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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Political Science

Master's Thesis

Rentierism and its Divergent Paths: Bahrain and the UAE

During the Arab Spring

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Political Science

In Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By:

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Introduction

Gulf diversity remains an under-researched topic that is stereotyped as uniform with its monarchical or Emir system relative to its Middle Eastern counterparts. This is why this thesis is initiated out of the interest to research a region that is known for its geopolitical value worldwide. Stereotyped as a region in which citizens enjoy the wealth of their nation through distribution, the events of 2011 showed otherwise. When encouraged by Middle Eastern counterparts, uprisings in Bahrain signaled that not all of the population is at ease, and that being among the “oil wealthy” states does not necessarily imply stability and bring about citizen satisfaction. Some citizens in Bahrain have shown that they prioritize more basic freedoms and political participation. On the other hand, citizens of the UAE have seen minimal calls for reform and change, and a fairly stable system of rule. Explaining such different paths and nuancing the over-generalizing aspects of rentierism are at the core of this thesis. The thesis adopts a socio-historic approach to show that differences in state-formation, types of elites and sectarian structure account for such divergent paths.

This thesis aims at researching the reasons behind the different events Bahrain and UAE experienced during the 2011 Arab Spring. Despite being similar on many fronts, the events of the Arab Spring have challenged the Gulf countries to different degrees. The thesis argues that several socio-historic reasons are at the core of why

Bahrain witnessed mass uprisings while the UAE did not during the 2011 Arab Spring.

Though all GCC countries are put together as a coherent group, the Kingdom of Bahrain and The United Arab Emirates witnessed completely different events during the Arab Spring. In comparing these two cases, the most similar system design (MSSD) comparative approach will demonstrate our basic hypothesis/argument: that deeply-rooted socio-historic differences account and explain the different routes both cases have experienced.

This thesis aims at explaining why Bahrain witnessed mass protests during the events of the Arab Spring in 2011, while neighboring UAE remained unaffected despite several social and political similarities. While both cases have: monarchical/Emir rule, similar tribal culture, and instances of economic boom from oil; both cases also differ in instances of parliamentary experiments and degrees of political activism. Such similarities and differences are key to the analysis; however, they remain as symptoms that do not explain why protest events unfolded in Bahrain but not in the UAE. As mentioned above, this thesis hypothesizes that deeply-rooted socio-historic differences are found in the following: state formation, types of elites, and sectarian structure and account for the different routes of both cases.

Rentierism: Necessary but Not Sufficient

The recent uprisings that shook the Middle East and have become known as the “Arab Spring” have indeed raised questions about the vulnerability of some regimes and the persistence of others. Scholars have continued to seek reasoning behind the events as uprisings sparked in a country after the other. At first glance, the outcome of the Arab Spring seems to suggest that monarchies are indeed more persistent than their republican counterparts.¹ The assumption that especially these rentier monarchies will indeed endure longer has been usually attributed to the trickle-down effect of oil. Michael Ross has argued that the existence of a natural resource such as oil and the ability for the regime to utilize it as a tool to gain support has been exploited for survival over the years, accounting for the persistence of these regimes.² Lisa Anderson also provides a compelling framework which analyzes how different regimes respond to rebellion. Anderson contends that skills, resources and institutional design all play an interchangeable role to different degrees when coming to respond to unsatisfied crowds.³ Geographically, the cases of Bahrain and UAE enjoy great proximity as well as sharing similar regime types headed by Kings or

¹Holger Albrecht, “Authoritarian Transformation or Transition from Authoritarianism? Insights on Regime Change in Egypt,” in *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond 2008*, eds. Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 252. See also Zeina Bicharat, *Survival of non-oil producing monarchies from “Arab Spring”: Morocco and Jordan*, The American University in Cairo, 2014.

² Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-2.

³ Lisa Anderson, “Authoritarian legacies and Regime Change,” in *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World 2014*, ed, Fawaz A. Gerges (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 56.

Emirs. They have also shared a similar tribal culture and have experienced similar colonial experiences over the years as elsewhere across many of the Gulf States.

As mentioned above, some scholars have explained the survival of authoritarianism in the Gulf region through a distinctive regime type that has the capacity to co-opt and suppress its population. Consequently, these analysts have used the economic approach to explain how social services and financial handouts have been the underlying factor behind regime continuation through appeasement, in other words economic wealth leads to regime political control. However, this control cannot be maintained forever. Christopher M. Davidson contends in his latest book that Gulf authoritarian regimes are on the decline, and that it is just a matter of years before we see the Sheikhs replaced.⁴ With the backbone support to his main arguments built on modernization theory and the effectiveness of “the domino effect”, he claims that mounting internal and external pressures that will be ignited by the recent events of the Arab Spring will fuel the decline of the Gulf monarchies.

Davidson discusses a specific type of state-formation that involves tribal pacts and colonial agreements. British involvement in the state of affairs of the Gulf States was evident, and grew over time with discovery of oil as a natural resource. The

⁴ Christopher M. Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

utilization of oil by such states is at the core of the analysis and granted them what Davidson describes as “Eudemonic Legitimacy”, i.e. legitimacy derived from economic wellbeing. The book lays out what oil wealth has allowed for in these states ranging from: subsidized utilities, government housing, and grants of land for commercial use and unemployment social security. On a domestic level, Davidson argues that there is a problem of sustenance due to declining resources and the inability to meet rising demand for public sector jobs. On the other hand, he mentions how sheikhs have been able to survive domestically by means ranging from creating a unified dress code, to providing for marriage funds, as well as the cooptation of expatriates and religion.⁵

On an external level, Gulf monarchies have maintained a solid bilateral relation with the West. Extensive revenues have partly returned to the West through the building up of over-equipped militaries in these Gulf monarchies. Over the recent years, strong bilateral relations have also been on the rise with other Asian powers in an attempt to diversify their allocation-based economies.⁶ Large-scale economic joint ventures have been established as well as the financing of other educational institutions, increasing the soft power of those Gulf States.

⁵Ibid., 116-120

⁶ Martin Hvidt, “Economic Diversification in GCC Countries: Past Record and Future Trends”. Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States. *The London School of Economics and Political Science* 27, (January 2013): 3.

The above explanations all revolve around mainstream rentier theory, attributing continuation of regime type to acquisition of money and its distribution to different degrees around the region. Rent as a concept was used as early as 1860's by Marx to explain income that was derived from renting out property. Rentierism as a theory was first used in the contemporary context by Mahdavi in describing the case of Iran,⁷ then used by Hazem Beblawi to describe a state that is heavily engaged in extracting rent from its natural resources and involving many citizens in the distribution of it.⁸ Rentier state theorists have argued that absence of taxation, the ability to oppress the population and the prevention of changes in class structure are all products of a rentier economy. Huntington adds that macro level economic development that builds an industry may yield some type of democracy, but the reliance on selling natural resources does not contribute much to political development.⁹ Running parallel, Ross argues that "oil impedes democracy", and that while oil wealth produces some type of development, it hurdles the transition more than contributing to it.¹⁰ In the Latin American context, Terry Karl explains how the access to money from resources such as oil can have a negative effect on

⁷ Hussein Mahdavi, "The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in Economic History of the Middle East 1970*, ed. M. A. Cook (London: Oxford University Press).

⁸ Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World", in *The Rentier State 1987*, eds. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), 51.

⁹ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 65.

¹⁰ Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 342-343.

development, especially if it coincides with the period of state-building. Such funds are argued to completely damage state institutions and prevents any decision-making platforms to emerge. The damage as Karl argues, comes from the idea that economic activity is replaced by oil funds and that the state tends to fund accelerated development and control the non-taxed population.¹¹

The below matrix dichotomizes different Middle Eastern states in respect to their oil wealth, percentage of oil in GDP, and regime type, highlighting those who witnessed significant street uprisings during the 2011 events. The table clearly suggests that regime type and oil wealth cannot be sole indicators of regime survival and persistence. Worthy to note is that none of the monarchies had witnessed regime change. A successful tool in this case would be the usage of the equation governance = legitimacy + force.¹² In other words, the less the legitimacy of a regime, the more force it needed to coerce its population and vice versa. In Morocco for example, King Mohamed counts on his religious legitimacy/affiliation to bring down any opposing movement. In Bahrain, however, the military crushed the protest movement, sustaining the Al-Khalifa rule. This was the case mainly because of tribal and

¹¹ Terry Lynn Karl, The Perils of the Petro-state: Reflections on the Paradox of the Plenty, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1999, 34-35.

¹² Bahgat Korany, Redefining Development for a New Generation: A Political Economy Analysis, in *Arab Human Development in the 21st Century: The Primacy of Empowerment*, ed. Bahgat Korany, (Cairo, New York: American University Press), 2014, 7.

religious connections with the military, coupled by neighboring Saudi Arabia's support.¹³

	Oil-Wealthy	Oil-Poor
Monarchy	Bahrain – 2.6% Kuwait – 38.5% Oman – 20.5% Qatar – 5.9% Saudi Arabia – 22.5% UAE – 11.2	Jordan - 0 Morocco – 0
Republican	Algeria – 9.1% Libya - --	Egypt – 2.6% Tunisia – 1.8 Syria - -- Yemen – 1.9 Sudan – 0.7%

Source: The World Bank, Data, Oil Rents as Percentage of GDP, 2015.

- No data available

While the cases of Bahrain and UAE do practice forms of rentierism, this model has been generalized to explain regimes in resource-rich states; especially those where rent revenues occupy a large percentage of total government revenues. Rentierism in its over-generalizing form in that case is not sufficient to explain why Bahrain and the UAE experienced different trajectories during the events of the Arab

¹³ See also Eva Bellin, Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2012), 127-149.

Spring. This thesis proposes a modified rentier model that takes into consideration the socio-historic differences in the cases of Bahrain and the UAE, then showing how such deeply-rooted causes were further emphasized/sustained by oil money.

It is evidently worthwhile to study how different countries in the Gulf region have survived the recent waves of uprisings. Despite sharing a monarchial system of rule, a tribal culture, and similar colonial experiences, both Bahrain and the UAE differ in socio-historic trajectories leading to different routes and outcomes as hypothesized by this thesis. Differences in socio-historic trajectories include state formation characteristics, types of elites and sectarian structure. Each of these explanatory factors has been present in the cases to different degrees, and is at the core of the analysis. Degreeism in that sense is a crucial term that has been coined by Giovanni Sartori to reiterate the necessity for the removal of dichotomies and replacing them with continuous ones giving the example of democracies and non-democracies. “Democracy cannot be separated from non-democracy; rather, democracy is a property that to some different degree can be predicated of all political systems and, conversely, non-democracy is always more or less present in any polity”.¹⁴

¹⁴ Giovanni Sartori, “Comparing and Miscomparing,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* vol.3, no. 3, (1991), 248.

Tribalism: What Impact?

The cases of Bahrain and the UAE are chosen as an example of rentier states that have experienced different socio-historic trajectories leading to a difference in outcome when faced with challenges of the Arab Spring. Despite the presence of Rentierism, experiences in state-formation, types of elites, and sectarian structure add explanatory value and highlight different characteristics to the cases of Bahrain and the UAE.

A number of contemporary similarities exist between the cases of Bahrain and the UAE, from the foundational basics pertaining to both of those countries, to conducting similar day to day policies. Ballantyne provides a comparative analysis of the foundational principles of the Gulf nation-states.¹⁵ In the case of Bahrain, there is a clear divide between the legislative, executive and judicial branches, while the case of UAE shows a system of elite power-sharing, and legislation can involve the Federal National Council, but it does not need its consent to function. It is important to note that the UAE has a different form of constitution due to the nature of being a federation, which is a significant difference in itself. The tribal nature of the region is one that is distinct from any other, and the mere existence of a union between tribes shows a distinct type of power-sharing.

¹⁵ W. M. Ballantyne, "The Constitutions of the Gulf States," *Arab Law Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (February 1986), 159-162.

This tribal nature of the region is indeed one of the most important characteristics that one must expand on, and directly pertains to the discussion on structure and construction of actual Gulf States. Khoury shows how the role of tribes is significant to the construction of major political systems and institutions.¹⁶ In the case of the Gulf, we have seen certain regions that had not been fully colonialized, and tribalism has indeed had a deep-rooted history in empires that have developed to take part in recent concept of a modern state. It is crucial to note that the concept of the modern nation-state in the European sense differs substantially from what we are confronted with today in the region.

The notion of a “state” is yet another term characterized by degreeism. Khoury reviews various literatures on the state showing two sides of the spectrum. On the one hand, the state is identified as an entity using different forms of power to maintain an organized society. On the other hand, the state is seen as requiring borders, some type of central government and a homogeneous population.¹⁷ But since the tribal basis is very present in these states, it is important to highlight the various definitions that pertain to “tribe”. Tapper has approached the tribe as being a group that comes together on the basis of kinship, and a group that considers itself different from the others in terms of custom, language or (real or perceived) origins, and usually share

¹⁶ Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, (eds.) Introduction to *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1996), 4-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

similar political thought, yet not necessarily unified under one leader.¹⁸ On the other hand, Albert Hourani has identified the tribe not necessarily as kinship, but rather a belief of common origin sometimes inscribed in the name of the family or tribe.¹⁹

Scholars of social sciences usually find it difficult to find and agree on an all-encompassing definition for a certain phenomenon. As argued by Fuad Khuri, a tribal society has a “cultural substance”. This cultural substance can endure because values and beliefs are abstract, and therefore members of the tribe will subscribe to the values and beliefs, even though they might not have a clear-cut definition of such values. Tribes in their basic sense seem to have a much more uniform group dynamic within them. In the case of the Middle East, tribal interactions have usually formed states such as the cases among the Gulf monarchies. In such context, it is crucial to define the term “chiefdom” which has also been used to describe a tribe that has successfully established some type of leadership; chiefdoms do not only bring about kinship, but also have a more regulated system of leadership. According to Tapper, this tribal leader or chief plays a crucial role in controlling and regulating the interactions between his tribesmen, and have the ability to sustain a continuous flow of goods and services to his followers to maintain their support and allegiance. Tapper adds that the chiefdom must create some type of regulatory mechanism to sustain

¹⁸ Ibid., 5

¹⁹ Albert Hourani, “Tribes and States in Islamic History,” in Ibid., 304.

leadership such as that of establishing a “hereditary dynasty”.²⁰ In an attempt to understand the reasons behind the development of tribes into chiefdoms, Khoury observed that tribes had to be better-off economically, and therefore offer to share the economic surplus in exchange for recognition. By doing so, tribes could sustain themselves both on the day to day services to their followers, and also retain power to avoid any challenges.

²⁰ Khoury and Kostiner, *op.cit*, 9.

Conceptual Framework

Deeply rooted socio-historic differences are a characteristic of different routes

Bahrain and the UAE experienced during the Arab Spring, such deeply-rooted factors must be distinguished from other differences that might exist and are argued to be effects or outcomes of the deeply rooted causes.

Symptoms, Effects or Outcome of Deeply Rooted Causes:

<u>Similarities:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monarchial system of rule• Tribal culture• Similar colonial experience
<u>Differences:</u>	
Bahrain:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political parties / civil society organizations• Parliament• Other means of political mobilization
UAE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No political activism, extreme absolutism• Rich in oil revenues

Deeply rooted socio-historical factors that are different in each of the two countries, and focused on here:

- State-formation
- Types of elites – degree of power-sharing
- Sectarian structure / political function

By emphasizing these socio-historic factors, this thesis adopts a critical approach to rentier theory. While the availability of funds does play a role, it cannot

be used as an all-round approach to account for the situation in any and every one of the Gulf States. Having a no-taxation policy and financial rewards as rents are not sufficient to describe the survival of all and every Gulf State.²¹ In his study, Herb argues that oil wealth produces something similar to development in certain areas that does not necessarily have the same effect as other industrial sources of wealth, but is also likely to have positive effects on democracy.²² Okruhlik adds that structuring of the market and how the flow of funds occurs is the problem, in the sense that politics must play a part in explaining the current state of Middle Eastern monarchies.²³ He proposes that rentier analysis in the Middle East must be redesigned to fit the personal exercises adopted by extraction, intrusion and penetration. All of these characteristics link the state with society whether through formal or informal means that are exclusive to each society. Okruhlik concludes that it is crucial to integrate historical and social contexts into contemporary analysis rather than merely starting analysis with the exponential growth of oil revenues in the 1970's.²⁴ In other words "the receipt of oil revenues per se does not explain development or opposition or relations between ruler and ruled. The manner in which the rent is deployed, however, tells us

²¹ Michael Herb, "No Representation Without Taxation? Rents, Development, and Democracy," *Comparative Politics* 37, no. 3 (2005): 297-298.

²² *Ibid.*, 300.

²³ Gwenn Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States," *Comparative Politics*, (1999): 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

much. The choices made can distort, inhibit, or accelerate political dialogue and economic growth”.²⁵

Methodology

This thesis adopts a socio-historical comparative analysis between Bahrain and the UAE. In that regard, this thesis adopts the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) in analyzing the socio-historic paths undergone by Bahrain and UAE that will explain why Bahrain and the UAE experienced different events during the Arab Spring. The MSSD is based on a system in which the researcher chooses cases that are similar in as many features as possible to be able to minimize the experimental variables.²⁶ The MSSD is concerned with the system level of analysis, where similarities and differences are explained in terms of system patterns and divergence respectively. In the words of Przeworski and Teune “Common systemic characteristics are conceived as controlled for, whereas intersystemic differences are viewed as explanatory variables. The number of shared characteristics sought is maximal and the number of not shared characteristics sought is minimal”.²⁷ Differences that are found among the systems studied will imply two theoretical implications. The first implies that factors that are shared by both Bahrain and UAE are not applicable to the explanation of

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1970), 32-34.

²⁷ Ibid.,

different routes during the Arab Spring since differences have been observed. The second implication concerns the differences that are found between the cases, such differences or any interaction among them can be used to explain different state behavior²⁸ While the MSSD in that sense focuses on differences related to both cases in the study, one shortcoming to the findings is the inability to be generalized beyond the cases.

As this thesis argues that differences in socio-historic trajectories are what explained the different episodes each country was exposed to during the events of the Arab Spring, it is important to note that other contemporary differences exist. These differences include parliament in the case of Bahrain, and having a history of mobilization. Instances of elections do not only show the existence of political parties, but more importantly in voting patterns that could be significant in reflecting the construct of the kingdom. While in the UAE there are no signs of political activism, coupled with the presence of large revenues from oil resources. These differences are crucial to the thesis, but are treated as an effect or outcome of the different routes in each case, because they are an effect or product of the socio-historic differences, rather than being causal in themselves. The case of Bahrain is an interesting one that shows the existence of actual political parties and several instances of elections on a national level. Bahrain is also among the less fortunate of the Gulf countries when it

²⁸ Ibid., 34

comes to oil reserves, and economic welfare per se. The case of UAE on the other hand provides an interesting example of a recently emerging international business center and skyrocketing economy. Yet interestingly enough, the UAE does not allow for any type of political contribution from its citizens.

Responses to Arab Spring (Outcome)

As we have established, rentierism is a tool that has been recycled over the years in times of discontent to co-opt the population. Just a mere example displaying the power of rentierism was evident during Arab Spring in 2011 when the UAE government increased salaries of those working in the public sector up to 70% as well as offering several privileges to the citizens.²⁹ Such example shows how the state can successfully buy out the loyalty of its people. In this case, one can assume that the economy is indeed integral to the maintenance of a certain political order and acts as a cooptation measure that does not involve much violence or deterrence. Formal patronage has been seen in patterns of bureaucratic employment that has fragmented potential opposition formations and ensured that they are dependent on the state.³⁰

²⁹ Kristin Smith Diwan, "Royal Factions, Ruling Strategies, And Sectarianism in Bahrain," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G Potter, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2014, 144.

³⁰ Steffen Hertog, "Saudi Arabia's Political Demobilization in Regional Comparison: Monarchial Tortoise and Republican Hares," in *The Arab State and Neoliberal Globalization: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, ed. Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (Reading, UK: Ithaca, 2009), 75.

The case of Bahrain, when approached through an economic lens, appears to be different.

The existence of trade union leaders was indeed a significant point in the Bahraini case that date back to the series of strikes that took place between 1954-56. Labor movements, as a form of political activity, are significant in developing discussions on origins, education, religious affiliations and political orientations. Such political activity was not only portrayed in having elections, but more importantly in voting patterns that could be significant. The development of a radicalized, industrial proletariat was a powerful factor in shifting the government's emphasis in economic development away from heavy industry with working class to more "white collar" work that is based on finance. Active labor movements have usually been united under the umbrella of al-Wifaq party, who is mostly composed of Shiite Muslims. According to Wehrey, opposition in Bahrain has had a history of launching successful anti-regime movements in which they can channel their demands and press for a more free and fair legislative body.³¹ Despite having an elected parliament, the body was very inefficient and more or less incapable of channeling any demands from within. The inability of al-Wifaq to formally channel demands of the workers during the five years they were present in parliament between 2006 and 2011 was reflected in the uprisings taking place in the "Pearl Roundabout".

³¹ Frederic Wehrey, "Bahrain's Decade of Discontent," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2013), 117.

Being present in Bahrain during the events of 2011, Toby Matthiesen provides a primary source account of how events unfolded, and how the regime had framed the situation in an attempt to bring the protests to a halt. In one account, Matthiesen refers to a dialogue between one of the expatriate labor leaders and representatives working there during the early days of the uprising who describes the situation as “It’s the Shiite, they always make trouble. They don’t like the ruling family, and they want to take our jobs”.³² Such first-hand account reflects the centrality of the ethnic factor and the extent to which Shiite have been framed and being held responsible for the events as they unfold. With the unfolding of events, and the offering of the Prince Salman further concessions, people returned to the Pearl square days after the shootings.³³ As uprisings continued day in day out, and people found more public space to ask for the restructuring of the regime altogether, Saudi Arabia had sent troops along with some UAE police forces, to limit protest in Bahrain, bringing the country to a lockdown with martial law, and curfews coupled by mass arrests to put the uprising down.³⁴

³²Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), 2013, 34.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-53.

Chapter 1: A Critical Approach to Classical Rentierism

Is oil a curse?

Throughout the past century, Rentierism as a concept has dominated the literature, claiming positive correlation between oil and authoritarianism. Scholars such as Micheal Ross, Christopher Davidson, and Samuel Huntington among others have all argued along the lines that oil is indeed a curse economically and/or politically to the nations that have it. This thesis revisits the idea that rentierism has an equal effect all across the board, focusing specifically on the cases of Bahrain and UAE during the recent events of the Arab Spring. This thesis aims to add a socio-historic perspective to rentierism to provide a more encompassing approach to explain events in Bahrain and UAE. . In other words, oil money was utilized to emphasize and sustain the already existing deeply-rooted socio-historic factors that explain why Bahrain and UAE experienced different events during the Arab Spring.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the Arabian Gulf was found to be floating over vast oil reserves that would indeed bring about future geopolitical importance to the region. Such geopolitical importance of Gulf oil had reached its climax during the early years of World-War II. Countries at war found it crucial to control the Arabian Gulf and utilize its geographic proximity to extend their influence

and assert control. Britain's influence and administration was the most prevalent during that time as it relied on Bahrain as a source of oil. During the years of the war, the ports were heavily used by Americans and British, expanding their trade across the Persian ports.³⁵ Britain was also keen to protect and control the air route over the Gulf where civilian aircrafts had to pass to reach India, Singapore and Australia.

Bahrain was seen as a significant asset that Britain had utilized to exploit its oil fields and refineries, as well as the established naval base at Jufayr. Controlling the area surrounding the Arabian Peninsula meant that Britain could administer and control the access to the Indian Ocean, Asia and the Pacific.³⁶ Britain had utilized air and sea transport to service the war through transport of personnel and material through this area in the later stages of the war. With growing involvement in the region, the United States had also made use of the British facilities and later on establishing an airfield in Dhahran, and administered small naval activity in the Gulf from Bahrain. Increasing American involvement later materialized in the oil sector and then consolidated with the creation of The Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in Saudi Arabia.³⁷

³⁵ J. E. Peterson, "The Historical Pattern of Gulf Security," 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), 21.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

The second half of the twentieth century would bring about an inevitable decline in British involvement and a shift in more American involvement in the region. The Western strategy shifted to focus on maintaining friendly relations with the newly-independent states and to secure Gulf oil. With British involvement in the region coming to an end in 1971, the United States had taken over the leadership role despite its great unfamiliarity with the region. While the United States played a huge role in training and equipping Saudi Arabia and Iran with arms, The United States connection to the newly established states was more bilateral in nature due to their full integration into the international system.³⁸

The emergence of oil in the early decades of the 20th century is believed to have led to important implications in the region and a potential change in its geopolitical value. The discovery of oil also brought rise to a literature on the political economy of rentier states. Oil was also hypothesized as a curse rather than a full blessing, and that the distributive capacity made possible to its governments stretched vertically along the social strata of society. Rentierism as a concept was born out of the notion that oil accumulated wealth to the governments and therefore losing the need to tax its population as well as develop a production based economy.³⁹ Such

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁹ Robert Springborg, "GCC countries as "Rentier States" Revisited," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no.2 (2013): 301-302

relationship between state and society was concluded to have rendered democratization very unlikely.

While rentier theory has been applicable to oil rich states in South America and elsewhere, the counties of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) occupy a greater share in contemporary analysis. Dissatisfaction with the concept of rentierism was born out of the fact that oil had different effects in different parts of the world. Norway has been used throughout the literature as a prime example of country with abundant oil reserves, yet has managed to remain democratic and contain problems such as “dutch disease”.⁴⁰ Scholars who focused on the Middle East had started to question the applicability of the theory. In his focus and analysis of the Saudi Arabian economy and state institutions, Tim Niblock argued that oil was not necessarily a curse and that it contributed to the development of institutions in Saudi.⁴¹ While some scholars have attempted at times to dismiss rentierism all in all as part of the explanation, others such as Luciani and Hertog have contended that the concept remains relevant, however in need of taking into consideration changing circumstances.⁴² Springborg presents the two different interpretations of rentier economy and its implications on rentier states. On one hand, the argument stands that

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Tim Niblock with Monica Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (London: Taylor and Francis) 2007.

⁴² Springborg, op-cit, 305.

these rentier states are on the verge of decline as their oil revenues drop. The other view denotes that rentier states are very unlikely to decline, and that they will continue to engage in their process of reform to develop their institutions.⁴³

Luciani states that the ruling elites in the Gulf States have been committed to developing their economies and engaging in diversification.⁴⁴ Luciani also adds that oil is not necessarily a curse, but rather an asset when coupled with good public policies that encourage growth of the infrastructure, the effects of the Dutch Disease can be avoided. Luciani concludes that GCC policy makers have been successful in implementing the correct developmental model to ensure diversification of industry away from pure rentierism.

Along the lines of Luciani, members of the GCC have all adopted the same developmental model in an attempt to escape the resource curse syndrome and induce development. While this thesis acknowledges that rentierism does indeed play a role in shaping the political outcome of the GCC states, it remains a tool that is utilized by the governments to promote a certain model or sustain the status quo.⁴⁵ Rentierism

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴ Giacomo Luciani, "Resources Blessed: Diversification and the Gulf Development Model," in *The Gulf Region: Economic Development and Diversification 2012*, ed. Giacomo Luciani, Steffen Hertog, Eckart Woertz, and Richard Youngs (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2012) 9.

⁴⁵Ibid., 9.

alone however might not be sufficient in describing why certain events happened in one place and not the other despite sharing similar to equal performances.

Rentierism as a concept has emerged recently first in Hussein Mahdavi's explanation in the case of Iran⁴⁶, and later on by Hazem Biblawi to describe the generation of wealth by a few to be distributed among the greater population.⁴⁷ If we look however into the histories of those newly developed Gulf States, one might argue that oil wealth is simply a transformation from one prosperous economy that was mainly based on management of ocean trade to the extraction and use of oil revenues. While Gulf countries had lived off and prospered through ocean trade they had never produced anything of their own but were successful middlemen and business makers.⁴⁸ Oil wealth in the contemporary Gulf countries has produced no industry, and has acted as the primary exchange commodity when dealing with the outside world. Despite having abundant oil reserves, the Gulf has indeed been engaged in the process of diversification that Luciani had outlined above. Oil generated wealth has been used to revive the old ports that had been used for trade becoming new international hubs. Being such wealthy nations gave birth to job opportunities that invited people from abroad to service the luxuries and facilities

⁴⁶ Mahdavi, op-cit.

⁴⁷ Beblawi, op-cit, 51.

⁴⁸ Izady, op-cit, 69

until this very day with large numbers of expatriates ranging from 39% of the population being expatriates in Oman to as high as 82% in UAE.⁴⁹

A Framework of Modified Rentierism

This thesis will revisit the rentier state model by taking into consideration the socio-historic differences that exist between Bahrain and UAE to explain why mass uprisings occurred in the first but not the latter. It is important to reiterate and underline, however, that this thesis does not aim at ruling out the effects of classical rentierism; but rather emphasize the transformations that were brought about as a result of the socio-historic differences, similar oil wealth notwithstanding. In other words, deeply-rooted differences that are exclusive to each of the cases of UAE and Bahrain were met with different responses therefore yielding different contemporary internal structures. While both cases under comparison, and the region as a whole, seem to share a common history in regards to relations with foreign powers and similar version of monarchy rule, there are current differences that were born out of their different historical experiences with state-formation, types of elites and their sectarian structure.

Gwenn Okruhlik proposes that rentier analysis of the Middle East must be taken on a case-by-case basis to account for different patterns of extraction, intrusion

⁴⁹Ibid., 69-71.

and penetration.⁵⁰ In that sense, a socio-historic perspective when dealing with the contemporary status of the Gulf is crucial to the analysis. Life did not just start in these states when oil was discovered and prices skyrocketed in the 1970's, but oil was just another phase –though important- in the developmental track of those states. Okruhlik also adds that the social structure of society in the pre-oil era is key to the analysis of contemporary oil states of the GCC. Being resource rich in this case “does not explain development or opposition or relations between ruler and ruled. The manner in which the rent is deployed, however, tells us much”.⁵¹

Referring to the previously mentioned works of Michael Ross and earlier rentier scholarly works, Matthew Gray provides a rather compelling framework that outlines a more contemporary version of rentier state theory. Gray proposes dividing rentierism into three distinct stages: Classical rentier state theory, specialized and conditional rentier state theory, and a theory of “late rentierism”.⁵² For Gray classical rentierism manifested the early tenants of the theory between the 1950's and the through the 1980's.⁵³ As mentioned before, the classical rentier state theory rendered the state autonomous from society. In other words, the availability of rents allowed the governments to buy off its citizens in return for democratic sacrifice. Citizens who

⁵⁰ Gwenn Okruhlik, op-cit, 12-13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13

⁵² Matthew Gray, *A Theory of “Late Rentierism” in the Arab States of the Gulf*. Doha: Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University, (2011):1–50.

⁵³ Ibid., 24.

did not accept such tradeoff were sidelined and repressed. Such classical rentier theory has been characterized by linking undemocratic government and oil. Accordingly, the effects of oil on democratic government can be summarized into three main points/stages rentierism, repression and modernization.⁵⁴ The rentier effect basically dictates that people are not taxed in exchange for political solidarity. The repression effect shows how abundant oil resources have allowed for the creation of repressive system that is capable of bringing down any radical attempts for change. The modernization effect is the engagement of the state in development projects to meet the needs of the citizens.

As this thesis has stated, rentier effects go beyond the generalizations that were first advocated by classical rentier state theory. Michael Ross himself revisited his approach later and acknowledged some shortcomings to his initial theory.⁵⁵ Along the lines of Gray, it was the unfolding of events and change in the social structure of the Arab Gulf states that outdated the initial theory, with a need to update it to accommodate a different phase. This was the case in what Gray identified as the second phase manifested in what he calls specialized and conditional rentier state theory.⁵⁶ The second phase was a response to the inadequate answers that the initial theory provided. More precisely its applicability was slightly questioned by states in the Gulf such as Dubai, which was able to globalize over the past decade and adopt a

⁵⁴ Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" op-cit, 332-338.

⁵⁵ Ross, "Oil and Democracy Revisited," op-cit, 2.

⁵⁶ Gray, op-cit, 24

policy to diversify their economy. Classical rentier state theory had also disregarded the two significant oil booms that changed the spending patterns of oil wealth, or even the variations that existed among the Gulf nations. This was “also inseparable from questions of accountability and responsiveness that are, in turn, related to the democracy debate and, of course, to wider political economy elements of the state-society relationship”.⁵⁷ This is why specialized rentier state theory advocates for a more inclusive analysis of the Gulf States, rather than a one size fits all approach.

As this thesis has advocated from the beginning, the Gulf countries might appear an undifferentiated block from the outside, but significantly different if analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Specialized or revised rentier state theory promotes an analysis that takes into consideration the specifics of each countries historical trajectories and accounts for the social interactions and developmental options of the Gulf states which were ignored by the classical approach. This is why this thesis lines up with specialized rentier state theory to include historical trajectories and analysis of socio-historic experiences on an intra-state level including decades of state formation and elite interactions. More convincingly, the thesis builds on specialized rentier state theory to argue that these states were not initially born the day oil was founded and started to be extracted, but there was some type of established rules set by the elites functioning within a certain institutional form. These very dynamics of state-formation act as the building blocks of the modern Gulf states.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 11.

Specialized rentier state theory also includes aspects of international relations. According to Gray the theory acknowledges that external threats and interstate conflict also contributed to the creation of the modern Gulf state. With the existence of oil came the threat of conflict over resources acquisition or effect on the national and regional political scene. This was mainly due to the fact that oil had different effects in different places. Such addition to classical rentier state theory is significant in analyzing the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and more related to the thesis, Bahrain's dependence on Saudi Arabian funds for development projects, but more importantly internal security and stabilization. The crux of the argument is that even when these states became wealthy from oil, their states did not become more stable on the domestic level or secure on the international level.

Along the lines of specialized/ revised rentier state theory (under the second phase) is the state's conditional aspect mostly concerned with state autonomy. Such line of thought advocates for a specific analysis of the state and its relative vulnerability or responsibility towards society. Conditional rentier state theory discusses the idea that the state is always alert to societal needs and plays an active role in providing for its citizens. Basically, "the state must do more than simply buy off or repress society".⁵⁸ Examples of state interference to provide for development on the national level are seen in modernization waves that smaller Gulf states like Dubai

⁵⁸ Ibid., 14

championed in the 1990's and later followed by neighboring emirates. Dubai had initiated deliberate and strict strategies of gradual economic diversification away from oil. Dubai pioneered the process of globalization in the region by bringing down trade barriers and opening up for free trade and investment as well as international quality education that attracted citizens and expatriates from around the globe. It is important to note that throughout this transformation in Dubai, political stability and sustainability were indeed at the core of such rapid globalization and integration into a world economy. Unlike the classical rentier state theory claim, the process required "responsive" and "forward-looking" state institutions that "must still be responsive to society if –as it has done in the past couple of decades- it wants to ensure its long-term survival".⁵⁹

The aforementioned framework offers our starting point of analysis from which we can compare the different socio-historic tracks and state-society interactions that can explain the different events Bahrain and UAE experienced during the Arab Spring. In that sense, we focus on differences in three basic variables: state-formation patterns, types of elites, and sectarian structures. Their distinguishing patterns are found in various degrees and prevail more in one of the cases than the other. Along the lines of Okruhlik, if we analyze the social structure of society during the pre-oil era, one will find a different type of state-formation. Bahrain had emerged through the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 15.

domination of a minority group who controlled agricultural land by force. UAE however, depended on the coming together of a number of emirates to form a union that was based on consent and cooperation. It is therefore logical to believe that governments would choose to allocate their oil funds differently. Dealing with different types of elites who emerged through the popular pearl industry in Bahrain, the government had to cooperate with those merchant elites that existed as a way to garner support and legitimacy. As such, Bahrain was also faced with a proletariat that was able to come together and form opposition groups. Such social constructs were able to lobby for some type of representation, giving birth to a couple of parliamentary experiments. The coming together of business elite in the case of UAE was different. With most of the social strata skewed to the upper-middle and upper class, and an enormous expatriate working force more than four times the native population UAE did not have to confront any worker calls for unionization or representation. The rationale behind the difference in those cases is to actually show that despite having oil wealth at their disposal, Bahrain's regime might rationally prioritize security over economy, and invest in force build-up rather than public sector enhancement. Indeed, sectarianism is another a socio-historic factor that is only prevalent in the case of Bahrain. Having a two-third majority Shiite population that does not rule does indeed yield different internal group dynamics than the mostly homogeneous UAE society.

State-Formation:

It is worthy to note that the modern Gulf monarchies of today have emerged out of tribal coalitions that inhabited the region centuries ago. Butti Sultan Al-Muhairi highlights how different tribes started to settle in the early 19th century.⁶⁰ Among them were the “Qawasim, a maritime people who lived in Ras Al-Khaimah and Sharjah Emirates. The other major tribal force was the Bani Yas federation, who spread their influence in the lower Gulf and dominated the area stretching between present day Dubai and Abu Dhabi”.⁶¹ What is worth noting in the establishment of the modern-day Gulf States is the process by which those tribes were transformed into chiefdoms creating coalitions. In the case of Bahrain, we see the coming together of different tribal identities under the most dominant Al-Khalifa family who has governed Bahrain since the 1780’s.⁶² Al-Khalifa family had first imposed its domination by controlling most of the agricultural land on the island. Later on, they

⁶⁰ Butti Sultan Butti Ali Al-Muhairi, "The Development of the UAE Legal System and Unification with the Judicial System," *Arab Law Quarterly* 11 no. 2 (1996): 117-118

⁶¹ Ibid, 118.

⁶² Fred Lawson, Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy, (Boulder: Westview Press), 1989, 6.

succeeded to establish a power-sharing mechanism in distributing land according to proximity with Al-Khalifa family.

The UAE on the other hand is indeed an interesting case of federal unity. Initially the federation would have included modern day Bahrain and Qatar, but they backed out following British withdrawal.⁶³ The interesting aspect that one must highlight in the case of the UAE is the inequality among the members. Such inequality required consensus and realization that their unification was for their overall benefit as one. Sheikh Zayed has been continually praised for being an “ardent advocate of political cooperation between the Gulf States”.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that the creation of the union was successful, a number of challenges had faced the newly-born state that brought about a number of different tribes that existed in the region. As Heard-Bey puts it the emirates have always been “unequal brothers”. Abu-Dhabi, for example, was the largest in land size, as well as the richest when it came to oil revenues. Dubai, on the other hand, was the most populous, and others like Sharjah were well known for education.⁶⁵ Such inequality meant that cooperation was crucial and interdependence would remain as the core building block of the union. One must not underestimate such process of unification that brought about several smaller “cheifdoms”. Shortly after becoming President, Sheikh Zayed was quoted saying “our experiment in

⁶³ Al-Muhairi, op-cit, 118

⁶⁴ Frauke Heard-Bey, The United Arab Emirates: Statehood and Nation-Building in a Traditional Society, *The Middle East Journal*, 2005, 358.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 360

federation arose from a desire to increase the ties that bind us, as well as from the conviction of all that we were part of one family, and that we must gather together under one leadership”.⁶⁶The difference in the UAE that makes it distinct from other Gulf States is the federal system that has grown to adapt to the historical tribal nature of the Emirates.⁶⁷

Types of Elites

Formal institutional patronage networks indicate a dominance of a certain actor over the polity that does not allow the emergence of other autonomous groups that are equally powerful. In the case of Bahrain and UAE, one will historically find great involvement by the British in the internal affairs of these emerging states. Though not formally colonizers, the British had shown dominant presence in the region. The discovery of oil in the Gulf during the initial decades of the 20th century had significant implications on the region as a whole. It is significant to note that Bahrain was the center of the popular pearl industry that was controlled by “rich merchant families” that were tied to Al-Khalifa.⁶⁸ The rise of the oil industry brought about the decline of the pearl industry, and in turn a change in the role of its merchant elites who now became part of the regime’s economic dependents and a main source of

⁶⁶ “UAE Mourns Shaikh Zayed’s death,” *Khaleej Times*, November 3, 2004, accessed 21 March, 2015.

⁶⁷ Heard-Bey, op-cit, 358.

⁶⁸ Lawson, op-cit, 7.

trust loyal to Al-Khalifa family. As for the UAE, before the union in 1971, tribes were the dominant political actors, and the sheikhs would usually function through the “*diwan*”, which was usually composed of the sheikh’s tribe, other tribal leaders and representatives. The “*majlis*” on the other hand was a forum-like gathering in which people (ordinary citizens) could voice their problems or concerns to the sheikh in person or to close advisors.⁶⁹

The success of the Gulf monarchies was evident in their ability to transform their tribes into nominal modern societies while at the same time maintain their traditional values. The process of transformation was described by Foley who shows how some monarchies succeeded in enhancing their legitimacy through revenues accumulated from oil, and were actually able to maintain their long-standing tradition of governance till this day. By doing so the monarchies were able to “modernize their societies in the twentieth century, while retaining governing traditions and monarchies”.⁷⁰ This was more the case in UAE than in Bahrain, where other challenges such as sectarianism existed and were a frequent source of discontent.

Bahrain’s situation was a dominant Sunni minority that controls the Kingdom and has established its own hierarchical network to govern and control. Such control has been

⁶⁹ Christopher M Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival*, (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2005), 16.

⁷⁰ Sean Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner), 2010.

mostly inflicted on the resources of the kingdom, in an attempt to allocate and create networks of trust that support the leadership. Despite having a 50% expatriate population,⁷¹ the source of the island's discontent has usually occurred along sectarian lines. The dominant Sunni minority are found among the higher classes either being members of Al-Khalifa family or among the merchant elites that surround the sheikh. The middle class consists mainly of other tribes who have allied with those of Al-Khalifa and other smaller traders. The subordinate strata have continued to consist of the working class who usually work in agriculture and as craftspeople.⁷² The middle class has usually been coopted by the state through employment in the public sector where benefits are offered such as subsidized housing. The subordinate class is of great importance here, not only that it was non-existent in the case of the UAE, but also due to being predominantly Shiite with some Sunnis in the industrial sector. While the sectarian division was usually a point of friction, workers usually had negative sentiments towards expatriates who were seen as a competition for their jobs. As Lawson notes, the discovery of oil brought about a decline in industrial and agricultural production, affecting the poorer social strata of society.⁷³ Following the intervention of the central administration in an attempt to control prices and manage labor through a severe crackdown on expatriates, the

⁷¹ Anthony H Cordesman, "Gulf Security, Stability, and Terrorism: Country Rankings," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (November 2014): 12.

⁷² Lawson, op-cit, 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 48.

working class recovered its role.

The UAE shows significant differences and different formations at the social level. According to CIA estimates, the native UAE citizens account for about 19%, while more than 80% are mainly expatriates operating in different sectors of the economy.⁷⁴ One should highlight that the local population have a strong sense of solidarity among each other, and usually rank in the upper and middle class leaving the labor work to the expatriates.⁷⁵ What is worth noting is the huge sentiments and nationalist aspirations that the UAE carry until this very day. It is not only a privilege to live in such a wealthy nation, but more importantly retaining everything of their identity with every emirate having something in particular to contribute to the federation.⁷⁶

On the personal network level, both countries have created clientalistic networks that are maintained through “jobs, bureaucratic protection and access, money, contracts and other state services”.⁷⁷ The clients are responsible for passing on the patron’s message creating a wider base of cooptation. The case of the UAE is an interesting one in that regard, when it comes to the business relationships among its citizens. Certain Gulf countries have succeeded in maintaining political stability

⁷⁴ A Cordesman, op-cit, 75.

⁷⁵ Heard-Bey, op-cit, 361.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 362.

⁷⁷ Hertog, op-cit, 75.

through several acts of “consolidating their own networks of trusted individuals in the bureaucracy, the political sphere, the economic sector, and the military apparatus who are directly tied to the authoritarian center”.⁷⁸ Examples of business elite cooptation has been prevalent in the case of the UAE as described by Almezaini who shows how the regime has perfected survival despite several economic turbulences and has managed to engage “different major merchants in the diversification process in the private sector” and attracting foreign direct investments.⁷⁹ While techniques of developing clientalistic networks have been adopted in both countries, different social structures have yielded different outcomes in each country. As mentioned above, the skewed social class of the UAE has been satisfied with the living standards, leaving calls for political representation virtually non-existent. While in Bahrain, calls for representation in the political structure have been prevalent among the lower classes of society. Such calls have usually created a dilemma among the Bahraini leadership, who were stuck between calls of liberalization, and the need to maximize power.

The roots of present political structure in Bahrain can be traced back to 1961, where a partnership was instituted between the previous Emir and his brother who acted as Prime Minister. While the Emir appeared to be popular for his ongoing

⁷⁸ Philippe Droz-Vincent, “Changing Roles of Middle Eastern Armies,” in *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes*, ed. Oliver Schlumberger (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 207.

⁷⁹ Khaled Almezani, “Private Sector in the UAE and their Role in the process of economic and Political Reform,” in *Business Politics in the Middle East*, eds. Steffen Hertog and Giacomo Luciani, and Marc Valeri, (London:Hurst, 2013), 45.

efforts to reform, the Prime Minister ensured the continuation of the bureaucracy, budget and security forces overseeing the continuation of authoritarianism. In 1973, reform brought about the 30-member elected parliament with full legislative power. Two years later, the rising alliance between opposition forces could have actually controlled the parliament, and was shut down. As Abdulhadi Al-Khalaf has argued, “this first parliament was never a truly democratic body, but rather a form of institutionalized tribalism and sectarianism guided by certain rules of conduct. Once a cross-sectarian coalition began to emerge and threatened al-Khalifa absolutism, the experiment was ended. It was a pattern that would repeat itself again in 2010”.⁸⁰

Sectarian Structure

Bahrain in its modern form had seen myriad challenges in the late years of the 18th century. Being the dominant tribe in Bahrain, the Khalifa family had emerged as a powerful tribe that forcefully dominated the island’s majority of indigenous Shiite population. These yielded decades of instability for Bahrain, as well as drawing the British forces more deeply in the internal affairs of the country.

According to Diwan, the Khalifa family had continued to impose its tribal rule over the Shiite peasantry.⁸¹ Such dominant nature of emergence based on conquest

⁸⁰ Wehrey, op-cit, 118.

⁸¹ Diwan, op-cit, 148-149.

had controlled the resources, allowing tribes who cooperated to become allies and established a close relationship with the leadership during the times of the pearl industry and again with the discovery of oil. The Khalifa family continued to tighten its control over the resources, and ensured that Sunni tribes who lost their pearl industry's resources due to the decline had moved into other businesses, and joined with the already established merchant elite to maintain and enlarge this strong support for the ruling Al-Khalifa. The Shiite population of Bahrain at that time, were left disadvantaged because their villages remained lacking in education with minor improvements in their jobs as workers. Despite being isolated for a period of time in the more rural areas, such differential treatment was opposed by national movements that started to materialize in the 1950's and the 1970's. These were also echoed by other mixed uprisings materializing in the capital and joining solidarity with shared economic interest and demand for greater political accountability.⁸²

Despite having a long history of exile and struggle with the British leadership in the early decades of the 20th century, the Khawalid remain a crucial royal faction in the case of Bahrain that must be closely studied to understand the power sharing dynamics each country possesses. The Khawalid are a branch of the Khalifa family that was marginalized by the British for having a hardline position against their Shiite

⁸² Ibid., 150.

counterparts.⁸³ The Khawalid had seen their rise with the emergence of King Hamad in 1999 who came into power with several reforms and who is considered among the soft-liners of the regime. Immediately the Khawalid had perceived that reforms and concessions were too much, and analysts had signaled that such actions adopted by Hamad would not be done “without confronting hardliners from the ruling family”.⁸⁴ The Khawalid who represent the hardliners of the kingdom have securitized the issue in such a way that has now “shifted towards those who conceive of the Shiite problem in security, rather than political, terms and who continue to pursue a corresponding security solution to what is undoubtedly a political conflict”.⁸⁵ Such securitization of an ethnic faction does indeed create and encourage a strong sense of the need to install preventive measures both domestically and regionally to fight what has been coined as the, “Shiite threat that is backed by Iran”.

Arguably, the securitization of the Shiite has developed over the years, and it is rational to believe that their continued marginalization has contributed to the radicalization of either side over the years. While reforms in the post-2002 experience aimed at integrating the Shiite population into national politics, the differential

⁸³ Justin J. Gengler, “Royal Factionalism, the Khawalid, and the Securitization of the Shī‘a Problem’ in Bahrain,” *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 3, no. 1 (2013): 54.

⁸⁴ Abdulhadi Khalaf, “Political Reform in Bahrain: End of the Road?” *Middle East International* 719, (2004): 26.

⁸⁵ Gengler, “Royal Factionalism” op-cit”, 54.

treatment remained intact to a large extent.⁸⁶ It is evident that ever since the emergence of the Al-Khalifa reign in Bahrain, sectarianism has played a role in it. What is important for the sake of our study in this case is the securitization of the Shiite dimension, and its emphasis as a threat by those in government. Such actions constitute what Louër calls “Pragmatic Sectarianism”.⁸⁷ In other words, the Shiite/Sunni divide was utilized in a time of conflict as the rhetoric changed to “the strategic use of Shiite sectarian identity to counter the influence of Marxist and Arab nationalist movements”.⁸⁸ Such opportunist securitization of the events by the Bahraini Sunni leadership can be further proven by the regional political dynamics involved. On a regional level, Saudi Arabia and Iran are perceived as the leaders of each sect and have used religion to legitimize their rule, and support their counterparts elsewhere in the region.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Diwan, op-cit, 161.

⁸⁷ 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, New York: Oxford University Press, (2014), 142.

⁸⁸ Ibid.,

⁸⁹ With that in mind, Diwan actually argues that Bahrain’s history is not one that reflects ongoing sectarian strife, but actually the opposite. “Within the constraints imposed by history and geography, coexistence and even cross-sectarian cooperation predominated, enough so that until recently Bahrain could promote itself within the Gulf on the basis of its cosmopolitan inclusiveness, (p.144).

Chapter 2: State-Formation trajectories and its implications on creating the modern UAE.

Bahrain and the UAE have indeed gone through different developmental paths throughout history. As discussed in the previous chapter, rentierism is a tool that has been utilized by the leaders to sustain the contemporary status quo. However, rentierism does not necessarily have an equal effect on all Gulf countries, nor does it, alone, help us understand the current status. Focusing on the two case studies of this thesis, this chapter aims to stress the significance of state-formation experiences and to track its effects up to the events of the Arab Spring. Such developmental stages will highlight also the formation of different types of elites that attach themselves differently with the ruling class.

It is notable to acknowledge first that the gulf monarchies that we see today are all very recent creations that were only acknowledged as states in the second half of the past century. Previously, this Arabian Peninsula was ruled by the once powerful Ottoman Empire. The decline of the Ottoman Empire brought about the creation of a significant number of monarchies. As Lisa Anderson argues, the prevalence of monarchy in the Middle East can be seen as a matter of European imperial policy towards the region. Anderson argues that unlike other areas that the Europeans

controlled through imperial power such as sub-Saharan Africa, imperial power had “endowed the Middle East with an unusually large number of monarchies”.⁹⁰ The Gulf monarchies of today appear to be homogeneous, and have indeed shared a common history of tribal nature. The Gulf region was also found to be floating on significant amounts of oil that was discovered at the advent of the twentieth century. Seen as a geopolitical asset to the West, Anderson argues that “monarchies were installed, retained, and refurbished because to a greater or lesser degree they served European imperial purposes”. Anderson adds that the current hereditary systems that are installed in these monarchies do not necessarily reflect the traditional tribal nature of the gulf’s inhabitants. Rather, such new creations of nation states have made rulers more involved and keen to take up national projects that create a sense of nationalism to a state rather than allegiance to a certain tribe.⁹¹ As this thesis argues, the monarchies in the cases of Bahrain and UAE are different, and have used different mechanisms to justify and consolidate their rule during their early stages of state formation. Since monarchies rule in totality, it is rational to assume that they do not adopt any type of power sharing mechanisms, or have them installed as a façade for liberalization. As such, monarchies tend to rely on other mechanisms to retain legitimacy such as affiliating themselves with a divine religious lineage or through alliances with rich merchant elites who are largely influential. In other words, the

⁹⁰ Lisa Anderson, “Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.106. No1, 1991, 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

availability of support from the traditional elite allows the monarch to enjoy voluntary compliance. Anderson adds that the “monarchy does not provide the solution to all the dilemmas of state formation, but its affinity with the project’s early stages may well account for its otherwise surprising resilience in the Middle East and North Africa”.⁹²

Trucial States as a Modern Creation:

British presence in the region was mainly concerned with securing the passage to India. Despite having no formal imperial rule over the Gulf States, the British had established a treaty to administer the territories known as Bahrain and UAE since the early years of the 1880’s. While these treaties were initially concerned with securing the ports and using them to export their manufactured goods worldwide, they also came in handy with the discovery of oil in an attempt to secure access to the vast oil supplies the region was found floating on.⁹³ The establishment of the Gulf monarchies in their modern form was something novel to the region and its inhabitants. No idea of nation-state existed, but rather they were present in their tribal nature, centered by religion as their higher authority. As Reinard Bendix explains that “the exercise of governmental authority was an aspect of family and property. The various functions

⁹² Ibid., 5.

⁹³ Michele Penner Angrist, “The Making of Middle East Politics” in *Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Michele Penner Angrist (Lynne Rienner, 2013), 11.

of government were appropriated on a hereditary basis by a governing class consisting of king, his high officials, the magnates of the realm, and privileged corporations which controlled their respective territories and thus ruled the country”⁹⁴

It is worthy to note however that the traditional Islamic rule was not built on family and property, but rather on religious grounds. The leader was seen as one who would safeguard the interests and welfare of the community, while applying the highest standards of justice and “to live in harmony with others, and to contribute its share to the general good”.⁹⁵ Such ruler did not necessarily have to be from a certain hereditary lineage, but the one most fit and best qualified to lead (though he had to have a minimal level of seniority).

British imperial powers had seen religion as a constraint that would hinder the ruler since religious leaders were the source of rule in those traditionally Islamic societies. It was the British who installed a secular leader to those newly established nation states. To further protect and secure their interests, the British attempted to regulate succession. “This was one of the principal aims of the British in their treaties with the royal families of the Gulf Sheikhdoms, with the result that families who had been no more than *primus inter pares* were recognized and protected as ruling families with

⁹⁴ Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 228.

⁹⁵ Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 3.

dynastic rights”.⁹⁶ By doing so, the British could now secure their interests through one ruling family that they would support in exchange for a firm control over the internal matters of the state. The ruling families of the gulf sheikhdoms today enjoy huge autonomy from any religious institution marking a great transformation from the traditional Islamic rule. Moreover, the dynastic families of today have successfully incorporated religious leaders into the system, most of which are now employees of the state, creating a much freer environment in which control by state leadership prevails.⁹⁷

Anderson goes on to suggest answers as to why monarchies in the Middle East are somewhat successful. Part of the answer to this is found in the embryonic age of those monarchies themselves, who have emerged as absolutist and supported by the European imperial powers. Those new monarchies are capable of doing much under the name of preserving the country as a whole, and more importantly engage in the production of a sense of Nationalism “turath”⁹⁸. European imperialism over the region has contributed to such political absolutism. It weakened any form of rivalry to the emerging monarchies, leaving them confronted with populations where local

⁹⁶ Anderson, *Absolutism and the Resilience*, op-cit, 9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11

⁹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14.

proletariats are virtually non-existent, and groups of elites who control the agrarian sector do not pose any threatening challenge due to their young age.⁹⁹

In the cases of Bahrain and the UAE, the above trends were applicable to different degrees. European imperialism has indeed left its mark on the region, and in the experiences of state formation and elites in the newly established Gulf countries. Bahrain and the UAE are worthy of a separate analysis into their emergence patterns and their rather different appeals to cooperate and institutionalize their rule. In each case, it is important to analyze the demographic composition of society, and how this has affected the state formation patterns. Each of the regimes has relied on a certain faction for continuous support and legitimacy, and each has a different way in which decisions are taken. One can therefore argue that the historic construction and structure of such societies form the relationship between society and the state. Such relationship will in turn reflect the ways in which the leadership governs, but more importantly how it reacts to threats such as that of the Arab Spring uprisings. Not only does state formation tell us much about the capability of each state today, but also highlights its vulnerabilities. In doing so, one must also visit Barbra Geddes approach to authoritarian rule and understand “who exactly are their constituents, how satisfied

⁹⁹ Anderson” Absolutism and Resilience”, op-cit, 14.

do they have to be, and what factor besides satisfaction with regime performance affect their level of acquiescence”.¹⁰⁰

Early Developments:

The UAE can be classified as a monarchy with a federal system of government. Composed of seven emirates, and seven ruling families making up the Federal National Council. Though the emirates have always been unequal in terms of resource wealth, the UAE provides an interesting case of power sharing. Both the UAE and Bahrain share commonalities in the pre-oil era, including trade across their shoreline and having populations that were mostly Bedouin nomads, raising sheep and popular for their date production. Populations of modern day UAE and Bahrain were minimal in number and therefore had no significant centralized governments. As mentioned before, British presence in the region led to treaties that aimed at securing access to India, the world’s trading hub at the time. It was because of these treaties that modern UAE was called the Trucial Coast.¹⁰¹ Those treaties were the starting point of authority and recognition to the ruling family in each emirate. The British had started to withdraw from the region towards the beginning of the 1970’s, which brought about ongoing negotiations among the sheikhdoms to form a federation.

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Geddes, “What do we know about Democratization after Twenty Years?”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 2.1 (1999), 125.

¹⁰¹ Michael Herb, “Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates”, in *Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Michele Penner Angrist (Lynne Rienner, 2010), 360.

Initially, Bahrain and Qatar were to be part of the federal agreement, but they withdrew, giving birth to modern UAE composed of seven emirates.

As Herb mentions, Gulf monarchies had emerged by creating modern state institutions and dominating them, occupying all senior posts and decision-making centers of the state. State institutions as a concept did not exist in the Gulf in the pre-oil era. “This style of monarchical rule is new to the Gulf, if only because formal ministerial governments (those with ministers of foreign affairs, defense, interior and so forth) did not exist in the Gulf before the oil era. Before oil, and before the possibility of the construction of large states, the ruler shared little power with other members of his family”.¹⁰² Domination of state institutions by the ruling family was first seen commonly in Kuwait, and most other ruling families followed. What Herb calls “family regimes” were then followed by the systematic build-up of strong and modern state institutions that were able to stretch their authority across the state established borders. Such rapid build-up was of course financed by accumulated oil wealth, which transformed the weak states into “modern states dominated by the ruling families”.¹⁰³ In the case of the UAE, and especially in the dominant Abu Dhabi, the consolidation of the family rule was successful after minor internal family

¹⁰² Ibid., 361.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 362

conflicts between Sheikh Zayed and Shaikh Shakhbut.¹⁰⁴ Sheikh Zayed was quick to consolidate his rule over the oil rich Abu Dhabi in the year 1966, and then embarked on a fully-fledged transformation scheme that would transform “Abu Dhabi into a modern city with blinding speed”.¹⁰⁵

In the case of the UAE, one can argue that its state formation mechanisms were characterized by successful power sharing mechanisms.¹⁰⁶ While it is rational to assume that monarchies in general are vulnerable to a great extent to coups and deaths of state leaders, this system of state formation has declared any form of coups void. This is mainly because, so many of the family members are entrenched in the state institutions. Succession has also been firmly regulated in the cases of Gulf monarchies insuring smooth transition by declaring a second in line. In the case of the UAE, the ruling families “act as an informal mechanism of representation, with various members of the families talking to different groups in society. This gives groups in society the sense that they have a voice within the ruling family”.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The case of Bahrain is yet another case of family regimes that formed through installing family members in key state positions.

¹⁰⁷ Herb, op-cit, 363

Power Sharing:

If one is to analyze the political system of the UAE, it can be seen as a federal coalition that is used to regulate and control the territory of the seven smaller emirates. The seven emirates however have always been unequal in size, wealth and population. Abu Dhabi is considered the wealthiest due to its significant oil reserves (about 95% of the country's production), and therefore the most powerful of the emirates. Here it is important to highlight the effect of oil as the reason behind the modern build-up of those states. The federation has indeed allowed for some circulation of Abu Dhabi's oil wealth among other less fortunate emirates, and Dubai has always caught up through hegemonizing economic and political resources in an attempt to balance out leadership in the Federation. It is worthy to emphasize the power sharing mechanism among the emirates through the example given by Herb. Herb describes how oil revenues are collected and redistributed among the emirates, revenues from oil are deposited in bank accounts of individual emirates and not into a common bank controlled by the federal government. Therefore, oil revenue distribution is done on voluntary contributions from each emirate (probably Abu Dhabi in this case) rather than specified quotas of some sort. In that sense, the intra-emirates interaction is mostly voluntary involving some type of decision to support a certain emirate financially. It is not a mandate of the Federation's Supreme Council.

Reflected in the Federation's establishing constitution, the UAE is considered "as a loose confederation of ruling families. The dominant political institution at the federal level is the Supreme Council, which consists of the rulers of the seven emirates".¹⁰⁸

While the Supreme Council is indeed made up of the seven emirates, still the hegemony is skewed towards Abu Dhabi and Dubai who solely enjoy a veto right over any internal decisions. It has been custom among the Supreme Council ever since 1971 that the president is the ruler of Abu Dhabi, and prime minister is ruler of Dubai. The council of ministers includes members from all seven emirates distributed among modern day ministries and institutions. As Herb describes, ministries are not very autonomous and are influenced by the power of other emirates. Such influence can be seen in the case of defense minister who is usually a member of the Dubai ruling family but the actual ministry has little power; the Emirati military is headquartered in Abu Dhabi and run by its ruling family.¹⁰⁹

The Federal National Council (FNC) is yet another manifestation of power sharing that exists between the emirates. The FNC is composed of appointed individuals from each emirate to represent it in a nationwide council. Though Dubai and Abu Dhabi are represented more (in terms of numbers) in the Council, all other

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 365.

¹⁰⁹ Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates*, op-cit, 37-38.

emirates have representatives.¹¹⁰ The FNC can be considered UAE's representative body. What is notable is that in 2006, there was a decision to allow elections to take place among the citizens of each emirate in selecting their FNC representatives. Of course, these elections were limited and only 6,000 hand-picked citizens were given the right to vote by their respective ruler.¹¹¹ "The method of selection was anything but transparent, and the process inspired mostly cynicism: turnout was only 63 percent even among the handpicked electorate. In 2011, the electorate expanded to 130,000 citizens, but the elections similarly suffered from poor turnout. Press reports did not identify any elected members who could be identified as forming an opposition in 2006 or in 2011".¹¹²

Many people would argue that the lack of true opposition in the UAE is due to its oil wealth. Herb argues that oil wealth does not dictate the internal political dynamics of Gulf states, but rather their political history does.¹¹³ Herb provides a comparative analysis with neighboring Kuwait saying that Kuwait has about as much oil as the UAE, but is totally different when it comes to levels of political participation. Similarly, the case of Bahrain, which has similar percentages of oil revenue in GDP compared to that of UAE. Bahrain does indeed show much higher

¹¹⁰ Herb, "Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates", op-cit, 366.

¹¹¹ Ibid.,

¹¹² Ibid.,

¹¹³ Ibid, 373

political activity levels, and was the most affected (in the Gulf region) during the events of the Arab Spring in 2011. Indeed, the political history of Bahrain says much about its current social construct, and the current sectarian divide that has been the source of the island's discontent for many years.

Opposition in the UAE

When looking at the UAE in general, there seems to be a distinct type of power sharing mechanism that has not seen a parallel before. While the UAE was indeed born out of European imperialism in the region, it has created a structure of its own; one that is without doubt developmental, yet absolutist and dominant. As discussed before, Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi is the one to credit for the rapid buildup of modern UAE of course through the huge influx of oil revenues. Needless to say, oil revenues have indeed affected each and every gulf state in a way or the other.

But can we attribute regime survival to oil? Do the Sheikhs of UAE only survive through the traditional rentier state theory assumption of distribution? It is rational to believe that the more money a government has, the more it is capable of suppressing its population either through force or through buying off support. This chapter advocates that there are other structural reasons behind the UAE's survival and

different distinct effects of the Arab Spring including the historic trajectories of state formation, and elite representation.

Herb explains how ruling families in the UAE have always closely monitored political activity. Herb adds that while the regime is not necessarily repressive, it does not welcome political activity. Police is believed to be very active in the UAE, closely monitoring any type of political gatherings. For instance, those who have an Islamist orientation are usually constrained in their work easily since most citizens work with the government in some way or the other.¹¹⁴

Historically, the UAE had also faced some challenges, for instance, during the outlining the federal constitution in 1971. It is worthy to note that the Nahyan family of Abu Dhabi and the Maktoum family of Dubai had been in struggle over the foundational basis of the 1971 constitution. Al Nahyan consistently pushed for a dominant role to be played by his family who was dominant in terms of finance, and attempted to belittle the role of other smaller emirates. The Maktoum family of Dubai had continuously attempted to avoid this imbalance, and therefore resisted such transformation and chased different sources of wealth. Thus al-Maktoum family transformed Dubai into a tourist destination and an international business hub that

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 373.

would prosper.¹¹⁵ Such efforts were successful, and the Federation remained unchanged in terms of power distribution between Dubai and Abu Dhabi. While this was the last instance of attempted change from within, the Emirati citizens have continued to show their discontent towards the huge numbers of expatriates in their countries.¹¹⁶ “In the 1970’s this was a central issue in the debate over changing the constitution; in the 1990’s it was an issue in the FNC; and today Emirati intellectuals bemoan the irreversible tide of immigration and what they perceive to be the loss of their countries identity”¹¹⁷ While expatriate labor is indeed a topic of discontent among the Emirati citizens, their political voice remains virtually non-existent. The only significant opposition facing the state came about in 2012 with an attempt by a Muslim Brotherhood group that was immediately suppressed by the regime.

Tracing the historical trajectories of the UAE as seen above indeed yields interesting points for its state-formation. It is important to note the ways in which conflicts were managed in the UAE. As if it appears that the rulers of the once Trucial states had understood that the union was needed for their power and survival, and despite the imbalance between them, they would remain together to invent a national identity that would convert Bedouins and nomads to citizens of a modern nation state.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 373-374.

¹¹⁶ Discontent about expatriates at the time about Persians has been an issue that dates back to the pre-oil era. Arab merchants in Dubai protested the ruler’s favoring of Persian merchants.

¹¹⁷ Herb, op-cit., 373-374.

Again, the management of conflict between rulers is key especially in the case of the rivalry between Abu Dhabi and Dubai who could have easily broken the Federal system especially at its embryonic stages. While their initial power might have been drawn from the treaties with the British, the leaders were keen to develop a Federal structure in which they would share a common future.

The historical trajectories of the UAE suggest no signs of political activity or significant opposition movements that would challenge the leadership. Even the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 that had swept across the Middle Eastern countries had left the UAE unaffected. Specifically, the UAE had witnessed no signs of street demonstrations; but in the climax of events in the neighboring Middle East the UAE had witnessed a signing of a petition in “March of 2011 demanding that the FNC be given real authority and that all citizens be allowed to vote”.¹¹⁸ Such petition could be considered the climax of political discontent in the UAE during the events of the Arab Spring. 2012 also saw the activity of a Muslim Brotherhood group who were quickly arrested by the police along with anyone affiliated with it. The group is believed to be very small in number and more active in the poorer emirates to the north especially Ras al-Khaimah.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 375

¹¹⁹ Ibid.,

Unlike the UAE, Bahrain had witnessed mass protests in the center of Manama with calls of bringing down the leadership, as we will see in the coming chapter. As this thesis advocates, the difference can be found in areas other than oil wealth. It is the way this oil wealth is used.

Herb suggests that “the enormous improvement in the standard of living of Emirati citizens over the past two generations has no doubt damped down the sort of dissent that is generated by economic hard times”.¹²⁰ In other words the developmental welfare state that was created has indeed satisfied the Emirati population. This was a success in itself that leadership elsewhere could not attain though they enjoyed oil wealth. In other words, rulers of the UAE were successful in utilizing oil money to advantage their citizens, while leadership in Bahrain could not. Such conclusion suggests that historical trajectories and social interactions in UAE favored a successful developmental model that played to the advantage of both the leadership and the citizens. The case of Bahrain however shows the problematic of sectarian divide that has been the core conflict since the modern emergence of the islands. A more important factor than the one mentioned above is indeed related to the number of expatriate labor present in the respective country. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, expatriate labor in the emirates account for more than 80% of the population, making them a significant force on the national level. While expatriates also exist in the case of Bahrain, the huge amount in UAE has given expatriates an

¹²⁰ Ibid., 375.

important economic role, “UAE citizens have been reduced to a small, exceedingly privileged minority”¹²¹ disengaging them from any type of uprising. While it might be foreshadowed that this over dependence on huge numbers of expatriate labor might have negative political consequences on the long run (if they collectively push for political rights), but it is clear that political rights are highly exclusive to Emirati citizens alone. Even though the average citizen does not have much political influence, he does have “ a privileged claim on state resources in the form of state employment, free education, free healthcare, housing subsidies and the like. A real democratic revolution would threaten all of this and would threaten the Arab and Islamic Identity of the country”.¹²²

Government and Business Elites: policy-making and power-sharing

On a general level, Elites are usually a small number of people who organize to control large amounts of power. In the case of politics, political elites can be considered those leading the state and its main institutions. The power this group has is usually a product of historical interactions and pacts between different groups existing in a certain polity.¹²³ In a classical work on elites, Vilfredo Pareto assumes that in a perfect case of social mobility in any given country, elites would consist of

¹²¹ Ibid., 375.

¹²² Ibid., 376

¹²³ Luis Garrido Vergara, “Elites, political elites and social change in modern societies”, *Revista De Sociologia*, no. 28 (2013), 32.

the most talented individuals. In reality, elites are those who have a combination of force and legitimacy and an inherent advantage of historical families or wealth.¹²⁴

As Lester Seligman notes, elite recruitment patterns are a great indication of the political nature in a certain country. She also highlights that there are certain criteria that go along with elite recruitment including legitimation, eligibility, groupings and mobility.¹²⁵ In the case of Bahrain and UAE, we are confronted with two different cases in terms of power-sharing and policy-making mechanisms.

In the case of Bahrain, instances of power-sharing were more of a mirage and were never made tangible. In other words, the climax of power-sharing in Bahrain was seen in the 1973 National Assembly “al-Majlis al watani” where elections were held and people chose 30 members of parliament along the 14 others who were chosen by the emir.¹²⁶ Still any legislation passed at the time had to have the emir’s approval, which implied that he had veto power at any time. The parliament could also veto any royal decrees by a 2/3 majority. This was actually the case when the emir tried to pass a decree giving substantial power to State Security Law; this power struggle ended by the emir dissolving parliament in 1975. The next experiment – the setting up of cabinet – was also an indicator of political elite dominance over power. The cabinet had consisted of 1/3 Shiite 1/3 Sunni and a 1/3 from the ruling family. Again, power was skewed towards the Sunni royal family since Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa (brother of Emir Isa) has led the cabinet since its inception, as well as holding onto

¹²⁴ Vilfredo Pareto, “The Mind and Society. A Treatise on General Sociology” (New York: Dover), 1915/1935, 2031-34, quoted in John Higley, “Elite Theory” in *Political Sociology*, (University of Texas at Austin) 2008, 1.

¹²⁵ Lester G. Seligman, “Elite Recruitment and Political Development”, *The Journal of Politics*, vol.26, no. 3 (1964), 613-620.

¹²⁶ Abbas Busafwan and Stephan Rosiny, “Power Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate”, GIGA Research Programme: *Violence and Security*, no. 280, (2015), 11.

key ministries such as those of interior, defense, justice, finance and the state budget.¹²⁷ As events unfolded, Bahraini leadership continued to issue decrees and laws that would favor the ruling family. Even after Emir Isa's passing, his son Hamad continued on the same footsteps, and even sidelining more the role of Shiites after the Iranian revolution and spread of radical sentiments in the region. The 2001-state-sponsored National Action Charter and the 2002-constitution showed no signs of power-sharing, and more importantly entrenching power in the hands of Al-Khalifa, and the 2002 constitution turned the legislative body into a consultative one.¹²⁸

The Bahraini leadership has continued to portray the Shiite minorities as a threat and containing them has been the priority. The council of representative's elections in 2002, 2006, and 2010 have continued to under-represent the Shiite majority population.

Ruling elites in the case of the UAE are different in the very nature of it being a federal system of government. Compromise and the willingness to cooperate was at the core of a successful union in 1971 especially between the famous Al-Nahyan and Al-Maktoum families. The Federal National Council is the only manifestation of power sharing and policy making in the UAE. Comprised of 40 members from the different emirates, 20 are elected and 20 are appointed by the respective emirate leader.¹²⁹ Sheikh Khalifa ben Zayed al-Nahyan saw that the FNC will continue to play a crucial role to accommodate the issues affecting citizens.

The system of power-sharing in that case was built on the concept of *Shura* policy of consultations and discussion. While the power sharing mechanism among the elite in

¹²⁷ Ibid., 11- 12

¹²⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁹ 2006 was the year that saw the introduction of voting into FNC membership, before that all 40 members were appointed by emirates rulers

UAE has been a success, political activity has been very limited in to the scope of FNC with no history of political activism. It is an obvious choice that the leadership has continued to take avoiding any distress arising from political unrest especially within the context of regional unrest.

State-society relations in the business sector are key indicators of elite arrangements and their location relative to leadership. It is also a significant indicator of regime resilience. According to Marc Valeri, the degree of proximity and independence of the business elite (who are all members of the Sunni minority) is indicative of the degree of reform and shapes the economic policy set forth by the state. To assess the role of elite in these societies, it is crucial to look at the situation within the context of pre-oil and post-oil eras.¹³⁰

In Bahrain, the popular merchant elites were part of the pre-oil pearling industry, and Al-Khalifa had the power to control those merchant elites, through control of their agricultural land in return for protection. The merchant families in the case of Bahrain had been an important player until the discovery of oil in the 50's. The shift here is integral because oil wealth now gave the state the luxury of economic independence forcing the merchant families out of the decision/participation equation. The perceived era of economic liberalization foreshadowed economic diversification and true competition to open up markets and enhance the private sector as a leader of change. The decreased role of business owners brought about a much weaker private

¹³⁰ Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9-10.

sector that lined up with the leadership, this in turn divided and reduced their capability to act freely relative to the ruling elite.

The cases of UAE and Bahrain show clear distinctions in the oil-era. In the case of Bahrain, the era of economic liberalization or growth of private sector was aborted in its early stages with rebirth of economic and political ties with historic families in proximity Al-Khalifa. As Valeri narrates, Al-Khalifa controlled most of the islands land, as well as a percentage of any contracts signed on the island. The Al-Khalifa family had no monitoring bodies to hold him accountable since the dissolving of the 1975 parliament. The recent history of Bahrain shows that only two people from outside the ruling family held positions in the government, coming namely from the Urayyad and Fakhro families.¹³¹ As one can assume, these are rich merchant families that were in great proximity with Al-Khalifa family since the discovery of oil.

With that mindset, the Al-Khalifa family showed no signs of economic diversification or intention of reform. It is also the acceptance of the business elite of the status quo, and the preference of staying as “rent seekers” than reformists. It might have also been the case that merchant elites of the pre-oil era had lost their organizational capacity and could no longer pose a threat to the regime itself.¹³²

The case of UAE is rather different, and the transition made possible by oil is significant. The transformation of the UAE can be seen in all forms of life from infrastructure to modern lifestyle and a major business hub. Emirates such as Dubai

¹³¹ Marc Valeri, “Oligarchy vs. Oligarchy: Business and Politics of Reform in Bahrain and Oman”, in *Business Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Steffen Hertog and Giacomo Luciani, and Marc Valeri, (London: Hurst, 2013), 22-23.

¹³² Crystal, op-cit, 10

have also championed initiatives of economic diversification and has been an attractive home to foreign direct investments and tourism, and hence became less reliant on oil as years' progress.¹³³ Elite arrangements in the case of UAE are completely different from that of Bahrain, in the sense that it was the state of UAE that championed and led the process of economic diversification. The state-sponsored economic liberalization brought about no representation and no institutionalization creating the contemporary capitalist form.¹³⁴ This was of course coupled by increased consumption and a huge foreign population, nearly four times the size of the native population. This rendered the public sector and any aspiration for reform irrelevant.

As previously mentioned, the UAE remains a symbol of cooperation despite conflicts between the Nayhan and Maktoum families that could have ended with separation as early as 1971, if either of the two sides was not eager to compromise. That being said, the UAE shows a sign of successful power sharing, and the application of customary rules to divide power across the seven emirates. The main manifestation of such power sharing could be seen in the FNC and the Supreme Council of Ministers. While the imbalance remains, the UAE has chosen to remain as one. Readily available through oil revenues, the UAE had immediately chosen to embark on a nation-building scheme that would advantage their citizens and coin

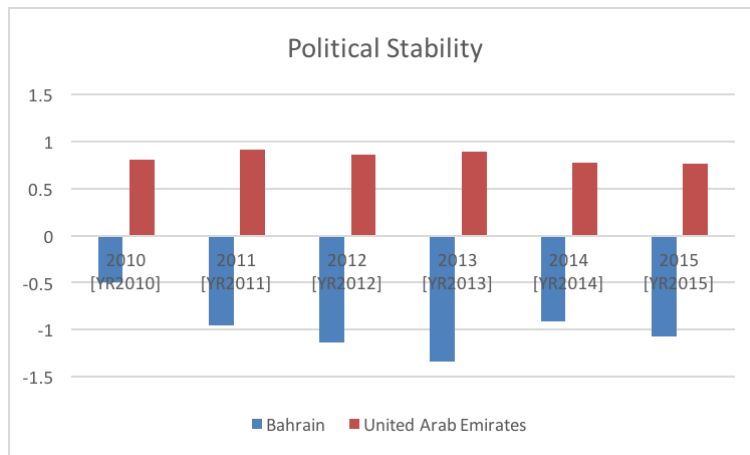
¹³³ Abu Dhabi has been in a way the central bank for the smaller emirates in order to modernize, due to it being the home of UAE's oil reserves. Dubai in particular has tried to diversify its economy away from Abu Dhabi's oil. This has been the policy especially after the 2008 financial crisis.

¹³⁴ Michael Herb, "A Nation of Bureaucrats: Political Participation and Economic Diversification in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2009) 375-380.

them as a privileged minority. Such privileged minority is indeed closely monitored through public sector employment to avoid any unwanted political activity. Such system was put into test as the recent events of the Arab Spring unfolded. While there were minor calls for reform in the UAE advocating for a more representative FNC, these calls were quick to end, leaving the UAE unaffected. Huge differences are seen when comparing Bahrain and UAE when it comes to political stability during the events of the Arab Spring and its aftermath. Figure 1 below shows each country's ranking between the years 2010-2015 in terms of political stability on a score range of -2.5 (Instability) to + 2.5 (stability). The inverted graph immediately shows difference among vulnerability of each regime to the events of the Arab Spring. By definition, this indicator also measures "the absence of violence" and the probability of political unrest or politically motivated violence.¹³⁵ The events of the popular Pearl Roundabout in 2011 continued to decrease political instability through 2013 despite neighboring Saudi Arabia's attempts to crush and contain the uprisings. UAE on the other hand remained relatively stable with slight changes to which the UAE leadership easily contained.

¹³⁵ "Worldwide Governance Indicators," The World Bank, 2010-2015.
<http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=worldwide-governance-indicators#>

Figure 1: Political Stability Estimate: Worldwide Governance Indicators

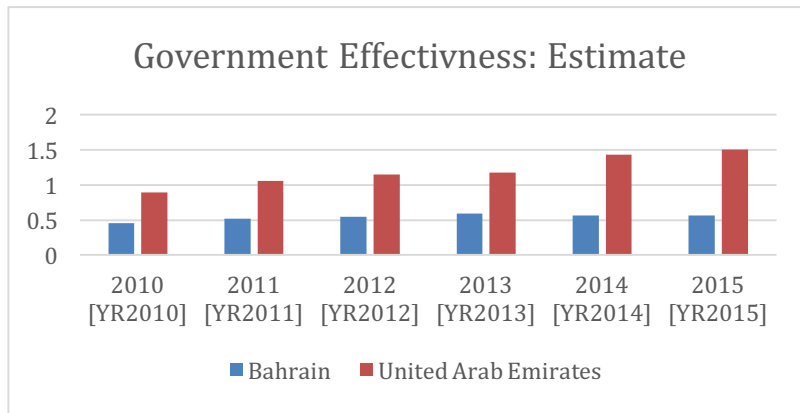


Source: Worldwide Government Indicators (The World Bank).

Figure 2 below also shows government effectiveness indicator that highlights the extent to which government is successful in providing good quality of public services, civil service, independence from political pressures, policy formation and credibility of government commitment to such policies.¹³⁶ This graph also shows a significant difference between the cases of Bahrain and UAE, especially in accessing public opinion towards government. Bahrain marks slight improvements that can be attributed to GCC supports in terms of patronage and reallocation of resources to suppress the uprising by offering more to the public. Improvements in UAE echo what was mentioned earlier by Almezani in the inclusion of elites in patronage networks that are able to distribute wealth as well as access to better services usually welfare.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Figure 2: Government Effectiveness Estimate: Worldwide Government Indicators.



Source: Worldwide Government Indicators (The World Bank).

Though Bahrain has witnessed similar events under British control prior to the oil era, the island has indeed witnessed a totally different historic trajectory. The following chapter will aim at tracking the differences in the case of Bahrain. What is worthy to note is Bahrain's leadership and its emergence as a dominant force on the island. Such dominant Sunni minority had enforced order over the indigenous Shiite majority, and in turn involving the British more in the internal affairs of the country. Unlike the UAE, The Khalifa family of Bahrain had also faced several challenges with the status of elites who already existed on the island and benefited from the harvest as well as the popular pearling industry. A significant difference that one can detect right away is that the Khalifa family had emerged on an already existing

system. Changing such system has been at the core of dispute yielding a different outcome for Bahrain relative to that of the UAE even before the discovery of oil.

Chapter 3: The Challenges of Power-Sharing and its Effects on Contemporary Bahrain.

The Kingdom of Bahrain, as formally known today, has witnessed significant events over the past couple of years that are worthy of attention. The recent events of the Arab Spring have hit Bahrain the most among the GCC countries. Though most of the GCC countries appear similar at a first glance, this thesis has stressed on their internal differences. Such differences have been attributed to non-uniform historical trajectories of state formation and elite interactions. The previous chapter highlighted the paths underwent by the UAE during the early stages of autonomy from the British, mainly characterized by cooperation and different power-sharing mechanisms vested in the federal system they have until today.

In an attempt to find reasoning behind the different effects of the so-called Arab spring on the Gulf States, this chapter aims at situating Bahrain into perspective relative to its regional counterparts. Similar to the previous analysis on UAE, socio-historic trajectories will be the focal point of this chapter, as well as elite interactions. It is worth noting that among the GCC countries, Bahrain had seen the highest levels of political activity, and calls for the change in regime were advocated. Though such political activity was quickly brought to an end, there are important political

connotations that must not go unanalyzed. Historic trajectories and interactions in state formation explain why political mobilization materialized in Bahrain and not in neighboring UAE. As the analysis in this chapter will show, elite domination and coercion fuelled such political discontent.

Bahrain in regional perspective:

Similar to the UAE, Bahrain was another island that was controlled by the British. Bahrain had been under effective control by the British as early as 1880 through a treaty, which effectively controlled the island until its independence in 1971.¹³⁷ Though British control over the UAE was limited to securing pathways to India and later the security of the vast oil reserves of the region, Bahrain was significantly different and experienced much more British involvement.

Similar to most of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, inhabitants of modern day Bahrain were of tribal nature. The al-Khalifa tribe would emerge on the island in the late 18th century in an attempt to establish their rule and control the island.¹³⁸ As Khallaf describes, it took just under a century of continuous struggle

¹³⁷ Angrist, op-cit, 11.

¹³⁸ Abdulhadi Khallaf, "Contentious politics in Bahrain: From Ethnic to National and Vice Versa", *The Forth Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies: The Middle East in Globalizing World*, Oslo, 1998, 1.

until al-Khalifa family was able to consolidate its rule. Specifically in 1870, al-Khalifa was able to control the island through a prolonged series of land confiscation and a redistribution among those who lined up with his alliance, causing lands to be divided “into a network of small fiefdoms, *moqata‘at*”.¹³⁹ It is important to note that al-Khalifa family was predominantly Sunni Muslims who came to control an indigenous Shiite population that inhabited the island. These fiefdoms were basically a system of dividing the people into smaller geographical groups, with the leader “fief” acting as the administrator to such estate, and appointing intermediaries to manage the economic activity which at the time depended mainly on agriculture and fishing. In the words of Khallaf, “these agents played a dual intermediary role: they were agents of ‘exogenous’ landlords; and, they were patrons of ‘indigenous’ peasants.”¹⁴⁰

Bahrain’s history suggests right away two main differences relative to the UAE. First was the idea that Bahrain came into being with the consolidation of al-Khalifa rule over the island. Their emergence involved physical control over the indigenous population and as stated above, took just under a century to consolidate. Such instability has required from the British more interference in the internal affairs

¹³⁹ Ibid., 1

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 2

of the island more than anywhere else in the Gulf.¹⁴¹ Secondly was the unfavorable sustenance of internal divide within al-Khalifa family and dispute among the hardliners and those in power from the ruling elite have continued until this very day.

British involvement in Bahrain was crucial for maintaining order over the island and securing British access to Indian ports. The island's significance was coupled by the recognition of al-Khalifa tribe by the British by signing treaties to regulate trade and passage of vessels.¹⁴² Khallaf narrates how the British were the backbone of al-Khalifa rule, especially in its embryonic stages, " Britain deployed its forces to quell internal clashes or ward off external foes of al-Khalifa. British support, particularly since 1869, will continue to be the major resource for the regime, for its protection, stability and prosperity".¹⁴³ Differently from the norm elsewhere in the Gulf, al-Khalifa family were not able to normalize relationship with the subject population. In other words, Bahrain was unable to develop into becoming a unified entity with a homogeneous population, but rather al-Khalifa continue to guard their identity/image as 'settlers-rulers'. However, their 'tribal' backgrounds and identity have not been static. The al-Khalifa conquest of 1783 continues to be commemorated by the ruling family on a yearly basis, with major buildings and roads on the island

¹⁴¹ James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century," in B. Pridham and J. Smart (eds), *New Arabian Studies* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 31.

¹⁴² Peterson, op-cit, 21-23

¹⁴³ Khallaf, op-cit, 2.

carry the names of the imitators and contributors. Moreover, the conquest has been integrated into schoolbooks and has been celebrated in special festivals, confirming all the negative allegations targeted at al-Khalifa, and confirming how the Shiite frame them as conquerors.¹⁴⁴

In comparative perspective, one can emphasize here the different socio-historic process of which Bahrain and the UAE emerged. Though both modern states emerged from a similar shared tribal nature, their state-formation trajectories were clearly different. Both had come into emergence with relying to a great extent on British recognition and support. The actions by the leader of each tribe were inherently different. Both cases embarked on a system of state building that would require the breaking down of social barriers and a transformation into becoming a more homogeneous society. As discussed in the previous chapter, the UAE was successful to a great extent in bringing down social barriers and securing a federal constitution that entailed power sharing among the different emirates. Though the smaller emirates suffered from unequal resources, the bigger emirates were successful in managing any problems that would arise out of this resource gap – they simply understood problems that would arise, that with their unity came their strength. UAE's success was not paralleled by the leadership in Bahrain, giving the UAE an edge over Bahrain in a critical time of state formation. Though none of these tribal

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 2

societies smoothly emerged into their modern form, or without turbulent periods of feuds, alliances and compromise to reach their modern form of state-building. UAE leadership managed much better. The case of Al-Khalifa in Bahrain was one that reflected a huge failure to assimilate and accommodate the needs of the subject population, which created a sense of floundering between leadership and population, and consequently lacked in significant state building efforts.¹⁴⁵

The consolidation of al-Khalifa:

As mentioned above, the consolidation of al-Khalifa rule came by their influx over the island and the control over agricultural land. Agricultural land was divided into estates that were controlled and administered by members of the ruling family. The emergence of al-Khalifa came at a time when indigenous Bahraini citizens depended on pearl trading, a sector considered led by rich merchant elites who held considerable power in the pre-oil era.¹⁴⁶ It is rational to assume that such notable merchant elites would not appreciate the emergence of oil wealth that would be controlled by the ruling family. While the discovery of oil brought about tighter control of al-Khalifa over the island, Bahrain had witnessed internal developments that were unprecedented emphasizing al-Khalifa's right to rule that was based on conquest and domination of state resources. With such actions came unrest from

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁶ Lawson, op-cit, 7-11.

discontented pearl divers and peasants of the island in an attempt to resist socio-political change through non-compliance and sabotage.¹⁴⁷ While these actions were short-lived and did not initiate much change “they can, on occasions, undermine the legitimacy, stability and productivity of the system to the point that power elites feel the need to institute some significant reforms”¹⁴⁸. In order to keep the system functioning the British had to become increasingly involved.

With the arrival of oil discovery in the twentieth century, the British saw the increasing need to establish certain reforms to consolidate al-Khalifa rule initiating four major developments. Firstly was the attempt by the British to create a local administration. Such administration would be more formal and would eradicate the system of fiefdoms. Such administration would now be responsible to “maintain public order, collecting taxes, and allocating accrued oil revenues and custom duties”.¹⁴⁹ Oil companies constituted a new destination that would attract various types of labor including former pearl divers and peasants, more importantly was the fact that no sectarian divide existed with Sunni and Shiite workers working side by side.¹⁵⁰ Such societal transformation was made viable by the cooptation of the Shiite clergy and the previously rich merchant elites, who remained in support of al-

¹⁴⁷ Khallaf, op-cit, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Susan Ekstien, “Power and Popular Protest”, ed. Susan Ekstien (University of California Press, 1990). 8-9

¹⁴⁹ Khallaf, op-cit, 4

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Khalifa.¹⁵¹ This process can be seen as the transformation from tribal community to a more modern state. As Diwan describes “tribal chiefs became government officials and religious jurists became state judges, all with fixed salaries. At the top of this system remained al-Khalifa who soon assumed control over all the states sovereign ministries and its growing oil revenues.”¹⁵²

The second development that was initiated by the British in an attempt to consolidate the rule of al-Khalifa was an administrative arrangement that would allow substantial flows of oil reserves directly to the “piggy bank” of al-Khalifa, precisely one third of oil revenues.¹⁵³ The development of the oil industry brought about tighter control over the state resources by al-Khalifa. Similar to the case of the UAE and other classical rentier economies, oil grants its beholder a distributive capacity by which the leadership can buy off its supporters and ensure internal stability. Though oversimplified, oil in the case of Bahrain was also subjected to distribution to account for the ongoing social transformations. As this thesis has advocated from the beginning, the effects of oil cannot be disregarded, but they are not sufficient to provide an explanation of events alone. The process of integrating previous members of society was made readily available with oil. This was seen in “the emergence of a stratum of entrepreneurs, middlemen, bureaucrats, and professionals who were

¹⁵¹ Lawson, op-cit, 7-11

¹⁵² Diwan, op-cit, 148-149.

¹⁵³ Khallaf, op-cit,” 4.

recruited by the oil industry and the government from among the pearl merchant and other notable families of the main towns, Manama and Muharraq”.¹⁵⁴ Manama and Muharraq emerged as the two main cities of Bahrain with major ports and central administration crucial for the islands trade and power consolidation.¹⁵⁵

The final development was seen in a foundational problem of societies: ethnic divide. i.e. the ability (or lack thereof) members of ethnic divisions to work side by side.¹⁵⁶

This was indeed a development that did not occur ever-since the Sunni conquest of the island in the late 18th century. Recent Bahraini history has been shaped by British to mitigate this ethnic divide. As Khallaf describes it “It is, in part, a history of ongoing, yet faltering, process of de-ethnification and nation-and state-building”.¹⁵⁷

The socio-historic approach to Bahrain yields an ongoing process of attempting to break loose of ethnic affiliations whether them being, tribal or religious. Khuri coins it as an ongoing attempt of enlightenment that “meant rejecting sectarian politics, opposing colonial rule and the tribally controlled regime, and championing the cause of labor classes”¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁵ Lawson, op-cit, 11.

¹⁵⁶ Khallaf, op-cit,” 4

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 5

¹⁵⁸ Khuri, op-cit, 198.

Though these policies favor stability and signal a more accepting Bahraini society, this was not necessarily the outcome. Khalaf describes a form of “divide and rule” approach adopted by al-Khalifa family, or what he calls vertical segmentation. Vertical segmentation describes the process of society separation in which al-Khalifa family had invested into sustaining and continues to benefit from its divided frontiers. “vertical segmentation, in Bahrain, is maintained through mobilization of tribal, confessional, and ethnic myths, through appropriate parts of communal histories, through cooptation as well as through actual use of physical force”.¹⁵⁹ Immediately when analyzing Bahrain, the Sunni/Shiite divide has been the most prevalent and sustained. While other differences existed, among them being wealth, tribal origins, religious sectarianism remains the highlight of Bahraini politics until this very day. Sustaining this divide has been the main goal of the regime in an ongoing attempt to prevent any interactions or grouping among those societal sects. As such, Khallaf narrates that “long before it assumed its control of modern sources of rent and extraction of wealth, al-Khalifa were able to monopolize use of force in the territory, mediate among tribal and confessional hierarchies, and impose their segmented co-existence”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹Khallaf, op-cit, ”5.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

Emphasizing the sectarian divide:

As mentioned above, the creation of oil allowed al-Khalifa family a tighter control over the Bahraini society. With their ongoing tactics of vertical segmentation, the traditional elite had declined with the end of the pearl industry or moved into business with al-Khalifa or with the elite community of merchants in Manama.¹⁶¹

In the meantime, Shiite villages were left unattended for in terms of general state building and development. While some of the peasants turned into wage workers and served the increasing rise of urban Manama, others remained underprivileged and “were transformed into bedroom communities for labor in the new industries, they maintained a strong communal base”.¹⁶² The regular marginalization of Shiite communities allowed them to unite behind the cause, however little was there for them to do due to their scattered nature. This dispersion however did not continue for long since the decades of the 1950’s and the 1970’s saw a rise of nationalist movements elsewhere in the Arab world that were exported to Bahrain. Nationalist movements were more effective in the capital of Manama which was “spurred by leftist ideologies and Arab nationalism, managed to forge alliances with the village-based movements on the grounds of shared economic interests and demands for

¹⁶¹ Diwan,op-cit, 150

¹⁶² Ibid., 151

greater political accountability”.¹⁶³ Systematic Shiite differential treatment continued as the developmental state seemed to only target the urban centers of Manama and Muharraq. The rise in oil prices in the 1970’s also saw another rise of the state’s welfare role, and expanding its clientelistic role by providing access to public land readily available to Sunni and Shiite commercial elite. Still however differential treatment was evident in maintaining/consolidating certain structural inequalities, with the neglect of the Shiite rural villages being on top of the list.¹⁶⁴ Employment in the public sector was accessible more to those who had social connections who were by nature predominantly Sunni and mostly urban communities. Such huge gap between urban and rural (predominantly Shiite) communities left the masses vulnerable to any radical exogenous ideologies such as that of the Iranian revolution in 1979.¹⁶⁵

As commonly perceived, the sectarian imbalance in the case of Bahrain has usually been the source of problems in the islands. Especially with a monarchy representing the Sunni minority, and a Shiite population between 400,000 to 500,000 people in 2009, accounting to between 65% to 75% of total population.¹⁶⁶ What is worthy to note is the Shi’i minority in the case of the UAE “comprising about 15 percent of the

¹⁶³ Ibid 150

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 152-153

¹⁶⁶ “Mapping the Global Muslim Population, Religion and Public Life”, *Pew Research Center*, 2009. <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/#map-distribution-of-muslim-population-by-country-and-territory>.

total citizen population”.¹⁶⁷ Existing on a much smaller scale, Shiite minorities in the UAE are minimal compared to other parts in the region with not much tangible repression, but rather have “long benefited from the patronage of the rulers”.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, civil society groups do not contribute much to political activity or materialize to form organizations. More active civil society groups in the UAE are more concerned primarily with business activity as well as sports clubs.

It is crucial at this level to take a step back and highlight a few aspects in such context. While it was evident that the Sunni and Shiite communities of Bahrain had received different treatment by the leadership, it was the lack of development and the inability of the rural population to follow in the footsteps of Manama that was mourned. In other words, the Shiite community did not necessarily complain and try to mobilize because they were Shiite, but because they did not enjoy the luxuries of the welfare state that was felt by the more fortunate. As such the Shiite mobilization was a product of “vertical segmentation” advocated by al-Khalifa. Continuous dividing of the society saw the creation of the first coalition known as the Higher Executive Committee (HEC) in the light of nationalist movements taking place elsewhere across the Middle East. The HEC was established after a series of movements advocated by clubs against the British presence in Bahrain as well as the

¹⁶⁷ Herb, “Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates”, op-cit, 378

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.,

absolutist control of al-Khalifa. The HEC would set a precedent as an organized group composed of Sunni and Shiite representatives alike and calling for a list of reforms from al-Khalifa.¹⁶⁹ These reforms called for: the election of a legislative council, the adoption of a system for criminal and civil laws, the establishment of trade unions and the call for appointment of a court of appeals. While the HEC made it clear that these calls did not affect the status of the ruler, the talks with the regime failed. However, the HEC had achieved two very important gains: the establishment of general trade unions and the recognition as an official independent political organization.¹⁷⁰ The HEC was seen as the first challenge to al-Khalifa after the partial withdrawal of the British into Bahraini affairs. The HEC was popular and spread across the island harvesting support of more than 6000 workers and was seen as more and more problematic by the leadership. The power of the HEC can be measured by its successful attempt “to stem Sunni-Shiite conflict in the 1950s and the coalition voting of the leftist People’s Bloc and the Religious Bloc in the 1973 parliament, a challenge to the government which led directly to the parliament’s dissolution.”¹⁷¹

Again, it is important to step back and analyze the context in which mobilization was born. Since the gradual handing over of the Bahraini affairs by the British to al-Khalifa, the strive of the lower class has been a socio-economic one. It

¹⁶⁹ Lawson, op-cit, 61-62.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 61-63

¹⁷¹ Diwan, op-cit, 151

was al-Khalifa who have continuously emphasized the strategy of sectarian divide and targeted the more urban centers where mostly Sunnis benefited from the welfare state. The impoverished Shiites of rural Bahrain had continuously advocated for working rights. The HEC was an example bringing together both Sunni and Shiite workers calling for their rights as workers and a more equal representation to balance out al-Khalifa's authoritarian rule.

The start of the 1980's brought about religious mobilization that was exported from neighboring Iran. Interestingly enough, religious mobilization found ground among the urban Shiite "who followed Hojjat al-Islam Hadi al-Mudarrisi, a cleric from Iraq associated with Shirazi Islamic Action Organization who was granted Bahraini citizenship in 1974".¹⁷² Such organization had fed off continuous differential socio-economic treatment among the Shiite population and later formed the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) which was later accused of attempting to overthrow al-Khalifa family in 1981.¹⁷³ Such attempts would later elicit a drastic reaction from al-Khalifa, eliminating any Shiite from jobs in the military and police as well as all sovereign ministries, deliberately denying the Shiite population any powerful job.¹⁷⁴ After being prevented from employment opportunities in a large share of the country's public sector, the Shiite population were quick to look for

¹⁷² Ibid., 153

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁴ Khallaf, "Contentious Politics in Bahrain", op-cit, 6

employment in the private sector where much lower-wage workers and expatriates occupied the market. The inability for the Shiite population to find a job gave rise to yet another wave of political mobilization among the working classes who “took to the streets, feeding the village uprisings of the mid-1990’s. Even more threatening for the al-Khalifa was the reappearance of cross-sectarian political cooperation at this time in the form of petitions demanding the reinstatement of the parliament” .¹⁷⁵

The island was now left with discontented masses that were able to effectively mobilize. Mobilization was now explicitly done on a religious sect basis. This is to emphasize again that the movements called for better access to jobs and equal opportunity in terms of employment; in other words, the plea was not explicitly religious. This was also confirmed by Sunni-based mobilization that materialized among the urban community of Muharraq. Supported by proxy from neighboring Saudi Arabia, the Shiite movement was much smaller in magnitude relative to that of the Sunni community because the “Muslim Brotherhood in Bahrain was associated with from its origins with a notable al-Khalifa sheikh, Khalid bin Muhammed al-Khalifa” meaning that the movement was less independent and had a much smaller effect in challenging the ruling family.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Munira Fakhro, “The Uprising in Bahrain”, “Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 1997.

<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1997/bahrain/> .

¹⁷⁶ Diwan, op-cit, 153

By the end of the 1990's al-Khalifa family was strongly challenged and had faced significant civil unrest and internal weakness reflected in their declining economy and weakening political system. Similar to their historical dependence on Britain for normalizing disputes and interfering in favor of consolidating power to al-Khalifa, Bahrain would now turn to neighboring Saudi Arabia as a source of multiple support, and at times asked for Saudi National Guard troops to domestically bolster al-Khalifa.¹⁷⁷ This was a pattern that we will later see happen in 2011's pearl roundabout.

The events of the 1990's had left the island exhausted in terms of financial capabilities as well as a need of some type of reform to avoid this ongoing struggle. The succession of Emir Hamad in 1999 brought about a change in the leadership, not necessarily better, but rather different. Championing the idea of reform, King Hamad brought about a national project coined as "the National Action Charter" that aimed at diversifying employment opportunities among the population and decreasing the amount of foreign labor, opening up the job market to absorb more domestic workers among them were Shiites; he adopted "controlled liberalization".¹⁷⁸ It was an attempt to normalize the relationship with the Shiite population without compromising the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 154-155

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 156

power of al-Khalifa. Such reconciliation with the Shiite groups was seen in “the coming together of most of the Shiite opposition into a unified alliance – al-Wifaq, or the Islamic National Accord”.¹⁷⁹ King Hamad promised the return to parliamentary life in Bahraini politics. With the return of parliament in 2002, King Hamad insured that Shiite majorities did not control much of the decision-making process; this led to the opposition boycotting the elections while others still participated in an attempt to initiate change from within. The Crown Prince would also adopt a reformist policy along the line of King Hamad, one that was more concerned with economic modernization and development in an attempt to follow in the footsteps of neighboring Gulf countries.

The rise of “true” Sectarianism and the events of 2011

Attempts by King Hamad and Crowned Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa to reconcile with the marginalized Shiite communities were short lived and quickly came to a halt. Confronted by the regime hardliners vested in Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, and the Khawalid sect – who control the Defense Ministry- had prevailed when dealing with the 2011 uprising.¹⁸⁰ The Khawalid had

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁰ Diwan, op-cit, 162.

come to rise ideologically at a time when neighboring Iraq saw the success of a Shiite regime. Their rise was fueled by “regional discourse of Sunni victimization, Shiite savagery, and American deceit gained traction through the months of escalating sectarian civil war in Iraq”.¹⁸¹ Bahraini leadership, and especially in this case the Khawalid, were quick to oppose the idea of reform and any form of power sharing with the opposition. The events of 2011 came at a time where internal disputes existed on all fronts, on one end the attempt by King Hamad and Prince Salman to initiate reforms and normalize tense societal relationships over the previous decades, and on the other the confrontation with internal family struggles posed by al- Khawalid.

It was the youth activists that advocated the initial calls for demonstration; the legal opposition was quick to join the protests as part of the domino effect that swept the region. The divide was evident with the regimes violent response to the peaceful demonstrations. “Popular anger at the ‘tribal privilege at the heart of the boom economy was in full evidence in the protest sites chosen by the street opposition”.¹⁸² While many occupied the pearl roundabout in Manama, younger generations headed to more symbolic places such as Bahrain’s financial harbor and the royal court which was the backbone of the ruling al-Khalifa family.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁸² Ibid., 167

Al-Khalifa family was quick to condemn the uprisings and acted violently, the crown prince openly asked for negotiations with the formal opposition, and agreeing to removal of the Khawalid minister of cabinet affairs from his post. The opposition was quick to call for the ousting of the Prime Minister, but such calls were met with counter-mobilizations on the part of some Sunnis with bloody confrontations in front of Bahraini leadership buildings. The next day before the intervention of the “Gulf Cooperation Council Peninsula Shield Forces”, led by the Saudi Arabian National Guard, crossed the causeway, ending the uprising.

The socio-historic trajectories of Bahrain and its state formation experiences tell us much about the Bahraini society and the way it came into being. Similar to what has been argued in the case of UAE, oil rents have been a reoccurring resource that has facilitated the execution of certain national projects or political initiatives adopted by the regime. What oil has not done in this case is to insure the sustenance of the regime. Regardless of its abundance, the process of state formation in Bahrain and its progressive nature has yielded a more politically active society by nature. The nature of its emergence since the 18th century has involved physical force on behalf of the Sunni settlers over the Shiite indigenous population. Though the Sunni/Shiite divide cannot be disregarded, this chapter has argued that the history of the struggle was not necessarily religious but more dependent on the policies adopted at the top. In

most instances of Shiite mobilization, especially before the 1990's, the group was advocating for better access to jobs and equal opportunity to those living in the urban capital of Manama. Elite policies have played a more prominent role in the history of Bahraini conflict. The Khawalid have indeed coined themselves as al-Khalifa hardliners with no compromise or power sharing. With the advent of the wave of political reform by prince Salman, a series of disputes and internal divides among the ruling elite would prevail and obstruct power sharing.

While the sectarian divide remained, a tactic deployed by al-Khalifa in the early decades of state-formation (during this vertical segmentation approach), it can be argued that sectarianism dug its roots into the Bahraini society with the Islamic Revolution taking place in neighboring Iran. Not only were groups established on religious sect basis such as that of al-Wifaq or the Islamic National Accord, but also followed by regime hardliners opposing any compromises with Shiite minorities. True sectarian divide intensified and prevailed when the Shiite populations of the region gained power in Iran and Iraq, which made al-Khalifa leadership –hardliners especially- feel even more a true threat from their Shiite population.

In one of the very few opinion surveys conducted in the Bahrain, Gengler provides a detailed study of the securitization of Shiite threat. Survey data suggests that there are imbalances in access to public goods and services between Sunni and

Shiite even after balancing out the effects of individual-level variables and influences. Only as an example, data suggests that a Sunni Bahraini is 56% more likely to be employed in the public sector, compared to a Shiite Bahraini of same gender, age, education and marital status. This pattern is more prevalent towards those at the lower end of the educational spectrum.¹⁸³ Only do Shiite with high level education/certificates can Sunni equivalent employment. The other 35-40% of Shiite who have a secondary terminal education or less experience inequality and it is a proven quantitative reality.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Justin Gengler, "Rentier Theory and Rentier Reality" in *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 111-116.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 118

Conclusion - Divergent Paths Explained: Bahrain and the UAE.

The popular and influential concept of rentier states has been at the core of this thesis especially contesting its over-generalization as an explanatory framework. Comparing the cases of Bahrain and United Arab Emirates, this thesis has adopted a socio-historic approach to analyze state-formation, types of elites and the sectarian structure in each country. This thesis was born out of the different events that Bahrain and UAE experienced during the 2011 Arab Spring. The connotation of “the Gulf States (GCC)” has implied that the six countries are uniform on the political, economic and social level. Rightly so, these countries do share a number of commonalities. However, they also differ dramatically when it comes to historical experiences of state formation, and internal group dynamics. As this thesis argues, these dynamics have been at the core of explaining why the cases of Bahrain and UAE experienced different outcomes during the events of the 2011-Arab Spring.

This thesis has proposed a revision of the traditional Rentier state definition of resource extraction and distribution, and the no taxation/no representation policy. Rather it has proposed a more case-specific approach that is more indicative of internal group dynamics. Not everything started with oil. One of the main additions of the specialized and conditional rentier state model proposed here is the movement away from the state-centric approach. Following recent research, the thesis proposes

that the state can never be detached from society, where the idea of violent uprisings can be present. In an increasingly globalized world, the state must do more than repress or buy off society.¹⁸⁵ Earlier Rentier state theory has also fallen short to predict the diversification waves that emirates like Dubai and Abu Dhabi had embarked on in the early years of the 1990's and 2000's. These emirates have purposely installed diversification schemes and reforms away from oil by opening up their economies to international markets and attracting investments. By doing so, Dubai was quick to absorb major international corporations and businesses turning itself into an international business hub. On the level of the citizens (and expatriates), this opening up has allowed for abundant business and educational opportunities.¹⁸⁶ It is of course logical to assume that at the center of the state's thinking during these reforms was the idea of survival. While traditional rentier state theory has correctly assumed that oil-rich states will continue to resist democratization, it fell short in highlighting that the state "must still be responsive to society if—as it has done in the past decades- it wants to ensure long-term survival".¹⁸⁷

It is important to emphasize that this thesis does not advocate to do completely without the rentier state theory, but rather advocates a modified version that locates it within a series of explanatory variables highlighting its evolutionary contribution. In

¹⁸⁵ Gray op-cit, 14.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 15

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.,

other words, this thesis lines up with Gary's proposed approach to consider rentierism as only one aspect of the explanation rather than being a full-fledged exclusive explanatory framework that applies to a wide spectrum of rentier regimes. Several Gulf scholars have also echoed the idea of modified rentierism in their works.¹⁸⁸

Matthew Gray has proposed some type of diagnosis to features of late-rentierism that have taken place since the 1990's and early 2000's in Gulf monarchies. This decade marked a change in spending strategy and marked the start of a process to diversify the economy and move more towards long-term sustainability. Gray rightly argues that Gulf states moved towards being more supportive of development and also more responsive than before. While it was a movement away from the classical rentier state model, some of the core ideas remained: "in none of these states has there been a dramatic transition to a pluralistic or Western-style democracy".¹⁸⁹ This is why this thesis did not propose doing away altogether with Rentier state theory. The analysis of the two cases in this thesis shows, that Rentier state theory has been valid in explaining how Bahrain, UAE and other oil wealthy states act, especially in times of discontent, at least by using available resources to cope with such discontent. It is easy to see immediate shifts in spending

¹⁸⁸ For examples of similar rentier theory approach see Steffen Hertog, *op-cit*. Also see Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 81-89. Also See Toby Craig Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁸⁹ Gray, *op-cit*, 23.

strategies such as those done by the UAE during the events of 2011. Saudi influence in Bahrain was also apparent and actually crucial in maintaining the regime's survival in 2011.

As this thesis has mentioned before, the welfare state in the UAE was made available by oil rents. Most important here is the recognition that it was a state leadership decision to utilize oil money to benefit their citizens. The historical trajectories and social interactions in UAE favored a successful developmental model that played to the advantage of both the leadership and the citizens. This, on the other hand, did not materialize in the case of Bahrain.

In line with the findings of this thesis, recent research on rentierism suggests “features of a late rentier state”.¹⁹⁰ These features are at present emerging after a process of transformation over the past two decades. The first thing is the fact that oil has created a responsive state though still politically undemocratic. It is true that in the example of UAE, the state is providing international standards when it comes to education, healthcare and other privileges to their citizens and can sometimes be offered free of charge. This comes with limitations when it comes to certain freedoms that are related to politics, or other recent technologies that can undermine the state's control.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 23.

The rentier effect here is slightly transformed because the UAE was capable of financing its welfare state and stay responsive to its federal components by the money made readily available mostly through oil.

The second feature of “late rentierism” was opening up to globalization but with some protectionism.¹⁹¹ This characteristic was very evident again in the case of UAE where it exploited globalization to become an international business hub and a center to many modern cooperation’s. This was done, on the other hand, with extreme caution. Dubai in this case was a model of success, it transferred its wealthy classes into engaging with more opportunities in “stocks, property trade, and work as senior government officials, business intermediaries, and investors”.¹⁹² It is still important to highlight the fact that in the case of UAE it was the historic and social interactions that existed at the time of oil’s discovery that set the stage for Dubai to emerge as it has today. In other words, it was the utilization of the oil money by the leaders and their decision to diversify the economy that created modern Dubai. It was a decision taken to shift from the usage of oil money as consumption-based economy, to one that is more diversified and focuses on the core of state building. This is what Gray coins as an active economic and developmental model. This also demonstrates the importance of the type of elite and policy-making – as mentioned above.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹² Ibid., 25.

One of the most important points to consider when going into further research on the gulf countries and their comparative similarities/differences is the significant transformation that has happened over the years in terms of political economy. The 1960's through to the 80's were a period of significant reliance on oil in the economy, with oil constituting a huge percentage of GDP of gulf countries. But there has been a movement towards some transformation. It is a movement that Gray describes as a movement from "energy-centric" to "energy-driven and energy-underwritten" economies.¹⁹³ Such transformation will remain a significant one when analyzing aspects of gulf politics.

While this thesis has focused on the potential of revising rentier state theory through analysis of socio-historic trajectories of Bahrain and UAE in an attempt to explain why events of the Arab spring occurred intensely in one place and not the other, there are of course limitations that can illuminate areas for future research. On the top of the list would be aspects of foreign intervention or foreign policy towards other key international players. One example in the case of Bahrain would be Saudi Arabia's stretching influence over the island's history. The British involvement in the preliminary years of the UAE is also an example. The influence of foreign countries has to be brought in to explain the socio-historic trajectories of those states and others

¹⁹³ Ibid., 31.

in the region. This is the thesis main message: classical rentier state theory is a very good start but is not, and should not, be the finale in research on Gulf dynamics.

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