Windsor Horse Show Among 72 to have Citizenship Revoked," *Independent* (1 February 2015) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/exiled-bahrain-activist-who-protested-at-windsor-horse-show-among-72-to-have-citizenship-revoked-10015919.html> accessed 4 January 2016; Sayed Alwadaei, "We Are Human Rights Defenders, but Bahrain Says We're Terrorists," *The Guardian* (9 February 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/09/human-rights-defenders-bahrain-says-terrorists> accessed 4 January 2015.

<sup>1006</sup> Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, "Countries," (n.d.)

<http://www.adhrb.org/category/countries/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1007</sup> Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, "Members of the BIRD team in Geneva #HRC26," *Facebook* (30 June 2014) <https://www.facebook.com/667215573317777/photos/pb.667215573317777.-2207520000.1451359299.739390659433601/?type=3&theater> accessed 4 January 2015.

<sup>1008</sup> Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, "History of Bahrain," pamphlet (n.d.)

<sup>1009</sup> Specifically, Mohammed al-Maskati is head of the Bahrain Youth Centre for Human Rights (BYCHR), which essentially functions as the youth branch of the BCHR, and is also son-in-law of BCHR head Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. Jalila al-Salman might best be described as an independent activist, and was affiliated with the teachers union and strikes in 2011, but has been described here as associated with al-Wefaq due to her membership in the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory, al-Wefaq's representative at international advocacy campaigns.

also have a level of affiliation with independent activists and those with links to the mainstream political societies such as al-Wefaq.

ADHRB and BIRD, like most Bahraini exile human rights communities, are highly organised, and well connected to international advocacy networks. They issue weekly online newsletters and conduct sustained advocacy campaigns.<sup>1010</sup> ADHRB meets regularly with members of the US Congress, and, in much the same way as the BFM collaborated with Lord Avebury in the UK, uses these associations to lobby for reform in Bahrain. In April 2013, for example, Congressman Jim McDermott hosted a panel titled, “Critical Condition: Bahrain’s Ailing Healthcare System Two Years After the Uprising”, in collaboration with ADHRB and Physicians for Human Rights.<sup>1011</sup> The implications of such a panel are not merely rhetorical: McDermott has been a repeated sponsor of bills to deny military assistance to countries that violate medical neutrality, as ADHRB claims occurred in Bahrain when the state cracked down on doctors who demonstrated at Salmaniya hospital in 2011.<sup>1012</sup>

ADHRB and BIRD were described by members of al-Wefaq as taking harsher positions towards current events in Bahrain than the mainstream political societies, presumably a function of their exiled status of their members.<sup>1013</sup> The major formal opposition societies (the National Democratic Opposition Societies Coalition, hereafter Opposition Coalition, which is comprised of al-Wefaq, Waad, al-Tajamua al-Qawmi, al-Tajamua al-Watani, and al-Ikhaa) also attend international human rights events to advocate for reform in Bahrain, usually through the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO). The BHRO was established by the major political societies, but also by independent human rights activists, and is thus not an external arm of the Opposition Coalition, but

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<sup>1010</sup> For example, the ADHRB, alongside other human rights organisations, organises letters from members of the US Congress expressing concern over various human rights issues, including a March 2013 letter urging the government to reinstate Jalila al-Salman after she was terminated from her position in the Ministry of Education, and a June 2013 letter addressed to King Hamad expressing disappointment after the UN Special Rapporteur Juan E. Méndez’s visit to Bahrain was indefinitely postponed. See Congressman Henry C. ‘Hank’ Johnson et al. to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, (7 June 2013), letter, Washington D.C.: Congress of the United States; Congressman James P. McGovern et al. to Her Excellency Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain (21 March 2013), letter, Washington D.C.: Congress of the United States.

<sup>1011</sup> Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, “Critical Condition: Bahrain’s Ailing Healthcare System Two Years After the Uprising,” *ADHRB Bahrain Bi-Weekly Newsletter* 6 (19 April 2013) <http://www.adhrb.org/2013/04/adhrb-bahrain-bi-weekly-newsletter-issue-6/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1012</sup> United States Congress, House of Representatives, *Medical Neutrality Protection Act of 2011*. 112th Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, HR 2643 (Introduced in House – IH) <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.2643.IH:/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1013</sup> Personal correspondence with members of al-Wefaq, 2015.

does tend to represent them at international conferences: one member of al-Wefaq described it as a “subsidiary, or an outsourcing arrangement”.<sup>1014</sup> In November 2013, for example, Bahraini attorney Mohammed al-Tajer, who does not align with al-Wefaq,<sup>1015</sup> was the head of the Bahraini NGO delegation to Geneva, and the General Coordinator of the BHRO. Exemplifying the pragmatic crossover between various Bahraini transnational human rights networks, al-Tajer also attended a House of Lords event (organised by the BFM) on 20 November 2013 to discuss the implementation (or, in the view of the BHRO, the lack thereof) of the BICI report.<sup>1016</sup>

Yet, overall, there is little coordination between groups like ADHRB/BIRD and the BHRO, averred several current and former members of al-Wefaq.<sup>1017</sup> The BHRO, for example, relies largely on al-Wefaq’s publications when preparing materials for international conferences, whereas ADHRB and BIRD issue their own publications, drawing from the BCHR, BFM, and their own sources.<sup>1018</sup> ADHRB and BIRD also focus most of their efforts on international advocacy and generally have the same delegation present, for example, for all three weeks of every UN HRC, whereas al-Wefaq and the BHRO tend to swap out their representatives depending on resources and availability.<sup>1019</sup> A great deal of the BHRO’s work is also domestic, rather than internationally oriented.<sup>1020</sup> Even the primary languages of the BHRO and ADHRB’s twitter accounts belie their domestic versus international audience; the BHRO tweets primarily in Arabic, ADHRB primarily in English.<sup>1021</sup>

With a primarily domestic constituency, there are stronger incentives for al-Wefaq to maintain a moderate line and delegate their representation to the BHRO. Insofar as direct attendance at international events can bolster the domestic position of al-Wefaq

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<sup>1014</sup> Personal correspondence with member of al-Wefaq, 2015.

<sup>1015</sup> Author interview with Mohammed al-Tajer, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>1016</sup> Mohamed al-Tajer, “Two years since the report by the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI): What has been achieved?” *London, UK House of Lords event hosted by Lord Avebury* (20 November 2013).

<sup>1017</sup> Personal correspondence with current and former members of al-Wefaq, 2015.

<sup>1018</sup> Ibid; author interviews with members of the BHRO, Bahrain 2014.

<sup>1019</sup> Personal correspondence with members of al-Wefaq, 2015.

<sup>1020</sup> As an example, see a September 2015 announcement by Shaikh Salman al-Maytham, head of the Religious Freedom Unit in the BHRO, of concern that new anti-hatred and discrimination laws might be abused to further restrict free speech and legitimate prejudice in Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, “AlSalman: New Anti-Hatred/Discrimination Legislation in Bahrain Could Turn to a Suppression Tool to Restrict Freedom of Expression,” (1 September 2015) <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/7612> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1021</sup> @ADHRB, *Twitter* <https://twitter.com/ADHRB> accessed 4 January 2016; @bh\_hro, *Twitter* [https://twitter.com/bh\\_hro](https://twitter.com/bh_hro) accessed 4 January 2016.

and bring attention to the Bahraini opposition, however, it is pursued by al-Wefaq's Liberties and Human Rights Department, headed by Sayed Hadi al-Mosawi. As with the BHRO, much of the work of this department is domestic, with a focus on researching and disseminating information on domestic human rights abuses, yet al-Mosawi is also one of the key members of al-Wefaq who regularly participates in international advocacy efforts. A former al-Wefaq MP described their international advocacy strategy:

We regularly have delegates attend the UN Human Rights Council every 4 months as a key international institution. But we also visit any other relevant conference or events if we have the capacity to do so. Bringing international awareness is a key aspect of our activity and therefore this is usually our goal.<sup>1022</sup>

And on how al-Wefaq identifies which international institutions, NGOs, and foreign governments to target:

We generally don't have one single policy and attempt to build relationships with as many NGOs and governments as possible. Of course we hope to have relationships with the leading governments, especially those that have influence over Bahrain – such as the UK, EU, US, etc. Likewise there are the top NGOs such as HRW [Human Rights Watch], Amnesty [International] etc., who have a large sphere of influence and therefore are important advocates for us. But we also seek allies wherever possible and often it is the nations with less strong relations with Bahrain that have more freedom to be critical, such as the Scandinavian countries.<sup>1023</sup>

Individual members of major political societies also engage in their own advocacy efforts. Jawad Fairouz, a former al-Wefaq MP, started a society called Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (Salam-DHR) to target the EU region;<sup>1024</sup> it is part of the BHRO but also undertakes its own human right advocacy activities, with the BHRO functioning as an umbrella organisation. On the sidelines of a UN HRC meeting in March 2014, for example, the BHRO organised a two hour discussion on human rights in Bahrain, where Sayed Mohamed Al-Alawi, a Sweden-based activist and Head of Public Relations for Salam-DHR, lobbied for an end to the international community's export of weaponry that he claimed was being used against protesters.<sup>1025</sup> As with the

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<sup>1022</sup> Personal correspondence with former al-Wefaq MP, 2015.

<sup>1023</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1024</sup> Salam for Democracy and Human Rights, "Home," (n.d.) <http://www.salam-dhr.org/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1025</sup> He particularly noted that a group of NGOs have filed a lawsuit against the Swedish government for allowing USD147 million worth of military hardware to Bahrain. See al-Wefaq, "Bahrain Human Rights

BHRO in general, there appears to be little organisational or ideological coherence between transnational advocates associated with the formal political societies, and the street activists.

Both Bahraini exile communities and domestic opposition, then, have demonstrated the capacity to act on an international level, utilising transnational human rights networks and the rhetoric of the global human rights regime to place pressure on the Bahraini state, even where their domestic constituency (in the case of the BFM), or power to effect change (in the case of al-Wefaq), remains limited. Yet how much of a measurable impact have these efforts made, in terms of the Bahraini domestic state-society relationship? ADHRB self-reports that: “as part of its legislative advocacy, ADHRB successfully secured language in the Fiscal Year 2013 *National Defense Authorization Act* requiring the US State Department to issue a report assessing the implementation status of the BICI recommendations”.<sup>1026</sup> ADHRB and BIRD are regularly among the most active groups of Bahraini exiles at UN events, playing a primary role in advocacy and organising events to highlight the political situation on the sidelines of UN HRC meetings.<sup>1027</sup> In concert with other human rights organisations, they also pressured UN-member states to sign onto various joint statements of concern over Bahraini human rights issues, for example those during the 24<sup>th</sup> (September 2013) and 30<sup>th</sup> (September 2015) sessions of the HRC signed by 47 and 33 countries, respectively, including the US and the UK.<sup>1028</sup> The most intense criticism through the UN, thus far, occurred at a May 2012 meeting where 67 countries, again including the US and UK, expressed

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Observatory Holds Event at UN Human Rights Council,” (12 March 2014) <http://alwefaq.net/cms/2014/03/12/27782/> accessed 4 January 2016; @sm\_alawi, *Twitter* [https://twitter.com/sm\\_alawi](https://twitter.com/sm_alawi) accessed 4 January 2016; see also a 2012 video of al-Alawi discussing his human rights advocacy in svenskafredsanna, “Sayed Mohamed Alawi After Parliamentary Debate May 23rd 2012,” *YouTube* (24 May 2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQWM2Y9M3PI> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1026</sup> Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, “History of Bahrain”.

<sup>1027</sup> Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, “Counter-Resolutionaries: Bahraini Obstinace at the HRC,” (15 September 2015) <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/09/counter-resolutionaries-bahraini-obstinace-at-the-hrc/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1028</sup> See an example of a joint letter from BIRD, BCHR, ADHRB, and other international HR organisations asking states to sign the statement in 2015 in English Pen et al., “RE: HRC30 Joint Statement on Bahrain,” (24 September 2015) [http://www.omct.org/files/2015/09/23386/bahrain\\_2015.09.24\\_joint\\_ol\\_hrc30.pdf](http://www.omct.org/files/2015/09/23386/bahrain_2015.09.24_joint_ol_hrc30.pdf) accessed 4 January 2016; Mission of the United States to Geneva, Switzerland, “Joint Statement Expresses Concern about Human Rights Situation in Bahrain,” (9 September 2013) <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2013/09/09/joint-statement-expresses-concern-about-human-rights-situation-in-bahrain/> accessed 4 January 2016; Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and to the other International Organizations in Geneva, “Joint Statement,” *30e Session du Conseil des Droits de l’Homme* (14 September 2015) [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/draft-joint-statement-on-Bahrain\\_13.09\\_with-list-of-states.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/draft-joint-statement-on-Bahrain_13.09_with-list-of-states.pdf) accessed 4 January 2016.



concern at Bahrain's human rights, which Bahrain defended on the grounds that the state's security was at stake.<sup>1029</sup>

Bahraini transnational pressure can also have an impact on key bilateral relationships. Sir Harold Walker, a retired member of the British Diplomatic Service with extensive experience in the Middle East region, noted the influence Bahraini human rights societies have over British media, that, in turn, creates pressure for British foreign policy to be shifted according to those interests (though he did not believe this should occur).<sup>1030</sup> The 2015 Saudi-led intervention into Yemen's civil war and increasing involvement of the West in the war against ISIS have also catapulted Gulf states such as Bahrain back into the international spotlight.<sup>1031</sup> British politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn, the UK's Leader of the Opposition, for example, regularly criticise Bahraini human rights issues, particularly the UK policy of selling arms to Bahrain, although, as a key arms export destination, this policy is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.<sup>1032</sup>

The US relationship with Bahrain has also been challenged, although, like the UK, the US must balance security and financial interests with human rights concerns. Arms exports to Bahrain have been particularly contentious. Having halted shipments of arms that could be used against domestic political protesters in response to crackdowns in 2011, restrictions were lifted in June 2015 as a result of Bahraini lobbying.<sup>1033</sup> In response, Congressman James McGovern advocated a resumption of the export ban or, at least, tying it to full implementation of the BICI recommendations.<sup>1034</sup> In August 2015, McGovern introduced bi-partisan bill *HR 3445: The Bahrain Independent*

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<sup>1029</sup> United Nations TV, "Geneva/Bahrain Human Rights," (21 May 2012), <http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/unifeed/asset/U120/U120521b/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1030</sup> Walker disagrees that human rights considerations, alone, should govern British foreign policy and notes the multifaceted relationship between Britain and Bahrain, but it is his identification of the pressure stemming from public media that is of interest here. See Harold Walker, "Written evidence from Sir Harold Walker," *UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee Publications* (12 November 2012) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaaff/88/88vw15.htm> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1031</sup> Justin Gengler, "Saudi Arabia Drags Bahrain Back into the International Spotlight," *Religion and Politics in Bahrain* (8 October 2015) <http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.com.au/2015/10/saudi-arabia-drags-bahrain-back-into.html> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1032</sup> Jeremy Corbyn, "Question: Arming Bahrain," (n.d.) <http://jeremycorbyn.org.uk/articles/question-on-britain-arming-bahrain/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1033</sup> Felicia Schwartz, "U.S. Resuming Arms Sales to Bahrain's Military," *Wall Street Journal* (29 June 2015) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-resuming-arms-sales-to-bahrains-military-1435618872> accessed 4 January 2016; Ron Wyden and Jim McGovern, "Rethink U.S. Arms Sales to Bahrain," *CNN* (10 September 2015) <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/10/opinions/wyden-mcGovern-bahrain-arms-sales/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1034</sup> Wyden and McGovern, "Rethink U.S. Arms Sales to Bahrain".

*Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Accountability Act of 2015*, which prohibits the sale or transfer of specific weapons (those that can be used for domestic crowd control) to Bahrain, until the US State Department certifies that the BICI recommendations have been fully implemented.<sup>1035</sup>

Bahrain's major allies – the GCC states, the UK, and the US – are unlikely to strain their relationship with the island state while, for example, Bahrain remains a key ally in the recent escalation of military involvement in Iraq and Syria to combat ISIS. The Bahraini state has also actively attempted to discredit the human rights narrative created by transnational advocacy networks, depicting international criticism such as that from the UN as biased, out of context, and lamenting that the countries supporting critical statements did not “obtain their information from impartial and credible resources”,<sup>1036</sup> a clear reference to the impact of Bahraini exiled opposition on human rights networks. Loyalist media also attempted to debunk narratives of state repression constructed by human rights networks, instead emphasising the violent nature of Bahraini opposition. Gulf News, for example, quoted Bahrain's Permanent Representative to the UN, Yousuf Abdul Karim Bucheeri, as claiming: “these countries fail to understand the effects of such statements on the ground and how they can be misused to justify violence and terrorism, which have recently led to the deaths of five on-duty policemen”.<sup>1037</sup>

The effectiveness of human rights networks in achieving concrete political outcomes is thus complicated by the competing interests of foreign states, as well as the Bahraini government's attempts to shift the narrative of unrest in its favour. A member of al-Wefaq explained his view on the impact of transnational advocacy:

Bahrain is clearly very concerned by international pressure and I believe the situation could be far worse right now without it. However, Bahrain has proven very adept at giving the right answer to the right people in order to minimize international pressure, whilst doing no positive action. Definitely the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry would not have happened without huge international pressure, but it also serves as

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<sup>1035</sup> United States Congress, House of Representatives, *Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Accountability Act of 2015*, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, HR 3445 (Introduced in House – IH) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/3445> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1036</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Joint Geneva Statement Politicised, Unfair,” (18 September 2015) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/687359#.Vf2fYpThWF8.twitter> accessed 4 January 2015.

<sup>1037</sup> Habib Toumi, “Bahrain Says Rights Statement ‘Unfair’,” *Gulf News* (15 September 2015) <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-says-rights-statement-unfair-1.1584329> accessed 4 January 2016.

the reverse example, as it allowed the government to buy some time with the international community, whilst not making any serious changes.<sup>1038</sup>

The BICI report, as noted above, was a critical outcome of international pressure, though most opposition groups claim few of the report's recommendations have been fully implemented.<sup>1039</sup> Regardless, the publication of its findings alone, which were far more independent than many expected,<sup>1040</sup> are valuable, in that they provide a comprehensive overview of the events in the first few months of the Bahraini Spring, and an independent evaluation of various government, loyalist, and opposition claims. Al-Wefaq also uses the rhetoric and findings from the BICI report, and more broadly from the international human rights community, to reinforce their legitimacy domestically, hosting videos of representatives from international NGOs confirming their belief that, for example, the Bahraini judiciary is politically skewed.<sup>1041</sup>

More tangible effects of international advocacy are revealed in individual cases of detained Bahrainis. Multiple interviewees who had been incarcerated for political activism since 2011 claimed they were only released, or that the conditions of their detention improved, because a BICI inspector had visited, or there had been an international campaign to release them.<sup>1042</sup> The advantages of international advocacy, explained a member of al-Wefaq, include: "improving jail conditions, and granting inmates more rights like family visits as well as phone calls to loved ones".<sup>1043</sup> This is not unique to Bahrain, nor to the Middle East; as Amnesty International noted in its first annual report: "realization that the man or woman concerned is not forgotten has often resulted in the prisoner receiving better treatment and an improvement in his conditions".<sup>1044</sup>

Ultimately, transnational advocacy has not demonstrated an ability to radically shift domestic state-society relations in Bahrain, yet it has had a noticeable impact when focused on specific issues, such as on detainee conditions and major international

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<sup>1038</sup> Personal correspondence with member of al-Wefaq, 2015.

<sup>1039</sup> Project on Middle East Diplomacy, *One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain's Implementation of the BICI Report* (November 2012).

<sup>1040</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain 2013 – 2014.

<sup>1041</sup> See for example alwefaqociety, "FIDH Representative in UN: Human Rights Violations in Bahrain are Systematic," *YouTube* (18 June 2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qaqjikpv8M> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1042</sup> Author interviews, Bahrain and the United Kingdom, 2013-2014.

<sup>1043</sup> Personal correspondence with member of al-Wefaq, 2015.

<sup>1044</sup> quoted in Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 6.

sporting events. More importantly, in terms of an evaluation of RST, greater consideration of how societal groups regularly interact with, and act through, the international sphere needs to be integrated into the theoretical understanding of the ‘rentier state’.

## **The Limitations of International Pressure: Migrant Labour Rights and the Qatar 2022 World Cup**

The previous two sections found that transnational and international variables remain critical to the state-society relationship, although many constraints remain on the *extent* of their influence. Yet what of the impact of external variables in the *absence* of support from nationals? A final case study, focused on migrant labour rights and the Qatar 2022 World Cup, highlights the limitations of externally-driven reform where it lacks a significant domestic constituency: where, in fact, there was relatively widespread *opposition* to reform among the citizenry. While the previous example focused on how Bahrainis have been able to capitalise on international human rights networks to demand reform, then, this section asks why advocacy from human rights networks and foreign powers has *not* resulted in more comprehensive reform of the labour system in Qatar. As discussed below, it is not that Qatar is intrinsically more immune than Bahrain to international variables, particularly considering the centrality of branding to its economic development strategy.<sup>1045</sup> Qatar’s society has been described as “inward looking”,<sup>1046</sup> yet state or societal groups still draw from international relationships to reinforce their domestic position (albeit that, with far less unrest, this tends to be less politicised, less overt, and cannot draw from a large exiled opposition community, as in Bahrain).<sup>1047</sup> Qatar does not have an active and organised societal opposition, as in Bahrain, yet Qatari society still maintains many transnational and international links, such as cross-national tribal ties, religious networks, and transnational political groupings like the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>1048</sup>

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<sup>1045</sup> Gray, *Qatar*; J.E. Peterson, “Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State,” *Middle East Journal* 60:4 (Autumn 2006) 732 – 748; Kamrava, *Qatar*, 90-91.

<sup>1046</sup> Justin Gengler et al., “Civic Life and Democratic Citizenship in Qatar: Findings from the First Qatar World Values Survey,” *Middle East Law and Governance* 5:3 (2013) 258 – 279.

<sup>1047</sup> This would place Qatar closer to states such as the UAE (though the UAE struggles with Muslim Brotherhood transnational activism), and Bahrain more similar to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Oman occupies a middle position, since societal political organisation remains limited and foreign advocacy viewed with suspicion, yet its history as discussed in Chapter Two demonstrated the potential to draw from transnational movements and external influences when necessary, such as leftists networks during the Dhofar Rebellion, or the British support of Qaboos during the 1970 coup.

<sup>1048</sup> It should be immediately clarified here that the Qatari domestically-oriented incarnation of the Ikhwan (as distinguished from externally-oriented figures associated with, for example, Yusuf al-

Why, then, did external pressure not result in more than a façade of migrant labour reform? Although the new labour law passed in late 2015 strenuously avoids the negatively connoted term *kafil* ('sponsor', meaning employer), and there are some improvements to migrant labour rights discussed below, the *kafāla* ('sponsorship', hereafter *kafala*) system essentially remains in place.<sup>1049</sup> Pressure from the international community, especially in light of controversy surrounding Qatar's successful bid for the 2022 World Cup, has been unceasing: human rights abuses against migrant workers are regularly documented (or, where journalists are prevented from accessing migrant workers, this obstruction is then documented), and international media scrutiny has been, for the most part, scathing.<sup>1050</sup> The paragraphs that follow discuss what, specifically, the international community objected to in the existing *kafala* system, and how external pressure interacted with domestic resistance to reform shaped by broader issues of development, demography, and national identity.

External pressure to reform the *kafala* system and improve conditions for migrant workers is not new, although the FIFA 2022 World Cup and Qatar's continuing construction boom has intensified attention on the issue. Some of the most criticised facets of the *kafala* system, and migrant labour conditions more generally, include: the absence of a minimum wage; the "crowded and unhygienic" state of worker housing; allegations of abuse and misrepresentation of salaries, particularly by unscrupulous recruitment agencies; employers (illegally) holding passports of workers; late, reduced, or non-payment of wages; prohibition on the formation of independent labour unions or other organisations representing migrant labourers; and a legal system that disproportionately balances power in favour of employers.<sup>1051</sup> Some of these, such as misrepresentation of salaries by recruitment agencies, obviously occurred before labourers arrived in Qatar. Yet it is the lack of legal protection for migrants, and a

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Qaradawi), "does not appear to harbour ambitions beyond continuing intellectual and spiritual pursuits". This marks a significant distinction from the UAE, and other parts of the Middle East, where the Ikhwan operates as a *political* society. See Courtney Jean Freer, "Rentier Islamism: Muslim Brotherhood Affiliates in Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates," (PhD Diss., University of Oxford, June 2015) 216.

<sup>1049</sup> Doha News, "Qatar Law No. 21 of 2015 Governing Foreigners (in English)," (5 November 2015) <http://dohanews.co/qatar-law-no-21-of-2015-governing-foreigners-in-english/> accessed 4 January 2016; Shabina S. Khatri, "Report: Changes to Qatar's Kafala Law to Take Effect Dec. 14, 2016," (25 December 2015) <http://dohanews.co/report-changes-qatars-kafala-law-take-effect-dec-14-2016/> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1050</sup> Mark Lobel, "Arrested for Reporting on Qatar's World Cup Labourers," *BBC News* (18 May 2015) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32775563> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1051</sup> See International Trade Union Confederation, *The Case Against Qatar* (March 2014); Amnesty International, *The Dark Side of Migration* (2013).

labour system that leaves them vulnerable to exploitation that is of note. Despite the illegality of employers holding their employee's passports, for example, the 2011 SESRI Omnibus survey found the vast majority (91 percent) of migrant workers surveyed had surrendered their passport to their employers.<sup>1052</sup> Consider, also, the following Articles from Law 4 of 2009, "Regarding Regulation of the Expatriates Entry, Departure, Residence and Sponsorship":

**Article 4**

An entry visa may not be granted to an Expatriate who was previously a resident in the State of Qatar for employment purposes until two years have elapsed from the date of departure.

**Article 14**

Should an employee be terminated of the employment pursuant to the provisions of Article 61 of the Labor Law, the provisions of the laws governing the State personnel, or of any other law, and the employee decides not to appeal the decision before the court of jurisdiction or if such appeal is unsuccessful, he may not return to the country within four years from the date of departure.

**Article 18**

Each Expatriate granted an entry visa to the State of Qatar shall have a sponsor. Save for women sponsored by the head of the family, minors and visitors staying thirty days or less, all Expatriates may only leave the country temporarily or permanently on submission of an exit permit granted by the residence sponsor.<sup>1053</sup>

These articles place employees in a very weak position relative to their employers, particularly where existing laws, such as those prohibiting the confiscation of passports, or withholding of wages, are not effectively enforced. Under the kafala system, employer permission, through a 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC), is required to obtain a driver's license, rent a home, open a checking account, change jobs (even for a period after a contract has concluded), or leave the country, which in practice means that employees can be prevented from quitting even after a fixed-term contract has ended.<sup>1054</sup>

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<sup>1052</sup> Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, *Omnibus Survey* (2011).

<sup>1053</sup> See the full law at Government of Qatar, "Law no. 4 of 2009 Regarding Regulation of the Expatriates Entry, Departure, Residence and Sponsorship," (29 March 2009) <http://almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2611&language=en#> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1054</sup> Richard Morin, "Indentured Servitude in the Persian Gulf," *The New York Times* (12 April 2013) [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/sunday-review/indentured-servitude-in-the-persian-gulf.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/sunday-review/indentured-servitude-in-the-persian-gulf.html?_r=0) accessed 1 January 2016.

Media coverage of poor migrant working conditions in Qatar has been damaging to Qatar's international reputation and drawn criticism even from some of the regime's strongest allies.<sup>1055</sup> In June 2015, the *Washington Post* reported that approximately 1,200 migrant workers died, since the 2010 awarding of the World Cup to Qatar, as a result of poor working conditions.<sup>1056</sup> This figure has since been questioned, and a *BBC* report, while maintaining that "living and working conditions for some migrants in Qatar are appalling", noted that the death *rate* of workers was not exceptionally high.<sup>1057</sup> The Qatari government, for its part, unilaterally rejects the *Post's* figure, instead claiming: "after almost five million work-hours on World Cup construction sites, not a single worker's life has been lost. Not one".<sup>1058</sup> It goes on to emphasise the impact of such coverage on Qatar's international reputation:

[E]normous damage has been done to Qatar's image and reputation by the online publication of the Post's article. In fact, 'The Human Toll of FIFA's Corruption,' with its fabricated numbers and its inflammatory and inaccurate graphic, has now gone viral, with almost five million views on Facebook and YouTube as of 1 June.

As a result of the Post's online article, readers around the world have now been led to believe that thousands of migrant workers in Qatar have perished, or will perish, building the facilities for World Cup 2022 – a claim that has absolutely no basis in fact.<sup>1059</sup>

External pressure has thus impacted Qatar's branding and, through that, its investment in soft power. James M. Dorsey goes so far as to claim Qatar's "return on investment in soft power...is proving to be abysmal", as international media coverage has latched onto allegations of widespread corruption in FIFA (allowing them to question how the Qatar 2022 World Cup bid was awarded), disseminated information on campaigns

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<sup>1055</sup> See criticism from the US, UK, and others on the basis of migrant labour conditions in United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review," *United Nations Human Rights Council 27<sup>th</sup> Session* (27 June 2014); see also Kuwait Times, "Emir: Qatar Doesn't Back Extremists – Top Saudi Clerics Warn Against Joining Jihadists," (17 September 2014) <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/emir-qatar-doesnt-back-extremists-top-saudi-clerics-warn-joining-jihadists/> accessed 1 January 2016.

<sup>1056</sup> Christopher Ingraham, "(Updated) The Toll of Human Casualties in Qatar," *Washington Post* (27 May 2015) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/27/a-body-count-in-qatar-illustrates-the-consequences-of-fifa-corruption/>; this report appears to have drawn its original figures from the International Trade Union Confederation, *The Case Against Qatar*, which attributes all migrant worker deaths to poor working conditions, regardless of the actual cause of death.

<sup>1057</sup> Wesley Stephenson, "Have 1,200 World Cup Workers Really Died in Qatar?" *BBC News* (6 June 2015) <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33019838>

<sup>1058</sup> Qatar News Agency, "Qatar Government Communications Office Denies Washington Post Article about Worker Conditions in Qatar," (2 June 2015) <http://www.qna.org.qa/en-us/News/15060218340056/Qatars-Government-Communication-Office-Denies-Washington-Post-Article-about-Worker-Conditions-in-Qatar> accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>1059</sup> *Ibid.*

against sponsors for the 2022 World Cup, and published exposés on the poor conditions and rights of migrant workers constructing the stadiums and infrastructure to be used. “As if to drive the point home”, writes Dorsey:

It was not Qatari aid to the victims of two devastating earthquakes in Nepal that made headlines but the refusal of contractors working on World Cup-related projects to grant Nepalese labourers compassion leave to return home to attend funerals or visit relatives. The refusal that sparked rare criticism from a labour-supplying nation followed the opening in France of an investigation of a Qatari-French joint venture into alleged abused of workers on World Cup projects.<sup>1060</sup>

There is also mounting pressure on major FIFA Sponsors such as Coca-Cola, Adidas, Visa, and McDonalds to withdraw their support unless Qatari working conditions, and FIFA corruption allegations, are more effectively addressed. These global brands have been personally targeted by numerous campaigns, including a May 2015 series of ads subverting the iconic images of Coca Cola, McDonalds, Visa, Adidas, as well as a host of second-tier sponsors including Kia, Hyundai, and Anheuser-Busch InBev (Budweiser) with the slogan “Proudly Supporting the Human Rights Abuses of World Cup 2022”.<sup>1061</sup> Though no first-tier sponsors have withdrawn support for FIFA as a result of migrant labour concerns, (and second-tier sponsors who have, such as Sony and Continental, only indirectly referenced the issue), the repeated issuance of statements confirming their support for reform suggests public campaigns are having a marked effect on sponsor attitudes, at least publicly.<sup>1062</sup> “We continue to be troubled by the reports coming out of Qatar related to the World Cup and migrant worker conditions”, Visa said in a statement in May 2015, and later in the same month threatened to cut ties with the FIFA’s governing body unless swift action was taken to rebuild a “culture with strong ethical practices”.<sup>1063</sup> Ultimately, it remains unlikely that

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<sup>1060</sup> James M. Dorsey, “A Shrewd Financial Investor, Qatar Boasts Dismal Returns on Investment in Soft Power,” *Huffington Post* (24 May 2015) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/a-shrewd-financial-invest\\_b\\_7430632.html?ir=Australia](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/a-shrewd-financial-invest_b_7430632.html?ir=Australia).

<sup>1061</sup> John McCarthy, “Creatives Condemn Qatar World Cup sponsors Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Visa, and Adidas with Pro-slavery Ads,” *The Drum* (27 May 2015) <http://www.thedrum.com/news/2015/05/27/creatives-condemn-qatar-world-cup-sponsors-coca-cola-mcdonalds-visa-adidas-pro>

<sup>1062</sup> The Independent “Fifa Loses Three Major World Cup Sponsors as Castrol, Continental, and Johnson & Johnson Add to Pressure on Sepp Blatter’s Organization,” (23 January 2015) <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/news-and-comment/fifa-lose-three-major-world-cup-sponsors-as-castrol-continental-and-johnson-johnson-add-to-pressure-9998064.html> accessed 2 August 2016; AB InBev et al., “Open Letter to the FIFA Executive Committee,” *Coca-Cola Company* (1 December 2015) <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/press-center/company-statements/open-letter-to-the-fifa-executive-committee/> accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>1063</sup> Sneha Shankar, “FIFA 2022 World Cup Sponsors Visa, Adidas, Coca-Cola Concerned Over Qatar’s Labor Conditions,” *International Business Times* (21 May 2015) <http://www.ibtimes.com/fifa-2022-world-cup-sponsors-visa-adidas-coca-cola-concerned-over-qatars-labor-1932365> accessed 2 August



major sponsors such as Adidas and Coca-Cola would leave a multi-decade partnership as a result of existing human rights campaigns, yet it does suggest that international advocacy has forced these companies to maintain pressure for reform on FIFA's governing body and, through that, on the Qatari government.<sup>1064</sup>

In contrast to international coverage of migrant labour, FIFA corruption, and other issues associated with the 2022 World Cup, local media has a decidedly different take on events. In March 2015, as representatives from Amnesty International concluded a two week visit to review migrant working conditions, local newspaper *Qatar Tribune* carried an article titled "Amnesty hails MoI's human rights record" on its front page (Amnesty representatives later denounced the article as misleading).<sup>1065</sup> In 2014, another local paper, *The Peninsula*, claimed the negative international media attention was part of "sinister media campaign" which, if not a result of an anti-Arab Western media bias, was potentially orchestrated by the UAE, in co-ordination with Israel.<sup>1066</sup> A May 2014 opinion piece by Qatari Maryam al-Khatir best summarises a common Qatari response to international reform pressure:

After Qatar recently announced that it will replace its sponsorship law with another system based on contracts, Amnesty International cast doubt on the move. The international organisation said the move was "not enough".

As citizens, we are not supposed to succumb to pressures put on our government with the aim of ushering in confusion in its laws and policies and create public dissatisfaction...Everyone is talking about some sub-contracting companies violating the rights of labourers, but what about rights of citizens, the employers?<sup>1067</sup>

These articles are not exceptional, but rather reflect local Qatari opinions that largely reject external pressure for reform. That is, the ruling elite has simultaneously been

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2016; Anjali Athavaley and Emma Thomasson, "Visa Threatens to Ditch FIFA as Sponsor Dismay Mounts," *Washington Post* (28 May 2015) <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-soccer-fifa-sponsors-idUSKBN00C2UH20150528> accessed 1 January 2016.

<sup>1064</sup> Athavaley and Thomasson, "Visa Threatens to Ditch FIFA as Sponsor Dismay Mounts".

<sup>1065</sup> *Qatar Tribune*, "Amnesty Hails MoI's Human Rights Record," (15 March 2015) <http://qatar-tribune.com/viewnews.aspx?n=1F18F1F6-D111-4449-BCA4-8496DB9CEC68&d=20150315> accessed 2 August 2016; Amnesty representatives involved in the visit blasted the article as "shameful propaganda" and instead claimed "Qatar is failing migrant workers", see Al Jazeera, "Amnesty Criticises Qatar on Migrant Labour Rights," (21 May 2015) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/amnesty-criticises-qatar-migrant-labour-rights-150521062250964.html> accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>1066</sup> *The Peninsula*, "Campaign Driven by Agenda," (25 October 2014)

<http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/305182/campaign-driven-by-agenda> accessed 1 January 2016.

<sup>1067</sup> Maryam al-Khatir, "Controversy of 2022 World Cup," *The Peninsula* (29 May 2014)

<http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/maryam-al-khatir/285622/controversy-over-2022-world-cup>

pressured by the international community to improve migrant labour conditions, while the domestic community presses for a *stricter* kafala system.

The recommendations of Qatar's Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura) on various draft laws to reform the labour system are revealing. After the government presented a draft law to reform Law 4 of 2009 to the Council, members made a series of recommendations that, far from relaxing restrictions on foreign workers in Qatar, "would actually give employers more control over expats".<sup>1068</sup> Local Arabic-language papers *al-Rāya* and *al-Sharq* described the debate over the draft law as "heated" and outlined the recommended changes from Majlis al-Shura members, including: that workers be prohibited from changing jobs more than twice; that employers have the right to return workers hired on fixed-term contracts to their home countries once the contract has ended; and that employers be required to educate new migrant workers about Qatari law and culture.<sup>1069</sup> They also expressed concern about a new element in the draft law that would allow migrant workers to leave the country solely through an application for an exit permit to the "delegated authority", reportedly the Ministry of Interior, instead suggesting the worker should apply to their employer first, and then to the Ministry (which in practical terms would mean a perpetuation of the NOC and exit visa system). Most controversially, the Majlis recommended that troublesome workers (those who fail to comply with the terms of their contract) be penalised by having to work twice as long as their contract states (or for 10 years rather than 5 if on an open-ended contract), before they could change employers or quit without an NOC.<sup>1070</sup>

By July 2015, despite the reservations noted above, the Majlis al-Shura officially signed off on the draft law. Yet it is important to note that it was not solely Majlis al-Shura members who pressed for a more restrictive labour policy. Well before the draft law was sent to the Majlis, it had been circulated to Qatar's Chamber of Commerce, the

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<sup>1068</sup> Peter Kovessy and Heba Fahmy, "Qatar Council Sends Back Proposed Kafala Changes for More Revisions," *Doha News* (23 June 2015) [http://dohanews.co/qatar-council-sends-proposed-kafala-changes-back-for-more-revisions/#disqus\\_thread](http://dohanews.co/qatar-council-sends-proposed-kafala-changes-back-for-more-revisions/#disqus_thread) accessed 2 January 2016.

<sup>1069</sup> Al-Sharq, "al-shūrā: jewāz intqāl al-wāfed li'amal ākher ba'ad muḍiyy 5 sanawāt," (23 June 2015) <http://www.al-sharq.com/news/details/348369#.VoOXisB94y5> accessed 4 January 2016; Manāl 'abās, "al-shūrā ye 'ayed qānūn dakhūl wa khurūj al-wāfedīn lildirāsa," *al-Rāya* (23 June 2015) <http://www.raya.com/news/pages/81e21e41-fccf-45a9-be6e-9be631ce91ee> accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1070</sup> This recommendation was later changed to apply to all migrant workers. See 'abās, "al-shūrā ye 'ayed qānūn dakhūl wa khurūj al-wāfedī lildirāsa"; Manāl 'abās, "al-shūrā yewāfeq 'alā <<tanzīm dakhūl wa khurūj al-wāfedīn w'iqāmatehum>>," *al-Raya* (7 July 2015) <http://www.raya.com/news/pages/4e8e7235-3e4f-44db-b469-89e184d3110a> accessed 7 August 2016; Lesley Walker and Heba Fahmy, "Despite Doubts, Qatar Advisory Council Signs off on Kafala Changes," *Doha News* (7 July 2015) <http://dohanews.co/despite-doubts-qatar-advisory-council-signs-off-on-kafala-changes/> accessed 12 August 2016.

bastion of Qatar's business elite.<sup>1071</sup> The Chamber of Commerce had officially backed the draft law in October 2014, though in the following months they still iterated some additional recommendations.<sup>1072</sup> As a January 2015 *Peninsula* article elaborated:

Understandably, the only change the sector wants in the new system is that engineers and senior employees of mega projects should not be entitled to sponsorship change before they have completed five to 10 years with a company. This is because a major development project takes at least five to 10 years to complete, argues Qatar Chamber, the representative body of the private sector.<sup>1073</sup>

Concern that the balance of power rest with the employer was not restricted to elite circles. The SESRI Qatar 2010 Omnibus Survey found, for example, that: "When asked about the sponsorship system or 'kafala', nearly half (47%) of Qatari respondents said that the system should be tightened to make the worker more dependent on his or her sponsor".<sup>1074</sup> It is critical to note here that Qatar labour law reform is wrapped up in broader issues of citizenship, economic development, and migrant labour.<sup>1075</sup> Chapter Four also discussed the balance between Qatar's partial opening to globalisation and fast-tracked development, and a growing backlash against the rapid shifts in Qatar's demography and perceived threat to traditional values and culture; this was highlighted as one of the most likely areas from which significant political opposition could emerge.<sup>1076</sup> There were numerous examples provided in Chapter Four of nascent political challenges stemming from a sense of marginalisation perceived by Qatari nationals, who, after all, form only a small minority of the total population in Qatar. These challenges permeate Qatari attitudes toward migrant workers, and contribute to a sense that these workers represent a threat to Qatari traditional culture and values. In October 2015, for example, members of Qatar's elected Central Municipal Council (CMC) complained that Law 15 of 2010, which bans blue-collar (usually migrant) workers from living in neighbourhoods populated primarily by families, should be enforced more actively, echoing earlier comments from an opinion piece in *The*

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<sup>1071</sup> Peter Kovessy, "Qatar Officials Propose Changes to Kafala System," *Doha News* (14 May 2014) <http://dohanews.co/qatar-officials-propose-changes-kafala-system/>

<sup>1072</sup> Lesley Walker, "Qatar's Business Community Gives Nod to Kafala Changes," *Doha News* (17 October 2014) <http://dohanews.co/qatars-business-community-gives-nod-kafala-changes/>

<sup>1073</sup> The Peninsula, "Private Sector Softens Stand on Sponsorship," (2 January 2015) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/314307/private-sector-softens-stand-on-sponsorship> accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>1074</sup> Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, *Omnibus Survey* (2010) 16;

<sup>1075</sup> See Sharon Nagi, "Making Room for Migrants, Making Sense of Difference: Spatial and Ideological Expressions of Social Diversity in Urban Qatar," *Urban Studies* 43:1 (January 2006) 119-137; Nakhleh, "Labor Markets and Citizenship in Bahrain and Qatar".

<sup>1076</sup> See for example al-Kuwari, "The Visions and Strategies of the GCC Countries from the Perspective of Reforms".

*Peninsula* by journalist Rashed al-Audah al-Fadeh claiming that “these bachelor workers are threatening the privacy and comfort of families, spreading like a deadly epidemic that cuts through our social fabric”.<sup>1077</sup>

It should also be noted that Qatari opinions towards migrants are mixed: the same SESRI survey that found 47 percent of Qataris support a stricter kafala system also found an overwhelming majority of Qataris felt expatriates and migrant workers “help to build the country’s economy” (90.4%) and “strengthen our country because they bring talents” (89.9%). Simultaneously, a smaller majority (65.1%) felt labour migrant workers, specifically, weakened the country because “they take our resources”.<sup>1078</sup> There is thus a complex relationship between Qatari nationals and migrant workers, problematised by issues of citizenship, demography, identity, economic development, and globalisation, and Qatari support for the kafala labour system must be understood with this in mind.

As of September 2015, FIFA has confirmed the 2022 World Cup will take place in Qatar.<sup>1079</sup> The labour reforms were signed into law by Emir Tamim in October 2015 as Law 21 of 2015, although it will not be implemented until December 2016.<sup>1080</sup> Many of the provisions include important legal protections or relax previous NOC requirements. Article 21, for example, stipulates that foreign workers no longer need to obtain an NOC from their employer to change jobs, or to leave the country upon completion of a fixed-term contract (or after five years employment with a non-fixed term contract), although an NOC is still required before that point. Article 8 outlines more specifically that employers cannot hold employee passports without written permission from the employee, and that the employee can rescind this permission at any time. Article 22 also establishes some vital protection for household workers, who were not previously

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<sup>1077</sup> Rashed Al Audah Al Fadly, “Why Do Bachelors Live in Family Areas?” *The Peninsula* (27 February 2014) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective/-rashed-al-audah-al-fadly/274126/why-do-bachelors-live-in-family-areas> accessed 2 August 2016; Heba Fahmy, “CMC: Qatar Should Do More to Enforce ‘Bachelor Ban’ in Residential Areas,” *Doha News* (21 October 2015) <http://dohanews.co/cmc-qatar-should-do-more-to-enforce-bachelor-ban-in-residential-areas/> accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>1078</sup> Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, *Omnibus Survey* (2010) 16.

<sup>1079</sup> Bryan Altman, “FIFA Has Confirmed The 2022 World Cup Will Take Place In Qatar,” *CBS Local Sports* (25 September 2015) <http://sports.cbslocal.com/2015/09/25/fifa-has-confirmed-the-2022-world-cup-will-take-place-in-qatar/> accessed 2 August 2016.

<sup>1080</sup> The law has not yet been officially translated into English, but was circulated in Arabic through al-Sharq, “qānūn raqm (21) lisana 2015,” (2015) <http://media.al-sharq.com/portalfiles/pdfissue/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84.pdf> accessed 11 August 2016.

covered by the 2009 labour law, although even under the new law their protection is discretionary rather than institutionalised.<sup>1081</sup>

Of particular import is Article 7, which revises the requirements for exit permits. As noted above, the Majlis al-Shura objected to forms of the draft law that suggested that the Ministry of Interior, rather than the employer, would be responsible for granting an exit permit. The final version of Article 7 requires foreign workers to notify the delegated authority (the Ministry of Interior) at least three days before departure, and the worker receives permission to leave immediately after their employer notifies the MoI of their assent.<sup>1082</sup> If the employer, or the MoI, refuses to grant permission to leave, the law creates a new appeals council, to be formed by Ministerial decree; it is too early to tell if the appeals court will respond more to employer or employee concerns. In the event of an emergency, the appeals council must respond to the request within 72 hours of submission. While far from a complete overhaul of the exit permit and NOC system, then, the final version of Article 7 suggests a compromise between external and internal pressure. The state has also passed other laws and regulations addressing external criticism, including a Wage Protection System, which requires all wages to shift to electronic bank transfers, so the state can more easily monitor payments to workers and respond to allegations of late or missing wages.<sup>1083</sup> Notably the terms *kafil* and *kafala* were strenuously avoided within all new legislation, and local news announced the *kafala* system had now been entirely overhauled.<sup>1084</sup>

Foreign media and international human rights groups were less convinced. “It sounds extremely disappointing...this does not sound like a change in the law that will move things forward for workers,” said Nick McGeehan, a Gulf researcher at Human Rights Watch.<sup>1085</sup> James Dorsey wrote of the new Qatari labour law:

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<sup>1081</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1082</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1083</sup> Peter Kovessy, Riham Sheble and Heba Fahmy, “Qatar’s Emir Signs Into Law Kafala Changes (Updated),” *Doha News* (27 October 2015) <http://dohanews.co/qatars-emir-approves-kafala-reforms-changes-more-than-one-year-away/>; Shabina S. Khatri and Peter Kovessy, “Qatar Emir Approves Law Mandating Electronic Wage Payments For Workers,” *Doha News* (18 February 2015) <http://dohanews.co/qatars-emir-approved-changes-countrys-labor-law/> accessed 5 August 2016.

<sup>1084</sup> The Peninsula, “Kafala Replaced by Job Contract System,” (1 November 2015) <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/357116/kafala-replaced-by-job-contract-system> accessed 7 August 2016.

<sup>1085</sup> quoted in Peter Kovessy and Heba Fahmy, “New Qatar Sponsorship Law Met with Frustration, Praise,” *Doha News* (28 October 2015) <http://dohanews.co/rights-advocate-extremely-disappointed-with-qatars-kafala-reforms/> accessed 2 August 2016.

Never missing an opportunity to shoot itself in the foot, the 2022 World Cup-host Qatar has adopted a new law that is more likely to convince its critics that it aims to put a friendly face on its controversial kafala or sponsorship system rather than radically reform a legal framework that trade unions and human rights activists have dubbed modern slavery.<sup>1086</sup>

Yet, as with the divide between international and domestic attitudes to reform, local opinions were more positive. Qatari businessmen praised the new law for protecting employer rights, and government figures such as Qatar Minister of Justice, Dr. Najeeb al-Nuaimi, defended the new law by maintaining that “the reforms are not up to the expectations of international human rights organizations, but are still an improvement from the old kafala law”.<sup>1087</sup> Qataris particularly emphasised the importance of patience, noting the time needed to effectively implement the reforms. “Changes take time”, said Qatari editor-in-chief of *The Peninsula*, Khalid al-Sayed, when asked about migrant labour reform in 2013. “Today we are in the middle. We can’t go back, we need to go forward, [but] we have to balance international and local pressures. We need to take the citizens with us”.<sup>1088</sup> “We understand the impatience [of labour reformers] but it is important that we advance at our own pace”, explained Abdullah Salah Mubarak al-Khulaifi, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs, in September 2015:

We are constantly required to adapt while ameliorating the conditions in which foreign workers are accepted, particularly since we expect an influx of record numbers in the period 2016 – 2018. Our laws are already being modified and we have made considerable effort to ensure that these workers are informed, at home or upon arrival in Qatar, of their rights.<sup>1089</sup>

Yet international pressure is unlikely to abate anytime soon. As Ulrichsen notes, the World Cup is already drawing out confrontations between traditional and globalising forces, suggesting that:

[T]he interaction between globalising forces and localised responses will be contested rather than consensual in years to come. As the FIFA World Cup looms more sharply into view, the policy choices may well become sharper and more controversial...the new leadership in Qatar

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<sup>1086</sup> James M. Dorsey, “New Qatari Labour Law: Too Little, Too Late,” *Huffington Post* (29 October 2015) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/new-qatari-labour-law-too\\_b\\_8408458.html?ir=Australia](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/new-qatari-labour-law-too_b_8408458.html?ir=Australia) accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>1087</sup> See al-Sharq, “rijāl ’a māl: qānūn dakhūl wa khurūj al-wāfedīn yehequq meṣāleḥ al-’āmel walkefil,” (27 October 2015) <http://www.al-sharq.com/news/details/380397#.Vodye8B94y5>; Najeeb al-Nuaimi quoted in Kovessy and Fahmy, “New Qatar sponsorship law met with frustration, praise”.

<sup>1088</sup> Author interview with Khalid al-Sayed, Qatar 2013.

<sup>1089</sup> Akram Belkaid, “Des Réformes à Pas Comptés Pour les Travailleurs au Qatar,” *Orient XXI* (8 September 2015) <http://orientxxi.info/magazine/des-reformes-a-pas-comptes-pour-les-travailleurs-au-qatar,1011> accessed 12 May 2016.

will have to deal with the fall-out from each new revelation [about migrant labour conditions] in the full glare of the international media spotlight. It will not be easy to shift the narrative away from an issue that large sections of the press have identified as the major public and human interest story surrounding the 2022 World Cup.<sup>1090</sup>

International attention is thus likely to increase in the lead-up to the Qatar 2022 World Cup, and will continue to place pressure on the Qatari state-society relationship. Yet a complete overhaul of the Qatari labour system, as desired by international human rights organisations, is unlikely while there exists such strong societal opposition to any weakening of employer (citizen) rights. Not only would the leadership be viewed as capitulating to foreign pressure, but reforming the system requires the state to address embedded and systemic issues of demography, citizenship, identity, and equality: in essence, a significant reformation of state-society relations. Ultimately, the state has made some promises of change, but is yet to deliver anything befitting the description of an *overhaul* of the kafala system: it seems that without a domestic base, international human rights pressure can cause only limited change.

### **Conclusion: Implications for RST**

There remains a significant gap within RST regarding the role and importance of international variables. The rentier state that arises from the extant literature is typically depicted as politically autonomous, not only from their own society but also from foreign political influences (the exception being those that impact the fiscal basis of the regime).

Yet, while there remain many limitations to international and transnational pressure for reform, the case studies in this chapter highlight the importance of these dynamics to any understanding of state-society relations. The transnational nature of political opposition is not unique to the oil-rich states of the Gulf, but it is critical to understanding how opposition in a rent-rich state can have domestic roots yet act internationally, generating new and potentially promising avenues of research. Rather than focusing on whether oil enhances the presence (or absence) of violent conflict, for example, a productive line of inquiry might be to examine how internationalised networks of opposition, formed over time from waves of exile and amnesty, have helped to sustain pressure for reform in rent-rich states even where domestic opposition

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<sup>1090</sup> Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring*, 170, 178.

remains weakened due to the ‘repression effect’. Transnational human rights activism has also demonstrated an ability to impact the fiscal basis of the rentier regime itself, particularly where campaigns successfully target high profile and profitable events (such as the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix), revealing an interesting challenge to the rent-societal quiescence relationship.

International dynamics can also help explain the *choices* rent-rich states make in distributing rents to some sections of society, and repression to others, which, as noted in Chapter Five, are critical to the effectiveness of the rentier bargain itself.<sup>1091</sup> The Shi‘ite Crescent narrative and Iranian-Saudi rivalry, for example, have markedly shaped state and loyalist attitudes towards transnational Shia political groups in Bahrain, and prompted a show of unity from GCC states who felt a sense of security interdependence with the Bahraini regime. While the Shi‘ite Crescent narrative is currently prominent in the northern states of the Gulf – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, as well as Iraq – previous narratives have highlighted the threat of Marxists, Arab Nationalists, colonialists, and other groups with external ties: this is clearly an important governance strategy that should be incorporated into the core understanding of rentierism in the Gulf region.

This does not mean that external and transnational pressure is necessarily the dominant factor shaping state-society relations. Transnational advocacy via lobbying of key foreign allies must contend with other interests shaping the foreign policies of those states, such as security, financial, or other interests that can reduce incentives to place political pressure on the Gulf state. Moreover, as discussed in the case of Qatari labour reform, complete overhaul of the kafala system is unlikely to occur solely as a result of external pressure, particularly where the state must remain responsive to its domestic citizenry, who are concerned about what reform might mean for their status in a country where they are already vastly outnumbered by migrant workers. Yet, ultimately, where international or transnational actors can align with reformers in the society (or, alternatively, with the state), they can play an influential role in reshaping state-society relations. Without theoretical space for these international and transnational dimensions of state-society relations, RST risks overemphasising the autonomy of the state, whereas it seems more likely that oil and gas-rich Gulf states are not isolated politically, economically, or socially, from regional and international pressures. International

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<sup>1091</sup> Okruhlik, “Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition.” 295-395.



variables, then, must be more directly integrated into the core understanding of state-society relations in rent-rich states.

## Conclusion

Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman represent archetypal rentier states drawn from the very region where RST was first conceptualised: they are among the most likely cases where RST should have continued relevance. Although no theory should be expected to comprehensively explain state-society relations, this dissertation highlights several aspects of these relations for which RST, especially the classic literature, contributes to a misleading image. Particularly problematic assertions include: that the state is autonomous; that societies in rent-rich states are passive and effectively coopted; that inequality is irrelevant to societal political mobilisation; and that rent-rich states are insulated from transnational and international political influences, excepting those which impact the fiscal basis of the state. Essentially, RST encourages attention on the material basis of political legitimacy and authority, yet, as a result, neglects non-material dynamics shaping political activism. This has contributed to a significant gap in the literature in terms of understanding the emergence of societal reform movements in rent-rich (and, assumedly, materially satisfied) states, such as those that occurred across the Gulf in 2011. Further, the specific process through which rents assumedly cause societal quiescence needs more thorough interrogation, as in some cases the practical implementation of a cooptive strategy – as discussed in the case of Omani development in Chapter Five – has resulted in heightened, rather than reduced, political mobilisation.

This does not mean that RST should be discarded in its entirety; as discussed throughout this dissertation, rents remain highly relevant to the state-society relationship. Certain political mobilisations – such as those orchestrated by Sohari youth, the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition in Bahrain, and, in Qatar, the #Qtelfail movement – had primarily material motivations that suggested potential rent-seeking; the first two also represent groups that have been (relatively) neglected by the rentier bargain, and thus their political activism does not challenge RST but, rather, reinforces it. Rents were also used indirectly, through rent-funded cultural projects such as Katara Cultural Village in Qatar, to reinforce state legitimacy; this contributed to a greater sense of responsiveness among citizens that emerged as a key determinant of political loyalty, *ceteris paribus*. There are clearly gaps remaining in RST's explanation of state-society relations, but this should not be taken as implying the irrelevance of rents, but rather as offering an opportunity to revise and refine core assumptions of RST, curb conceptual

overstretching, and widen theoretical space for the inclusion of other, non-material, elements of the state-society relationship.

### **Revising Rentierism for the Modern Arab States of the Gulf**

In drawing together the findings of this dissertation to offer a revised conception of state-society relations in modern Gulf rent-rich states, it should first be noted that this is not intended to apply to all types of rentier states, nor should it be taken as a permanent state of affairs that can be removed from its temporal context. This research examined the impact of political pressure on *consolidated* rentier states, where rentier dynamics and state-building processes have had time – not as long as Western states, certainly, but more than many other developing nations – to coalesce and mature in a (relatively) stable setting. The states examined in detail have been rentier almost as long as they have had the bureaucratic institutions of a ‘modern’ state, thus rentierism developed alongside traditional state formation processes and has become embedded in state and society – indeed they are all ruled by the same families that were in power when oil and gas rents were first received. They are also all small states located in the Arabian Peninsula along the edge of the Persian Gulf, thus have particular characteristics specific to the region – tribal dynamics and large expatriate populations, for example – that shape the state-society relationship alongside rentierism.

Having established some definitional boundaries, this concluding chapter outlines six key features of what it terms *Gulf Rentierism*, as a revised version of RST that better captures the prevailing state-society relationship in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman since 2011. These features are specific revisions of RST that ultimately generate a substantially different picture of state-society relations from that typically assumed within the extant literature, and additionally provide a summary of the findings of this thesis, with the first two features corresponding to findings in Chapter Three, the second two Chapter Four, and the fifth and sixth to Chapters Five and Six, respectively.

#### **1. The ‘rentier’ state is not a unified actor.**

Edmund Burke declared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that “the revenue of the state is the state”,<sup>1092</sup> a claim that Karl asserts is “emphatically confirmed by the experience of oil

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<sup>1092</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that Event*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1790) 334.

exporters”.<sup>1093</sup> RST also generally rests on a depiction of states as cohesive entities: even if there exists internal fragmentation between ministries, government departments, and other state actors, the assumption is that horizontal competition for rents between these groups stymies their engagement with non-material policy, leaving the ruling elite largely autonomous. As Courtney Freer notes: “most early works on rentierism treat the state as a single homogenous unit, leaving little space for political actors aside from what is assumed to be a united government and devoting scant attention to the internal political workings of such a state”.<sup>1094</sup>

Yet this dissertation found that fragmentation within the state is critical to understanding variation in state attitudes towards society since 2011. As discussed in Chapter Three, certain factions within the state – for example former Emir Hamad in Qatar and Crown Prince Salman in Bahrain – have been associated with efforts to push for greater economic, if not political, reform and many government interviewees from all three case studies expressed a desire to mitigate the effects of rentierism. Even where a state acts in ways consistent with the idea of a rentier state, such as by distributing massive rent-derived wealth to society in response to the Arab Spring, the influence of rentierism may vary between institutions, factions, and individuals. The consultative parliaments of the Gulf provide an interesting example here, particularly since they straddle the divide between ruling elite and political societies, which in turn find legitimacy through responding to popular sentiments. The empowerment of conservative forces within Bahrain’s electorate since 2011, for example, has had implications for the type of policy that has emerged from the elected Majlis al-Nuwwab. Recent developments within the lower house of Bahrain’s parliament include: a heated protest over fuel price hikes, a proposal to impose a trade embargo and ban on all travel to Iran, a call to limit the number of expats in Bahrain to 50 percent of the population, and repeated pushes to ban alcohol.<sup>1095</sup> Many of these proposals have been previously rejected by Cabinet, but have re-emerged repeatedly since 2011, problematising any

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<sup>1093</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 222.

<sup>1094</sup> Freer, “Rentier Islamism,” 22.

<sup>1095</sup> Courtney Trenwith, “Bahraini MPs Renew Push to Ban Alcohol,” *Arabian Business* (28 May 2014) <http://m.arabianbusiness.com/bahraini-mps-renew-push-ban-alcohol-551845.html> accessed 1 August 2016; Arabian Business, “Bahrain MPs Urge Cap on the Number of Expats,” (14 December 2015) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-mps-urge-cap-on-number-of-expats-615180.html> accessed 1 August 2016. Arabian Business, “Bahrain MPs Stage Heated Protest Over Fuel Price Hike,” (20 January 2016) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-mps-stage-heated-protest-over-fuel-price-hike-619163.html> accessed 29 January 2016; Arabian Business, “Bahrain MPs Seek Iran Trade Embargo,” (6 January 2016) <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-mps-seek-iran-trade-embargo-617403.html> accessed 29 January 2016.

notion of a ruling elite divorced from the interests and non-material demands of lower echelons of state actors.<sup>1096</sup> Instead, there were clear negotiation processes occurring *within* the state over how it should respond to developments in the post-2011 era, and the relationship between state and society was continually contested. Crucially, certain factions within the state demonstrated awareness of the importance of appearing responsive alongside rent-based distributions, and several of the changes made since 2011, particularly in Oman, denote this responsiveness.

This should not suggest that rentierism is irrelevant to practices of governance. There was, for example, significant *prima facie* evidence suggesting that the state views its relationship as primarily allocative, particularly the massive direct transfers of wealth that occurred across the Gulf region in response to 2011 unrest, as well as many statements from government interviewees indicating a conscious rentier relationship with society. Members of the state, particularly in Bahrain, described the post-2011 protests as driven by primarily material desires, the implication being that greater rent distributions could placate society and prevent further mass mobilisation. Even as these views are not consistently held across state groups and formed only a minority overall, they offer a useful narrative of the unrest, delegitimising opposition as rent-seeking and allowing the state to portray those who accepted rent distributions and nevertheless joined societal reform movements as ‘ungrateful’. These narratives are, in turn, internalised and promulgated by societal groups, particularly loyalist actors and others that have aligned with the rent-rich regime in the post-2011 era.

Further, as revisionist theorist Hertog notes, fragmentation of the state is in part a *product* of rentierism, where the availability of rents has encouraged the creation of not only an expanded bureaucracy, but also a system of governance that fosters clientelism and duplication. The exception, as noted in Chapter One, is within what Hertog terms “islands of efficiency”, but while his findings focused on the implications of fragmentation for bureaucratic efficiency and the effectiveness of diversification programmes,<sup>1097</sup> this research also found that members of these islands were often

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<sup>1096</sup> Hertog’s findings similarly suggest the ruling elite is beholden to bureaucrats and lower level state actors at a micro-level and thus question intra-state autonomy, but his research focused on the implications for the effectiveness of policy and state capacity, rather than on the implications for state responsiveness to society. Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*.

<sup>1097</sup> Hertog was careful about overgeneralising from his findings, noting that in Bahrain and Kuwait, as well as non-Gulf states such as Venezuela, Iran, and Indonesia, the strength of pre-oil independent popular mobilisation and horizontal integration across societal groups problematises the notion of limited state autonomy that he develops based on a case study of Saudi Arabia. *Ibid*, 275.

reform-oriented and had been consistently pressuring the state, internally, to become more efficient, to mitigate the negative economic influences of rentierism, and, ultimately, to allow citizens to become equal partners in development. These entities not only problematise classic RST's depiction of rent-rich states as unlikely to formulate development policy, but also, in some cases, challenge the claim that government departments compete with each other for influence rather than coordinating to create sustainable economic development. It is notable, for example, that the bodies created through Bahrain's Economic Development Board, such as Tamkeen and the LMRA, formulate coordinated strategies that coherently align with Bahrain's 2030 Vision,<sup>1098</sup> as compared to the more general absence of synchronisation and coordination that typifies economic development in the Gulf.<sup>1099</sup>

## **2. Cooptation is rarely effective by itself, even among supporters.**

Despite continued rent allocations from state to society, the role of rent distributions in engendering loyalty to the regime among interviewees was not immediately clear; certainly, they did not create support in the absence of a sense of responsiveness. However, as noted by Gray and Peterson, states such as Qatar have used rents to finance development projects designed to enhance an image of responsiveness and benevolence and *these* projects, such as Katara, the Museum of Islamic Art, and Souq Waqif, were among those listed by Qataris to justify their loyalty to the state.<sup>1100</sup> Rents, then, may *enhance* a perception of responsiveness even if political liberalisation remains absent, and the ability to satisfy material demands (such as providing full coverage for medical treatments) should not be undervalued. Interestingly, this also means that rents form part of a broader state-legitimation process, which implies that material and non-material legitimacy-building tactics are inextricably linked, and should be analysed simultaneously.

Overall, however, citizen explanations for why they remained politically quiescent, or alternatively mobilised in *support* of the regime, tended more towards a sense of personal access to the state, and only secondarily on material distributions. The distinction this dissertation draws between passive acceptance and active support for the

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<sup>1098</sup> See for example Tamkeen's 2010-2014 Strategy, available in Tamkeen, "Tamkeen Strategy 2010-2014," (n.d.) <http://www.tamkeen.bh/docs/Tamkeen%20Strategy%202010-2014%20English.pdf> accessed 8 June 2014.

<sup>1099</sup> This is particularly notable when examining policy on SME entrepreneurialism. See Moritz, "Rents, Start-Ups, and Obstacles to SME Entrepreneurialism in Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar," 201-221.

<sup>1100</sup> Gray, *Qatar*; Peterson, "Qatar and the World," 732-748; see also Kamrava, *Qatar*, 90-91.

state is important: understanding the difference between the two groups can help to distinguish between dynamics that encourage societal quiescence, reminiscent of the typically passive society described in classic RST, and those which drive political activism and explicit support for the state. Despite the importance of these groups to the perpetuation of the rentier bargain, there is a serious dearth of analysis of the complexity of their support for the rent-rich state.

For example, for those who refrained from political mobilisation in the 2011 to mid-2014 period, the expectation, according to the logic of RST, should be that their (in)action was caused by rent distributions, and a sense of material satisfaction. Yet, when asked to explain their personal decision to eschew political action, the vast majority of Qataris, Bahrainis, and Omanis interviewed for this research referred, above all else, to the responsiveness they perceived from the state. The specific causal path varied between case studies. In Oman, state responsiveness to societal concerns, exemplified since 2011 in a series of prominent graft and corruption cases, as well as the nation-building strategy pursued since 1970 that has strengthened personal loyalty to Sultan Qaboos, have contributed to Omani political quiescence. In Bahrain, the heightened politicisation and polarisation of the citizenry since 2011 complicated the search for interviewees who had *not* mobilised politically, yet two important trends were evident. First, some Bahrainis who belonged to societal groups (such as wealthy Sunni Bahrainis) who tended to mobilise in *support* of the state expressed a dislike of the disruption caused to political and economic life in the country, and argued their political quiescence allowed the state more space to deal with opposition. Second, some Bahrainis who otherwise described views aligning with Bahraini mainstream opposition claimed they felt the personal cost of mobilisation was too high, exemplifying the divergent impact of the state's use of repression: that in some circumstances it had prevented political action yet in many others, as evidenced in Chapter Four, *encouraged* it. In Qatar, the sense of direct access to the ruling elite expressed by interviewees is likely shaped by the small size of the citizenry, agency of the ruling elite (in terms of governance, referring particularly to their first-mover strategy), the homogeneity of the population compared to other, more restive, societies in the Gulf, as well as the relative *absence* of factors identified as mobilising agents. Rent distributions were also referenced, but only secondarily, suggesting that there *is* a cooptation effect, but that it interacts with other political dynamics, such as tribal and sect-based identities, nation-building efforts, and a sense of state responsiveness shaped by effective statecraft.

Active supporters referenced this same sense of state responsiveness to explain their loyalty to the state, but tended to additionally be drawn from societal groups that had historically enjoyed preferential relationships with the state, such as business elites or traditional tribal allies. In Bahrain, active supporters tended to align with sectarian schisms in society, whereas in Oman and Qatar, active supporters emerged from a broader cross-section of society, and had often mobilised in *response* to reformist agitations. There was a broad correlation between groups that had historically received rent distributions and the expression of active support, but the loyalty of these groups was not automatic, nor was it inevitably assured by large and targeted distributions from the state. Rather, these groups maintain independent interests that regularly differ from those of the ruling elite, and have proven adept at placing policy constraints on the state, particularly where they can capitalise on intra-state fragmentation and ally with one state faction to place pressure on another. The mobilisation of Bahraini Sunnis, in particular, presents an interesting challenge to the rentier bargain: groups such as al-Minbar and al-Asalah limit state autonomy even as they express political support for the state, and newly formed Sunni youth groups such as al-Fateh Youth have demonstrated a capacity to reinforce state legitimacy by rejecting Shia opposition, while simultaneously making clear political demands of the state, including explicit calls for political liberalisation.

These findings suggest that the *balance* of RST requires revision. That is, the extant theory does not adequately account for the interaction between incentives to press for reform and incentives to remain politically quiescent that impact the attitudes and actions of state and societal groups. The importance of these non-material sources of loyalty also help to explain why Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman place such emphasis on building political myths and nationalist ideologies that reinforce their non-material legitimacy, as opposed to the classic RST assumption that nationalist myths are unnecessary in a rentier state.

### **3. Cooptation can fail**

While the state has made continued efforts to transfer rent-based benefits to society, it has faced repeated political challenges since 2011. Societies in these states are far from passive, unmotivated, and uninterested in political reform, and have mobilised to varying extents in all three states during the 2011 to mid-2014 period.



Not all of these movements necessitated transfer of power from state to society; many instead primarily sought increases in their material welfare and were thus rent-seeking movements. While this thesis agrees that the availability of rents encourages rent-seeking, it also suggests that, since the state often bases its legitimacy on traditional power bases and especially on particular elite groups, the *ability* to petition the state for a greater share of resources is not equal. This means that while some groups will be coopted via rentier dynamics, it is still very possible for other groups who are unable to secure an equitable share of rents to oppose the regime, contra early RST which suggested the complete cooptation of society. The #Qtelfail movement, for example, represented almost entirely a rent-seeking movement even as it highlighted the mobilisation potential of the Qatari populace. The environment in which these movements emerged is critical; the 14<sup>th</sup> February Coalition was – in large part – a rent-seeking movement, yet was also influenced by the highly politicised Bahrain domestic environment and it is questionable whether its members would be satisfied by material responses from the state. Regional demonstrations in Oman, too, evinced elements both of rent-seeking *and* political challenges.

Other movements were much more difficult to link to material dissatisfaction, problematising any materially-focused theory of political mobilisation. Critically, political challenges have emerged in all three states despite cooptation efforts, reflecting that there will always remain sections of society likely to make political demands of the state, regardless of rent-distributions. These reformist elites were central to the emergence of non-material demands in Gulf reform movements, but – and this was particularly clear in Bahrain – repeated political challenges also emerged from broader society. Interestingly, it was not always the state that responded repressively to reform movements; active supporters have strongly rejected demands from the reformist elite and attempted to limit the public space open to reformers, as members of Dr Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari's majlis found when they called for a broad revision of the state-society contract in Qatar.

Having established that some level of non-material opposition exists in all three states, the more interesting question becomes: why does cooptation fail? Shifting the focus to examine where rentierism *does not* predominate, compared to the more general assumption that it is universally effective, generates interesting questions that will help

to strengthen RST's explanatory power, such as: in what circumstances does rent-seeking, as opposed to political challenges, prevail? Answering this question, considering the complex interaction between rentierism and other variables, and the diverse motivations of individual and group mobilisation, requires a detailed sub-national analysis, such as the qualitative account offered in this dissertation. Although the findings of this research represent only the first word on the subject, it identified certain dynamics that demonstrated a capacity to overwhelm rentierism in the Gulf. Namely: where a citizen forms part of the reformist elite, often denoting an ideological commitment to political and social reform, they were likely to make political challenges, regardless of their personal material satisfaction. The state's use of repression, against the individual or their extended kinship networks, enhanced this relationship, and also tended to incite more widespread and radical opposition, including the transformation of rent-seeking movements into political challenges. The existence of activist families also reveals the intergenerational nature of reformist movements, forming highly politicised networks that challenge the state over time, and underscoring the potential for political activism to transfer through kinship networks even during times of political quiescence, where overt opposition is driven underground or otherwise limited in the public sphere. Inequality, moreover, was particularly notable, as it demonstrated not only a capacity to encourage political challenges, but also rent-seeking movements, including among sections of society that have historically leaned towards loyalism.

Two other dynamics identified in Chapter Four were not exactly *motivations* for political mobilisation, but rather weakened *obstacles* to political action. The spread of ICTs enhanced opportunities for reformers to organise, and allowed the rapid documentation and dissemination of corrupt and repressive actions by the state. There was also some evidence that existing rent distributions decline in effectiveness over time, as citizens start to view benefits as rights rather than gifts; that is, newer generations of Bahrainis, Qataris, and Omanis seemingly expect political progress to accompany continued rent distributions.

The importance of these non-material factors in shaping political loyalty contrasts distinctly with the current mainstream understanding of how rents engender societal quiescence. Ross's "fiscal theory of democracy", for example, depicts citizen loyalties as entirely "determined by the government's impact on their incomes...if their

government provides them with large benefits and low taxes, they will support the ruler; if it provides them with few benefits and high taxes, they will try to replace him”.<sup>1101</sup> Instead, this dissertation suggests that the state may attempt to coopt society via rent distributions but it must do so while balancing different interest groups within society, and within the state itself. Ultimate power to continue this relationship rests with society, yet the state provides powerful incentives to resist challenging the rentier bargain. Contrary to suggestions in early RST, the state fundamentally relies on support from society and is never autonomous from it, although it may use a combination of traditional legitimacy-building and rentier tactics to enhance its position. An atmosphere of competition, domination, negotiation, and resistance pervades state-society relations in Gulf rent-rich states and overwhelms the less convincing relationship implied within classic RST of allocation and passivity.

#### **4. Despite an engaged society, the state may still dominate state-society relations**

While there are several dynamics that can overwhelm rentierism and society, overall, remained engaged and active, reformist groups in the Gulf are hindered by fragmentation, problematising the formation of a cohesive and sustainable reform movement, often leaving the state in a dominant position. The disorganisation of reformist groups, this dissertation contends, is largely a result of historical state limitations to civil society, and deliberate attempts to reinforce societal schisms in the 2011 to mid-2014 period.

This findings aligns with more recent works within revisionist RST, though few have highlighted the *dynamic* nature of fragmentation, instead presenting it as a static state of affairs. However, while groups in society may be *disorganised*, as Hertog argues is the case in Saudi Arabia,<sup>1102</sup> this should not be equated with being permanently *marginalised*. The argument in this thesis instead highlights the fluctuating influence of ‘marginalised’ groups over time, and particularly noting that most Gulf states have witnessed the re-emergence of many previously ‘marginalised’ groups as part of the Arab Spring: the Bahrain Freedom Movement and Haq, are prominent examples. Within this understanding, groups who are usually disorganised can still, if conditions and agency are favourable, take collective action where an issue cuts across societal

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<sup>1101</sup> This is Ross’s simplified model of political mobilisation, yet throughout the entire work only material motivations for political action are considered. See Ross, *The Oil Curse*, 68.

<sup>1102</sup> This is a theme throughout the book, but see particularly Ibid, 146 – 147, 191 – 192, 223 – 234, and 249 – 253.

divisions, as occurred in both Bahrain and Oman in 2011. Despite the ephemeral nature of cross-sectarian opposition in Bahrain during the early 2011 demonstrations, for example, this nevertheless represented a serious challenge to state authority, and were cooperation to remerge across these groups (as well as across other divides, such as that between the street and formal opposition), it could rapidly mobilise Bahrain's society. Awareness of this threat could explain why states such as Oman and Bahrain allegedly attempted to deliberately foment fragmentation and disunity between reformist groups organising demonstrations in 2011.

### **5. Rent-driven development can contribute to societal activism, if it creates sub-national inequality.**

States are similarly dynamic, rather than static. While increased rents may tempt states to spend on popular short-term projects, there is now considerable evidence that rent-rich regimes in the Gulf have invested (or at least attempted to invest) in the long-term sustainability and diversification of their economies – a focus surely motivated, at least in part, by lessons learned from earlier experiences with rentierism. It also provides a strong argument for reconsidering the role of agency in rentier state-society relations, particularly in the Gulf context where individual rulers often have phenomenal control over policy.<sup>1103</sup>

Yet, unlike classic RST understandings of state-society relations, certain development strategies – specifically, those closely described by Gray's theory of "late rentierism" – can impact the effectiveness of cooptation, if they contribute to a sense of inequality among citizens.<sup>1104</sup> This is to say that it matters greatly *how* the rent-rich state distributes wealth to citizens and how it implements its diversification project. Chapter Five provided a detailed analysis of how rent-driven economic development, and attempts to distribute rent-derived wealth from the state to society, have not resulted in societal quiescence in Oman, but, rather, exacerbated societal schisms, particularly in the context of rising unemployment and migrant labour. More specifically, development planning in Oman entailed a focus on industrial mega-projects and other sectors that capitalise on cheap oil and gas inputs. This has undoubtedly contributed to improvements in many areas, including the availability of healthcare, literacy, and basic

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<sup>1103</sup> A recent attempt to highlight the importance of agency in RST was made by Sandbakken in 2006, yet RST remains a heavily structuralist theory overall. See Camilla Sandbakken, "The Limits to Democracy Posed by Oil Rentier States: The Cases of Algeria, Nigeria, and Libya," *Democratization* 13:1 (February 2006) 135-152.

<sup>1104</sup> Gray, "A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf".

infrastructure, but failed to address rising inequality of wages, employment, and living standards. Economic development is rarely truly equitable, yet in the case of Oman it was the mismatch between the type of employment created through its development programme, and the skills and education of Omani citizens that was particularly problematic, ultimately leading to rising unemployment and material dissatisfaction. That these industrial projects are highly visible and dependent on expatriate labour is also important: for citizens struggling to find economic opportunities, the projects can form a very public symbol of inequality, driving young, disadvantaged Omanis to wage protests demanding more material distributions, but also responsiveness, from the state. They do not represent groups who have been deliberately cut out of the rentier bargain – quite the opposite, in fact, since the industrial parks were intended to bring employment and economic growth to Omani regional areas – but rather have been unintentionally disadvantaged, leading to the emergence of societal unrest despite active cooptation efforts.

This means that the state, through the implementation of a rent-driven development strategy that exacerbates (or at least fails to effectively address) inequality, has created the conditions for its own opposition. This differs significantly from the majority of extant RST works, particularly within the classic literature, which operate under the assumption that if there is a functioning rentier relationship between state and society *overall* – in terms of macroeconomic indicators such as low national unemployment, rapid GDP growth, and continued welfare funded by high oil prices – then rentierism remains effective in preventing societal discontent; this understanding drove Luciani’s claim that inequality is “not relevant for political life”.<sup>1105</sup> This dissertation disagrees with this assumption and advocates viewing this relationship at micro- and meso-levels to highlight how sub-national inequalities impact the effectiveness of the rentier bargain.

## **6. The international dimensions of state-society relations cannot be neglected.**

Although there remain many limitations to international and transnational pressure for reform, the case studies in Chapter Six highlight the importance of these dynamics to any understanding of state-society relations. The transnational and international nature of political alliances is not unique to the oil-rich states of the Gulf (nor to rentier states), but it is critical to understanding how, for example, opposition can have domestic roots,

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<sup>1105</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States,” 74.

yet act internationally. This is particularly important where the state has repressive relations with groups in society, or otherwise where the ability of societal groups to press for reform is limited in the domestic sphere. The role of transnational opposition built from exiled communities also generates interesting implications for RST: it highlights the importance not only of transnational variables but also a dynamic understanding of state-society relations, where repression against previous incidence of unrest may result in the formation of an opposition in exile over time.

The state, too, draws from international and transnational alliances to reinforce its domestic position, and these relationships can shape decisions as to which groups receive targeted rent distributions, and which do not. The relationship of dependency between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia is a good example: Saudi Arabia has a clear interest in preventing instability in their smaller neighbour, yet may also limit the Bahraini state's ability to offer wide-reaching domestic reform. The Bahraini state also attempted to discredit opposition as externally-driven, pointing to the existence of transnational ties as evidence of a potential Fifth Column. While the Shi'ite Crescent narrative is currently prominent in the northern states of the Gulf – Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain – previous narratives utilised across the Gulf have highlighted the threat of Marxists, Arab Nationalists, colonialists, and other groups with external ties: this is clearly an important governance strategy that should be incorporated into the core understanding of state-society relations in Gulf rent-rich states.

This is not to say that external and transnational pressure is necessarily *successful* in reshaping state-society relations. Transnational advocacy via lobbying of key allies, such as the US and UK, must contend with other interests shaping the foreign policies of those states, such as security, financial, or other interests that can reduce their incentives to place political pressure on the relevant Gulf state. International human rights networks are more likely to join reform campaigns, but arguably less influential. Yet, there are certain aspects of rentierism that make states more vulnerable to international political pressure. The late rentier development strategy, for example, places emphasis on international trade networks and branding – especially where their international brand is based on appearing forward-thinking, stable, and open to international business interests – and can leave states more exposed to attacks on this brand by domestic reformist groups operating through international human rights communities and the media. This means that these transnational human rights networks can impact the fiscal

basis of the rent-rich regime, if their campaigns successfully target events that would otherwise attract significant foreign capital, such as the forced cancellation of the Formula One Grand Prix in Bahrain that occurred in April 2011. In the case of Qatari labour reform, a complete overhaul of the kafala system is unlikely to occur solely as a result of external pressure, particularly where the state must remain responsive to its domestic citizenry, who are concerned about what reform might mean for their status in a country where they are vastly outnumbered by migrant workers. Yet, where international or transnational actors can align with local state or societal groups, they can play an influential role in reshaping state-society relations, rather than the classic RST emphasis on fiscal crisis as the primary determinant of domestic political reform.

### **Generalisability of Findings**

To a great extent, this dissertation focused on *exceptions* to the prevailing understanding of state-society relations. It focused on three crucial cases for RST, the idea being that if the theory is revealed as flawed in these archetypal cases, it is even less likely to work in other contexts. Yet how generalisable are these tenets of Gulf Rentierism?

In Saudi Arabia, another archetypal rentier state, Gulf Rentierism can help explain the state's use of symbolic, as well as material, responses to 2011 unrest, and the emphasis on non-material sources of state legitimacy, such as the use of the Saudi Ulama to denounce demonstrations as un-Islamic, and the attempted use of Shia notables, and coopted figures from Shirazi groups, to quell demonstrations in the Eastern region. The strength of societal schisms – stronger even than in Bahrain – greatly complicated the emergence of a cross-sectarian opposition movement in Saudi Arabia, alongside other fractures between secular liberal and hardline Islamist groups, regional fragmentation, and even within major Salafi movements such as the Sahwa movement (al-ṣaḥwa al-ʿislāmiyya); the state's ability to pit these groups against each other has contributed greatly to its continued dominance of state-society relations despite ongoing protests, especially in the Eastern region.<sup>1106</sup> Yet this fragmentation, as in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, is not a permanent state of affairs: disunity was briefly overcome in February 2011, when an Islamo-liberal milieu presented multiple petitions calling for a fully elected Majlis al-Shura and other changes to encourage state accountability to society. Broader calls for the release of political prisoners also placed liberals, Salafi groups, and Shia groups on the same side, although direct cross-sectarian cooperation remained

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<sup>1106</sup> Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*.

extremely limited. The coalescence of these groups, short-lived as it was, nevertheless highlights the importance of a dynamic understanding of fragmentation; as Stéphane Lacroix writes: “the regime’s strategy of social control was being openly challenged. The groups that had until now been seen as coopted were once again active”.<sup>1107</sup>

Despite the weakness of classic RST in explaining the emergence of societal reform movements, rents remain highly relevant to state-society relations in Saudi Arabia. Lacroix argues that the state’s timely announcements of rent distributions, valued at around USD130 billion, in late February and mid-March played a critical role in quelling unrest, noting that the Sahwis, one of the most organised groups within the Islamist cohort, abandoned the reform movement following large disbursements to religious institutions. For other groups, such as Saudi Shia living in the Eastern region, rent distributions were less effective, suggesting sectarianism, similar to the situation in Bahrain, overpowers cooptation.<sup>1108</sup> Also similar to Bahrain is the fluctuating loyalty of Sunni groups; the Sahwa movement, for example, was enlisted by the regime to denounce transnational Shia movements in the 1980s, but from 1991 to 1994 also formed a clear opposition movement, termed the *intifāda al-ṣaḥwa*, denouncing the state as “corrupt”, “unacceptably pro-American”, and calling for radical political reform.<sup>1109</sup> At the same time, individuals such as Abdallah al-Hamid, Saud Mukhtar al-Hashimi, and Sulayman al-Rashidi, who might be described as a reformist elite, *escalated* their political challenges, embodied in petitions for political reform, from 2003 onwards, revealing little correlation between rising oil rents and the intensity of political challenges.<sup>1110</sup>

Kuwait, an extreme rentier state, has long been considered a political outlier in the Gulf for its active civil society and regular exercise of the parliament’s ability to interpellate ministers and excoriate them publicly for alleged mismanagement, corruption, and poor policy-making. Attempts by the ruling elite to limit parliamentary authority have typically incited popular unrest, problematising any notion of a passive and coopted society. Mary Ann Tétrault’s Kuwait-inspired critique of RST, in fact, is strikingly similar to that offered in this dissertation, noting that “[t]he Arab Gulf nations are often

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<sup>1107</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, “No Spring in Riyadh: Saudi Arabia’s Seemingly Impossible Revolution,” in *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*, ed. Lina Khatif and Ellen Lust (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014) 310.

<sup>1108</sup> *Ibid.*, 313-314.

<sup>1109</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>1110</sup> *Ibid.*



viewed as rentier states whose governments trade money and benefits for a politically passive population. In reality and despite diverse differences from place to place, Gulf populations are not passive”.<sup>1111</sup>

The response of Kuwaitis to rent distributions announced as part of a new budget in June 2011 also bears great resemblance to the reaction of Bahrainis noted in Chapter Four. That is, some Kuwaiti recipients “ridiculed the irrelevance of the regime’s responses to demands, but others saw them as an invitation to push for more”.<sup>1112</sup> As in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, Kuwaiti societal groups were also able to exploit intra-state fragmentation, such as between the Emir and the parliament, to more successfully press for reform. As an example: when Islamist groups within parliament rejected then-Emir Jaber al-Ahmad’s reforms granting women the right to vote and run for office in 2005, liberal and Islamist women’s societies, perceiving a mandate to press for reform, coalesced to create an effective reform movement, particularly after the addition of student activist groups, and ultimately forced parliament to adopt a bill expanding women’s political rights in May 2005.<sup>1113</sup> More recently, regular Cabinet reshuffles since 2011, including the replacement of controversial Prime Minister Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah with Shaikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad al-Sabah in December 2011, also exemplifies the state’s responsiveness – or at least an attempt to *appear* responsive – as a result of societal unrest.<sup>1114</sup>

The *dīwāniyya*, similar to the *majlis* in Qatar, has also been used in Kuwait as a semi-protected<sup>1115</sup> space for political dialogue by a highly politicised reformist elite and organised opposition networks, problematising any notion of a classic rentier bargain between state and society. This does not mean that fragmentation between societal groups is irrelevant; rather, distinctions between leftist and Islamist groups, youth societies and those catering to the established business elite, and especially cleavages between *ḥaḍar* (urban) and *badū* (tribal) Kuwaitis, remain critical to understanding the state-society relationship. The invigoration of youth opposition, as part of the mostly

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<sup>1111</sup> Mary Ann Tétreault, “Political Activism in Kuwait: Reform in Fits and Starts,” in *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*, ed. Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014) 268.

<sup>1112</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>1113</sup> *Ibid.*, 278-279.

<sup>1114</sup> BBC News, “Kuwait’s Prime Minister Resigns After Protests,” (28 November 2011) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15931526> accessed 31 July 2016.

<sup>1115</sup> Albeit the state has intervened to prevent participants from attending *dīwāniyyas* on occasions when it deemed these meetings posed a significant threat to its authority.

urban Orange Movement in 2006 but also since 2011, is also important; they have formed a diverse reformist movement that, despite state attempts to brand it as tribal and potentially violent, includes Kuwaiti men and women from all backgrounds: Sunni and Shia, ḥaḍar and badū, bidun (stateless) and nationals, as well as diverse social classes.<sup>1116</sup> As Tétrault notes: “[t]heir desire and ability to transcend the fault line that divide their elders challenges the regime’s strategy of divide-and-rule”, and as a result, “[t]he demonization of youth activists is aimed at delegitimizing political activism by tribal youth”, denoting state attempts to promote disunity within opposition, as occurred in Bahrain and Oman.<sup>1117</sup> Factionalism within the state also complicated cooptation efforts, when members of the ruling elite vied for political dominance, notably former PM Shaikh Nasser al-Mohammad and Shaikh Ahmad al-Fahd, who appeal to the Kuwaiti Shia community, and the Muslim Brotherhood (alongside several Salafi groups), respectively. As Azoulay and Beaugrand note: “the politics of alliance building have in recent years in Kuwait contributed to a polarization of political life, with each prince striving to create alliances...they have also led to the emergence of a protest movement instigated by the educated youth aspiring to end patronage-based politics”.<sup>1118</sup> The existence of the bidun community in Kuwait further complicates any conception of a coopted and passive society: by excluding them from the material and non-material benefits of Kuwaiti citizenship, and hence also any rentier bargain, these groups can be expected to, and did, mobilise to demand greater political and material rights in the 2011 to mid-2014 period.<sup>1119</sup>

In the UAE, the persistence of authoritarianism and absence of street demonstrations in 2011 is often attributed to rents. Yet reformist movements have long existed even during periods where overt protest did not occur, problematising any conception of Emirati society as passive and apolitical.<sup>1120</sup> In the 2011 to mid-2014 period, two societal groups have played a prominent role in calling for political reform, even in the

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<sup>1116</sup> Kristin Diwan, “Breaking Taboos: Youth Activism in the Gulf States,” *Atlantic Council Issue Brief* (March 2014) 1-6; Fatiha Dazi-Heni, “The Arab Spring Impact on Kuwait ‘Exceptionalism’,” *Arabian Humanities* 4 (2015) <https://cy.revues.org/2868> accessed 31 July 2016.

<sup>1117</sup> Tétrault, “Political Activism in Kuwait,” 291.

<sup>1118</sup> Rivka Azoulay and Claire Beaugrand, “Limits of Political Clientelism: Elite’s Struggles in Kuwait Fragmenting Politics,” *Arabian Humanities* 4 (2015) <https://cy.revues.org/2827> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1119</sup> Yazan al-Saadi, “Kuwait’s Bidun: Reviving the Struggle for Status,” *al-Akhbar* (3 January 2012) <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/2988> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1120</sup> In 1984, for example, Abdulla identified four potential sources of political challenges within the UAE, including: nationalist state technocrats, nationalist and reformist intellectuals, particularly young intellectuals, Islamist and conservative religious forces, and the military establishment. See Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, “Political Dependency: The Case of the United Arab Emirates,” (PhD Diss., Georgetown University, 1984) 286-287.

absence of popular unrest. First, there exists a reformist elite, comprised of prominent intellectuals such as Ebtisam al-Kitbi, Abdulkhaleq Abdalla, and Ahmed Mansoor al-Shehhi, who have all publicly called for domestic political reform, alongside less direct reformers (who express support for the idea of political liberalisation but focus their attention more on neighbouring states than on the UAE) such as Sultan al-Qassemi and Mishaal al-Gergawi.<sup>1121</sup> Another critical movement in the UAE case is al-Islah (jam‘iyyat al-‘islāh), the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which has regularly agitated for political change, and, particularly since the 1990s, been actively repressed by the Emirati government, which designates it as disloyal, orchestrated from abroad, and potentially violent.<sup>1122</sup> In terms of Gulf Rentierism, describing al-Islah as materially motivated overlooks their ideological foundations and goals, whereas a more accurate understanding would be of al-Islah as a societal group for which ideology has *overpowered* rentierism. As Courtney Freer notes:

The government’s largely economic response to political opposition reflects the regime’s understanding of politics as primarily pecuniary, considering citizen approval to be determined by the distribution of resources rather than the state’s adherence to any ideological tendency. Nonetheless, Islamist complaint remains a viable independent voice in super-rentiers, as its supporters are not swayed by government handouts.<sup>1123</sup>

Further, though fragmentation remains key to Emirati state-society relations,<sup>1124</sup> short-term cooperation between societal reform movements occurred in 2011, when members of both liberal/intellectual and al-Islah created a petition in March calling for political reforms such as universal enfranchisement and legislative power for the Federal National Council (FNC). Demonstrating an understanding of the importance of responsiveness (or at least the façade of responsiveness), the state made (limited) concessions in response to this pressure, expanding the number of Emiratis permitted to vote in FNC elections from under 7,000 to over 120,000 in 2011 elections, and over 220,000 in 2015. The body lacks, however, formal legislative power, and remains, like similar institutions in Qatar and Oman, primarily consultative: this suggests that,

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<sup>1121</sup> Marta Saldaña Martín, “Rentierism and Political Culture in the United Arab Emirates: The Case of UAEU Students,” (PhD Diss., University of Exeter, 2014) 144-145.

<sup>1122</sup> See a defense of the state’s position in Ali Rashid al-Nouaimi, “Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE,” *Al Monitor* (15 October 2012) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/contents/articles/originals/2012/al-monitor/uae-setting-the-record-straight.html> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1123</sup> Freer, “Rentier Islamism,” 313.

<sup>1124</sup> Christopher M. Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005) 227-228.

ultimately, the state retains dominance over state-society relations.<sup>1125</sup> Further, the UAE-94 case, where 94 individuals linked to al-Islah were arrested under the charge of “establishing an organisation that aimed to overthrow the government”, also signifies that the state is willing to use repressive force against groups or individuals it deems a threat, in addition to more targeted arrests of the UAE-5, identified as the five primary organisers of the 2011 petition.<sup>1126</sup> At the same time, Marta Saldaña Martín highlights the emerging phenomenon of citizen empowerment among UAE university students, where increased access to higher education, ICTs, and exposure to foreign societies through travel and other features of globalisation, has “empowered its citizens to challenge authoritarianism and gradually make them more politically aware”.<sup>1127</sup> That education, technologies, and foreign travel – for example through scholarships for education programmes abroad – were often financed by rents highlights the importance of a dynamic understanding of rentierism, where the implementation of economic development programmes, alongside longer processes of change (as described in Chapter Four), may ultimately encourage the emergence of political challenges, rather than precluding them.<sup>1128</sup>

Outside the Gulf region, the findings of this dissertation have less utility. The specific economic development strategy described in Chapter Five is largely limited to small states who rely heavily on imported labour, and would not apply to well to larger states with substantial manufacturing sectors, such as in Iran or Russia; yet the broader claim that rent-driven development encourages the formation of opposition if it contributes to relative inequality may still hold.<sup>1129</sup> The close relationship between the business and ruling elite in the Gulf region also limits extension of the claim that close tribal and business relations foster active support for the state; close relationships between the state and certain (usually historically favoured) societal groups remain highly relevant to political loyalty, but in, for example, Venezuela they do not correspond with the business elite, which remain avidly opposed to the former Hugo Chávez and current

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<sup>1125</sup> Kristin Smith Diwan, “UAE Elections: A Managed Opening that Unites the Federation,” *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (21 October 2015) <http://www.agsiw.org/uae-elections-a-managed-opening-that-unites-the-federation/> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1126</sup> Pen International, “United Arab Emirates (UAE): Human Rights Organisations Renew Call For Release of Peaceful Activists Convicted at Grossly Unfair Mass Trial,” (4 March 2016) <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/united-arab-emirates-uae-human-rights-organisations-renew-call-for-release-of-peaceful-activists-convicted-at-grossly-unfair-mass-uae-94-trial/> accessed 1 August 2016; Freer, “Rentier Islamism,” 310-312.

<sup>1127</sup> Saldaña Martín, “Rentierism and Political Culture in the United Arab Emirates,” 23.

<sup>1128</sup> This is the central argument in *Ibid.*

<sup>1129</sup> In the case of inequality and Iran’s 2009 Green Movement, see Yassamine Mather, “Iran’s Political and Economic Crisis,” *Critique* 38:3 (August 2010) 503-518.

Nicolás Maduro regimes. Yet cases such as Venezuela highlight the critical importance of understanding society as active rather than passive: Venezuelan society has regularly mobilised to demand political reform, despite forming one of the quintessential South American ‘rentier’ states.<sup>1130</sup> Further, even supporters of the regime place political constraints on the state; the political legitimacy of the current Venezuelan regime is based heavily on support from Chávistas, who regularly call for the “deepening of the revolutionary process”, even as the state’s fiscal position worsens as a result of falling oil prices and economic mismanagement.<sup>1131</sup>

The responsiveness and sense of access to the ruling elite, though majālis, Twitter, and even radio programmes, that engendered societal loyalty in Qatar, is also, unsurprisingly, more difficult in states such as Azerbaijan or Iraq, which have similar levels of rent dependence but far larger populations, driving down both rent abundance, and inhibiting the state from interacting with citizens as directly as in Qatar. On the other hand, the finding is highly relevant to Brunei, an extreme rentier state with a similarly sized population to Qatar (just under 300,000 citizens, and a total population of 411,900 in 2014),<sup>1132</sup> and where the state’s focus on non-material legitimacy, particularly the promotion of the Malayu Islam Beraja, or Malay Islamic Monarchy, ideology, has encouraged societal loyalty despite the political system remaining fundamentally authoritarian.<sup>1133</sup> Although a reformist elite, embodied in various leftist political societies pressing for freedom of speech, equitable distribution of wealth, and political liberalisation, such as the Brunei National Solidarity Party, exists, the relative quiescence that followed their sudden de-registration in 2008 suggests popular support for these groups remains limited. Rather, as occurred under Sultan Qaboos in Oman, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei cultivates an image of himself as the symbol of the nation, and a “Caring Monarch”, and nation-building strategies have effectively concentrated societal loyalties around the personage of the Sultan.<sup>1134</sup>

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<sup>1130</sup> Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*.

<sup>1131</sup> Steve Ellner, “Venezuela: Chavistas Debate the Pace of Change,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 47:1 (2014) 4-9; Peter Wilson, “The Last Days of Nicolás Maduro,” *Foreign Policy* (22 February 2016) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/22/the-clock-is-ticking-for-maduro/> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1132</sup> Sally Piri, “Brunei Will Face Aging Population if Low Birth Rate Continues,” *The Brunei Times* (21 October 2015) <http://www.bt.com.bn/frontpage-news-national/2015/10/21/brunei-will-face-ageing-population-if-low-birth-rate-continues#sthash.L31w7gvr.dpbs> accessed 31 July 2016.

<sup>1133</sup> B. A. Hussainmiya, “‘Manufacturing Consensus’: The Role of the State Council in Brunei Darussalam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 31:2 (September 2000) 321-350.

<sup>1134</sup> The tone and language is strikingly similar to that used in Omani state media releases. See BruDirect, “Well-Wishers Thronged Capital to Greet His Majesty,” (25 July 2016) <http://www.brudirect.com/new.php?id=9913> accessed 25 July 2016; see also Dominik M. Müller,

Not every aspect of Gulf Rentierism will be equally applicable to every rent-rich state, yet by relieving rents of the burden of *explaining* the state-society relationship and offering instead an understanding of rents as important, but often overshadowed by other political and social variables, the findings of this thesis may nevertheless offer an opportunity to redirect scholarship towards moments where rentierism does *not* predominate, rather than assumptions that it inevitably does, and add nuance to conceptions of state-society relations in rent-rich contexts.

### **The 2014 Oil Price Fall and the Future of Reform in the Gulf**

To some extent, the finding that rents are often *not* the primary determinant of societal quiescence may be good news for Gulf states facing a decline in oil and gas revenues since June 2014, when oil prices tumbled from USD112 per barrel to USD62 per barrel in December, driven by the discovery of new sources of oil and gas, especially in North America, slowing growth in energy demand, particularly from India and China, and, most importantly, continuing high production from OPEC member states, assumedly in a bid to retain market share.<sup>1135</sup> Brent crude oil futures, which have ranged between approximately USD25 and USD55 per barrel since January 2016, suggest prices will remain low for some time.<sup>1136</sup>

The principle economic challenge for Gulf states is high breakeven oil prices (the oil price at which states can balance their budgets, without drawing down on their sovereign wealth funds or other assets), which in 2015 ranged from USD49.40 for Kuwait, to USD127.10 for Bahrain. Oman and Qatar, respectively, required a price of USD102.60 and USD60 to meet spending commitments.<sup>1137</sup> With both Brent and West Texas Intermediate crude oil prices sitting around USD42 as of early August 2016, Gulf

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“Brunei in 2015: Oil Revenues Down, Sharia on the Rise,” *Asian Survey* 56:1 (January-February 2016) 162-167.

<sup>1135</sup> Saudi Arabia, the main proponent of high production within OPEC, may also be driven by an intention to place financial pressure on countries with higher breakeven prices, especially Iran, with whom they are competing for influence over Iraq and Syria. United States Energy Information Administration, “Crude Oil Prices Down Sharply in Fourth Quarter of 2014,” (6 January 2015) <http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=19451> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1136</sup> There are also some emerging indications that the global supply glut may be ending and futures prices for 2017 at the moment predict a small price rise. However, the stabilisation of demand and supply is unlikely to occur at the price points of over USD100, thus the Gulf states are still facing a significant drop in revenue from 2003-2014 levels.

<sup>1137</sup> M. R. Raghu, “How GCC States’ Break-even Oil Prices Stack Up,” *The National* (24 August 2015) <http://www.thenational.ae/business/energy/how-gcc-states-break-even-oil-prices-stack-up> accessed 1 August 2016.

states will need to draw from other sources of income to manage the fiscal shortfall. For states such as Bahrain, where government debt comprised 44 percent of GDP in 2013, and whose overseas reserves are substantially smaller than those of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, this is a significant challenge, resulting in a downgraded debt rating of double-B by Standard & Poor in February 2016.<sup>1138</sup> Qatar, by comparison, has overseas reserves “equivalent to several annual budgets, giving them considerable leeway to incur deficits without debt”.<sup>1139</sup> Yet despite variation in the exposure of these states to decreasing oil prices, all have attempted to implement fiscal and budgetary reform, including cuts to subsidies on fuel, electricity, and water, announcement of the intended implementation of a Value Added Tax across the GCC by 2018, and, in Oman and Qatar, new corporate taxes.<sup>1140</sup> Though they have resisted, so far, cuts to the public service and other politically sensitive economic reforms, the Gulf states have renewed their focus on economic diversification, the most ambitious example being Saudi Arabia’s *Vision 2030*, announced in April 2016.<sup>1141</sup>

These changes are likely to shift the political balance within the state toward reformers, at least in terms of control over economic development policy; just as deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud is leading Saudi Arabia’s *Vision 2030*, the Bahraini government announced in September 2015 its intention to create a parallel ‘smaller government’ at the behest of Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, tasked with finding solutions to Bahrain’s financial difficulties in the wake of contracting rents.<sup>1142</sup> The ‘smaller government’ initiative, then, represents a renewed attempt by a senior reformer within the state to overcome resistance to at least economic

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<sup>1138</sup> Reuters, “Fitch Affirms Bahrain at ‘BBB’; Outlook Stable,” (20 June 2014) <http://www.reuters.com/article/fitch-affirms-bahrain-at-bbb-outlook-sta-idUSFit70510920140620> accessed 1 August 2016; Hertog, “Oil Prices”; Maria Armental, “S&P Downgrades Kazakhstan, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia on Oil Slump,” *The Wall Street Journal* (17 February 2016) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/s-p-downgrades-kazakhstan-oman-bahrain-saudia-arabia-on-oil-slump-1455734291> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1139</sup> Hertog, “Oil Prices”.

<sup>1140</sup> There has also been speculation that the UAE may also implement corporate tax reform, though it would have to balance this against potential damage to its ‘tax-free’ international branding. Karen E. Young, “Drop in the Bucket: Reduced Fuel Subsidies Offer Little Deficit Relief,” *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (6 April 2016) <http://www.agsiw.org/drop-in-the-bucket-reduced-fuel-subsidies-offer-little-deficit-relief/> accessed 1 August 2016; Cleofe Maceda, “UAE, Other GCC Firms Urged: Get Ready for VAT Now,” *Gulf News* (19 June 2016) <http://gulfnews.com/business/economy/uae-other-gcc-firms-urged-get-ready-for-vat-now-1.1848598> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1141</sup> See an analysis of the Saudi *Vision 2030* in Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, “The Politics of Economic Reform in Arab Gulf States,” *James A. Baker III Institution for Public Policy, Rice University* (June 2016) 1-19.

<sup>1142</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Royal Directives to Form Smaller Cabinet Wise Decision,” (17 September 2015) <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/687291> accessed 1 August 2016; Gulf News, “Bahrain to Form Parallel ‘Mini-government’,” (17 September 2015) <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-to-form-parallel-mini-government-1.1585843> accessed 1 August 2016.

reform from conservative figures within the royal family. That being said, Bahrain more generally appears mired in a period of increased restrictions on political opposition, evidenced by the disbandment of al-Wefaq in July 2016, likely a result of conservative factions such as the al-Khawalid increasing their control over political matters.<sup>1143</sup> As noted in Chapter Six, this is unlikely to deter opposition in the long-term, but rather contribute to the political activism of transnational Bahraini communities and radicalisation of domestic opposition, as moderate opposition is driven underground. The harsh stance toward instances of political opposition explain, to some extent, why continuing protests – the Bahrain Freedom Movement claims over 56 protests occurred in 35 villages between 18-24 July alone – have focused more on non-material factors, such as the incarceration of major opposition figures, notably Shaikh Isa Qasem, rather than on material demands and post-2014 economic reform.<sup>1144</sup>

In Oman, by comparison, materially-focused popular movements have continued to occur, such as strikes in response to cutbacks in public and private sector industries, the most notable of which took place in May 2016, when over 1,000 employees of the Muscat Municipality went on strike to protest a downward adjustment of their paygrade.<sup>1145</sup> There was also an immediate blowback on social media in June 2014 after the government announced it would remove subsidies on around 70 products, including over 10,000 tweets in two days under the hashtags: “Statement Denouncing the Decision of the Council of Ministers,” and “Against the Council of Ministers’ Decision on Consumer Protection”.<sup>1146</sup> In Qatar, little public dissent has occurred as a result of fiscal reform, but this may again be due to the government’s ‘first-mover’ strategy, demonstrating responsiveness prior to the emergence of popular dissatisfaction; a recent

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<sup>1143</sup> Al-Wefaq and the formal opposition was already facing pressure on their political base as a result of decision to boycott the November 2014 elections. See Jessie Moritz, “Prospects for National Reconciliation in Bahrain: Is it Realistic?” *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (16 April 2015) [http://www.agsiw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Moritz\\_Bahrain.pdf](http://www.agsiw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Moritz_Bahrain.pdf) accessed 1 August 2016; Kristin Smith Diwan, “Parliamentary Boycotts in Kuwait and Bahrain Cost Opposition,” *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (6 July 2016) <http://www.agsiw.org/parliamentary-boycotts-in-kuwait-and-bahrain-cost-opposition/> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1144</sup> Kristin Smith Diwan, “Bahrain Faces Austerity, Without Protest,” *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (20 April 2016) <http://www.agsiw.org/bahrain-faces-austerity-without-protest/> accessed 1 August 2016; Bahrain Freedom Movement, “FCO Admits Possible Saudi War Crimes, Alkhalifa Persecute Religious Leader,” (27 July 2016) <http://english.voiceofbahrain.org/?p=6351> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1145</sup> Muscat Daily, “Muscat Municipality Workers Go on Strike,” (29 May 2016) <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Muscat-Municipality-workers-go-on-strike-4pym> accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>1146</sup> Middle East Eye, “Oman’s Economic Policies Spark Rare Protest on Twitter,” (18 June 2014) <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/omans-economic-policies-spark-rare-protest-twitter-1642462009> accessed 1 August 2016.



example in 2016 is the new draft law announced in July, which will expand the State Audit Bureau's capacity to combat corruption and increase financial scrutiny of public money.<sup>1147</sup>

Despite the clear awareness amongst Gulf states of the importance of remaining politically, as well as materially, responsive to post-2014 challenges, the focus of academia remains on the material basis of political legitimacy, an approach that this dissertation finds lacking. The emphasis on rents as the primary guarantor of Gulf state stability, for example, has driven claims that Saudi Arabia is at imminent risk of collapse as a result of falling oil prices.<sup>1148</sup> Despite increasing regional instability, as a result of Yemeni state collapse, and the spread of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Gulf states remain relatively stable. Multiple bombings inspired by ISIS have occurred, especially in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, yet, in general, the political systems of the Gulf region remain resilient, underscoring the strength of their non-material, as well as material, legitimacy. The ultimate purpose of this dissertation was to nuance RST's core understanding of the link between rents and societal quiescence, in order to better understand the emergence of domestic reform movements. Its findings suggest that rents are often far less effective than traditionally assumed, and that other variables, such as national identity, inequality, and repression, can overpower or alter the influence of rentierism. Societies, then, were far from quiescent, and this research examined the networks and dynamics that have allowed citizens to challenge state authority even during a period of high rents. Oil and gas-rich states of the Arab Gulf retain exceptional capacity to respond to the material demands of their citizenry, but they must also remain responsive to a politically active and engaged society, especially during the post-Arab Spring period. The mobilisation of Gulf society since 2011 serves as a critical reminder to rentier state theorists that materially-focused theories offer only a partial explanation of societal politicisation, and that unless both political *and* material dissatisfactions are addressed, similar mobilisations have the potential to occur in the future.

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<sup>1147</sup> Shabina S. Khatri, "Qatar to Expand Audit Body's Powers to Help Fight Corruption," *Doha News* (19 July 2016) <http://dohanews.co/qatar-to-expand-audit-bodys-powers-to-help-fight-corruption/> accessed 1 August 2016.

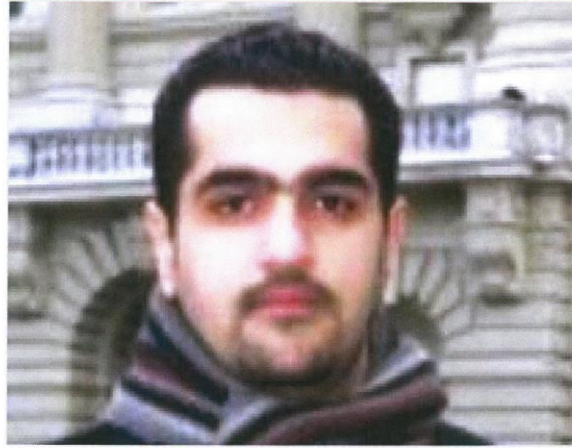
<sup>1148</sup> John Hannah, "It's Time for the United States to Start Worrying About a Saudi Collapse," *Foreign Policy* (7 October 2015) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/07/will-the-united-states-help-if-saudi-arabia-starts-to-fall-apart/> accessed 2 August 2016.

# Appendix

## Wanted posters for Human Rights activists, a comparison.

These pictures were provided by Bahraini interviewees during fieldwork in the Gulf region. The identical text on the two examples that follow reveal attempts by state-oriented NGOs (such as those listed at the bottom of each image) to delegitimise Bahraini human rights and opposition activists as violent, Islamist, and linked to Iran.

### مطلوب - DEMANDÉ - WANTED



## HUSSAIN JAWAD

- Responsible for the past two years when Bahrain has witnessed hundreds of attacks on schools, exploitation of children in villages by arming them with Molotov cocktails and putting them in the forefront of face-offs with police as part of the culture of martyrdom, which is popular amongst some radical groups of the opposition.

- He is not a human rights activist! he is a political activist and a core part of the Bahraini opposition with their roots in extremist groups like the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the Islamic Action Society and the Bahrain Freedom Movement.

- Responsible for the terrorists attacks against asian workers in Bahrain and spreading the culture of hatred and racism against foreigners.

- Stand against womens rights and Shiite Personal Status Law.

- Creating discord and hatred and sectarianism in Bahraini society.

Rechercher les responsables depuis que Bahrain a ete temoin d'attaques contre les ecoles, responsables aussi d'avoir inciter les enfants des villages a des actes de sabotages en leur fournissant des molotofs et de les mettre au devant de la scene contre les agents de l'ordre ce qui fait d'eux selon l' ideologie de certain groupe radicalistes d'opposition, des martyres.

Ces groupes ne sont pas des defenseurs des droits de l' homme mais des extremistes comme le groupe ( front islamique de liberation de Bahrain, la societe d'action islamique Le Mouvement Libre de Bahrain.)Ce sont ces groupes extremistes qui sont reponsables d'attaques terroristes contre les travailleurs asiatiques ,responsables de propager la culture de la haines contre les etrangers et creer ainsi une division sectarienne parmi la population .

- مسؤول عن العامين الماضيين عندما شهدت البحرين مئات الهجمات على المدارس، واستغلال الأطفال في القرى عن طريق تسليح مع قنابل المولوتوف وضمهم في طليعة المواجهات مع الشرطة كجزء من ثقافة الاستشهاد، والتي تحظى بشعبية بين بعض الجماعات المتطرفة من المعارضة .

- هو ليس ناشط في مجال حقوق الإنسان! هو ناشط سياسي وجزءا أساسيا في المعارضة البحرينية المتطرفة التي تمتد جذورها في الجماعات مثل الجبهة الاسلامية لتحرير البحرين وجمعية العمل الاسلامي وحركة أحرار البحرين.

- المسؤولة عن الهجمات الارهابية ضد العمال الآسيويين في البحرين ونشر ثقافة الكراهية والعنصرية ضد الأجانب.

- الوقوف ضد حقوق المرأة وقانون الأحوال الشخصية الجعفري.

- خلق الفتن والكراهية والطائفية في المجتمع البحريني.





## MOHAMMED ALMASKATI

- Responsible for the past two years when Bahrain has witnessed hundreds of attacks on schools, exploitation of children in villages by arming them with Molotov cocktails and putting them in the forefront of face-offs with police as part of the culture of martyrdom, which is popular amongst some radical groups of the opposition.

- He is not a human rights activist! he is a political activist and a core part of the Bahraini opposition with their roots in extremist groups like the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the Islamic Action Society and the Bahrain Freedom Movement.

- Responsible for the terrorists attacks against asian workers in Bahrain and spreading the culture of hatred and racism against foreigners.

- Stand against womens rights and Shiite Personal Status Law.

- Creating discord and hatred and sectarianism in Bahraini society.

Rechercher les responsables depuis que Bahrain a ete temoin d'attaques contre les ecoles, responsables aussi d'avoir inciter les enfants des villages a des actes de sabotages en leur fournissant des molotofs et de les mettre au devant de la scene contre les agents de l'ordre ce qui fait d'eux selon l' ideologie de certain groupe radicalistes d'opposition, des martyres.

Ces groupes ne sont pas des defenseurs des droits de l' homme mais des extremistes comme le groupe ( front islamique de liberation de Bahrain, la societe d' action islamique Le Mouvement Libre de Bahrain.)Ce sont ces groupes extremistes qui sont reponsables d'attaques terroristes contre les travailleurs asiatiques ,responsables de propager la culture de la haines contre les etrangers et creer ainsi une division sectarienne parmi la population .

- مسؤول عن العامين الماضيين عندما شهدت البحرين مئات الهجمات على المدارس، واستغلال الأطفال في القرى عن طريق تسليح مع قنابل المولوتوف ووضعهم في طليعة المواجهات مع الشرطة كجزء من ثقافة الاستشهاد، والتي تحظى بشعبية بين بعض الجماعات المتطرفة من المعارضة.

- هو ليس ناشط في مجال حقوق الانسان! هو ناشط سياسي وجزءا اساسي في المعارضة البحرينية المتطرفة التي تمتد جذورها في الجماعات مثل الجبهة الاسلامية لتحرير البحرين وجمعية العمل الإسلامي وحركة أحرار البحرين.

- المسؤولية عن الهجمات الارهابية ضد العمال الاسيويين في البحرين ونشر ثقافة الكراهية والعنصرية ضد الأجانب.

- الوقوف ضد حقوق المرأة وقانون الأحوال الشخصية الجعفري.

- خلق الفتن والكراهية والطائفية في المجتمع البحريني.



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