

TRIBALISM, STATE FORMATION AND CITIZENSHIP  
IN KUWAIT

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TRIBALISM, CITIZENSHIP AND STATE-FORMATION IN KUWAIT**

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The thesis explores the relationship, or assumed relationship between nomadic tribalism and the stateless group in Kuwait. While exploring this issue, the thesis also examines state formation and tribalism throughout the history of Kuwait.

By exploring what the author calls, "Pan-Tribalism," the thesis also explores assumed cross-border linkages, and perceptions of loyalty, or disloyalty among various groups in Kuwait. The thesis includes research on the history of Kuwait because it reveals early tribal dynamics. The thesis uncovers the roots of certain historical issues and power structures that exist today - as all of this is related to citizenship and statelessness.

The thesis takes a close look at the impact of oil on state-formation both due to the mass influx of immigrants that oil wealth caused, as well as the welfare/distributive state policy that emerged afterwards. Both of these issues directly affected citizenship. Additionally, it thus explores internal oil politics rather than international oil politics.

Keywords: Kuwait, statelessness, state-formation, citizenship, Middle East, tribalism.

## ÖZ

### KUVEYT’TE AŞİRETÇİLİK, VATANDAŞLIK VE DEVLET OLUŞUMU

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Bu tez Kuveyt’teki göçebe aşiretçilik ve devletsiz (vatansız) gruplar arasındaki varsayılan ilişkiyi inceliyor. Bu konuyla bağlantılı olarak tezde Kuveyt tarihi özelinde devlet oluşum süreçleri ve aşiretçilik de incelenecektir.

Tez, yazarın "Pan-Asiretçilik" diye adlandırdığı olguyu inceleyerek, devlet sınırlarının ötesindeki bağlantılar ve Kuveyt’teki çeşitli gruplar arasında sadakatlik, veya sadakatsizlik algılarını incelemektedir. Tez, belli başlı tarihsel meselelerin ve iktidar yapılarının kökenlerini, vatandaşlık ve devletsizlik kavramlarıyla ilişkisi bağlamında açığa çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Kuveyt tarihi, erken aşiret dinamiklerini açığa çıkardığı oranda araştırılacaktır.

Tez, petrolün Kuveyt’te devlet oluşum sürecine etkisi bir tarafta petrol gelirinin ürettiği refah sonucu oluşan kitlesel göç, öte yandan refah dağıtımına yönelik Devlet politikası bağlamlarında incelenecektir. Bu süreçler vatandaşlık sürecini doğrudan etkilemektedir ve tez petrol politikalarına uluslararası petrol politikalarının yanısıra Devlet içindeki petrol politikalarına bakmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuveyt, vatansızlık / devletsizlik, Devlet oluşumu, vatandaşlık, Orta Doğu, aşiretçilik.

For my parents, and my friends in Kuwait

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## **Tribalism, State Formation, and Citizenship in Kuwait**

“Returning to Kuwait in 1946 after an absence of ten years, during which the Kuwait Oil Company had become the vital factor in the life and economy of the state, I was prepared to face the inevitable change. But at that time, when the actual production of oil had only been under way for a few months, there were no vast or obvious improvements in the rambling Arab town. Two tall wireless pylons and one strip of tarmac road provided then the only tangible evidence of material progress or westernization (Freeth 1946, 46).”



Photo by : Ceyda Oskay, 2004.  
An old Kuwaiti house and modern buildings in the background.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Exploring elements of tribal loyalties and tribal ties from state-formation, citizenship, oil and the welfare state to the modern nation state brings insight into contemporary dynamics in the Middle East.

The thesis specifically explores Kuwait, because its history and current contemporary affairs clearly show the linkage between the mentioned. The main thesis question is exploring the relationship, or assumed relationship between nomadic tribalism (Bedouinism or being Bedu) and the stateless group (Bidoon<sup>1</sup>) in Kuwait. The aim is to see if and to what degree this assumption is valid. However, many other issues emerge from this study – as the issues of citizenship, tribalism and state-formation are linked to broader dynamics, values, political and cultural structures in the Middle East and in Kuwait.

Kuwait underwent rapid social, political, economic, and cultural change throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, going from a modest, tribal-power based entity into a wealthy, globalized nation-state very rapidly. At the same time, certain tribal, political, and economic dynamics, beliefs and practices stayed the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Bidoon literally means “without” in Arabic. The term comes from “bidoon jensiyya” ie. “Without citizenship’ or nationality and is used to refer to the stateless in Kuwait.

As of 2009, the population of Kuwait is 3.52 million people, of which around 68% are expatriates. This figure also includes around 100,000 stateless people who claim Kuwaiti citizenship. This group constitutes a very large percentage of the population. The Governmental system is a monarchy with a parliament. The main religion is Islam among the citizens of Kuwait (Sunni 70-75%, Shia Muslims 25-30%, and the remaining few are apparently Christians and Bahai's<sup>2</sup>). The expatriates are mostly Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist. The ethnic background is Kuwaiti 45%, other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%, Iranian 4%, other 7%.<sup>3</sup> The 32 % of the total population who are Kuwaiti, can trace their roots to neighbouring countries including Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, but differentiate according to which families settled earlier in Kuwait (in fact, the Kuwaiti Arabic accent/dialect has been likened to that of Zubair, a neighbourhood in Basrah, Iraq. This differentiation also exists in legal terms in the different degrees of citizenship and the rights and services accorded to each type. Those who work in the Defence Forces, however, male or female, are not permitted to vote and neither are the bidoon.<sup>4</sup> The diverse population in Kuwait is a result of many historic events as well as the oil economy which necessitated immigration due to the boom in the economy.<sup>5</sup>

Since only a third of the population of Kuwait are citizens of the country, and around 100-150,000 bidoon claim historical ties to the country and expect citizenship, and the rest are foreigners, the result is a highly complex situation. The

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<sup>2</sup> There are also rumors that there is a Jewish Kuwaiti family left in Kuwait, but this is not confirmed.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of State. Kuwait: Background Note May 4, 2010. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs : <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Women in Kuwait gained the right to vote in May 2005, though they could work in the public sector and become Ministers prior to that date. The June 2006 election was the first one with female participation.

<sup>5</sup> For a full description of the oil boom and it's economic impact, see Case, Paul Edward ad Roger, George. "Boom Time in Kuwait," *The National Geographic Magazine*. Vol. CII. Number six. December, 1951. National Geographic Society. Washington, DC. USA.

issue has several dimensions and complexities which prevent it from being solved. A full investigation into the history and emergence of the problem, and examination of the arguments and counter-arguments is necessary.

One also needs to look at the history of Kuwait keeping in mind the “original Kuwaitis” and the “other” – which affect citizenship. Certain relationships with the “other” are formed early on, or are rather still based on historical power dynamics that continue today. These “other” include “other tribes”<sup>6</sup>, Hadhar or Bedu<sup>7</sup>, the bidoon, and foreign workers to name a few.<sup>8</sup> What the thesis aims to do is also see how these relationships transform with state-formation, how they are influenced by tribal values, and how the situation of the stateless and citizenship may, or may not be related to this exclusion.

It is thought that today the Bedu/ “Bedouins are mainly Sunni, 40% might be Shia and that the Hadhar are mainly Shia”<sup>9</sup> and this also affects the dynamics and relations between the groups. It is also thought that most of the Bidoon are Shia (although that is also contested).<sup>10</sup> Hence, the nuanced relationship between these issues.

The speed at which a state could be formed as a result of oil wealth, also enabled the quick transfer of tribal dynamics onto a modern state format, which

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6 There are many internal tribal dynamics related to the status of the tribe such as the physically stronger tribe and also the tribe that is the most pureblood, “äasil” tribe that has been able to maintain its lineage. There are also some tribes that will not marry their members to other tribes due to religious differences, or historic events that have created tension and animosity between them.

7 Hadhar are the settled people (commonly those who made money from shipbuilding and other sea related work, whereas Bedu are those who lived a nomadic life. However, these terms are used by some in everyday language now to mean “civilized” and uncivilized” respectively (see also Longva, Anh Nga. “Nationalism in Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse on Hadhar and Bedu in Kuwait.” *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 38 (2006), 171-187. USA. DOI: 10.1017.S0020743806382013.

8 Longva, Anh Nga. *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait*. USA: Westview Press, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Fawas, Kuwait, August 10, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Various Interviews – Kuwait, 2010.

helped create the state due to its funding of a welfare-state programme, and thus created an incentive to make becoming a citizen of the state highly desirable, and created an influx of workers – tribes or other - who may or may not benefit from citizenship- into the country.

The Ministry of Planning noted more than 100,000 Bidoon in 2006. This number used to be as high as 500,000 according to some estimates, and 250,000 according to other estimates. Some statistics are mixed because at one point the government considered them under the category ‘Kuwaiti’ while the next year it ceased to do so <sup>11</sup> which thus affected the ratio of Kuwait nationals to non-Kuwaiti nationals.

The roots of where and how the situation of the bidoon came to creation and why and how is unclear. It is assumed that many of these bidoon were closely tied to the Bedouin, or nomadic lifestyle, and claim to have been migrating during the census of 1962 which was the last one in which to register for citizenship. More specifically, the mentioned assumption, thus, was that this stateless group did not get citizenship because they could not register in the Census of 1940 and subsequent Censuses of 1960 and 1970 due to their nomadic tribal lifestyle. The assumption was that since they were nomadic they either did not know of the rules and regulations related to registration (since they were roaming at the time of registration) or that registration did not tie in with their general perspective of life at the time and this paradigm shift of borders, registration, citizenship, and state-formation was alien to them then. Yet others claim many in this group are actually from Syria, Iran, or Iraq and who want to assimilate because prospects of Kuwaiti citizenship is their aim and

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<sup>11</sup> see Human Rights Watch (HRW), *The Bedoons of Kuwait: “Citizens without Citizenship.”* Human Rights Watch, August 1995. USA and Longva1997.

that being a bidoon was more privileged than the status of being a foreigner until the 1980s<sup>12</sup>.

Citizenship and the state-formation of Kuwait, a Gulf country that was on the borders of the Ottoman Empire, later under several agreements with Britain, and one that boasts its own political structure since its early days, is quite unique. Examining the issue gives insight into the ideological structure of the area, perceived loyalty or non-loyalty (that has roots in tribal structure and continuing cross-border tribal loyalties), and thus, the political dynamics in the country which continue to be related to tribes and hence related to the earlier framework around which the country was formed. The root of tribal allegiances, values, and structures extend far beyond the contemporary period necessitating the historical examination of the issue.

When examining citizenship, the thesis attempts to explore the process of Kuwait's assumed "transformation" from a tribal political structure into a nation state. The thesis thus examines how tribal ties and values can affect citizenship, state-formation, and other issues even today, and how these issues are also affected by the economic and social transformative power of oil. Most of the police and defence forces in Kuwait, until 1993, were bidoon. Thus, the discussion of the bidoon and bedu closely parallels state formation in Kuwait.

While herding sheep and camels is not common in Kuwait as a livelihood, even though they are practiced as hobbies, "tribalism" exists today in terms of family and lineage being important and influencing various aspects of daily life, as well as power relations both inside and outside the country; and thus, this is how tribalism has survived in Kuwait today. The tribes with nomadic roots (Bedu/ Bedouin) are seen to have kept the tribal identity, however, the issue of lineage and family is

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<sup>12</sup> Note that since Kuwaiti women's foreign husbands and their children together are not granted citizenship, the term 'bidoon' also refers to this group.

important even in the tribes that have settled long ago (Hadhar), even though they are at first glance, not seen to have kept tribal traditions.

Findings of the thesis include that the main reasons for not granting citizenship to the stateless in Kuwait include economic, geo-political, security and mistrust of the bidoon's background and loyalty to the nation-state, fear of change of demographics, i.e. the current social concerns and values in Kuwait today. The lack of an organized structure with the aim of studying the credibility and general claims of each bidoon person (until very recently) and lack of proper documentation and basic rights further complicated the situation and perpetuate the problem.

However, remembering that the main issue in the French Revolution was the lack of social rights to a large group of people claiming what is similar to citizenship – one can see the impact and potential difficulties at keeping the issue unresolved – not to mention the difficulties in the daily lives of those who are bidoon.

Kuwait has the highest income per capita from oil in the Gulf if measured by the amount of oil exported divided by the population (that are citizens). Around 70% of proven oil reserves in the world are located in Kuwait. The earnings from exported oil are distributed among the citizens of Kuwait – creating a critical difference of being a citizen or not (this will be explored further in later chapters of the thesis, however, the benefits include very high housing grants, monthly grants, free education, free medical care, monthly food allowances, etc... thus making it highly appealing to be a citizen).

Many individuals claim their ancestors helped build the country when it was emerging from a small town into a nation-state (especially after economic oil boom), and that their citizenship applications were not acted upon and this is one of the main issues related to the bidoon situation. A counter argument is that those individuals



did not have loyalty to Kuwait at the time, and wanted to return – and this is counter-argued, with the argument that they cannot return to their countries and avail citizenship today even if they wanted to and it is their right to obtain citizenship. Since the situation of the stateless was better than the foreigners' status when the issue was first emerging, the promise of citizenship and being granted nearly the same rights and benefits as citizens except for the right to vote (and as noted, not all citizens actually have the right to vote), was a high motive to stay in the country and keep building the country, and the situation of the bidoon was not seen as problematic in general.

The mentioned change in the status of the bidoon that emerged during the mid 1980s, was related to suspicions that there were infiltrations into the group causing serious security problems in Kuwait that were happening during this time (such as car bombs and other violent attacks). It was suspected that individuals in this group had stronger ties to neighbouring countries, than to Kuwait – either through tribal affiliation, or other.

Another dynamic is added when tribes are seen to have allegiances to areas that have now become other countries, or no allegiance at all to a state, but – “to sheep and camels<sup>13</sup>,” which is how one Hadhar individual described the Bedu / Bedouin loyalty. However, the Hadhar could also have or not have strong ties to the neighbouring countries from which they are from – and in the case of Kuwait, there is still a national identity and loyalty that extends beyond tribal or family ties.

The history and complex transformation of *nomadic* Bedu/ Bedouin tribal groups brings in another perceived complex element of cross-boundary tribal and/or ethnic ties, as opposed to *sedentary* Hadhar tribes and their ties – which tend to be,

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with A.A.1. Kuwait, April November 2008 and April 10.

but not always are, more located within current nation-state boundaries, even though the Hadhar may still have ties to another country. The common understanding of free movement for the Bedouin across borders allowed Bedouin nomads to cross the borders between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq freely until at least the 1950s. This allowed the nomads to keep their tribal affiliations, cultural lifestyle, as well as a trans-national connection, even in a world that was increasingly divided with borders between newly emerging nation-states, and these tribes (as well as immigrants from Abadan, Iran and other) were recruited into jobs in oil and state-services sectors in Kuwait.

The transnationality of (mostly) nomadic tribes becomes highly complicated when considering issues such as citizenship and loyalty. Citizens of other nations continually attend the tribal primary election meetings in Kuwait, thus deciding and influencing local Kuwaiti politics and law, because they are of the same transnational tribe. These were conducted mostly among the Bedu nomadic tribes; these are pre-elections among tribes for their candidates who will run during the national elections, with the purpose to guarantee tribal representation.<sup>14</sup>

It is said that the government in Syria consults tribal sheikhs on decisions and political moves as tribal support is vital to maintaining power (for example Shammari)<sup>15</sup>. Those tribes in Syria have links to citizens in Kuwait of the same tribe (as well as common tribal links in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates and other Gulf countries). Some Kuwaiti men travel to Jordan to meet potential traditional Iraqi wives of the same tribe if they cannot do so in Kuwait, thus ensuring tribal

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with H3. Kuwait, April 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a Syrian man working at the Kuwait Oil Company, January 2010, see also Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Politics in an Arabian Oasis : The Rashidi Tribal Dynasty*. London and New York : I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1991. for a full account of the Shammari tribes (including the Rashidi) and their attempts to unify central Arabia.

continuity<sup>16</sup>. This shows how the boundaries of the nation-state, and even modern warfare (Iraq war, etc...), is put aside when it comes to tribal identities and marriage. Youth today are suddenly confronted with tribalism in relation to marriage and jobs if not their social life as they grow older.

Much literature and discourse exists on pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism in the Middle East, however, very little exists in terms of – what I will call “pan-Tribalism” of certain tribes- a very important, yet often overlooked element since tribes are studied mostly within boundaries, even in anthropology. Very often, the traditional study of tribes has also been limited to the very ‘micro’ level. Studying the tribe as macro – with linkages across borders and the modern nation-state, gives insight into current political dynamics. Some of the members of these tribes have family who are citizens belonging to and owing allegiance and loyalty to other modern nation-states. Yet, this does not make them non-nationalistic or non-loyal to the country in which they have citizenship – even if some are suspected to be so.

The route of the Murra tribe in Southern Iraq and Kuwait was affected by the 1990 -1991 Gulf War<sup>17</sup> and many tribes on the northern border of Kuwait were asked by the military to move in order to make space for warfare. Thus, tribalism is very much a part of the current nation-state order.

Kuwait’s early history and early tribal political divisions shaped Kuwait to the extent that the current social, political, and cultural structure today has its roots from several hundreds of years ago. It is thus necessary to examine the history of tribes in Kuwait, their livelihood, the trans-nationalism of Bedouin tribes, and the history of governing structures including the political and power structures of tribes

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Fawas, Kuwait, August 10, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Keohane, Alan. *Bedouin : Nomads of the Desert*. London, UK : Kyle Cathie Ltd., 1999. (43)

before and after state-formation and citizenship in order to study the concept of the tribe in Kuwait today. As Khoury and Kostiner write,

Tribes did not necessarily cease to exist because states were formed. Even when tribal forces contributed to the formation of states in regions as different as Iran and Morocco, they might remain much as they were in spite of state formation or they might just as easily become different kinds of tribal entities<sup>18</sup>.

When examining the relationship between state-formation and tribalism, one must keep in mind that there may not necessarily be an “evolution” from tribe to state. When looking at the state in a European-centric model, the state seems to favour the individual; and the tribe is assumed to favour the community. In this way, the two systems could be seen to be in conflict. However, the reality is that they co-exist, especially in many newly emerging states, and in states outside of Europe or North America. The state and other social groupings in Kuwait exist at times in contradictory ways and at times in complimentary ones. This bewildering situation is of key significance in understanding modern Kuwait.

Taking Benedict Anderson’s view of the nation-state as a reference point, the thesis examines if and how the “model of the nation-state” was transplanted to Kuwait, where the roots of the power-structures existing in this nation state come from, and state-tribe relations from around the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the current period.<sup>19</sup>

The dynamics between citizenship and tribalism and their cohabitation are debated. While citizenship is often thought to be an abstract and neutral state – it is seen that it is often very linked to historical and tribal power structures especially in Kuwait.

Longva, in particular traces the links between citizenship, state-formation, and tribalism. She notes that initially, many people were still identified by their tribe,

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<sup>18</sup> Khoury, Philip S. and Kostiner, Joseph; *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990. (2)

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, New York, USA: Verso, 1991. (5)

sib-divisions, clan, extended family, etc or according to the area they originated from and that it was only after World War II, with the emergence of nation-states in the region, that attempts were made to bring about a formal recognition of the incorporation of new members into the state within a relatively short time span.”<sup>20</sup> As she explains further, citizenship was an idea that was foreign to the conceptualization of social relations in this area due to extended tribal ties. She notes the conflicting relationships tribal ideology and citizenship had.

Longva further notes,

Like the nation-state, it [citizenship] was evolved in Europe and has been exported to the rest of the world in the wake of modern state building. But whereas *state* and *nation* have frequently been problematized by students of the non-Western world, the conceptualization and practice of citizenship have been, until recently, the object of limited analytical scrutiny. The assumption seems to be that we are dealing with a universal institution that is understood and practiced in the same manner in all societies and under all circumstances.<sup>21</sup>

These approaches help understand what is at first seen as a contradiction between tribalism and citizenship. Similarly, Derek Heater, who traces the roots of the idea of citizenship to European ones (as with many other theoreticians) notes the need for the non-west to examine notions of citizenship, with a particular note on the “Afro-Asian” states need to do so:

The European concept and practice [of citizenship], as we have seen, took centuries to evolve. True, the Afro-Asian states had this [European] experience to draw upon, but they still had to learn the difficult practical arts

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<sup>20</sup> Longva, Anh Nga. *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait*. USA: Westview Press, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1997. (46).

<sup>21</sup> Longva, Anh Nga. ‘Citizenship in the Gulf States – Conceptualization and Practice,’ in Buteschon, Nils A.; Davis, Uri; Hassanian, Manuel. *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East, Approaches and Applications*. USA : Syracuse University Press, 2000. (179-197).

and attitudes that citizenship entails, not to mention the problems of reconciling them with their own, valuable social customs.<sup>22</sup>

Citizenship is a highly contested issue, and can be one that could be used as a form of exclusion, as was in the Levant during state formation. Citizenship is also an active assertion of state-formation, and a definition of the state's identity, and we can see this very clearly in the case of Kuwait.

As Khaldoun Al Naqeeb puts it in his article, "How likely is democracy in the Gulf,"<sup>23</sup>

Social and political forces function in this particular system of political control in a manner more attuned to the traditional ways of political behaviour and social conduct, which are based on kinship and patronage. One could say that Kuwait efficiently adapted some democratic privileges to suit local folkways."

The analysis can be extended to citizenship: Kuwait has adopted the idea of citizenship, but kept its core values such as kinship and patronage and inserted them into the legal system of citizenship. The citizenship law includes class, rights, and privileges differentiated based on what degree of citizenship the individual is given – this degree, in turn, as discussed earlier, depends upon *when* the person's *ancestors* can be proved to have settled in Kuwait.

Theoretically, the study of citizenship is conceptually divided between two main types of citizenship: *jus sanguinis*, by "law of blood" and *jus soli* by "law of soil." The former refers to citizenship acquired through ethnic, legal, or cultural *origins* of ancestors or parents; and the latter refers to citizenship granted to those

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<sup>22</sup> Heater, Derek. *Citizenship The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education. Third Edition*. Manchester, UK and New York, USA: Manchester University Press, 2004. (p. 132-133)

<sup>23</sup> Fox, John W.; Mourtada-Sabbah, Nada; al-Mutawa, Mohammed. *Globalization and the Gulf*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006. (Chapter 6 : 137)

born within the *territory* of the state or who have lived in it for a certain number of years.

Most states have both *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* laws within their citizenship law. However, *jus sanguinis* is mostly prevalent in Japan and the Arab Gulf countries where the notion of nationality and citizenship is mainly based on race and ethnicity, and the place of birth does not matter as long as both parents are from the same nationality. *Jus soli* currently exists more in Europe, the United States and Canada, places of immigration where a number of immigrants are granted citizenship by virtue of *being born within the territory, or having lived in the territory for a number of years*.

The citizenship law in Kuwait can roughly be described as *jus sanguinis* based on the *jus soli* of the status quo of 75 years ago with some exceptions. Thus, first degree citizens are those who can prove ancestry before 75 years ago, second degree citizenship is also possible for those who came later, and there is very little flexibility in allowing other newcomers to become citizens except for roughly 50 / year during some years (although there were also some years where thousands of persons were able to avail citizenship). Citizenship in Kuwait is so much *jus sanguinis* that even DNA tests were used since 1998 to verify the Kuwaiti genealogy of some who claimed to be the bidoon. This point can be used to prove exactly what Longva notes as the “ethnocratic” state of Kuwait.<sup>24</sup>

Although much has been written about Europe and North America in terms of citizenship, history and current situation, it is rare to find as much on the Middle East. The situation in the Middle East, is, actually quite complex, especially after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent nation-state formation. *Citizenship in the*

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<sup>24</sup> Longva 1997.

*Arab World: Kin, Religion, and Nation-State*<sup>25</sup> and *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East: Approaches and Applications*<sup>26</sup> are both useful sources in understanding the situation today. The latter book has a chapter on citizenship in Kuwait by Anh Longva, which is particularly insightful for the purposes of this thesis.

As Gianluca Parolin describes<sup>27</sup> the beginnings of the idea of citizenship became formally established in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat, “reorganization era” and Ottomanization efforts in attempts to equalize the Ottoman subjects.<sup>28</sup> Uri Davis’ *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East* includes a description of the situation of citizenship and belonging to the state in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup>

The first Ottoman Law on citizenship was the Ottoman Citizenship Law of 19 January 1869 and adopted *jus sanguinis* (article 1). Conversion to Islam was not necessary to becoming Ottoman, whereas it is a requirement under Kuwaiti nationality law today. The second Ottoman law was the Treaty of Peace, Lausanne 24 July 1923 between the former Ottoman Empire, and the emerging nation of Turkey; and the nations fighting against the Empire. “Exclusion and inclusion had been part of the process of state formation in the Arab region that took place when Ottoman rule ended and European colonial powers divided up the Ottoman

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<sup>25</sup> Parolin, Gianluca P., *Citizenship in the Arab World: Kin, Religion and Nation-State*, IMISCOE Research Amsterdam University Press: 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Butenschon, et al, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Parolin 2009, 73.

<sup>28</sup> See also Davis, Uri. *Citizenship and the State – A Comparative Study of Citizenship in Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon*. UK: Ithaca Press (Garnet Publishing Limited), 1997. (xxvi and xxvii)

<sup>29</sup> Buteschon, et. al. 2000.



inheritance directly after the First World War.”<sup>30</sup> The Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons was created in 1954,<sup>31</sup> and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness was created in 1961,<sup>32</sup> however, Kuwait has not ratified either.

The thesis will thus examine the tribal power relations in Kuwait from its initial establishment to state-formation (Chapter 2), the economic boom as a result of oil and the subsequent mass hiring of workers outside of the original city walls,” and formation of the welfare state (Chapter 3), and the concept and dynamics of citizenship in the modern nation-state of Kuwait after the formation and international recognition of Kuwait as a nation-state (Chapter 4). The thesis traces from early history to the contemporary period and I identify the noted themes to emerge with different eras in Kuwait’s history.

A few key points must be kept in mind before one follows through the history of Kuwait in the first chapter. These include: the early history of Kuwait and the connection to migratory economics particularly in relation to India and nations which neighbour the State of Kuwait today, the fact that there was an intra-tribal political agreement within the country that kept the balance of power and order, and kept the tribal economic and social structure in place; these factors can all be juxtaposed with the nomadic nature of some of the tribes in the area.

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<sup>30</sup> Shiblak, Abbas. “The Lost Tribes of Arabia,” *Forced Migration Review (FMR) Statelessness* (Issue 32), April 2009. University of Oxford, UK. (37)

<sup>31</sup> Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Done at New York, on 28 September 1954. Official texts : English, French and Spanish. Registered ex officio on 6 June 1960. United Nations Treaty Series, No. 5158. <http://www.unhcr.org/3bbb25729.html>

<sup>32</sup> Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (with Final Act of the United Nations Conference on the Elimination or Reduction of Future Statelessness held at Geneva from 24 March to 18 April 1959, and Resolution I, II, III, and IV of the Conference). Concluded at New York on 30 August 1961. Authentic texts : English French, Chinese, Russian and Spanish. Registered ex. Officio on 13 December 1975. United Nations Treaty Series, No. 14458. <http://www.unhcr.org/3bbb286d8.html>

Goods constantly flowed in and out of the area, and tribes themselves constantly travelled freely in the area (excepting wars, tribal raids between nomadic tribes as was the accepted cultural practice at the time, or exile of a tribe due to blood feuds or other).

Kuwait's history is so tied to migration- *when* the tribe or individual settled in Kuwait makes a big difference social life, and citizenship degrees which influence rights and welfare. This discussion also relates to whether or not the person is granted citizenship and hence gains access to some rights and privileges, to whom the individual is going to marry, to where the person might be working and so on.

Kuwait's particular experience with migration is unique due to its history of migration flows due to oil, as well as the tribal and nomadic identity of some of its citizens who often have tribal connections to Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia in addition to the other Gulf states of Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, etc... These cross-border tribal kinship ties still exist today. The combination of various local identities as well as foreign ones in a country with 60% of its population being foreign, creates a highly cosmopolitan culture.

There has always been a lot of migration of the Northern Tribes as well as the Southern Tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, and this migration extends through South Iraq into Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and parts of Syria. The Northern Tribes generally migrated between Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Syria, while the Southern Tribes mainly migrated within the Arabian Peninsula including Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, and the Gulf littoral states.

Kuwait is often described as a place of refuge. Kuwait was also a safe-haven from many fleeing neighboring areas of Iraq, Saudi Arabia (including, in later years Ibn Saud), and Iran. This established the diverse, multi-cultural society of Kuwait

early on. Thus, there was also migration that included settled tribes that sought refuge in Kuwait and other Gulf areas before the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. This created a dilemma with regard to citizenship and the division of national borders, and the transition to sedentary lifestyles after the discovery of oil. However, the delineation of physical borders also included a delineation of tribes.

The sudden boom in Kuwait's economy (highest per capita income for the national population in the world in 1985) as a result of the export of oil greatly affected the tribal lifestyle as well as citizenship and benefits, among other issues. The emergence of the oil-based economy created a rapid need for workers.

Initially, it was mostly the neighbouring nomadic tribes from Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia if not other areas, that filled this gap. Some of these workers acquired citizenship – even if it was Second Degree citizenship (the details of which will be explained later). The advent of oil also affected the political economy of the country through the emergence of a welfare state<sup>33</sup>, and affected the power relations between the merchants and the now wealthy royal family.

Despite the transformative affect that oil wealth had on Kuwait, there continue to be correlations with traditional or formal social structures to power-relations, state-development, and citizenship in the country today. The second chapter will trace the historical evolution of these three elements – examining the transformation of Kuwait over the last hundred years, while looking at state-formation, tribalism, citizenship, and social change. The changes are examined through a historical, international relations, and political science perspective, as well as an anthropological one, showing that an examination of statehood and citizenship

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<sup>33</sup> Al-Dekhayel, Abdulkarim. *Kuwait Oil State and Political Legitimation*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 2000), is particularly insightful in looking at the role of the state in social services in light of oil economics in the country.

in Kuwait is not complete without looking at tribal structures and trans-‘national’ connections between different parts of the world.

Oil wealth affected society and the development and establishment of the state, having a great impact on state formation, tribalism and citizenship. Oil wealth had an impact not only in the emergence of a rentier economy (which later became post-rentier), citizenship (both as regarded in the degrees and rights accorded to each citizen as well as the influx of new citizens due to mass immigration) in the emergency of a welfare state, but also on the formation of the identity of the state, and state-tribe relations.

The Al-Sabah, the ruling family in Kuwait since the 1700s, and certain tribes and families favoured by the Al-Sabah family occupy high government ranks. It is thought by some that certain other families and tribes continually get procurement offers today and are given incentives by the government<sup>34</sup> and this proves that tribalism still exists, if in another form. Whether or not this is accurate, the belief of this by some citizens who act according to this assumption also informs us of a certain dynamic in Kuwait. Some tribes were more wealthy than the aristocracy, which affected the power dynamics until oil was discovered and the Al-Sabah became the stronger economic power as well.

Oil wealth allowed the Al-Sabah to be less reliant on the support of the merchant tribes. This created unrest in the community, only to be solved by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem’s consultations with eight heads of tribes (including both Hadhar and Bedu) and two foreign consultants, in order to form the Constitution of Kuwait. This further demonstrates the role of tribes and intra-tribal relations in the formation of the nation-state. This consultation was headed by Abdullah Thenyan Al-Ghanim,

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with H., Kuwait, April 7, 2010.

who compiled the constitution and presented it to the Sheikh in 1963. The group also included Al-Jalahma, Al-Bahar, Al-Khalid, and Al-Zaid among its members.

Oil wealth brought an influx of immigrants from the rest of the world. In addition to the technical expertise from afar, the state also needed a supply of local workers on the oil fields. Individuals from the nomadic tribes were also employed to work on the oil fields. Many of them were later given citizenship, but some were not.

This issue needs closer examination because it is argued by some that the Al-Sabah gave many of the Bedouin citizenship in order to establish another group that supported them in light of the waning local support from the old merchant families. Among other reasons, it is also thought by some that it was due to the history of, and controversy around some of the tribes that their members were not granted citizenship<sup>35</sup>. Also, the initial migration and employment of the Bedu, and later Palestinians and Egyptians was later to be re-substituted by immigration from Southeast Asia mainly due to political reasons.<sup>36</sup>

Kuwait, with its own dynamics, social structures, tribal and trans-national ties, and particular and unique history and way of incorporating tradition and modern day globalization - while being rentier, is also *post-rentier* in that it is currently the capital for investment abroad including Russia and Turkey. These dynamics are influenced by the power structures during state formation, citizenship granting/recognizing, and general everyday tribe relations.

The issue of citizenship, more closely examined in the third chapter, is an area where these changes and previous historical power structures, values, and traditions can particularly be studied. Divisions within the law and social conceptions of citizenship directly affects not only the state-formation process - but the current

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<sup>35</sup> Various Interviews Kuwait, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Longva 1997.

identity of a state. A nation-state constructs its identity by defining who it grants citizenship or recognizes as citizens and who it does not. This can be pre-meditated, or come as a natural result of certain policies or laws existing in the structure of the state, or the ways these laws are practiced. One can see how exclusion/inclusion in citizenship laws defines the identity of Kuwait, both in its history – in that only those who could prove male ancestry before 1920 could get first degree citizenship, as well as the belief that only selective persons/tribes/religions with quotas were given citizenship. It is also directly applicable in the modern day - with limitations as to who can be granted citizenship.

As Nikkie Keddie writes, a “wholistic” approach is necessary in studying the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Thus, anthropological, historic, economic, and other sources have been used in the research for this thesis. Various discussions and interviews in active fieldwork research in Kuwait during 2003 and between 2007 and 2010, have also contributed to the research in addition to my long-term stay in Kuwait between 1989 and 1998. Archives, newspaper articles and personal interviews also form the basis of the research for this thesis.

However, it is important to note several issues that I came across during the research process in Kuwait. These are :

1. The History of Kuwait is not widely taught in detail in Kuwait. While it is taught in government schools, it is not mandatory in private schools (while Arabic is mandatory for all students and Islamic Religion class is mandatory for Moslems students). Many Kuwaitis’ historical knowledge is

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<sup>37</sup> Keddie, Nikkie. “Material Culture and Geography : Toward a Holistic Comparative History of the Middle East. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*.” 26 (1984): 709 – 735. DOI: 10.1017/S0010417500011221

supplemented by knowledge in their family, which may vary depending upon their origin, and various other factors.

2. The Bidoon I met were not comfortable discussing their tribal background (family origins, tribe's name, tribal ties, etc...) in detail. This could be because it is generally assumed that they are "from another country and tore up their passports to claim Bedouin status," because of the third reason explained below, or because their tribal background may include Iraqi origins.
3. Since being "Hadhar" has a social connotation since the word is used in everyday language to insinuate being "civilized" – and "Bedu" is used in a more derogatory way – the Bidoon may feel more uncomfortable discussing their tribal roots and origins than others since they are already at a socially disadvantaged situation if they are Bedu.
4. In general, any research on Kuwait that is social research, is difficult because English sources are scarce, information is written for a particular purpose and hence biased, and because certain issues are still seen as taboo. Peter Lienhardt, an anthropologist in Kuwait in the 1960s, wrote of how difficult it was to study society because he did not find, as he puts it "anything coherent enough to be called a society." He also notes the difficulties of having access to Kuwaiti citizens as being an immigrant in Kuwait. He hence moves to Failaka Island off the shore of Kuwait city, and still had problems because the

society was so diverse<sup>38</sup>. While I think differently, there is absolutely a society to study, or at least, one that has consolidated over the years, and I have been lucky to have made very close Kuwaiti friends over the years, I fully agree with him on the difficulties of research on Kuwait. Every issue has multiple implications and nuances, and since various issues are not recorded in written records, one is dependent on memory and anthropological research for various insights into society. This can present several methodological difficulties, however, when overcome, the stories of Kuwait are most delightful to discover and change major theoretical perceptions.

5. Issues that were quoted three or four times in interviews are not cited in the thesis as this is accepted as general fact.

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<sup>38</sup> Lienhardt, Peter. (ed. Al-Shani, Ahmed) *Disorientations : A Society in Flux : Kuwait in the 1950s*. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1993. (35)



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HISTORY OF KUWAIT**

#### **2. 1. EARLY HISTORY**

One needs to first examine the formation of settlement in Kuwait and tribal power relations in the area. The formation of a settlement in Kuwait began with nomads and mariners settling near the Kuwait harbor. The Kuwaiti harbor was a natural harbor and thus, a fishing, pearl diving, and ship building industry quickly flourished. Goods from incoming ships on the harbor were also taken inland, and thus, it was a natural location for merchants to trade. At the same time, there was also some herding of sheep and camels, and general trade with other Bedouin nomads by those who lived inland.<sup>39</sup>

Those who made a living from the sea, and who are generally considered to be more wealthy, and who were settled inside the Kut (original Kuwait)<sup>40</sup> city walls, were called “Hadhar,” (an Arabic word implying urban and used commonly also to mean “civilized”) whereas the “Bedouin,” (or “Bedu,” in everyday local terminology), owing to their nomadic lifestyle and intransigency, settled outside the

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<sup>39</sup> See also the work of Saad Sowayan and Donald Cole for the culture of the Bedouins of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>40</sup> The word Kuwait comes from the root word “kut” which means fortress- “Kuwait” means little fortress. Another word for the area was Graine. The word “gurain” was derived from the Arabic word of Qarn, meaning high hill, with “Grain” meaning small, high hill.

Kut city walls. This distinction, however, did not have the same connotations or implications in earlier years, as it does today. The Bedu were considered to be much more conservative, and made a living from camels and livestock. The Hadhar were the core group who were settled in Kuwait, who and were mostly refugees. The main social divisions in Kuwait developed along the lines of the Hadhar and Bedu.

Thus, among other distinctions within present-day Kuwaiti society related to religion, tribe, and origins, the Kuwaitis distinguish themselves between the “Hadhar” who traditionally settled earlier and whose livelihood also depended mostly on the sea (and who are mainly – but not necessarily first degree citizens today) and the “Bedu” (who were Bedouins, who settled later in time, and whose livelihood depended mostly on herding camels and sheep, and who now may or may not be first degree or second degree citizens).

Different distinctions between the settled tribes (the Hadhar) and the nomadic tribes (the Bedouin, or Bedu), were evident prior to the formation of the modern State of Kuwait. Some of the nomadic Bedu tribes who were passing through Kuwait were employed for defending the royal families, and later in the oil companies. However, various tribes in Kuwait, naturally had links with other tribes in the region in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. As in Carter’s book, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, one can trace the origins of quite established merchant families to Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that this book was originally written as a guide to entrepreneurs coming to the Middle East to do business, and not as an anthropological book, however, the way the author traces each tribe and family, their origins, and notes the various areas of business they work in – serves as an excellent anthropological account, especially in the absence of other such sources. Alan Rush’s

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<sup>41</sup> Carter, John R.L. *Merchant Families of Kuwait*. London: Scorpion Books, 1984.

book also traces the Al-Sabah, and notes the key posts that its family members hold.<sup>42</sup>

The early history of Kuwait being one intrinsically linked to economics made Kuwaiti political structures one in which the power dynamic between the ruling family and the merchant families a very important one early on. This identity influenced Kuwaiti political developments. As described and defended in numerous accounts of Kuwait's history, Kuwait always had some sort of autonomy – with the rulers and the merchants striking a special arrangement whereby there was a balance of power, which created a kind of proto-democracy.

This is enforced by the idea of the 'Diwaniya' and notions of 'istishara' or consensus discussion, a concept which developed after the advent of Islam and the subsequent formulation of Islamic jurisprudence. The concept and practice of consensus discussion is very important in Arab Islamic tradition. There were also daily 'majlis' meetings the Amir held with his people at the marketplaces or the palace – in addition to having an 'open door policy' whenever there was any conflict. Kuwait, being at the crossroads in the trade between India, Iraq, and Iran and Saudi Arabia, enabled the merchants to be quite wealthy and influential in the decision-making process (until the discovery of oil). At one point the Amir tried to enforce taxes, however, this idea was strongly rejected by the merchant families – who, lead by the Al-Khalifa, fled to Bahrain lead to escape taxation, returning only after an apology and rescinding of the decision.

In addition to the presence and influence of regional tribes in early Kuwaiti history, the Portuguese, Dutch, and Russian sailors, in addition to the Ottomans, have also had presence in Kuwait.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Rush, Alan. *Al-Sabah : History and Genealogy of Kuwait's Ruling Family 1752 – 1987*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ, and London: Ithaca Press. 1987.

Nomadic tribes settled in Kuwait between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. More specifically, the Utub<sup>44</sup>, a clan of the Aniza tribe from Najd (presently inner Saudi Arabia) founded the fortress of “Kut,” which is mentioned above in the discussion on Hadhar and Bedu. The Ottoman Empire had, what the Turkish Embassy historical note describes as “passive control” over these areas.<sup>45</sup>

When the ruler of the Bani Khalid died in 1762 the Al-Sabah family became the rulers of the area of Kuwait as the merchant families of the area selected Shaikh Sabah bin Jaber bin Adhbi as the leader of Kuwait.<sup>46</sup> This came about as a result of an agreement among the three main families of the Utub: the Al-Sabah, the Al-Jalahima, and the Al-Khalifa. These three families decided among themselves that the Al-Sabah would be the ruling family, the Al-Jalahima would be in charge of the maritime, and the Al-Khalifa family would be the merchants.

It is worth noting that the Arabian peninsula inhabited many different tribes with many different histories and different migration patterns and relations with the tribes that occupied Kuwait and thus, most of the versions could be true – or not at all since oral history can be contentious. The differing accounts of how the Bani Utub came to Kuwait (through Basra, from central Arabia, from Bahrain, etc... due to a varied number of reasons) is an example of the different histories of Kuwait. Additionally, different sources offer different explanations. In this way, one can see how even in Kuwait’s relatively short history of a few centuries – writing a full,

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<sup>43</sup> See Anscombe, Frederick F. *The Ottoman Gulf : The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar*, USA: Columbia University Press, 1997; as well as Slot, Ben J., *Kuwait, the Growth of a Historic Identity*. Kuwait: The Gulf Museum Consultancy Company, 2003.

<sup>44</sup>The word Utub comes from the Arabic word of ‘ataba meaning to travel from place to place (ie. Gocebe in Turkish, and nomad in English)

<sup>45</sup> Kuveyt Tarihi (History of Kuwait) 17.09.2008, Embassy of Turkey in Kuwait, official website. <http://kuveyt.be.fscnet.net/ShowInfoNotes.aspx?ID=103>

<sup>46</sup> Mansfield, Peter. *Kuwait : Vanguard of the Gulf*. London: Hutchinson, 1990. (6)

comprehensive, and non-controversial history can be quite difficult. History of nomadic groups is very difficult to record and later accounts of history are based on sources that may not be neutral.

However, what is known is that at the time of the arrival of the Utub in the geographical area of modern Kuwait, the Bani Khalid tribe were the initial rulers of Kuwait and remained in power until 1762. The Bani Khalid promoted caravan transportation of goods along the coast of the Gulf into Syria as they were nomadic guards protecting these caravans in the desert.

Thus, ruling powers in early Kuwait were linked to the protection of merchants and in the trade of goods and the political history of Kuwait is directly linked to an economic history of the area – and as noted in the introduction - this history has shaped the social, political, and cultural structure of Kuwait to this day.

The Al-Sabah family, after coming via Bahrain, then Basrah to Kuwait- had an agreement with the merchant tribes. The Al-Sabah lived above one of the main markets and any time there was a dispute, the merchants would knock on the doors of the Al-Sabah to resolve the conflict. Kuwait was on the cross-roads, in between the trade between India and Iraq, India and Iran. This brought money to Kuwait, and the merchants were thus influential in the decision-making process.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, a certain power structure was in place within Kuwait from the beginning of the state's formation and this interesting arrangement which created a balance of power between the rulers, the merchants and the seamen gave the merchants and seamen a fair degree of power in political affairs. This arrangement further compounded the situation where subsequent political changes in the country

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<sup>47</sup> Thus, actually very like the modern situation of large companies being more influential than some governments, or at least sometimes equally so and economics playing a large role in political issues.

were a result of economic reasoning. Thus, Kuwait's history is an early example of the effects of economic interests on a global level, and vice versa. It is also a good example of the transition from tribal power to democracy, and the Shuraá consultative process evident in early Middle Eastern Islamic societies.<sup>48</sup>

The death of the Bani Khalid Amir Sulayman Al Hamid in 1752 led the Utub to build a mud wall around their town to protect it against Bedouin attacks since the Bani Khalid could no longer protect them. According to Abu Hakima, the lack of centralized power in Persia, and the declining Ottoman Empire during the 18<sup>th</sup> century allowed the inhabitants of Kuwait to have some degree of autonomy during this time.<sup>49</sup>

All of this historical rise and fall is relevant today because it established the political and economic structures which are still very much in place today. The Al-Sabah ruling family (which is still the current ruling family and one that has been in power since after the Al-Khalid), which had Bedu roots, had nomadic tribes to protect them as their defence force. There existed many merchant families (Al-Ghanim, Boushahri, Al-Hajeri, etc...) and these families have mostly the same status today- one can recognize this particularly because their names are the names of many new companies they founded. One instantly recognizes the Alghanim industries, the Sultan family's factories and supermarkets (The Sultan Center, Agility Logistics Company), retail company), Al-Hajeri pharmacies. There are other companies owned

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<sup>48</sup> Kuwait's relations with Persia and Basra, not to mention the Ottoman Empire and Britain, added another dynamic to relations in the Gulf. A detailed history of these complicated and dynamic relations would be too extensive for this study.

<sup>49</sup> See Abu Hakima, Ahmad Mustafa. *History of Eastern Arabia. The Rise and Development of Bahrain, Kuwait and Wahhabi Saudi Arabia*. London: Probsthain, 1988. as well as Abu Hakima, Ahmad Mustafa. *The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965*. London, UK: Luzac & Company Limited, 1983. (Abu Hakima was born in Palestine and was asked by the Emir to write a book about the history of Kuwait).

by large families/tribes but who do not use the family name. Some large families have gone bankrupt, however, most of the main ones remain the same.

Their influence continued through state-formation, and to the present day.<sup>50</sup> Many high ranking officials still come from major families, and the Chamber of Commerce, a modern structure, is highly influenced by the traditional power relations of the merchant tribes. Tribes that have good relations with the ruling families are thought to be awarded special economic commissions or agreement – or be favoured in calls for proposals. Some of the earlier wealthy families, did, however, go bankrupt in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Cosmopolitanism was evident in Kuwait early on due to its trade-oriented lifestyle and identity, even in its early foundations. In fact, merchants in Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia came to Kuwait to trade. Indeed the five main markets in Kuwait, in addition to the port allowed for much trade to be done.

By 1829, the area of Kuwait was involved in both local and international trade. There was trade with inner Najd and Northern Najd as supplies of wheat, coffee, and Indian produce came through Kuwait. Kuwait imported cloth, rice, sugar, wood, spices and cotton, and coffee from Yemen, tobacco and dried fruits from Persia, wheat and dates from Basra, and cloth and dates from Bahrain. Kuwait exported ghee butter and horses (which it bought from neighbouring Bedouin tribes), and also exported pearls. Horses were brought to Kuwait instead of Basra to avoid paying Ottoman duties.

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<sup>50</sup> And for a more detailed study of the relationship between the ruling family and merchants in Kuwait from 1840 to 1940, one should look at Eran Segal (Chapter 13) in Levy, Zach and Podeh, Elie, ed. *Britain and the Middle East from Imperial Power to Junior Partner*. Brighton / Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2008. and Smith, Simon C., *Kuwait, 1950-1965 Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil*. USA: A British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph. Published by the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1999.

Kuwait operated as a free-trade/ duty free zone and as an alternate to Basra even during 1753 when the Dutch factory at Kharaq Island had much of the merchandise come through Kuwait instead of Basra because of the disagreements they encountered with the Pasha of Basra. The British Factory was also originally based in Basra, but temporarily moved to Kuwait during 1793 – 1795 due to disagreements with Ottoman officials in Basra.

Desert caravans carried rice, wheat, dates, vegetables and fruit from Basra. Basra houses the Shatt al-Arab river where the Tigris and the Euphrates meet and flow into the Arabian Gulf (called the Persian Gulf by the Persians, the Gulf of Basrah by the Ottomans). This location, of being a stop-over for caravans, a harbor for fishing and pearl-diving, and a port for ships, neighbouring and competing with Basrah, made Kuwait an ideal merchant settlement.

Zahra Freeth notes,

The townspeople rely chiefly on imported food supplies, dates from Iraq, and rice, wheat, and sugar from Persia, India, and the Far East. The only foods which are produced in quantity locally are mutton and fish.... Kuwait's chief export now is, of course oil. Skins, wool, and pearls are also sent abroad, but in comparatively small quantities.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the Persian occupation of Basrah between 1775 and 1779 caused many Arab merchants to flee to Kuwait – and thus established Kuwait as not only a political but an economic alternative to Basrah early on, and created a situation where the Kuwaitis had relations with the British as Ottoman proximity broke down.

Interest in the area also grew in later years, when the British Empire was looking for a path to India via sea, while at the same time oil was being discovered

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<sup>51</sup> Freeth, Zahra. *Kuwait was My Home*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Ruskin House, 1956. (43)



(suspected earlier, but the large fields discovered in the late 1930s), and the Ottoman Empire was weakening, especially during WWI.

## **2.2. EARLY STATE FORMATION**

### **2.2.1 The Ottomans and the British**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain began to have a deeper interest in Kuwait. As Zahra Freeth notes, the Ottoman Empire had helped Britain establish itself in the Gulf. While many history books on Kuwait today written in English do not even mention the Ottoman Empire, Britain had always seen Kuwait to be under Ottoman influence, and respected this until they found out about plans for the German Railway extending south with its outlet to be Kuwait.

Kuwait was regarded as being subject to Turkey, and was therefore considered to be in a different position from that of the independent sheikhdoms which had signed treaties in 1892. Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, had in 1892 recognized Kuwait as owing allegiance to Turkey, and Sir Arnold Wilson states that ‘‘until 1896 it was regarded as under the exclusive influence of Turkey. But the prospect of Kuwait’s becoming a Russian coaling station or a German railway terminus outweighed any scruples which Britain may hitherto have felt.’’<sup>52</sup>

The prospect of the railway created deep anxiety among the British, who were rivals with Germany inside Europe as well as on lands abroad. Additionally, the British had strategic interests in Kuwait since it could be a stopping point for ships on the way to British Colonial India. Kuwait had also been a passageway for supplies to the Ottoman Empire and thus, another strategic issue.

Rosemary Zahlan discusses the formation of national identity in the Gulf states and particularly notes the impact of role of the British when they made it a requirement for all ships to travel with the flag of the created Gulf state, rather than

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<sup>52</sup> Freeth 1956, 23.

the Ottoman Empire's flag,<sup>53</sup> and in the way the British dealt only with the heads of each local area, and thus, reinforced and played a part in creating the differences between each Gulf state.<sup>54</sup>

Shaikh Abdullah/ Shaikh Abd bin Sabah (1866- 1892) of Kuwait had actually had very good relations with the Ottoman Empire and asked for the displaced Saudi leader Abdullah bin Faisal to be given asylum in Kuwait. The Ottoman government agreed, and Faisal took refuge sometime between 1872 and 1874. Kuwait was then attacked by Saudi tribes. Abdullah fought against the attacks and order was restored. Shaikh Abdullah was succeeded by his brother Muhammad in 1892. Muhammad was invited by the Ottoman Empire to cooperate in restoring order to Al Hasa (modern day Bahrain). Ben Slot describes the rebellion in Central Arabia and Bahrain/ Al Hasa against the Ottomans and Kuwait's support of the Ottomans, which he writes, led Midhat Pasha to ask that Kuwait accept autonomy but remain under Ottoman rule in 1871<sup>55</sup>.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah succeeded Muhammed, and the policy of Kuwait towards the Ottoman Empire was very different afterwards. Mubarak Al-Sabah ruled Kuwait from 1896 to 1915. Mubarak is praised for his ability to further the autonomy of Kuwait by balancing Ottoman, British, and even Russian and other powers. Mubarak started to establish some of the first formal institutions in Kuwait and is thus for this reason known as, "Mubarak the Great." Certain history books note that Mubarak was known for his cunning and fearless nature, and was not opposed by the Bedouins or by the townsfolk in Kuwait because they feared the consequences.

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<sup>53</sup> There are many other accounts of Kuwaiti ships sailing with the Ottoman flag, and other such links with the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>54</sup> Rosemary Zahlan, *The Making of the Gulf Arab States*. UK: Unwin Hyman Ltd. Billing and Sons, Ltd., 1989. (14- 15).

<sup>55</sup> Slot 2003, 15.

Mubarak was exiled from Kuwait when his pro-Ottoman brother was in power, however, he returned to Kuwait and killed two of his pro-Ottoman brothers (his third brother escaped), and thus took power through this coup. There are detailed accounts of these murders, which apparently occurred at night while the brothers were sleeping. The elites at that time were also supporting Ottoman power, in part also due to having a common religion with the main rulers of the Ottoman Empire. When asked about the murders by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid, Sheikh Mubarak claimed they were carried out by Yusuf ibn Abdullah Al-Ibrahim, 'Chief Vizier' to Sheikh Mohammad, Qaimaqam of Kuwait.

Mubarak's brother's main advisor was Yusuf Al- Ibrahim, an Iraqi man who was pro-Ottoman. Mubarak feared Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, who had fled with Mubarak's nephews who were sons of Muhammad and Jarrah. They sought asylum with the Vali of Basra, Hamdi Pasha. Yusuf Al-Ibrahim attacked Kuwait in 1897, but was driven off by Kuwaiti ships that were on the port of Kuwait. Mubarak also feared that the Ottomans would support Yusuf Al-Ibrahim and his nephews. Mubarak thus asked for British protection during this time.<sup>56</sup>

During this time, Mubarak challenged the power of the Amir of Jabal Shammar, Ibn Rashid, in eastern Arabia together with the former ruler of Riyadh, Abdulrahman Al-Saud, who had been expelled by the Rashidi tribe that was supporting the Ottoman Empire. Mubarak encouraged him to raid the land of Ibn Rashid, and regain Riyadh from the Saud family. Abdulrahman was accompanied by his son, Abdulaziz, who, most probably through the influence of Mubarak, later returned to Saudi Arabia to establish a similar coup as Mubarak. He thus came to the

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<sup>56</sup> Thus, these examples show that the history of Kuwait was quite complex, and that there were other dimensions to the history of Kuwait even when agreements were being made with Britain.

throne after he killed the Rashidis and beginning from the Nejd Empire, began to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through to 1932. However, Al-Saud's son Abdulaziz later attacked Kuwait through the Ikhwan, thus showing the complexities of the politics in the area.

The families of both of Mubarak's murdered brothers were exiled to Iraq, where they remained until Kuwait's independence from Britain. By the time they returned, and shortly after they left, a practice had been established whereby none of their descendants could assume power; leadership was restricted to the sons of Mubarak, Salim and Jabir. This tradition, often thought to be a law, continues today, although the descendants of the killed brothers have been re-accepted into the royal family, allowed back from exile in Iraq, and given citizenship.

Mubarak proceeded to make a series of agreements with the British Government after he came to power, which had great implications. The fact that he made these agreements mostly in secret, and independently on behalf of Kuwait, showed that he was acting as if Kuwait was independent from Ottoman control. At the same time, he kept his relations with the Ottoman powers, (to the degree that Abdul Hamid apparently sent him two wives<sup>57</sup>), and thus balanced British and Ottoman control.

By 1899 most of Eastern Arabia had treaty relations with Britain even though power and borders were not clear in Arabia. Britain made an agreement with Kuwait after accusing Mubarak of supporting piracy as the British Indian Hargisa ship was in Kuwaiti waters. The 1899 agreement stated that Mubarak would not sell or lease any territory to a foreign power without British approval and permission, and there was another agreement on banning piracy on the Gulf waters. Mubarak added the clause

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Raeda, Kuwait, November 2009.

that Britain would protect Kuwait against any attacks. It is said that there was a secret agreement of 1896 which preceded the 1899 agreement.

The 1899 Agreement also came one year after the Berlin-Baghdad railway agreement of 1898 identifying Kuwait as the railway terminal of the Gulf. The Germans had visited both Basra and Kuwait in deciding on the terminal of the railroad. The Germans were going to discuss the permission for the endpoint of the railroad with the Ottoman Sultan, but British India advised them to discuss with Mubarak instead and told them of the 1899 Agreement with Britain. During this time, though the British government was making agreements with the Gulf, the British Ambassador in Constantinople had actually advised the British central government not to make agreements that would compromise Ottoman power in the region. Agreements were made despite this, as Britain needed to stop German power from increasing due to dynamics within Europe. The British Ambassador in Istanbul suggested the appointment of a British officer as resident in Kuwait to convince Mubarak not to attack neighboring areas.

International disagreements between the Ottoman Empire, Britain, Germany, and Russia came at the time that Mubarak was in power and it is always noted in Kuwait that Mubarak handled them with the utmost advantage to the State of Kuwait. For this reason also, Mubarak is reputed to be an extremely powerful and cunning politician even today.

The British made another agreement in 1900 to curtail arms smuggling to Afghanistan from Kuwait. Thus, one can see the link between Kuwait, and Great Power's global interests in other areas of the world.

A series of other agreements followed: the 1904 postal service and an agreement ensuring the British political agent Knox' residence in Kuwait, another

restricting Kuwait's free dealing with Al Saud, Ibn al Rashed or Governors of Basra. Britain rented the Shuwaikh port for British fleet and it is said due to securing a base from which to attack the Ottomans and Germans in case the Berlin- Baghdad – Basra- Kuwait railway was created.

Lord Curzon, who was representing Britain in India, was also meeting with Mubarak during this time and there were a number of sub-agreements – related to the Kuwaiti assistance in suppressing an uprising by an Arabian tribe by helping the Persian Khazál of Muhammara.

In 1913, Kuwait signed the Oil Exploration Agreement with Britain (in which Mubarak gave an undertaking not to allow oil exploitation in Kuwait by anyone excepting a person recommended by the British Government). This was the same year in which Britain negotiated the borders of Kuwait (mostly according to maps from much earlier periods) with the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1913 included an element on borders, in which there were two territories : a core internal territory (which was where the settled population mostly inhabited) as well as an external territory (which included desert roaming areas). This Agreement also recognized the Anglo-Kuwait Agreement of 1899 and other such agreements made between the British and the Kuwaiti leaders.

British policy in 1906 had been to have land on which to build a railway (and Germany and Russia were also making the same request). The Anglo-German Agreement of 1914 settled the issue of the Baghdad Railroad, in that it stated that the end of the line would be Basra. Neither the Anglo-Ottoman Agreement, nor the Anglo-German Agreement were ratified because of World War I, and as noted earlier, was one of the main reasons the British were interested in Kuwait. Also, in 1914, Mubarak asked for British assistance in Basra because he had date plantations

in Fao (apparently earlier given by the Ottomans as thanks in support) and he wanted the Ottoman Empire out of Basra for this reason. This is when the Ottomans began to ask for Ottoman identification by the Kuwaiti owners of the farms.

The British also had an agreement that all wealth from oil was to be shared among the citizens (probably to avoid any uprising as the British Empire was face to face with a lot of discontented masses in the Middle East).

Much to the wrath of the British Government at the time, Mubarak's two successors were supportive of the Ottoman Empire, and supplies were once again sent from Kuwait to the Ottomans during the First World War. Additionally, disagreements between the lines of the Sabah family's older brothers of Mubarak and those in power, apparently continue today with a television station apparently being broadcast by the opposition.<sup>58</sup>

Mubarak had died in 1915 and his eldest son Jabir took the throne. When Sheikh Jabir passed away in 1917, his brother Salim, who supported the Ottoman Empire succeeded him. When the British government discovered in 1918 that supplies were reaching the Ottomans in Damascus from Kuwait, it enforced a sea blockade in Kuwait. The British issued a sharp warning against the Sheikh.

In this way, we can see that cooperation with the British or with the Ottoman Empire was influenced by trade benefits and European politics, and by the politics of each ruler because only shortly after Mubarak died, Kuwait was once again cooperating with the Ottoman Empire. Thus, there was no widespread dislike of the Ottomans, as cited in some sources and the issue is more complex than that. However, the Ottoman Empire had become very weak and loyalty to a disintegrating empire was not practical. Additionally, certain policies initiated by the Ottomans,

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with H., Kuwait, April 7, 2010.

such as not holding arms, were not very popular in a desert setting where nomads needed to defend themselves against frequent tribal raids.

### **2.2.2. Formation of Borders**

During the pre-nation-state, Ottoman Empire era, the tribes of the Gulf region were closely connected. Nomadic tribes living inland, making a living off herding and grazing animals and handicrafts were known as ‘Bedu.’ They moved from the Gulf to the North towards Iran, Iraq, and even “Syria” (then including Jordan) in the Summer, and South again in the Winter, even though each nomadic tribe still was connected to an area of land called the “Dira,” which was something like a homeland (for example the Adwani and Otaibi were based in Taif, Saudi Arabia; the Ajmi were from Al-Wadi, Saudi Arabia; the Mutairi were from an area near Kuwait) . All this changed formally with the nation-state when boundaries were drawn between these areas. However, up until the 1960s, there was still an understanding that allowed the Bedouin to travel freely between the new nations, and some of the tribal linkages still continue informally today, even though the individuals are strictly loyal to the nation-state that they are the citizens of.

Additionally, Emir of the time still spent his summers in Syria, according to a KOC magazine from 1957 where the caption of a photo of the Emir returning from Damascus reads, “The last photograph taken of the late Sheikh Abdulla al Ahmad on January 3<sup>rd</sup> when he returned from Damascus, a city of which he was very fond. He managed to spend a few months there each summer during the past few years.”<sup>59</sup> The current head of the Al-Shammari tribe that has family in countries including Iraq and Kuwait, currently still resides in Syria, for example.

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<sup>59</sup> *The Kuwaiti – Published Weekly for the Employees of Kuwait Oil Company Limited.* Thursday 31 January, 1957.



Freeth's descriptions also depict the migratory nature of the era, showing that migration and "border"- crossing was not only among some groups, but that the very rulers of the separate entities still practiced trans- "nationalism" – just a few years prior to the formation of the independent nation-states in the area.

Kuwait was nearly invaded by Saudi Arabia in 1919 during the Ikhwan Rebellion. The Ikhwan were considered a fanatic Wahhabi group in the Najd (present day Saudi Arabia) and in fact, the origins of the Wahhabi group and the Ikhwan are considered to be related. The Wahhabi movement, apparently first emerged as a political movement. Apparently, the head of the Ikhwan movement later settled in Istanbul, however, this is historically confusing given the mixed relations between the Wahhabis and the Ottomans.

Ibn Saud had mixed relations with the Ikhwan. On the one hand, they were a threat to him due to their strong tribal alliance and rebellious nature, on the other hand, their actions served Ibn Saud in some ways (apparently, the Saudi Wahhabi relation with nomadic tribes was also different in the sense that they paid the annual Muslim mandatory zakat charity to the Saudi Amir, as noted by J.C. Wilkinson<sup>60</sup>).

Ibn Saud encouraged Ikhwan settlement along the border with Kuwait, though it is interesting to note that some of these Ikhwan tribes later stayed in Kuwait, and were even granted citizenship – thus showing the dynamics of state-formation, tribal relations, and citizenship.

The main issue is that the Ikhwan Rebellion had two major outcomes. The first outcome was that the Rebellion made clear the need to establish formal boundaries between the conflicting areas. The second outcome was that the

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<sup>60</sup> J.C. Wilkinson. "Nomadic territory as a factor in defining Arabia's boundaries." In Mundy, Martha and Musallam, Basim, ed. *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. (59)

establishment of these boundaries were also accompanied by agreements about tribes and which tribe belonged to which Dira,<sup>61</sup> as a way of solving the Ikhwan problem.

Apparently, a part of the Ikhwan movement, which originated in present day Saudi Arabia and was supposed to consolidate various tribes and promote settlement rather than nomadism, as well as promote a strict Wahhabi religious following, was even to have some tribes settle in “hujar” which were previously allocated sites. The Útayba, Harb, Mutayr, and Qahtan tribes, were expected to set an example and

...were expected to sell their camels and sheep, abandon their traditional nomadic habits, which in the past had been conducive to raids and defections, and become sedentary. By adopting agriculture and joining a religious revivalist movement, these tribes were also supposed to develop a new sense of cohesion and loyalty typical of a community of believers and to proselytize other tribal groups in the revivalist Wahhabi creed in order to extend pro-Saudi support. In addition, Ibn –Sa’ud sought to benefit from their military skills by turning them into a standing army, known as the Ikhwan, in service to the state.<sup>62</sup>

Freeth notes that the bloody battles were also related to a Sunni/Shia divide, thus, an indication that this division (which is apparently related to citizenship as well) existed strongly even early on.

In fierce Sunni hatred of the Shia Iraqi tribes, the puritanical Brotherhood had attacked a large encampment of Bani Malik shepherds here. Killing thirty-seven Iraqi men, the Ikhwan ... plundered many of the Iraqi families of all their possessions ... in a manner previously unparalleled in desert warfare<sup>63</sup>.

Despite the new concept of boundaries and territoriality, which Kostiner and Khoury attribute to the British involvement,<sup>64</sup> Ibn Saud still had the idea of flexible, borderless areas based on nomadic areas.

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<sup>61</sup> Segal, Eran (Chapter13 : The Uqair Conference (1922) Revisited : Britain and the Question of Boundaries in the Arabian Peninsula in Levy and Podeh 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Khoury and Kostiner 1990, 231.

<sup>63</sup> Freeth, Zahra. *A New Look at Kuwait*. UK: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Ruskin House, 1972. (173)

<sup>64</sup> Khoury and Kostiner 1990, 231.

In the treaties of Muhamara (May 1922) and Úqayr (December 1922) Ibn Sa'ud had to forego his concept of flexible, undemarcated frontiers based on tribal grazing zones and adopt the European concept of a border line. During the Hada' and Bahra conferences in the fall of 1925 the agreements delimiting the frontiers of the Saudi state with Iraq and Transjordan were signed. A vivid description of the collusion between the imposed frontier line and the tribal frontier was given by a British spectator who witnessed the Úqar conference. The British high commissioner for Iraq, Sir Percy Cox, called Ibn Sa'ud's "tribal boundary idea" childish. Against the backdrop of the Najdi ruler's sobbing, Cox took a pencil and "carefully drew a boundary line"<sup>65</sup>.

The Uqair Conference of 1922, following the meeting in May 1922 I Muhammara in present day southern Iran, settled the boundary dispute between Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Under the observance of the British, much land was given to Saudi Arabia from Kuwait to compensate for the losses on the Saudi side during the Ikhwan rebellion, and to compensate for the land that was given to Iraq which Saudi Arabia actually claimed.

However, a year after the Conference, the ruler of Najd (Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia) tried to collect taxes from the Najdi Bedouin who stopped to trade in the area of Kuwait causing a crisis. As these tribes then found other areas to trade, Kuwaiti merchants had a loss during the crisis which lasted 14 years. This deprivation and poverty was also exacerbated by tribal conflict and economic depression in the 30s. This created anti-government agitation and a need for social reform.<sup>66</sup>

### **2.2.3. Bedouins and the Formation of the Defence Forces**

As noted above - while the oil sector, bureaucracy, and other sectors absorbed the workers, it is also widely claimed that some of the tribes were recruited into the Military. However, some also believe that the bidoon foreigners pretended to be of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>66</sup> Ismael, Jacqueline. *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective*. New York, USA: Syracuse University Press, 1982

certain tribes just to be able to have more powerful jobs in the military since recruitment in the military was through tribal chiefs.<sup>67</sup> It is claimed that the Security Forces in Kuwait are mixed between Awazim and Reshayda (locally based tribes) and roaming, some Northern and some Southern tribes, for example, the Aneza (which extends to Syria, Jordan and Iraq).<sup>68</sup> The Shammar are also Northern tribes. The Al-Awazim, Al-Rashayda, Ajman and Eneza tribes stayed in the defence forces and are still in the Ministry of Defence (and other ministries) today. The Awazim are in the Ministry of Electricity.

Many bidoon were badu from the Shammar and Anayzah (also called Shammari and Enezi) tribes, two very deep rooted and extensive tribes. Apparently, the Emir encouraged them to settle outside the old city wall. Kuwait had an aliens' law as early as 1959, and tribal members were exempt from residency laws that applied to foreigners, and these tribal members were granted most rights.<sup>69</sup>

Jill Crystal has an excellent description of the link between tribes, state-formation, and statelessness.<sup>70</sup> She notes, "The military threat from Iraq [in 1960] coupled with the tribes' historical military role prompted Kuwait's ruler to offer many previously nominally stateless beduin tribes citizenship along with all the attendant rights in exchange for military service<sup>71</sup>." Additionally, Kuwait sent troops to Gaza in 1967 to defend the Palestinians.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Interview, G.A. Kuwait, November 3, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Crystal, Jill. "Public Order and Authority : Policing Kuwait" in Dresch, Paul and Piscatori, James, ed., *Monarchies and Nations : Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2005

<sup>70</sup> Crystal 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Crystal, Jill. *The Transformation of an Oil State*. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford : Westview Press, 1992. (75-76)

<sup>72</sup> also see Al-Omar, who quotes pre- 1991 Gulf War figures of Palestinians in Kuwait 38 % of the non-native population, and 19 % of the entire population and this influenced Kuwait's, internal, as well as external politics. Palestinians were later accused of supporting Saddam Hussein and his idea of 'Pan Arabism.' As Longva and others also note, the change in the

After the assembly opened, the rulers again encouraged large numbers of tribal families to settle in Kuwait, enticing them with new housing, social services, and jobs – including jobs with the state as soldiers, police officers, guards, and bodyguards. Their children received special fellowships and guarantees of special state jobs.<sup>73</sup>

Apparently, some took up multiple citizenship from multiple Gulf countries.<sup>74</sup>

Most, however, became stateless.

Because the process of granting nationality was selective and uneven, some beduin who were long resident in Kuwait fell through the cracks, becoming stateless *bidun jinsiyyah* (withouth nationality). This group, on the edge of legality, includes a range of residents. Some are *bidun*, beduins whose families historically lived in the desert territory in or – and this is a complicating factor – near Kuwait, but who, under the government’s new enforcement policy, were unable to produce papers proving historical residency in Kuwait and hence entitlement to nationality.

The employment of those outside the original city walls, their hopes and claims of citizenship, and hence the creation of a category of *bidoon* continued for a long time, because most Kuwaiti citizens could easily find more attractive jobs in other sectors in Kuwait.<sup>75</sup>

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countries of origin of foreign domestic and labour workers in Kuwait was related to an attempted ‘depoliticization’ of Kuwait from regional politics. Many Palestinians were granted citizenship in the mid-century and many prominent Kuwaitis today have Palestinian origin.

<sup>73</sup> Crystal 1992, 75 – 76.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Supported by an interview with a “bidoon” person with dual citizenship.

<sup>75</sup> Crystal 1992, 75-76.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **OIL, TRIBES AND MASS EMPLOYMENT**

This chapter aims to explore the social effects of the discovery of oil, namely, in the change of the lifestyle, and, as one of my informers put it, “going from the camel to the Prada.”<sup>76</sup> The chapter also explores the impact of oil in state-formation and the creation of the welfare state, and in the influx of a new working population as a result of oil. The impact of oil wealth had an effect on citizenship applications, as well as state-tribe relations.

### **3.1. OIL AND ITS SOCIAL IMPACT**

#### **3.1.1. State-Formation, Oil and the Welfare State**

The oil wealth that emerged in Kuwait around the time of early state formation affected the states’ relationship with its citizens. It was the catalyst for the creation of various institutions, the organization and creation of the modern city in Kuwait. The establishment of the welfare state in turn, created political acquiescence

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Fawas., Kuwait, August 10, 2009. (male Kuwaiti citizen of 31 years, who identifies himself as Bedu and is currently working in the Ministry of Defence).

to the Government and established rule. The welfare-state continues today to erase the debts of its companies and citizens.

The discovery of exportable oil decreased loyalty to the tribe by increasing social mobility between the Bedu and Hadhar to where the Bedu could become settled, “civilized,” Hadhar. As will explained later, oil wealth also helped establish a distributive state whereby the royal family could have direct relations with its citizens, and not only tribal ones. The distributive policies also create another type of loyalty.

The discovery of exportable oil also increased immigration to Kuwait, since many workers were needed to re-build the city and create the oil industry. Since the oil industry was created around the same time as the state was developing, it paralleled the creation of a welfare state. Additionally, this was also because one of the key conditions in agreements with Britain, was also that Kuwait distribute its wealth among its citizens. The nomadic lifestyle was also affected by the expansion of the settled areas in Kuwait, and by the recruitment of many of the nomads in Oil Company and other jobs. Kuwait could not have emerged as the same nation with such a low population as was present in 1920, and thus, the influx of workers as a result of oil greatly influenced state formation.

Oil was found by the British Expedition that came to study the reported “Black Lakes” on the surface of the desert sand in Kuwait just before World War II. As noted earlier, one of the agreements the British made with Mubarak, at the turn of the century was that no other nation or company could drill in Kuwait. The knowledge that there were minerals below the surface of the earth in the area of Kuwait was known centuries ago and oil was used for healing camel wounds, to light lamps, and other tasks.

Oil discovery, drilling, and export came in various stages. The Kuwait Oil Company was formed by Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now British Petroleum Company) and Gulf Oil Corporation (now Chevron) in 1934.<sup>77</sup> Geophysical explorations were carried out between 1935- 1936, with oil discovered in Bahrah, and in Burgan in 1938. Eight wells were drilled there, until 1942, when the drilling was halted until the end of the World War II, and drilling resumed in 1945.<sup>78</sup> Thus, commercial drilling in Kuwait did not start until after World War II, and it was on June 30, 1946 that the first oil shipment was exported and taken to England. Turkey had an oil concession agreement at the time.

The cessation of oil exports from Iran in 1951 due to nationalism helped open the external oil market of Kuwait<sup>79</sup>. Many in the oil industry in Abadan also moved to Kuwait, as is known from oral history, as well as documentation in the Oil Company's weekly newsletters<sup>80</sup>. A small neighbourhood was built by the British in the area of Ahmadi where the Kuwait oil company was based.

The process of nationalization of the company was gradual. Following the Kuwait National Assembly's ratification of a participation agreement in 1974, the State of Kuwait was given 60% control of the operations of KOC, with the remaining divided equally between BP and Gulf. It was in March 1975 that the Kuwait Government assumed full ownership of the Company.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "Kuwait Oil Company (K.S.C.) Significant Dates," *2005 Calendar/Diary/Planner*, Kuwait Oil Company, (KSC), Public Relations and Information Group.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Omar, Fuad A., *Bureaucracy State and Development in Kuwait and Arab Gulf States A Comparative Study*. Institute of Policy Studies- The Islamic Foundation Islamabad, Pakistan: Institute of Policy Studies, Shirkat Printing Press, 1997. (47)

<sup>80</sup> *The Kuwaiti – Published Weekly for the Employees of Kuwait Oil Company Limited*. Various issues during 1957.

<sup>81</sup> Kuwait Oil Company Significant Dates 2005.



The celebration of the full nationalization of the Oil Company took place on a large scale in December 2009. It was called the ‘Diamond Jubilee,’ and the Turkish President Abdullah Gul attended the ceremony.<sup>82</sup>

In an attempt at Kuwaitization, the government tried to have as many Kuwaiti staff as possible. The process of Kuwaitization in Kuwait is a reoccurring effort that emerges again and again in efforts to reduce the number of foreign workers in high positions in a country where 70% of the population is non-Kuwaiti. The first Kuwaiti, after a series of British since the first one in 1948, to serve as the Chairman and Managing Director (C and MD) of the Kuwait Oil Company was Ahmad M. Jaafar, who served from 1975 to 1983.

May 1978 was also a significant year in the nationalization of the oil industry, as KOC was then entrusted with the oil-production operations formerly carried out by the American Independent Oil Company, before the latter’s concession expired.<sup>83</sup> In fact, the KOC had a strong influence, if not the actual decision-making power, in terms of how the land was used in Kuwait because of its ownership of the land, and because there could be oil beneath the land.

A Divided Zone was also established between Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Joint projects would be conducted along this buffer zone between the international boundaries. The Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (K.S.C.) was created on February 10, 2002 to represent the State of Kuwait in the Divided Zone projects and took over the management of the offshore drilling area of the Divided Zone when the concession of the Arabian Oil Company, Ltd. came to an end as late as 2003.

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<sup>82</sup> *The Kuwait Digest 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Issue*. Ahmadi, Kuwait : Al-Nazaer Printing Press, January – March 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Kuwait Oil Company Significant Dates 2005.

The oil companies had a large say in the development of Kuwait. The oil companies are still consulted on every building or structure that is built on Kuwaiti land because there could be a potential oil field underneath, or it could interrupt a current, or future oil pipeline. Hence, the Kuwait Oil Company has strong influence, if not the actual decision-making power over all projects in terms of how land is used in Kuwait and the scope of this power extends to the offshore, joint-border areas.

The oil wealth helped create a welfare state, thus, reducing the political and economic-based conflicts that were apparently emerging before<sup>84</sup>. This idea is very similar to the welfare state and employment of nationals by state institutions, and thus the political economy model apparent in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East. Jacqueline Ismael writes of the financial support the royal family gives to its citizens in return for loyalty, applying the dependency theory on the case of Kuwait.<sup>85</sup> William Cleveland similarly writes that this method assured the survival of the royal families,” and “muted discontent by the skilful distribution of oil income, providing well-paying jobs for the educated elite and generous welfare systems for the population as a whole,” and created “remarkable political stability,” but that it postponed many problems.<sup>86</sup>

As Roger Owen notes, and as is the prevailing view of scholars of the Middle East, oil money as used to pacify opposition to the ruling family.

Those [states] with oil now had an expanding income, part of which they could distribute to their own family in various ways, part of which they used to develop the infrastructure and the social services for the benefit of their own citizens. Meanwhile, growing economic activity gave them the option either of permitting their own relatives to go into business or, as in Kuwait, of striking a deal with the powerful merchant community, by which the latter

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<sup>84</sup> Gause 1994, 23. in Al-Omar 1997, 64.

<sup>85</sup> Ismael, Jacqueline S. *Kuwait: Dependency and Class in a Rentier State*. USA: University Press of Florida, 1993. and Ismael 1982.

<sup>86</sup> Cleveland, William L. *A History of the Modern Middle East – Second Edition*. UK : Westview Press, Perseus Books Group, 2000. (456)

was persuaded to limit its demands for political participation in exchange for a free hand to make money.<sup>87</sup>

### **3.1.2. Formation and Financing of State Institutions**

The first bureaucratic structure in Kuwait was the municipality in 1931. Its establishment is mainly due to the suggestion of the merchant families to the royal family. It was also strongly influenced by the establishment of a municipality in Bahrain. The municipality included public services such as healthcare. A Construction Development Board, similar to the one in Iraq, was created in 1952 for all civil construction and modernization in Kuwait<sup>88</sup>.

Britain's full role in the state-formation in Kuwait as related to the oil company is difficult to trace without going through archives at the University of Warwick, UK since much of the British records, especially those with the Kuwait Oil Company, were taken back to Britain and are mostly with the University of Warwick, according to officials at the Local Relations Department of the Kuwait Oil Company.<sup>89</sup>

State-building in Kuwait, at least in terms of the modern nation-state, was strongly paralleled by external influence (if not anything else, through foreign experts) and private initiatives such as the hospital and educational system. Both of these institutions were also influenced by missionary work, and thus, external influence.

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<sup>87</sup> Owen, Roger. *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, UK: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005. (43).

<sup>88</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 48-49.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with the K.O.C. Local Relations Department, Kuwait, January 2010. In the interview, the KOC officials noted that many of the documents were with the University of Warwick, taken back to Britain after the British formally left Kuwait. This has not been confirmed with the University of Warwick, UK.

Britain especially played a strong role in the formation of the State of Kuwait – either through its advisors (and Tony Blair is an advisor to Kuwait today), or other. Hence, many of the institutions in Kuwait were already formed between the years between the agreement with the British Empire and the termination of these agreements in 1961.

A legislative assembly with 14 members existed in Kuwait on June 24, 1938 (the year called the Year of the Majlis or Year of the Assembly) and apparently one of its results was the creation of departments such as the Finance Department. These and other such institutions did not last long, and “...these councils were created for specific purposes, mainly to legitimate the power of the ruling family. As their role was fulfilled, they were terminated<sup>90</sup>.” This links the need to reinforce the rule of the ruling family, and the establishment of state structures. The Parliament was dissolved in 1976, 1986, and 2008 due to differences between the Amir and the Assembly. The dissolutions in 1976 and 2008 are attributed to fears of internal problems as a result of external Middle Eastern problems (respectively the Civil War in Lebanon as well as increasing Sunni/Shia tensions).

Many different institutions were created very rapidly due to the needs that arose with the fast development of Kuwait. These institutions later rapidly changed, and were reformed with the Kuwait high executive committee in 1954 and the committee for reorganization and administrative reform in order to readjust the roles of the institutions to better accommodate the needs and to be more relevant to the changed country<sup>91</sup>. Al-Omar notes, “In addition, this committee was established as a device to control the decisions of senior members of the ruling family<sup>92</sup>” Thus, this

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<sup>90</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 49.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Omar 1997 (citing Liebensy), 1956.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 50.

shows that there was an attempt to check the power of the Sabah ruling family /tribe, even though Al-Ebraheem notes that the presidents of all the departments of the government were from the Sabah family, and all were appointed or selected on the basis of personal realations, hence, as he puts it there was “no difference between the state and the ruler.<sup>93</sup>” Education was used as a tool to support the nationalization process through native manpower development.

It is claimed that Kuwait is the most democratic country in the Gulf. The first elected National Assembly of Kuwait was in 1963, and the Al-Sabah, merchants, and Bedouin were among the winners.

The population growth and native manpower development were less than the requirements of bureaucracy during its emergence.<sup>94</sup> The number of Government employees increased more than five times the amount in 1966 in a ten year span by 1976. Thus, proof that there was a need for a larger, naturalized population. Much of the population were sailors who were too old to be trained for other work, and who could only be absorbed in public employment especially since the other economic sectors were weak.<sup>95</sup>

The mass employment that was possible allowed for the state to “have a direct link to tribesmen or family members without the mediation of tribe or family chief.<sup>96</sup> This is highly significant because the state did not necessarily need to have certain relationships with tribes in order to create a state – the distributive policies already created that relationship and that loyalty.

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<sup>93</sup> Al-Ebraheem, Hassan A. *Kuwait : A Political Study*. Dissertation. Shuweikh, Kuwait : Al Qabas Printing Press. Kuwait University : 1975 (134-136).

<sup>94</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 76.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 64.

Saul S. Friedman notes that “As late as 1939, Kuwait had no formal government. Most of its 350,000 people were illiterate Bedouin, shepherds, goat herders, caravan merchants or pearl fishers, with an income averaging \$35 per year.<sup>97</sup>” While he is mistaken in his descriptions of when oil was found, and some other issues in the chapter, his note on the population of Kuwait in 1939 could be accurate. If so, the high increase in population to 22,073 in 1966 as cited in the paragraph above, cannot solely be explained through reproduction – but includes an influx either of nomadic tribes, or “foreigners,” and hence these facts establish a clear link between state-formation, oil and bureaucracy formation in a welfare state, and the influx of workers.

## **3.2. TRIBES AND STATE FORMATION**

### **3.2.1. Tribal Support**

One must understand that in addition to the Hadhar and the Bedouin were certain tribes that were of a ‘lower’ – or non-Asil status. The shepherds of the society would be made up of members of these tribes, or “tribeless” people. “True” Bedouins would care for the camels, but not the sheep. Additionally, the Bedu thought poorly of anyone engaged in handicrafts. The especially low status would be of those who make charcoaled smoked lemons. Thus, even early on- the gulf had an internal social structuring that makes itself apparent today when one sees the many layers and types of social othering. These values have been transferred to citizenship and current social relations. In fact, in most cases, it is considered to be socially better to marry a foreigner who is poor and originally non-Muslim, rather than someone of a lower

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<sup>97</sup> Friedman, Saul S., *A History of the Middle East*. USA: McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006.

tribal group. Certain tribal groups whose ancestors apparently ‘offered their wives and daughters to guests,’ are still marred by this rumor and their social status is affected.

Al-Omar notes that even state officials were selected “due to their social status and loyalty to the ruling regime,” and becoming a state official was a form of upward mobility<sup>98</sup>. This phenomenon also needs to be looked at more closely, as it was a way for persons of tribes with lesser power to move upwards in a society that was moving from tribalism to statehood.

Tribal support was an essential ingredient in the foundation of the Gulf States<sup>99</sup>. There were no armies under tribal and colonial rule. Tribes fought and commonly raided each other’s settlements, pirates attacked at sea. “However, tribal support was fragile and chiefs easily changed alliances and moved from the jurisdiction of one ruler to another, according to the standard treatment and extent of financial rewards<sup>100</sup>.” Freeth also discusses this when discussing tribal loyalties and elections – and this ties in with assumptions that the nomadic tribes are not loyal.

It is also argued that the Royal Family granted citizenship to a number of Bedouins mostly from the areas of current Saudi Arabia, to balance its power against the merchant families by creating an every-loyal class. In search of new Allies and to balance the influence of other interest groups, the regimes in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states granted Bedouins citizenship in large numbers and gave them preference in recruitment for security and unskilled jobs.<sup>101</sup> The Constitution was a

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<sup>98</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 53.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid (citing Gause 1994), 52.

<sup>100</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 52.

<sup>101</sup> Freeth and Winston, 1972.

compromise between the ruling family's interest and people's demands, a "blend of modern democratic models with tribal structures and values"<sup>102</sup>.

Al-Omar's description of the process is most insightful,

The GCC governments initiated and supported a policy for massive naturalisation of the Bedouin population and encouragement of their settlement. Since many tribesmen lacked qualifications and were not given the opportunity to be trained, continuous pressure was exerted to increase the budget allocation for unskilled jobs to absorb them within the bureaucracy. For example, in Kuwait, 55 percent of unskilled labour employed from 1940 till 1966 were recruited during the years 1961-65 and 23 percent joined the government during 1964-65 alone. As such, the policy of allies-building stimulated the need to increase job openings and initiated the nationalisation process<sup>103</sup>

During the 1967 election and the mass naturalization campaign, the government naturalized tens of thousands of Bedouin provided that they vote and were loyal to the rulers. Apparently, "the state encouraged tribes to run Assembly candidates... reinforced the government's attempts to break down clan loyalties by replacing them with both smaller family loyalties and larger tribal loyalties..." especially with the Ajman.<sup>104</sup>

Shortly after independence in 1961 the ruling family followed an active policy of 'naturalizing' the Bedouins. The loyalty of these 'manufactured citizens' was much easier to gain than that of the established commercial elites. The impact of the tribes on politics and elections in Kuwait always remained strong thereafter, with the following tribes playing key political roles: Al-Áwazim, Útaiba, Shammar, Al-Fudul, Ázman, Al-Rashayida and Mutair. These tribes act as semi-autonomous corps when preparing for elections, deciding internally on their candidates, in tribal primaries, before standing openly for elections.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 56.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>104</sup> Crytal 1995, 89 (on the Ajman, quoting Al-Haddad, Mohammad. The effects of detribalization and sedentarization on the socio-economic structure of the tribes of the Arabian peninsula: Ajman tribe as a case study. PhD Dissertation. Kansas State University).

<sup>105</sup> [for full tables see Al-Nafisi, 1978: 28ff, 74-90]." Ayubi 2005, 242.



Several Iranians were also granted citizenship, it is argued: in order to make different groups in Kuwait and create diversity and thus balance the power so that there would not be several very strong tribes. Thus, some Iranians were granted citizenship<sup>106</sup>. Another account is such that those fleeing Mossadaq's nationalization in Iran were also granted citizenship. All these groups formed the new working class in Kuwait.

At the same time, "A great influx of immigrants, especially Arabs, occurred during 1957- 75 due to huge labour demand for social and economic development. The private sector still depends entirely on the expatriate labour force with less than 15 percent native workforce in most cases<sup>107</sup>."

Later, immigration slowed down due to tight immigration regulations since the Egyptian and Palestinian foreign workers were seen to have too much political influence (especially over schoolchildren which some of them were teaching). In addition, it has been noticed that the composition of the ethnic profile has changed towards singles and short-term labour, mainly Asian."<sup>108</sup> The huge influx of foreign workers was also threatening to the native population at one stage. Strict immigration and citizenship laws prevent many foreigners from ever becoming citizens. This is necessary, according to many, otherwise, the nation would be at threat from having so large a foreign presence with such control. Leading, once again to, "Kuwaitization," which was first seen in the oil company and will be described later.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview, A.A.2 Kuwait April 4, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 76.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Omar 1997, 63. Al-Omar later notes the preference towards Arab migrant workers, and Freeth notes that in 1956, Persian and Iraqi immigrants formed the largest number of foreign workers in Kuwait and predicts that they will most likely return to their countries upon retirement or end of service, after this group comes the Palestinians, which she suspects will not be able to return and are intending to settle in Kuwait (Freeth 1956, 155-156). Longva notes that Asia workers were later preferred to Arab workers, which Kuwaitis found to be too political enough to affect their daily lives.

The discovery of oil created a lot of change in the society from changing the settlement patters. This ranged from changing the status quo through upward and downward social mobility to changing the status quo on a much larger scale by altering the relationship between the merchant families and the royal family due to the new wealth, and hence recovery of power, accumulated by the royal family through oil.

After the discovery of oil in 1936- 37, merchant families knew that the oil wealth was coming, and went to Iraq (they did not want to work in the oil sector but continue their career paths, and probably knew that the oil companies were mostly hiring experts from abroad and labourers and others they intended to train in the field, locally. They approached King Ghazi in Iraq and formed an alliance with him<sup>109</sup>. This was another factor forcing the Emir to create a Parliament in 1938. Apparently, with the strong feeling that there would be a lot of wealth from the oil in Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber dissolved the parliament. The parliament was dissolved many times after that, but Kuwait is ‘the only country that has had a functioning parliament since the 1960s.’<sup>110</sup> Some of the Bedouin families also argue that the oil wealth went directly to the merchants, or Hadhar, since they were already settled along the coastline and involved in marital trading and other work. This is still an issue in society in contemporary Kuwait.

Different dynamics emerge upon a closer examination of the power relations between the royal family and the merchants. It is argued that since 1946, there was

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<sup>109</sup> Interview, A.A.2, Kuwait, April 4, 2010.

<sup>110</sup> Al-Kazi, Lubna Ahmed, ‘Chapter 10: ‘Gulf Societies: Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity’ in Alaharekh, Alanoud & Springborg, Robert, *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, Lebanon: SAQI (in association with London Middle East Institute SOAS), 2008. (177)

no need for the merchant families from the perspective of the ruling family, and that the ruling family was self-sufficient, so to speak, due to the great oil wealth.

The Year of the Majlis in 1938 actually included the government's heavy crackdown on rulers of the opposition movement, shooting and chaining them.<sup>111</sup> Kuwaiti society was divided and apparently, still today, these merchant families are still considered unreliable and those who stood by the royal family are richly rewarded, and nouveau rich<sup>112</sup>. This is still an issue today, as apparently the opposition to the Sabah family (the Malik movement) has established a television station that is anti-Sabah.

Yet other families lost their fortunes in social mobility during this early period of state-formation. With the WWI restrictions on import and export (especially logistical support to the Ottomans), the Al Khamis and Al Mudaris families lost their fortunes and apparently, even in 1916 a prominent religious man originally from Mauritania, but who came from Egypt, was deported for supporting the Ottomans<sup>113</sup>.

### **3.2.2. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem (1950- 1965) and Tribes**

The era that is most significant in Kuwait's history in terms of tribes and state-formation is the time of Abdullah Al-Salem (1950 – 1965). Sheikh Abdullah seems also to be the most popular ruler in Kuwait and known for being down to earth, focused on equality and fairness. At one period, the National Day celebrated in Kuwait was not the day of independence from British protection, but rather Sheikh Abdullah's birthday.

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with K., Kuwait, August 7, 2010.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with H.1. Kuwait, April 7, 2010.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with K. Kuwait. August 7, 2010.

Much naturalization took place shortly after independence in 1961, as noted above, and this was during the time of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim, and more so during Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (between 20,000 to 200,000).

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem established a consultation with the tribes in order to form the constitution. He was heavily influenced by political processes in India and independence movement there as he spent many years there.<sup>114</sup> It is important to note the nationalism and independence and anti-colonial movements taking place in the world at this time. It was the movements namely in India and the Middle East that particularly affected the movement in Kuwait, although, naturally, Kuwait's experience of nationalism and independence was much different from both the Indian sub-continent as well as the Arab and greater Middle East.

Apparently, the tribes Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem met with were the merchant families that had lost their power after the discovery and export of oil began. These tribes wanted a say in the affairs of the country again, and approached the Sheikh. The alleged agreement made was that the Sheikh would appease the merchant tribes by guaranteeing a large share of the oil benefits in exchange that these families would not be involved in politics. However, there is no evidence to support this.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem also had two advisors from Egypt. This is also highly significant because of the politics of state-formation that were going on in Egypt at the time. Kuwait looked for experts from the Arab world, including teachers and lawyers from Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon. As noted earlier, later on, this began to politicize issues in Kuwait<sup>115</sup> and the foreign labour began to be replaced

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with A.A.2. Kuwait, April 4, 2010

<sup>115</sup> See Ghabra, Shafeeq, *Palestinians in Kuwait : The family and the politics of survival*. Westview Special Studies on the Middle East. Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987. and particularly Lienhardt 1993, Chapter III, pp 87- 105.

by the Desi (ie. a term used for those from South Asia), to curb the political influence the Palestinian teachers had on schoolchildren.

The emergence of the emphasis on tribal ties is also related to this, as some wanted to keep away from nationalistic and religious fervour, which was going on in the rest of the Middle East at the time. As one father noted to me, “Ofcourse, we stressed tribal ties in upbringing our children also because we did not want them to be involved in religious and nationalistic movements.”<sup>116</sup>

Parliamentary life began with the first elections in 1962, and hence Kuwait moved on in becoming an independent nation-state. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem is highly praised by most in Kuwait for his emphasis on equality and democracy and the number of key events that took place during his time are evidence of his focus on these issues.<sup>117</sup>

### **3.2.3. Independence and International Recognition as a Nation**

The tribal presence in Kuwait today is even more pronounced because the country went from a tribal structure to a state very quickly. Additionally, the incredibly fast booming economic change in Kuwait did not allow for time for the establishment of a clear division between tribe and state. Indeed, tribal power relations, roles and status-quo were all transferred to the nation-state – set up as a welfare state with the revenues from oil. This slightly altered the status quo as the “nouveau riche” could move up the social ladder – and caused a re-organization of the nomadic tribes.

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with M1, Kuwait, October 9, 2009.

<sup>117</sup> See also Bacik, Gokhan. *Hybrid Sovereignty in the Arab Middle East: The Cases of Kuwait, Jordan, and Iraq*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. for an account of state-formation and colonialism.

Kuwait obtained independence from the British Empire in 1961, and apparently popular feeling even around 1956 was in favour of immediate independence, even though leaders were seeking British help at the time<sup>118</sup>.

Kuwait was independent from British control in 1961. Kuwait then joined the Arab League, and became a member of the UN two years after its independence.

A few months after independence from Britain in 1961, Iraq once again laid claims to Kuwait and merchant families convinced the royal family to call on the British to aid. Iraq thought Kuwait and Britain overreacted. Britain, as well as the Arab League force from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the United Arab Republic came to aid Kuwait.<sup>119</sup>

To this day, claims of historic connections are stated by Iraq and Ottoman linkages are used to justify these claims, which are heavily refuted by Kuwait in fear that it will be used to try to justify any current action to gain Kuwait.

As Heater writes,

“No imperial power provided anything like an adequate training in citizenship for their colonial peoples in preparation for independence. As a consequence, the new states were presented with a massive task of ‘nation-building’ and civic education that had to be accomplished at great speed with exiguous financial and trained human resources.”<sup>120</sup>

### **3.2.4. Population Influx and Employment**

As noted in the earlier chapter, Kuwait needed extra laborers very quickly and there were groups of Bedouins who came to Kuwait to work after the oil boom and nation-state building in Kuwait which began in the 1920s. A number of the

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<sup>118</sup> Freeth 1956, 154.

<sup>119</sup> Ovendale, Ritchie. *The Longman Companion to the Middle East Since 1914*. Second Edition. London and New York: Longman publishing, 2008. (22)

<sup>120</sup> Heater 2004, 137.

persons in the Bedouin tribes who settled in Kuwait for work, as the first “foreign workers” of Kuwait naturally desired citizenship.

The nomads of Kuwait began to settle down gradually parallel to the discovery of oil, and to the state-formation of Kuwait.<sup>121</sup> The oil fields offered jobs for the Bedouins, who were suffering from a drought during that period. The oil companies and state also created enclosed areas, indirectly restricting the physical space that the Bedouins and their animals could travel and graze through. As one individual recounts:

...Before my brother and I decided to leave our *diraa* (homeland) in the Soman desert [which is located between the Kuwaiti and Saudi borders] and migrated to Kuwait, some of my lineage’s members and relatives thought that we were *emhabal* (sing. *Mahbol*, which means crazy in English). They thought that the economic development in Kuwait and other Gulf States, which was caused by oil discovery, was a temporary situation, and that oil would not last forever. Therefore, their opinion was that we were crazy in giving up our herds to find a job in Kuwait. But, my brother and I decided to leave. When we left, we were under the mercy of God. Many years later, my brother and I thanked God for making us crazy, as my lineage’s members said, to leave our nomadic way of life and to enjoy the grace of oil that God provided us with.<sup>122</sup>

After the discovery of exportable oil, a Training Center was established in Magwa in 1951 where KOC would train the Bedouins to work in the company.<sup>123</sup> It is said that many of those who were hired to work, were from nomadic Bedouin tribes.

There were still nomadic tribes from Iraq who came down to Kuwait even in the 1970s. Zahra Freeth gives accounts of this in her memoirs. She identifies the Iraqi tribes, especially the Muntafiq, from their uncovered women.<sup>124</sup> Freeth notes

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<sup>121</sup> Al-Zuhbi, Ali. Unpublished PhD thesis, *Urbanization, Tribalism, and Tribal Marriage in Contemporary Kuwait*. 1999 University of Michigan.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>123</sup> *The Story of Oil in Kuwait*, Kuwait : Kuwait Oil Company (KOC, subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation) Public Relations and Information Group DVD publication, 1996.

<sup>124</sup> Freeth 1956, 132.

that the Iraqis keeping donkeys, which the Kuwaiti families would never have.<sup>125</sup> She also mentions the “Hukkara, Iraqi shepherd tribes...<sup>126</sup>. “It has always been the custom for these tribes from the middle Euphrates to migrate to Kuwait after the winter rains, bringing their sheep to pasture. Then, during April or May, as the hot season drew on, they would return to their homelands in Iraq<sup>127</sup>.” She describes her visits to Iraqi tribes, and notes their hopes for citizenship. Her candid descriptions, hardly, if at all, found in any other source, are particularly useful because they show social connections between the countries, and a lifestyle that was there before the 1990 – 1991 Gulf War. Her accounts show how much migration was still going on, and as was the custom until the formation of the nation-state, much of this was most likely without papers.

Freeth also notes Iraqis smuggling cigarettes into Kuwait,<sup>128</sup> which is also interesting because many people today believe that some of the Bidoon used to be smugglers.<sup>129</sup>

When the rains come to Kuwait the shepherd tribes of Iraq, the Shammar and the Muntafiq, travel south to graze their flocks in Kuwait territory. In the winter the wheat and barley-fields along the Euphrates are newly-sown, and there is an age-old understanding between cultivators and shepherds that during this season the sheep shall migrate southwards so that they shall not damage the crops. So these Iraqi tribes trek annually to Kuwait; they come mostly on donkeys, for they own few camels, and they drive before them their white and brown Iraqi sheep<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>125</sup> Freeth 1972, 144.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 143-144.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>129</sup> A more analytical approach can be found in Toth, Anthony B. “Tribes and Tribulations : Bedouin Losses in the Saudi and Iraqi Struggles over Kuwait’s Frontiers, 1921-1943. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 32, No. 2 (Nov., 2005), pp. 145-167. Taylor and Francis Ltd. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30037690> whereby Toth describes how the cross-border trade that was once the regular way of life for the Bedouin, suddenly becomes viewed as “smuggling” with the paradigm shift into the new, bordered nation-state era.

<sup>130</sup> Freeth 1956, 132.



Apparently, the Kuwaitis did not own any white sheep which she explains later. She notes that she could tell an Iraqi tribe from any white stripes they might have on their tent<sup>131</sup> and her statement, “By mid-April most of the Iraqi tribes have left Kuwait to return to their own land, and by this time most of them will have sheared their flocks, to sell wool in Kuwait before making their homeward journey<sup>132</sup>,” is proof that there was a lot of cross-border migration even up until 1956 (which is the year her book was published).

The same goes for Iranian migration to Kuwait, As the daughter of H. R. P. Dickson, Zahra Freeth, once again observes in *Kuwait Was My Home*<sup>133</sup>, old Kuwait had a large number of Iranians whose families had lived in Kuwait for several generations “They retain their own language, live together in a certain portion of the town (though they are not constrained to do so), and do not usually intermarry with the Arabs, but they are regarded as Kuwaiti subjects, and come under the jurisdiction of the Kuwait authorities<sup>134</sup>”, thus, demonstrating the already mixed society that Kuwait was in earlier years as well. Freeth notes later in her book, that the “Persians” would also transport goods as porters or coolies.<sup>135</sup> A lot of oil workers from Abadan in Iran, and others, came to Kuwait following Nationalisation in Iran (of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company).

Statistical increases are explained with further insight by looking at Freeth. “Iraqis too (also Shiah) have been crossing the border in an ever-increasing stream to find work in Kuwait, and these Persian and Iraqi immigrants, with considerable

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 50.

numbers of Syrians, Lebanese and refugee Palestinians, account for the sharp rise in the population over the years from 1945 to 1953<sup>136</sup>.”

Freeth also mentions the presence of persons of Indians and Pakistani citizenship in Kuwait, mentioning that there were some Indians who were present in Kuwait earlier and who worked as ‘shop-keepers, tailors, or washermen’ but that there were a lot who came with the British or who were imported by them. “Indian clerks and artisans working on development projects, and cooks and domestic staff imported by the English. The oil company town at Ahmadi also has a considerable Indian population<sup>137</sup>, and Freeth continues,

Amongst the non-Arab Kuwaitis one may count also the negroes, most of them descendants of those originally brought from Africa as slaves, although there are still some, particularly of the older generation, who are African-born. Many of them are still owned as slaves by the larger and more wealthy families, others have long ago obtained their freedom<sup>138</sup>.

It is not only Freeth who traces this period of cross-border migration, Madawi Al-Rasheed also notes this migratory nature of the Gulf, although focusing on Bahrain. “The movement of tribal populations and merchant communities which intersected the Gulf waters facilitated the exchange of populations between Bahrain and the coastal regions between Kuwait to the Straits of Hormuz<sup>139</sup>.” In Bahrain, “The first available breakdown of the population of the city in 1904 suggests that approximately half of its 25,000 residents were originally from Basrah, al-Ahsa’, Qatif, Kuwait, Najd and Iran, with small communities of Indians, Jews, and Europeans.” As the author quotes J.G. Lorimer’s *The Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (2 volumes Calcutta: Superintendent Government

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<sup>136</sup> Freeth 1956, 42.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, USA and Canada: Routledge, 2005. (45).

Printing, 1908 and republished many times). ‘The mobility of the tribal society which dominated the Arabian Peninsula and southern Iran, and the dynamic maritime networks that connected the Persian Gulf to the Middle East, India, and East Africa consistently affected the make-up of the population of the islands.’<sup>140</sup>

Dr. Al Najjar notes that the word Bidoon originates from the word Bedu. In fact, in English, the word Bedouin and Bidoon are mistakenly used interchangeably due to misperceptions.<sup>141</sup>

The persons rapidly employed as workers during the oil boom and subsequent immediate nation-state like formation in Kuwait, either from the nomadic tribes or from other areas, later became the ‘bidoon.’ The occupations of the bidoon ranged from workers in the oil fields, in the defence forces in the army, police, and other services (however, generally in lower ranks with the higher ranks being occupied by full-Kuwaiti citizens).

The government apparently repeatedly stated its intention to grant citizenship to the Bedoons through committees to be formed to re-examine their citizenship applications. In the meantime, they were to be treated exactly as citizens with the exception of the vote. For these reasons, most people did not pay much attention to the differentiation between citizens and Bedoons and many were not aware of it. Members of the same family had different citizenship statues: some were “first class,” others “second class” and still others were Bedoons<sup>142</sup>.

As Longva argues in her book, “Walls Built on Sand,” and as Dr. Al-Najjar has stated,<sup>143</sup> and Dr. Fares has written,<sup>144</sup> using the non-citizen nomadic tribes as extra labour was actually initially profitable for the state of Kuwait. Kuwait needed a

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<sup>140</sup> Al-Rasheed 2005, 41.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Dr. Al-Najjar, Kuwait, November 6, 2008.

<sup>142</sup> HRW 1995.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Dr. Al-Najjar, Kuwait, November 6, 2008.

<sup>144</sup> Al-Waquiyah, Faris Matar. *The Stateless Persons in Kuwait : A Study Presented to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (March 2007) University of Kuwait.

labour force to do the work that the Kuwaiti citizens no longer felt comfortable doing due to their newly achieved social status and wealth.

Although the Bedoons continued to be treated as citizens and were repeatedly promised formal citizenship, their applications for citizenship were mostly shelved. The requirement most difficult for Bedoons to meet was to provide proof that an applicant's father was a "settled" resident of Kuwait before 1920 and that he maintained continuous residence in the country until the time of the application."<sup>145</sup>

### **3.2.5. Sedentarization**

Settlement and population clusters in Kuwait were formed around the six marketplaces and few other minor ones.<sup>146</sup> These marketplaces existed throughout Kuwait and were places where the Bedouins traded their goods with the modern goods and imports found in the market. Whereas earlier, there were five main markets in Kuwait that tribes from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran came to in order to sell their goods,<sup>147</sup> these markets and this lifestyle gradually declined.

With the nation-state boundaries of Kuwait being further defined under British rule, the area for nomads to graze decreased tremendously. The discovery of oil further added to the limited grazing land. Although the fields remain open and it is only the drilling ground and refineries that are enclosed, the oil drilling and refinery centers, roads, military zones, suddenly so frequent in a desert that was previously isolated, still disrupted the traditional life of the Bedouins. Those who wanted to keep the nomadic economic livelihood are reported to have gone to Saudi

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<sup>145</sup> HRW 1995, 8.

<sup>146</sup> see maps in Marzook Al-Mutairi's unpublished thesis, *The Narrative of an Approach : Modern Nomads*, submitted to the Faculty of Architecture at Kuwait University, 2009.

<sup>147</sup> See also Freeth's discussion of the importance of the marketplace for the tribes who came occasionally to buy various goods.

Arabia since there was more grazing land there.<sup>148</sup> Additional factors included the gradual limitation of the law on the free cross-border movement of nomads, and the demarcation of proper, closed borders, and settlement of border disputes between Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran starting from the 1960s.

Government imports of milk and meat from abroad, at a time where there was mass influx of world goods into the market in Kuwait as a result of the oil wealth, had the impact of cutting-off the nomadic economics, which was another related reason that this lifestyle declined,<sup>149</sup> in addition to the aforementioned reason that the boom in the economy made it unnecessary to live the difficulties of the desert life (even though it would continue to be enjoyed as a recreational activity in the winter months).

In the 1950s some of the wool was even exported to the US.<sup>150</sup> However, even today, the only locally produced items in the grocery store would be herbs, cucumbers and tomatoes grown in a greenhouse, dates, flour, milk products, and select types of headscarves. There are few, if any, other items produced and sold locally, and definitely not red meat, even though there is a milk dairy company, and even that is a joint- Kuwaiti- Danish Company (Kuwait Danish Dairy KDD) that sometimes buys local milk. The supermarkets are full of milk and meat from Egypt, Syria, New Zealand, and USA, as well as Saudi Arabia. However, local meat or produce is not sold publicly. There is an ostrich farm that is established in Wafra, an area in the South of Kuwait, that is close to the oil wells and known for its farms. However, these ostrich farms are new.

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Marzook Al-Mutairi, Kuwait, October 9, 2009.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Freeth 1956, 138.

These types of changes, and encouragements by parliamentary laws, forced people to adopt the settled lifestyle. And yet, people buying land were told by others: “Are you crazy!! You are buying SAND when you can buy a sheep or a camel!!”<sup>151</sup>

Some male Bedouins worked part time in the town to save up enough money to go back to shepherding while the women and children kept the animals in the meantime, thus these Bedouins would become seasonal workers who kept their traditional lifestyle. Many nomads joined the army for wages.

As Zuhbi traces through parts of his thesis,<sup>152</sup> the geographical division of the land changed with the discovery of oil, and with the boundaries and state institutions that formed as a result of the nation-state building. It is difficult to gauge the extent that the establishment of the oil companies physically affected the lifestyle of the Bedouins,<sup>153</sup> however, the oil companies initially had much more enclosed land than at the present. Currently, it is mostly the oil refineries and oil wells that are enclosed, however, even these are interruptions in the vast desert land.

Freeth notes the transition into a settled lifestyle (and hence becoming Hadhar), “They will be town Arabs. The word badawin cannot be applied to those who work for wages, live in a house, eat regularly and well, find amusement in the cinema<sup>154</sup>.”

The rapid change of lifestyle and economics in Kuwait also created a strong need to hold onto an original culture. The traditional dishdasha (long white dress worn by men) is a symbol of Gulf identity (explored in various articles which will be

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Fatima.R. Kuwait, May 2009.

<sup>152</sup> Al-Zuhbi 1999.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with the K.O.C. Local Relations Department, Kuwait, January 2010, the officials did not give a clear reply on this issue, only noted once again that many of the documents were with the University of Warwick, taken back to Britain after the British formally left Kuwait. As noted above, this has not been confirmed with the University of Warwick, UK.

<sup>154</sup> Freeth 1972, 171.

examined later). Various photos of “Old Kuwait” decorate public and private buildings and the historic identity of Kuwait is reinforced through them today. Until about ten years after the 1991 invasion, one was also constantly reminded of the event through public media and culture, reinforcing Kuwaiti national identity. The wearing of the Dishdasha among Kuwaiti men today is also an assertion of national identity<sup>155</sup> as foreign men who wear the Dishdasha only wear the colored ones and not the white ones. The assertion of Kuwaiti identity is an assertion of nativeness in a country where 60% of the population are foreign. One can also look at Sulayman Khalaf’s article, “The Nationalisation of Culture: Kuwait’s Invention of a Pearl-Diving Heritage,”<sup>156</sup> in Chapter 3 of *Popular Culture and Popular Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, to see how state identity and nationalism is reinforced through emphasis on pearldiving culture.

One can also hear such radio broadcasts on the history of Kuwait. The local radio 93.3 is especially active in broadcasting series’ on the history of Kuwait. What is ironic is that this radio station broadcasts in a variety of languages including English, Farsi, Hindi, and Tagalog, thus showing the multi-cultural society in Kuwait.

Bedu families that still keep sheep and camels today mostly do so as a hobby or as a trade on the side. The ones who some sell the sheep, do so not during Eid Al-Adha (which is the Moslem holiday for sacrifice), but rather as a collectors item similar to the pigeon trade in the Middle East, and enter them in competition in Saudi Arabia in the annual Um Rugaiba festival, or the Hafel Dahel, or the Ommor Gebah. An interviewee with a day-time job in the Ministry of Defence, travelled to Syria to

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<sup>155</sup> Fox, John W; Mourtada-Sabbah, Nada; al-Mutawa, Mohammed. *Globalization and the Gulf*. London and New York: Routelage Taylor and Francis Group. 2006

<sup>156</sup> Alsharekh & Springborg 2008, Chapter 3 : Sulayman Khalaf.

buy the most aesthetically pleasing sheep. “Their tribes,” he noted, “are important.”<sup>157</sup> Thus revealing how the tribes, or perhaps type, of the sheep are just as important as the tribe of a person and how deep-rooted tribal ideas and identity are. There is an annual festival in Saudi Arabia where the animals enter into competition. Many Bedu from various nation-states travel to attend this festival.

An informant who was proud of her strong Bedouin ancestry, notes that she can tell a mood of a camel just by looking at it. She claims that when she was in the Emir’s garden Al-Azaiz, Mahomiya in Sabah Al-Ahmed, where there were even ten year old gazelles, the animals naturally came to her.<sup>158</sup>

While there are only very few “nomads” in Kuwait who still live this lifestyle in the winter and the summer, many others still keep sheep and camels as a sign of prestige, as a hobby, and as a way of making money (by breeding certain types of sheep with others, getting an aesthetic – see photographs). Some travel outside to buy the perfect (“tribe” as they call it) of sheep. An informer travelled to Syria to buy his favourite type of sheep. Their tribes are important, he noted to me with deep pride. He seemed to place just as much importance onto the family name and the “tribe” of the sheep as he did to his own family, and to his views on the importance of the family tribe in Kuwaiti society. He then went on to speak of the Battiya camels from Oman, with their small heads, wide foreheads, large eyes, small mouth and long ears...<sup>159</sup>

What is interesting is that the people keeping these sheep in terms of feeding them daily and doing the manual work, are people of the subcontinent. Animal herding does not come instinctively to them, as they have not grown up herding

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<sup>157</sup> Interview with Fawas, Kuwait, August 10, 2009.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Fatima, Kuwait, November 5, 2008.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Fawas, Kuwait, August 10, 2009.



sheep, or... the sacred cows in India. Somalis, or Sudanese, have, however. Only they are more expensive than the Indians, and this is why people such as one of my informers, prefer to hire the Indian workers rather than the Somali or Sudanese, since they themselves visit the animals daily, and take care of the animals in a different way, "he just does the manual labor, that is why he doesn't need to know about the animals," The manual labor includes getting water from a water truck. A large hose is then tied to the truck, and the water is poured into the feeding tubs. The animals are also fed loose grass and plants.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **STATE FORMATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

#### **4.1 CITIZENSHIP IN KUWAIT**

##### **4.1.1. Types of Citizenship in Kuwait**

As noted above, categories of citizenship in Kuwait can be quite complex and can become even more complicated when marriages between them take place hence affecting the status of the wife (not husband because a foreign or stateless husband of a Kuwaiti woman has no right to citizenship) and children, examples as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Degree: from a family with roots in Kuwait since 1920 proven by getting the citizenship during the 1962 census. If a man with this citizenship marries a non-Kuwaiti woman, the children get the 1<sup>st</sup> Degree, but the wife gets the 8<sup>th</sup> Degree citizenship. A 1<sup>st</sup> Degree female citizen married to a non-Kuwait man would not be able to get her husband citizenship (hence her husband would be of the “bidoon” category).

2<sup>nd</sup> Degree: from a family who came in the 1970s. If a man with 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree citizenship is married to a non-Kuwaiti woman, the woman gets the 14<sup>th</sup> Degree and the children get the 7<sup>th</sup> Degree of citizenship; the 5<sup>th</sup> Degree citizenship is given to children whose fathers are unknown; the 7<sup>th</sup> Degree citizenship is given to children from a 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Kuwaiti father and a foreign mother; whereas the 8<sup>th</sup> Degree citizenship is given to a non-Kuwaiti woman married to a 1<sup>st</sup> Degree man.

Parallel to this, Kuwait has a comparatively accepting social law where children who are abandoned are put in an orphanage, given Kuwaiti citizenship (degree unknown), and granted rights and access to services including schooling and healthcare. When older, they are found jobs, and later married to one and other. Apparently, some of these children do not have 'Kuwaiti' features and are apparently of other origin, however, this does not matter, and all of these children are treated equally before this law. It is unclear what surname the children are given, as surnames and tribal names have great significance in Kuwait. All that is necessary is done to enable these children to blend into society smoothly, and the orphanage is kept absolute secret. Teachers are strictly instructed not to establish any differences in the classroom, or let the other children know of any of the orphaned children.<sup>160</sup>

Citizenship is closely tied to 'benefits' and state subsidies. This ties in with the oil based rentier economy of Kuwait, as well as the political reasons mentioned in the previous chapter.

The benefits given to Kuwaitis by the State of Kuwait roughly include 50KD per newborn child, rent allowance, 30,000 KD loan, 4,000 KD for marrying a Kuwaiti woman (given to a Kuwaiti man), 35/month rent allowance to pay for the government housing that is being distributed, 100KD/month to the wife; and if there

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with A.A.1. Kuwait, April 2010.

is a divorce, the Ministry of Social Work gives KD 300/month for assistance to the woman) have apparently made it desirable for many to become citizens.

What is important to note is that the rights and welfare given to its citizens by the State of Kuwait differs depending upon the *category of citizenship*, as described above. The *category of citizenship*, in turn, depends on *when* the persons' ancestors settled in Kuwait. The earlier the period of settlement, the more 'true' Kuwaiti the person is. Therefore, those who can prove that their ancestors settled before 1920 are "First Degree Citizens," and hence, have "first class" rights and benefits.

It is argued by many citizens and politicians that many who claim they are of Kuwaiti nationality are actually of other nationality and who simply would like the material benefits. Indeed, it is argued today that many have dual citizenship, especially with Saudi Arabia, and simply keep the Kuwaiti nationality for welfare purposes, with their true *loyalty* to Saudi Arabia. For most of the Kuwaiti Bedouins their 'second' nationality is thought to be Saudi or Iraqi and some in Kuwait believe that if you prove that you are Saudi, it is easier for you to get the nationality<sup>161</sup>. Around 12% of the bidoon apparently received citizenship in 2008 (the Government periodically reviews the bidoon claims and approximately X number of bidoons have received citizenship), however, these 12% are believed to have really been from Saudi Arabia, but with good Kuwaiti *wasta*/ personal connections and support.

As one interviewee put it, "We know that some of the parliamentarians only have documents from the 1970s and have citizenship and also have Saudi documents."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with N1, Kuwait, February 12, 2010.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.1.2. Stateless / Bidoons

As discussed in earlier chapters, Kuwait has historically been an area housing some tribes which settled early on, and some that were nomadic until the discovery of oil (with a few exceptions). Citizenship is a key component of the modern nation-state and national identity<sup>163</sup>.

In everyday language, the term bidoon can also be used to delineate foreign spouses of Kuwaiti nationals who do not have the Kuwaiti citizenship – regardless of whether or not they have citizenship in their place of origin. This nuance is why the term is not completely interchangeable with the English term : stateless in daily usage, but interchangeable in academic usage). It is claimed that most Kuwaiti families have at least one relative who is bidoon (in the broader sense of the word). These persons usually live in a particular area in Kuwait (Sulaybiya). There are many different accounts of who exactly the bidoons are and why they still do not have citizenship in Kuwait and these will be discussed below.

As the UK Home Office notes<sup>164</sup>, this group includes:

- 1) Individuals descended from nomadic groups whose ancestral lands are within the borders of present day Kuwait but who were unable to claim automatic citizenship under the Nationality Law of 1959 because they could not prove continuous settled presence in Kuwait from 1920, as that law requires.

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<sup>163</sup> Anh Longva notes in her article, “Citizenship in the Gulf States - Conceptualization and Practice,” in Buteschon et al 2000, 179-197. “It has become increasingly common to view citizenship not merely as a legal status entailing a set of formal rights and responsibilities, but also as a vehicle for nationalism and a focus for defining national identity. Citizenship is indeed the key concept without which the idea of the nation-state cannot be translated into practice.” (Longva 2000, 179).

<sup>164</sup> United Kingdom: Home Office, *Operational Guidance Note : Kuwait*, 5 March 2009, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refword/docid/49c35db62.html> (accessed December 2010). (4) (citing a Country of Origin (COI) report of 18.02.08), this is also the same group of reasons given by Bencomo, Clarisa. “Kuwait Promises Betrayed, Denial of Bidun, Women, and Freedom of Expression. *Human Rights Watch Volume 12. N. 2E*. October 2000.

- 2) Individuals who could have registered as citizens under the Nationality Law and earlier citizenship regulations but neglected to do so.
- 3) Individuals who attempted to claim citizenship under the Nationality Law and earlier citizenship regulations and whose applications were accepted for consideration but never acted upon by the Kuwaiti authorities.
- 4) Individuals who migrated to Kuwait from nearby countries to work and over time lost effective links to and effective nationality in their country of origin, as well as children of such migrants who failed to establish nationality in their parents' country of origin.
- 5) Children of Bidoon parents, including notably the children of Kuwaiti mothers and Bidoon fathers.

According to an article that compares expanding citizenship rights for women versus the stateless in Kuwait by Rizzo, Meyer and Ali, mercenaries (in addition to nomads) also compose the stateless group. These mercenaries are said to be mostly from Iraq, Syria, and Jordan and were hired after independence in 1961<sup>165</sup>

Dr. Fares' research also notes the following reasons a) persons did not think the certificate was of any importance and did not carry any benefits; b) persons postponed acquiring the certificate thinking that the chance would come up again; refusing to take the 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree due to belief that one was of 1<sup>st</sup> Degree status; c) death of the family elder/guardian and children not being able to follow through with the procedures of acquiring the nationality; d) reasons of political, racial, or religious beliefs.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Rizzo, Helen; Meyer, Katherine; Ali, Yousef. "Extending Political Rights in the Middle East: The Case of Kuwait. *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 2007. Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter): 177-197. supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Dissent Repression Nexus in the Middle East, and from Kuwait University Research Department. Quoting Maktabi, 1993. Rizzo, Meyer, and Ali's research is particularly insightful as it looks at which groups in the mainstream support women and which support the stateless – and thus which of the excluded those who are included support- and why. This offers another angle in looking at the issue. They find that generally older, privileged, Sunni men do not support the bidoons in acquiring citizenship.

<sup>166</sup> Al-Waqian 2007, 44.

#### 4.1.3. Tracing How the Problem of Statelessness Emerged

Human Rights Watch notes, and the UK Home Office Report expresses similar statements that,

Although the Bedoons continued to be treated as citizens and were repeatedly promised formal citizenship, their applications for citizenship were mostly shelved. The requirement most difficult for Bedoons to meet was to provide proof that an applicant's father was a "settled" resident of Kuwait before 1920 and that he maintained continuous residence in the country until the time of the application.<sup>167</sup>

As noted earlier, Kuwait has an interesting history of citizenship, which is closely tied to its state-formation and tribal issues. The first Constitution of Kuwait apparently included an Article noting the "Kuwaiti Badiya," i.e. the bidoons, have the right to work and have access to education, health services, and other basic rights. The first citizenship law in Kuwait was established in 1941 and declared that all those who settled before 1896 (which is the date of the Secret Agreement with Britain preceding the 1899 Agreement, thus marking the end of affiliation with the Ottomans), would be citizens.<sup>168</sup> The law differentiates between the settled and the "newcomers" or "nomads" through the First Degree, and Second Degree categories of Citizens, and their respective rights, entitlements, and privileges.

In a very *jus soli* manner, Kuwait defined the 'original Kuwaiti' as (a) every member of the ruling family, (b) every resident of Kuwait since 1899, (c) every child of a Kuwaiti father and (d) every child born on Kuwaiti soil of an Arab or Muslim father.<sup>169</sup> The Emiri Decree adopted in 1950 (marsum amiri 15/1959 of 5 December 1959) established citizenship. This Decree took 1920 as the year to determine

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<sup>167</sup> HRW 1995, 8.

<sup>168</sup> See British Archive documents in the Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait (CRSK) in Al Mansuria, Kuwait, on the need to show Ottoman documents to access the farms in Fao and Basrah, modern day Iraq. <http://www.crsk.edu.kw/>

<sup>169</sup> Parolin 2009, 89.

citizenship due to the Battle of Jahra, Subsequent amendments have not affected this date.

Subsequent amendments have, however, restricted the political rights of naturalized (i.e. Second Degree) citizens. For example, political rights of naturalized citizens were postponed from ten to twenty years after the naturalization decree in 1966<sup>170</sup>.

Additionally, all those in general in the defence sector such as police and soldiers (except in the National Guard), cannot vote as the Government of Kuwait sees this as undermining their neutrality<sup>171</sup>.

It is believed by some that in the initial stages, citizenship granting was built upon trust – with the local civil police member of each village informally verifying if a person was of Kuwait or not. This system was apparently used in 1959-1960 when the persons were being registered as citizens by the Government of Kuwait.

However, it is also argued that when the nationality law was issued in 1959, five committees were set up based on local areas and knowledge of people by the members of the communities. The committees apparently received applicants and had the authority to decide whether or not to grant citizenship. It is argued that since none were from the ruling families, and since the mukhtars had nothing to do with this process, exclusion based on tribe or other reasons – could not have been part of this process.<sup>172</sup> However, those registering for citizenship also apparently needed a witness noting that the person was an inhabitant of the area, and this system was apparently open to abuse.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>171</sup> Oskay, Ceyda. “At Last the People Speak.” Arab Times English Daily Newspaper, Seyassa Publishing Company, Shuwaikh, Kuwait. July 5, 2003.

<sup>172</sup> Interview, G. Kuwait, November 7, 2008.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with A.A.2. Kuwait, April 4, 2010.



With independence from the British in 1960, Kuwait established itself as a nation-state in the modern world, and the citizenship law was further defined. Through citizenship, the state defined its *identity*. Through citizenship, the state thus had a mechanism for distributing its wealth and, thus, formalizing loyalty to it.

Further citizenship laws such as those in 1960-1970 established the framework for different types of citizenship and different grants provided to each category. The Constitution of 1965 required documents to prove citizenship. Some applicants apparently didn't get citizenship even though they had documents before that time (see also above in the citation of HRW, 8 "applications shelved" which was supported by personal interviews<sup>174</sup>).

Kuwait has kept very accurate statistics and records of its population in annual publications of "Kuwait Today." Around 30,000 illegal Iranians are even cited in the demographics of 1960-70. and it is unknown, but possible that some could later be considered within the 'bidoon' group as public opinion is such that the bidoon group is mostly considered to be the newcomers to Kuwait after the oil boom (including, ofcourse, the other possible reasons mentioned in this thesis such as that they could not produce documents or that they were discriminated against).

Citizenship was granted to those registered in the 1965 census or before. During the 1970 Census, apparently some bidoons were offered citizenship (second class, naturalized citizenship), but they refused because they considered themselves to be true, original, first class citizens of Kuwait and hence original settlers. This was also one of the factors that created the bidoon dilemma that continues today<sup>175</sup>.

Another opinion in addition to the one that the nomads did not register because of the concept was not concurrent with their lifestyle and because they were

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with N.I., Kuwait February 12, 2010.

<sup>175</sup> Personal interviews.

roaming in different fields at the time, is that some bidoons refused because they were already wealthy and didn't need the benefits and/or were suspicious of registration, however, there is not adequate proof of these views.

Apparently, there was an amendment to the constitution in the 70s that if Bedouins spend 15 years in the country, they are entitled to nationality, but this article was put on hold. Similarly, there have been many different proposed amendments that are under discussion at least once a year, and later dismissed.

#### **4.1.4. The Relationship Between the Bedu and the Bidoon**

As similar to the UK Home Office's first definition, it is argued that many nomads did not declare themselves during the census of 1960, when Kuwait became independent from Britain, and the year which was also of the last census in Kuwait. This is the approach that Diana Elias takes in her article, "Nomadic Past is a strike against some in Kuwait,"<sup>176</sup> the perspective that many foreigners in the country have. It is also the approach that the Forced Migration Review article <sup>177</sup> takes, as follows, "The emerging new sub-national states of Arabia cut through nomadic or semi-nomadic societies. The extended Bedouin tribes had for centuries moved with their animals without check points or border crossings."<sup>178</sup>

The assumption is that the families of these extended nomads thus never got citizenship, "The bidoun say their ancestors, freely roaming the deserts of Kuwait,

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<sup>176</sup> Elias, Diana. "Nomadic past is a strike against some in Kuwait." Associated Press. Printed in the Los Angeles Times, October 21, 2007 and accessed online at <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/21/news/adfg-kuwait21> and 21/2. last accessed on September 12, 2010.

<sup>177</sup> Shiblak 2009, 37- 38.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 37.

Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, often had little use for citizenship.” And Elias quotes an individual, “Our grandfathers who lived in the desert were negligent.<sup>179</sup>”

Apparently, some of the Bedouins (not all as there are currently many high ranking First Class Kuwaitis with Bedouin origin), did not register in the census.<sup>180</sup>

As described in the Human Rights Watch report,

In 1920, most residents of Kuwait’s outlying areas were illiterate. Involved in limited agricultural activity, animal husbandry and small scale commodity trading with nomads of the hinterland, these residents, many of whom were nomadic, had near complete freedom of movement in what is now Kuwait and the surrounding countries. Requiring them to prove that they were settled in Kuwait before 1920 was in itself a difficult requirement to satisfy. Although thousands of Bedouins who were able during their registration period to provide convincing evidence to satisfy this condition, they were still denied citizenship though the government’s failure to act on their applications.<sup>181</sup>

Apparently, according to the 1975 law on livestock, nobody has the right to keep livestock unless they are Kuwaiti. This also challenges any possibility that the bidoun, if they are at all Bedouin, could continue their way of life. At the same time, there is another law that forbids the inhabitancy of the desert in the summer (when it can get up to 45 degrees Celsius or higher). Toilets and other infrastructure that is built during camping in the winter, is subsequently destroyed by the government in the summer for this purpose. There is, however, rumoured to be a tent in the desert, that is of bidoun Bedouin. There are also a few other Bedu who are rumoured to live in the desert year-round, however, this is difficult to prove.

As noted earlier, apparently some extended nomads chose to go and register as Saudi citizens, because they could not see a future for Kuwait at that time. What they saw was a small state with limited grazing land getting even more limited from the oil fields and military zones, and grossly expanding settlement areas.

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<sup>179</sup> Said by a bidoun quoted in Elias’ article (Elias, Diana 2007).

<sup>180</sup> Interview with N.2. Kuwait, June 13, 2009.

<sup>181</sup> HRW, 1995, 8.

Looking at the issue of state formation in Kuwait from a tribal and economic point of view, and tracing the formation of the state of Kuwait not only through the development of bureaucratic institutions, but also through the migration of the nomads to the urban areas of Kuwait<sup>182</sup> also shows a paradigm shift.

One young girl's account of her family's situation of statelessness is as follows:

My great grandfather was a pearldiver. He was out at sea when the census was taking place. There was a six month period of time to register under the census, from which one would get citizenship. He missed it. When he came back from sea, it was too late and they would not let him register. It was only last year (2008) when my uncle was able to get citizenship. I am waiting for my citizenship...<sup>183</sup>

However, there are many First Degree Citizens who have Bedouin/ Bedu background. Thus, the theory above is not applicable to all the bidoons.

#### **4.1.5. Discrimination and Statelessness**

The bidoon live in various slums in Kuwait, including Jahra and Sulaybiyya, a very impoverished part of Kuwait. Zahra Freeth discusses the inhabitants of Sulaybiyya to be of the Sulubba tribe<sup>184</sup>. She refers to this group as, "outcasts" in Sulubba (Sulaibiyya), 'Called generically 'Rashid,' 'of dubious racial origins,' 'unwilling to specify exactly what their origins were,' 'cheap brides hence intermarriage' 'who in the 70s, could earn as much money as Kuwaitis,' and notes

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<sup>182</sup> for this, the thesis of Dr. Ali Al-Zuhbi, cited earlier, was most helpful, as he traced how the nomadic life became sedentary in his unpublished thesis through first-hand interviews..

<sup>183</sup> Interview with N2, Kuwait, June 13, 2009.

<sup>184</sup> Freeth 1972, 147.

that this tribe is rumoured to be decedent of the Crusaders.<sup>185</sup> This could support the idea that some were not given citizenship because they were of “unnoble” tribes, however, apparently most of the Sulubba tribe do in fact have citizenship.

It was mostly Sunnis who benefited from Government programmes easing citizenship requirements to some 36,000 stateless who registered in the 1965 census, ‘even though unofficial estimates have found that Shias make up between 60-80% of the bidoon.’<sup>186</sup> Indeed, many informers also stated the same in interviews. Rizzo, Meyer, and Ali also note ‘There are also arguments that the Bedouin were granted first class citizenship because the majority of them are Sunni while the bidoon remain third class citizens because many of them are Shia, thus maintaining the Sunni balance of power in Kuwait<sup>187</sup>.’”

A counter argument is that the Shia were considered to be allies of the ruling family when they supported Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah against the reform movement during the 1938 legislative process. Apparently, there were restrictions on their military recruitment during the Iran/Iraq war (during which there were security incidents in Kuwait). However, some believe that the situation was normalized following the Gulf War of 1991 when the Chief of Staff (General Ali Al-Mo'men) was a Shia, was head of the Humanitarian Operations Center (for Iraq) in Kuwait, and was later appointed as Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Similarly, this is also noted by Raphael Patai's book *Society, Culture, and Change in the Middle East*<sup>185</sup> quoting Zahra Freeth's father, a Political Agent in Kuwait, H. R. P. Dickson, “The Solubba, whose name resembles the Arabic word for cross, are regarded by many tribes, as well as by several European students of the Middle East, as descendants of Crusaders, or Crusaders' mercenaries, or their camp followers.” He notes that some observers suspected Latin or French words within the language of the Sulubba.

<sup>186</sup> Rizzo, et. al. 2007.

<sup>187</sup> Maktabi 1993, quoted by Rizzo, Meyer, and Ali 2007.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with G., Kuwait, November 5, 2010.

## **4.2. CURRENT SITUATION OF THE BIDOON**

### **4.2.1. 1985, The Gulf War of 1990-1991 and the Aftermath**

The situation of this group in Kuwait was relatively stable, and very close to Kuwaiti citizenship until the mid-80s. Indeed, while citizenship was an expectation by the Bidoon, being stateless was apparently not an issue until the rights began to be taken away. The situation of the bidoons began to change in 1985, at the height of the Iran – Iraq war, when Kuwait directly felt the effects of this war through the plane-hijacking and car-jackings that took place in the country and it was suspected that the bidoon group included infiltrators, or ‘late-comers,’ claiming benefits, or Iranians or Iraqis who wanted to hide themselves from the authorities for whatever reason by destroying their documents.

This created a fear in the country that the bidoons had strong affiliations and loyalty to nations outside Kuwait but who were in Kuwait to claim citizenship and hence the benefits that come with it – and who may actually be working against Kuwait as collaborators. Whether or not this was accurate, there was definitely the perception of this, and the strong suspicion of them resulted in a reduction of the rights accorded to them. In 1985 it was demanded that bidoons either bring a passport or leave the country (with the assumption, ofcourse, that the bidoons had foreign passports and were illegal residents).<sup>189</sup>

The reduction in rights is apparent in the decrease in benefits, rights, status allocated to this group. Whereas they previously enjoyed access to all social services, access to the labour market and all other rights except the nationality and the

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<sup>189</sup> Al-Waquian 2007.

financial and in-kind grants, and they also did not need residence permits, had special treatment in higher education, including also being granted scholarships to study abroad, this took a sharp turn downwards after 1985, and especially after the Gulf War.

This fear and suspicion was intensified, and reached a peak after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait during 1990-1991, where many bidoons were suspected, and around 30 persons were convicted, of cooperating with Iraqi forces that invaded the country<sup>190</sup>. Others were accused of originally being Iraqi. Many bidoon claim the opposite, to have defended the country during this time (one of the factors they argue in favour of their loyalty to the country and to claims of citizenship). However, there was an even further reduction in their rights, and general social status, and an onslaught of social suspicion after the Gulf War.

According to Human Rights Watch, "...all Bedoons reported to their military bases on August 2 and many of those killed or taken prisoner by the Iraqis were Bedoons." <sup>191</sup> Interviews also support this, according to one informer, her uncles were captured as P.O.W.s but she still does not have citizenship.<sup>192</sup> During this time, the radio would apparently broadcast calls from the Emir noting for the Bidoons to stay in the country to defend the nation.<sup>193</sup>

There is contradictory information, as some in this group apparently fled the country, seeking refuge in other countries. A large number apparently went to Iraq during the Gulf War (and rumoured to have gotten citizenship for around 1,000 KD

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<sup>190</sup> Human Rights Watch Report 1985. "The Bedoons were accused of collaborating with Iraq's Popular Army during the Invasion of Kuwait and 20 were convicted (HRW 11).

<sup>191</sup> HRW 1995, 11.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with N.1. Kuwait, February 12, 2010.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

or 3,400 USD through the Iraqi Embassy.<sup>194</sup> Apparently, there are photos in various ministries, including the Ministry of Public Works of bidoons who continued to work during the Gulf War. Some also apparently went to Syria and Saudi Arabia. The rumors that the Iraqi government was paid to give citizenship to the Bidoon do not seem accurate since some still do not have citizenship in Iraq, and it would not make sense for the Iraqi Government to be paid to grant citizenship during such a tense period of war or after.

A news article from 1991, “Kuwait Under Pressure to Let Stateless Arabs Come Home,”<sup>195</sup> mentioned that there are an estimated 3,900 bidoun trapped in Abdali between Kuwait’s border with Iraq – who are not allowed inside Kuwait because they are believed to be “closer to Iraq,” in terms of loyalties, but whom Kuwaiti relatives can visit. Many of those trapped on the border, and the Bidoon in general claimed to have fought against the Iraqis during the 1990-1991 invasion.<sup>196</sup>

It is said that the Hadhar, who are mostly Iranian mostly stayed in Kuwait during the Gulf War of 1990-1991 if they didn’t have family in Iran, since they also didn’t have family in Saudi Arabia. While the Bidoon apparently stayed in the country, the Bedu are reported to have gone to the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain during the Gulf War where they could speak Arabic as they go to government schools

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with H.2. Kuwait, October, 2009

<sup>195</sup> Wilkinson, Tracy. “Kuwait Under Pressure to Let Stateless Arabs Come Home. May 20, 1991. Times Staff Writer. Published on the Los Angeles Times Article Collections, and last accessed on September 12, 2010 at : [http://articles.latimes.com/1991-05-20/news/mn-1476\\_1\\_saudi-arabia/3](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-05-20/news/mn-1476_1_saudi-arabia/3)

<sup>196</sup> Additionally, around 100,000 Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait on grounds that they were collaborating with the Iraqis during the Gulf War (Crystal 1992, 229)<sup>196</sup>. This may also account for a decrease in the numbers of the stateless group.



mostly in Kuwait. Many apparently also went to Saudi Arabia. Because they were not in the cities, they had time to evacuate the country.<sup>197</sup>

Apparently, the Kuwaiti army was around 80% bidoon before 1991 and is currently only 30-40% bidoon after changes in the early to mid-90s. Many were dismissed or voluntarily left in 1993, went abroad to study, and came back to set up their own businesses. “By May 1995, the government said that 25 per cent of the 20,000 soldiers were *bidun*, down from a pre-war level of nearly 80 per cent”<sup>198</sup>. This issue will be explored further in the chapter on citizenship, however, it is important to note the drastic change in their status, as can be seen through the paragraph below.

After the 1991 Gulf War, the bidoons’ legal position in Kuwait rapidly declined. Immediately after the war, when Kuwait’s first and second-class citizens received new ID cards, bidoons’ ID cards were not renewed [instead they were given the same ID cards as for livestock]. Many were deported or arrested. Not only did they lose their residency permits in post-war Kuwait, but also they lost their jobs in the bureaucracy and the military, and the limited health care and education they had received through having ID cards. The government launched another crackdown on the stateless in 2000 forcing many of them to obtain foreign passports (often illegally and with little likelihood of renewal once expired) in order to obtain a residency permit like other foreigners or be deprived further of basic rights. The legal status of many who did not normalize their residence permits remains unresolved.<sup>199</sup>

#### **4.2.2. Rights and Assistance for the Bidoon**

From the Iraqi invasion in 1990 until 2000, there was no school for the bidoons and thus emerged an entire group who were uneducated. Some families apparently alternate which child they send to school: one year they send the eldest, the next year the middle child, and the youngest the year after that. However, this is

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<sup>197</sup>At the same time, there were differing opinions and support to the invasion by some countries such as Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Libya etc... since it was framed around the Pan-Arab’ politics and apparently nationals from these areas later had problems renewing their residence permits.

<sup>198</sup> HRW 1995, 30.

<sup>199</sup> Rizzo, et. al. 2007, 179.

even more problematic if they have many children (one family apparently has five sons and seven daughters) and many of these children in the larger families don't get married because they are seen as being unsuitable spouses due to not being educated or having a job. Night schools have recently been established.<sup>200</sup>

There currently exists an Education Fund, lead by Sheikha Awrad who has taken up the cause of the bidoon. It is used for Iraqis, Syrians, and bidoons attendance at the private universities and the open university. Kuwait University currently reserves quotas for 100-120 bidoon students.<sup>201</sup>

The Ministry of Education accepted bidoon teachers around 2006, however, they are paid much less than Kuwaiti teachers, and are not paid for the summer holidays, or any other holiday such as the weekend or national holidays.<sup>202</sup>

There are also differences between the bidoons and personality conflicts which prevent them from being organized<sup>203</sup>. However, a public demonstration was organized by Dr. Al-Najjar around 2005. However, many bidoon were afraid to take part in the demonstration in fear of retaliation. Public demonstrations in Kuwait are extremely rare – and if any, are about labour rights, and thus, this rally was significant.

While bidoons used to be considered in the category of “non-Kuwaitis” after the Gulf War, they began to be considered “of illegal status.” The bidoon passports used to be grey, however, are no longer used, and have not been valid since 1985.

The documentation today includes a green name card, Civil ID, and security ID. They must renew their illegal residence cards annually and this card looks exactly like the card given to livestock. Many Bidoon are humiliated that their ID

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<sup>200</sup> Interview with N.1. Kuwait, April 2010.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with N.2. Kuwait, June 13, 2009.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with G., Kuwait, October 7, 2008.

cards are the same as a cow. Their births, marriages, and divorces and other civil status issues are registered by the “Committee of the Affairs of Illegal Residents.” Some bidoon find this humiliating because they do not consider themselves, “illegal residents.”

There are also allegations that the Committee can be “arbitrary in its registration. There are conflicting reports about the birth registration and the Ministry of Health accepting or not accepting the birth reports. “They don’t want to give us a birth certificate. Will put us as Iraqi or Iranians, or not give birth certificates. No marriage contracts to Bidoons. One must now make a court claim in order to obtain an official marriage certificate.”<sup>204</sup> One bidoon describes her case as follows, “They registered me in my marriage as my origin being : Iraqi, and my sister – who got married at the same time, as Iranian. When I got divorced, they registered me in my divorce paper as my origin being Iranian.”<sup>205</sup> However, looking at this issue closely, one wonders if this is so “arbitrary,” if there are tribes who crossed between what is now Iran and Iraq, and if part of her family is in Iran and part in Iraq – then the arbitrariness of the origin actually reveals something deeper about state-formation and present state/ international relations – and results in the lack of access to rights for a group of persons.

As one interviewee put it,

If you only have a driving license, you cannot be employed. Now the civil id says, ‘illegal resident’ I didn’t renew my license because of this. I did not want to be described as an ‘illegal resident’ or someone with ‘unspecified nationality,’ My father is an ‘illegal resident’ now even though he has been working at the MOI for 36 years.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Interview with N.1. Kuwait, February 12, 2010.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with N.2. Kuwait, June 13, 2009. and similar story by N.1. Kuwait, May 2009.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with N.1. Kuwait, February 12, 2010.

One approach is to legalize oneself as a foreigner first, by obtaining documents from another country. This approach worked for many stateless in the UAE and Kuwait is now taking this approach as well. Many Caribbean countries were approached by the bidoon for citizenship. Apparently, Comoros refused to sell citizenship, but other countries accepted. The bidoons thus legalized themselves by having a foreign status in the country. “Some, with family ties in these countries, [Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria] were able to take advantage of their more liberal citizenship laws. Others, with only dubious links to these countries, probably resorted to questionable means to acquire passports.”<sup>207</sup> Yet others have been granted asylum mainly in Europe, USA, Australia. Others refuse to leave the country or obtain any foreign documents because they claim they are full Kuwaiti and love Kuwait and would not want to leave it. They consider taking this approach contrary to their beliefs and desires of wanting to be in Kuwait.

One bidoon stated her reasons for not taking up this approach as follows, ‘My father was born in Kuwait, he worked for the Ministry of Interior for 36 years. My grandfather worked in KOC as a labourer, not high level, but he was one of the founders of Kuwait, the late Amir was his direct manager. We still have documents, photographs to prove it. He was sick and he wasn’t even getting treatment.

About her neighbors, she said, “One of them is a driver, but his father has a birth certificate from 1940 or 1960, he has all the documents and goes to lawyers, but even if you have the court verdict in your favour, they won’t implement it.” And, continued,

The late Prince Jaber in the 1980’s some people tried to kill him by crashing into his car. His guards were all bidoons and they saved the Prince’s life by taking the hit onto their car. They died and their families were kicked out, no salary, no citizenship even though they proved their loyalty. Two families

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<sup>207</sup> HRW 1995, 11.

went to Iraq. One family went to Jordan. Four or five years later, Sheikha Awrad called for the naturalization of the children, and they were given citizenship. Most of the people who sell things at the Friday market are bidoon. But you have to have a Kuwaiti sponsor even for the spot. The vegetable stands persons are jailed from time to time, but need it to live so they come back.... But even the private sector cannot hire them.<sup>208</sup>

Still other young children sell black market perfume at red light street corners, others work as herbalists or matchmakers and apparently write ads in the newspapers on their stories, seeking financial support.

#### **4.2.3. Obstacles**

There are many obstacles for the bidoon to obtain citizenship in Kuwait. Many of these are related to the law, however, the reason the law does not change is related to societal perceptions of the problem. Examples of these issues include economic factors. Granting 100,000 or so persons (and maybe more if any return from their residence abroad), will have a strain on a social welfare economy that gives monetary and in-kind grants to around 1 million people. This will be a 10% decrease in earnings and is perceived to, in turn, challenge the welfare state.

For some others, the issue of granting citizenship is an issue of security and mistrust. Lack of trust of certain tribes/history- enhanced through the history of periods of tension with neighboring countries affects notions of citizenship and loyalty today. There is also a lack of trust that the applicants are even of Kuwaiti origin (suspected to be Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, etc...).

Yet as noted earlier, to others, the issue is political and religious. Granting citizenship to more members of a certain tribe may change the demographics of types of tribes and power relations (strength in numbers). Additionally, if there is a change in the demographics of religious affiliation (Sunni/Shia) that would also alter power

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with N.1. Kuwait, February 12, 2010.

relations. The changing of the demographics of cross-cultural linkages would also alter the current status quo as it is assumed then that more (new) citizens would have alliances or loyalty to neighbouring countries. Thus, the issue is also related to wanting to keep the current status quo national identity, and security in terms of avoiding a challenge to the national identity.

The human rights situation of this group in Kuwait is highly criticized by many human rights organizations. Refugees' International, and Human Rights Watch have both produced extensive research on the human rights aspect of the issue,<sup>209</sup> and the bidoon's own online discussion forums are dynamic and informative.<sup>210</sup>

As of the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010 the Government of Kuwait established a Committee on the Bidoons that would examine claims of the bidoon. The committee is divided into three sub-committees that will examine the claims of the bidoon who have a) registered in the 1960 Census; b) registered in the 1975 Census; and c) not registered in any census. This is seen as a greatly positive move, and full implementation is expected with hope.

Other possible solutions to the issue could be to give all basic human rights including health, documentation, education, freedom of movement and employment; all that are in the Convention on Statelessness<sup>211</sup>. Documentation would be regular and not arbitrary, would be with revisions to the Bidoon committee and categorizations... esp, of origin"). As arbitrary documentation will only cause further problems and difficulties for both sides including the state, especially of newborns,

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<sup>209</sup> Refugees International Reports, [www.refugeesinternational.org/sites/default/files/kuwait\\_statelessrpt.pdf](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/sites/default/files/kuwait_statelessrpt.pdf) and other reports on the website.

<sup>210</sup> Bidoon's own online discussion forums include: [www.kuwaitibedoons.com](http://www.kuwaitibedoons.com) and <http://nonationofcitizenship.worldpress.com>

<sup>211</sup> Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons 1954 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness 1961.

the committee could do this in parallel to studying their rights to citizenship. Granting Permanent residence is another option.

UNHCR could give training on interview techniques and credibility and information verification, as per their mandate on the stateless. UNHCR's regular work with asylum-seekers and refugees in registration and status determination interviews establish UNHCR's expertise in this area and this expertise could easily be transferred to the stateless, especially in the context of Kuwait, where it is assumed that some have "economic" claims rather than other. This is similar to the discussion on economic migrants seeking asylum and UNHCR has the expertise in determining whether or not a claim is credible or not, or has enough ground to indicate persecution, or persecution amounting to discrimination, thus the refugee status of the person. UNHCR's extensive guidelines on individual registration and documentation would also well inform the situation at hand. The importance of signing the Conventions on Statelessness could also be reinforced.

Tribal (and religious) ties can affect national unity as well. Although Ayubi notes that tribalism and the government structure co-exist<sup>212</sup>, they co-exist in Kuwait in conflict, and not in the unison that he writes of. The reason they exist in conflict in Kuwait is because these tribes themselves are mostly in conflict, even internally amongst various branches.

Kuwaiti law does not allow for a second nationality and this dilemma has caused great disagreements recently in 2009 - 2010 as many [mainly those with Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti dual nationality] were called upon to renounce their non-Kuwaiti citizenship.

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<sup>212</sup> Ayubi, Nazih N. M. *Overstating the Arab State*. London and NY: I.B. Taurus, 1995.

The Amir also recently kept calling for national unity as a result of the crackdown upon those with dual citizenship – mainly Saudi Arabian citizenship and Kuwaiti. Dual citizenship is described as “citizenship of identity and loyalty versus citizenship of benefits,” with many in Kuwait feeling that others are holding Kuwaiti citizenship for purely economic benefits.

Many who do have roots in other countries – claim they cannot go back after 50 years and re-obtain citizenship because that nation will not accept them as citizens since a lot of time has passed. The issue of dual nationality is also thus related to the debates on the bidoon – as some of them (especially true among those bidoon who came in the 1940s from non-neighboring countries) were apparently offered citizenship in the 1960s but did not take it due to ‘loyalty to their country of origin.’ This is particularly true for some Palestinians, but others are affected as well. The feeling among this group of bidoon today is that they served Kuwait through many generations, cannot go back to their countries, and deserve citizenship, which they had denied (or at least not applied for) at one point where they could have received it.

At the same time, the government crackdown on dual citizenship, initially targeting those with Saudi Arabian and other Gulf or Arab citizenship, has been opposed with the argument that *all* with dual citizenship must give up their second non-Kuwaiti citizenship. Thus, there is active practice now among those with secondary European or North American citizenship to keep only their Kuwaiti citizenship.

This is highly significant in a country that is always in the position of feeling threat from its neighbours. The threat of Iraq has only now somewhat begun to diminish- but resurfaces with its neighbour claiming historic ties over it with arguments that it was tied to Basrah (a highly contentious issue in Kuwait- that has



also resulted in a denial of any ties to the Ottoman Empire as the Ottoman rule on Basrah is made to be tied to Iraqi arguments that it is a part of Iraq. (However, even the late Turkish President Turgut Ozal replied to an Iraqi delegation in 1991, that if Kuwait is part of Iraq, then Iraq is part of Turkey; and thus, history should be left alone<sup>213</sup>).

Derek Heater focuses on citizenship education, however, his comment on the concept of citizenship resonates in the context of Kuwait,

Or perhaps the very concept of citizenship is so alien to the native traditions of the Third World countries that the political and educational tasks of fostering its development are fundamentally misconceived? The concept took centuries to mature in its European context. Are the difficulties like political instability and confused political identity merely the growing pains of extremely young polities? Or is the attempted forced growth of European institutions including citizenship, quite artificial and evidence that the transplantation will not take?"<sup>214</sup>

A conference on citizenship took place in February 2010<sup>215</sup> in order to reinforce the sense of national identity, and state- society relations. Various issues from the role of the citizen to other were discussed.<sup>216</sup> Some of the organizers said that the conference took place in order to create a sense of national identity with the Bedu who migrated to Kuwait as well as the diversity resulting in differing religious sects.<sup>217</sup> Main messages from the conference were that there are no differences between Kuwaitis, all are the same under the law, and that "all should love their country and be good citizens."

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<sup>213</sup> Al Bassam, Anne. *Footsteps in the Sand Kuwait and her Neighbours, 1700 to 2003*. Kuwait: The Kuwait Bookshops Co. Ltd., 2004. (308)

<sup>214</sup> Heater 2004, 141.

<sup>215</sup> Muwatana, Patriotism Conference, February 2010, (Movenpick Hotel, Salmiya)

<sup>216</sup> See also Saeid, Ahmad. "Arab academics discuss Kuwait citizenship issue," *Kuwait Times*. February 21, 2010.

[http://www.kuwaittime.net/read\\_news.php?newsid=Nzk0Njc4OTYz](http://www.kuwaittime.net/read_news.php?newsid=Nzk0Njc4OTYz)

<sup>217</sup> Interview with conference organizers, Kuwait, February 20-21, 2010.

#### 4.2.4. The Bedouin and Perceptions of Loyalty

The situation of Bedouins itself is closely related to suspicions of loyalty, as apparent in one interviewee's comment,

What? You are studying the Bedouins?? You mean the nomads, yes? Gosh, I never met anyone who was interested in them. Why are you interested in them?.. Let me tell you something, they have no loyalty, you know? They are nomads, so they follow the sheep – We, I was also a Bedouin, but from Iran, we are different, you know, they are Arab Bedouins.<sup>218</sup>

What is interesting in the above passage is the issue of loyalty as well as difference perceptions among the various groups of origin in Kuwait. What is essentially examined in this thesis is also the changing loyalty from the tribe and the tribal homeland, to that of the new nation-state, the new “imagined community” to reference Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

Thus, loyalty, identity, and imagination (in Benedict Anderson's sense) of a community or at least their perceptions of them are thus inextricably linked. These issues directly affect the nation-state and world politics today through regional identities, cross-border “loyalties,” suspicions and security, and globalization and modernization.

However, elements of suspicion to this loyalty still exist to this day because of the tribal primaries and other. The issue has historic roots, as can be seen below.

At the moment the bedu are still in a stage of transition, marked by a curious intermingling of old customs and new ways. For example, when there is a general election to the National Assembly, badawin tribal leaders are among the candidates who stand. At such times the campaigning takes a form traditional and typical in desert life. Pitching their tents at strategic points in the suburbs, the aspirants to the assembly hold open house for their supporters. One is reminded that tribal allegiances in Arabia have often in the past been swayed by lavish hospitality offered by political leaders at moments

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<sup>218</sup> Interview with A.A.1. Kuwait, April 2010.

of crisis...” To the Badawin, the natural response is to follow who fills the belly...<sup>219</sup>

There are various ways in which tribal issues play out in daily political issues. There is a practice of holding “tribal primaries” before elections. These are when those with strong tribal connections decide to hold internal elections before the voting period. Political parties are banned in Kuwait. Thus the tribes hold elections within those in the tribal group who are running for parliamentary elections. The selected winners are those that the individuals in the tribe must vote for during election-time, thus, ensuring that the tribe does not lose votes in dispersion to various candidates, and consolidates them for one candidate who will then represent the tribe and the tribal political and social values. The practice of holding “tribal primaries” before elections- ensures that tribal values are incorporated into Governmental decision-making practices.

The government crackdown on holding tribal primaries only resulted in the police being attacked by stones a few years ago. Thus, these tribal ties are quite strong, being able to be stronger than the state forces in some instances. Additionally, it is not only Kuwaiti citizens who attend the tribal meetings, but individuals from the rest of the Middle East, who have different citizenship, but who may be of the same tribe also attend and vote. Thus, new nomadic tribal immigrants may become a core part of society, or at least influence national elections.

Tribalism also has other effects which continue today - ranging from having “wasta” or nepotism and favouritism in bureaucratic procedures as well as employment or other, to having various laws passed. For example, it is said that the Saudi tribal groups pass inheritance and zakat laws according to the Saudi Sharia laws and the Iranian Shia groups try to pass laws according to the Iranian Shia

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<sup>219</sup> Freeth 1972, 171.

system – and the Sunnis according to their system. The same may also perhaps be said of the Northern Tribes and the Sunni / Shia in those tribes. This is indicative in an already small country that has other social divisions. These are highly significant issues – and issues that are tied to the history, state formation, tribal migration and economic migration to the country; thus, combining issues that are all too often divided between the current disciplines of anthropology, economics, sociology, history, and international studies.

Ayubi notes, “In the Gulf, tribes and state are in a situation of complementing each other rather than being at conflict with one-another.<sup>220</sup>” Tribes and the existing structure seem to work very well on the surface. However, the parliament gets dismissed every few years, and there are continual tribal pre-elections and politics in a country where political parties are outlawed.

Once again to reinforce national identity, there was an exhibition of old maps of Kuwait in Kuwait city in early 2010. The maps included ones from Dutch, German, and other explorers, and dated to about the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of the exhibition was, according to the exhibiter, to show that Kuwait never belonged to Iraq.

However, upon speaking further with one of the organizers, he revealed that his father had settled in Kuwait in the 1940s (and was originally Iraqi) “but even the Sabah family came from Iraq,” he said, when he noticed that a First Degree Kuwaiti friend accompanying me was deeply disturbed by this “confession” on his ancestry which implied that he was not a First Degree Kuwaiti. The friend was further disturbed when the exhibitor had said the Sabah family originally migrated from

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<sup>220</sup> Ayubi 1995.

Basra... and what was stated to us would have serious social repercussions, including possibly no longer allowing the exhibitor to his fathers' Diwaniya.<sup>221</sup>

Apparently, the Bedu tribal groups have a much stronger sense of identity today. According to Dr. Al-Naqeeb, this is evident in that they put their main tribal names as their last name rather than the tribal branch or lastname. The largest tribes are the Awazim, Mutair, Ajman, and Rashayda totalling around 60,000 to 80,000 individuals. Now around 80% of students at Kuwait University apparently use their tribal names rather than lastnames. This can also be seen in some politicians or government officials now beginning to use their tribal names.<sup>222</sup>

The 1990-1991 invasion and earlier and subsequent threats from Iraq, and the nuclear issues in Iran, make some nervous and create a sense of the need for a backup plan if and when something may arise again. This affects the sense of security and national identity. The wound of '90-'91 struck a deeper political conscience that meets the eye initially, and some may be keeping their dual citizenship in fear of needing to escape, to have backup citizenship in the event that "oil runs out" or "Kuwait is attacked again," two serious national fears. The latter of which has resulted in a large part of Kuwaiti society buying jeeps or even hummers to make the escape easier.

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<sup>221</sup> Kuwait city, April 2010. / Interview with the map exhibitor as well as H.1.

<sup>222</sup> Interview with G., Istanbul, Turkey, August, 2010.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The thesis attempted to explore tribalism, citizenship and state-formation in Kuwait. It included a lengthy discussion on the impact of oil because the export of oil and subsequent economic boom in Kuwait greatly affected the three issues noted above. While the impact of oil on international politics is greatly researched and speculated upon, the impact of oil on internal politics is not as greatly researched. One of the outcomes of the thesis was also precisely this issue of the impact of oil on internal politics and internal human rights issues. Findings also included that tribalism was affected by oil since the economic boom attracted most to a different kind of livelihood. Since Kuwait began to become developed after the oil boom, land available for grazing was greatly decreased. State-formation was affected since Kuwait would not exist as the same state today either economically or socially had it not been for oil.

The main aim of the thesis was to explore the theory that the Bedu are bidoon. This theory has been dissected – only to find that the issue is much broader than it initially seems, and that it is also related to the great influx of immigrants to the country mostly following the oil boom. The mass immigration that took place in Kuwait during this period was caused by the oil boom since many workers were needed to work in the oil fields, and also to work in government and other sectors in Kuwait and they later applied for citizenship. However, the findings were that there

was not only one cause, or one situation of the development of the situation of the bidoon in Kuwait, but multiple ones (external immigration, immigration of the nomadic tribes (which has other sub-elements relating to tribalism), restrictions on citizenship related to the husbands and children of females who marry foreigners, and other). The bidoon do not consist of a single group, but are varied internally depending upon their “origin,” sector in which they work, years in which their relatives or ancestors came to Kuwait, religion, and tribal group and tribal history – and each of these issues may affect their social status in the country.

While examining the theories of the link between the Bedu and the bidoon (which proved to not be as linked as first assumed since there are many non-bidoon, First Degree citizens of Bedu origin in Kuwait), various other theories and issues emerged, showing how this issue reveals other dynamics, tensions, networks, power relations, and systems in Kuwait and beyond. Additionally, issues that otherwise seem to be separate issues in academic discourse today are interrelated in the case of Kuwait.

Thus, the case study of Kuwait has shown the linkages between tribalism, economic globalization, migration, nationalism, trans-nationalism, oil politics, citizenship, and state-formation. It has also shown how regional cross-border tribal identity (or at least perceptions of it), and other tribal issues have an effect on security and state-affairs. Kuwait is sometimes be seen to be an “artificial state,” however, it is actually a very “modern” state and embodies, in some sense, kind of statehood that other countries may be moving towards in the sense of its globalized cosmopolitanism. In fact, if it is at all an “artificial state,” whereby, as some inhabitants of Kuwait put it, “the people will leave once the oil runs out,” it deserves

even further study, as this in itself is a problematic issue that has multiple implications.

While citizenship in its present form was an alien concept in earlier years, the contemporary world of nation-states does not allow for many rights to be preserved without citizenship documents. This is a paradigm shift in perceived allegiances, loyalties, and lifestyle. What was relevant in a previous era, became obsolete with the introduction of a new set of laws and *documented* loyalties. Through the “citizenship” concept of allegiance to a nation (as well as other notions of citizenship), in one interpretation, the nation becomes the “protector” of the rights of the individual.<sup>223</sup> Tribal affiliation and loyalty, as well as religious identity *in theory*, becomes secondary. However, the repeated calls by the Government of Kuwait for national unity, as well as the Conference on Citizenship in February 2010 – are evidence that work on citizenship and loyalty is still continuing to this day. At the same time, certain assumptions – such as those with tribal linkage elsewhere not being loyal to Kuwait – do not hold true – as some of these citizens have proved to be the most loyal.

Statelessness in Kuwait is significant because granting citizenship to the Bidoon today can change the socio-dynamics of the country in a religious and political sense (increase in Sunnis or Shias, increase in those with stronger tribal affiliations to neighbouring countries or other), and also affect the economics of the country as a result in the increase in the number of persons benefiting from government grants and social services. The discussion around these issues also reflects many of the concerns, current values, and power structures evident in Kuwaiti society that still exist today.

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<sup>223</sup> Rizzo et. al. 2007, 180.



The thesis findings include that issue of statelessness does not completely overlap with ideas that nomadic tribalism and statelessness are linked. Moreover, the public has a different view of the situation and on closer examination, it becomes apparent that the issue is also linked to early and modern migration, the overlap between tribal customs and the formation of a nation-state, the end of tribal lifestyle in the traditional sense, security issues, as well as the emergence of a globalized, modern nation-state, yet one that keeps its traditional and tribal linkages. Additionally, it seems that there were multiple reasons on how this group emerged, and that there are various groups with different backgrounds and years during which they settled in Kuwait, within the larger group of stateless.

Kuwait's history as a land that was both a port and land trade route (thus serving as the crossroads of many nomads and merchant tribes) combined with the speed in which it developed, the politics of exclusionary citizenship, and state-building, and the politics of bidoons were examined in the thesis.

Findings include that Kuwait's unique history of state-formation, its relations with its neighbours – both tribally and diplomatically, and its distinct place in globalization as the epitome of a highly migratory and trans-national state (which can be traced through Kuwait's unique history of having particular historical roots of economic globalization as a result of being situated along the southern end of the Silk Road, and on a port that was alternative to the Port of Basrah) are all examples of the dynamics involved in these three main issues of tribalism, state-formation, and citizenship.

Kuwait's early tribal political structure had an impact on political power dynamics during the process of modern state-formation. This was related to tribalism, which in turn, had an impact on modern citizenship in Kuwait. Examining

this impact is helpful in dissecting citizenship theory and practice today (especially when compared to current discussions on Europe).

Kuwait's trans-national tribal ties; regional ties to the GCC countries; rapid changes in the identity, social life, and economy of the country following the discovery of oil; and the 'post-rentier' state were all factors in the dynamics of citizenship and state-formation. At the same time, the preservation and glorification of some aspects of its culture and history in the creation of nationalism and the nation state, which has extended to the present day, serve as a way to create an overarching national identity over tribal and religious affiliation. The opposite also holds true, since as noted earlier, those who do not want their children to play part in nationalism and religious extremism emphasize the tribal identity.

The tribal presence in Kuwait today is even more pronounced because the country went from a tribal structure to a state very quickly. Additionally, the incredibly fast booming economic change in Kuwait did not allow for time for the establishment of a clear division between tribe and state. Indeed, tribal power relations, roles and status-quo were all transferred to the nation-state – set up as a welfare state with the revenues from oil. This slightly altered the status quo as the “nouveau riche” could move up the social ladder – and caused a re-organization of the nomadic tribes.

In summary, the findings of the thesis include that tribalism was at the root of state-development in Kuwait; it was slightly altered with the advent of oil; and that it has affected citizenship, wealth distributions and power relations as well as daily social interactions.

Certain theories of citizenship make it seem as though statehood and citizenship have equality at the root, however, the very nature of the degrees of

citizenship in Kuwait, those who lack citizenship, those preferred by the ruling families and those not, and the status of the foreigners shows how tribal divisions make themselves apparent in everyday politics in Kuwait. The new committee to be formed by the Government of Kuwait with the aim of grouping the bidoon in three different groups based on their background, and the subsequent examination of each claim and granting of citizenship upon credibility and meeting the requirements is a highly positive move in terms of human rights. The subsequent granting of citizenship to some may greatly change the demographic composition of the country. It will also ease some tensions in the country among this community.

As noted within the thesis, there is a recommendation for UNHCR to conduct credibility and assessment interview trainings to the Government of Kuwait, as well as trainings on individual registration and documentation. UNHCR has great expertise in these areas and its mandate includes refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as the stateless. UNHCR is currently mostly conducting credibility interviews and registration with asylum-seekers, however, could easily extend this to the stateless since the situation in Kuwait of the stateless. Moreover, training on the Exclusion Clause would help address the security concerns the Government of Kuwait suspects among the group. The more recent “economic migrants” within the stateless) situation is similar to the situation of some asylum-seekers and the process used to identify this. It should also be noted, however, that it is recommended that this approach also be used with caution as there may be many individuals who have stayed in Kuwait longer than a certain period of time, should be able to have had their citizenship claim processed, and who may have initially come for “economic reasons,” and ofcourse, may not be able to return to their countries of origin (this is especially true of the Palestinians, whose situation needs

further study), similar to “prima facie” refugees. However, with this in mind, the situation of the stateless, while there are similarities with the refugee issue, is also different. The stateless in Kuwait, thus, should not be treated as refugees from ‘abroad,’ but be given the individual respect and consideration as individuals whose ancestors have built the country. Any possibly discriminatory practices that may have existed during the citizenship registration process, should, ofcourse be duly addressed if and or when found.

The thesis also has implications beyond Kuwait. Trans-national connections when spoken of today, are frequently seen to be a product of modernity. An interviewee from Sudan noted how he and his friends would freely cross the Sudan-Chad border whenever they heard festive music and join the celebration taking place in the other nation. The music itself served as an open invitation for them to cross the border. To them, they were joining in a neighbouring tribal celebration. They did not have the concept of crossing an internationally divided zone, as they had tribal members across the other side of what they saw as an artificial division. “It’s just that the British were here [Sudan] and the French were there [Chad], so there are language and other differences now, but otherwise we are the same.”<sup>224</sup>

Nomadic communities in Northern Egypt are also suspected not to be loyal to Egypt and to be engaging in smuggling. This is similar to the discourse of Kuwait and the bidoon and could be examined further and compared with Kuwait. Thus, various issues still warrant future study. Issues such as the linkage (or non-linkage) between tribes, discrimination and citizenship; globalization and tribalism; feudal economic systems and world systems; Hadhar / Bedu dichotomy, etc..., the Merchants today and the Chamber of Commerce, the tribal history of the Bidoon,

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<sup>224</sup> Interview with Sudanese man from Darfur, Kuwait, December 2007.

Kuwait and the Ottoman Empire, all need further examination. These issues could not be explored in the full depth necessary to understand them completely due to the constraints of the thesis. With such a nuanced history and contemporary affairs, some issues have other complex elements that need to be explored.

The discussion on citizenship is similar to many current discussions today regarding the assumed ‘welfare immigrant-citizens’ in Europe may be benefiting from, and where their true loyalties lie. What this study could also bring may be insight into the current situation on citizenship discourse in Europe. While certain concepts of citizenship and the nation state may have started in Europe – where they are and where Europe is today with these definitions and can be understood better when looking outside Europe. For instance, the current discourse in Europe on citizenship includes assumptions of citizens being there solely there for welfare benefits and economic reasons with real roots, allegiance, and loyalty to outside nations – i.e. their ‘places of origin.’ This is said of the immigrant populations that have availed citizenship and welfare benefits – and is greatly similar to the current discourse in Kuwait of some citizens who have dual passports and who are assumed to simply be in Kuwait for economic reasons, benefiting from the welfare of the state – with true ties to neighbouring countries that they and/or their ancestors immigrated from, or with whom they consider to be tribally linked.

This research will hopefully add to the literature of the understudied statelessness issue as well as studies on Kuwait. Since this thesis is a step at exploring some of the assumptions of tribalism and citizenship Kuwait in more depth, further linkages will, hopefully, be studied and add to the literature on Kuwait, a place with a very interesting history and contemporary dynamic, that deserves further study.

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Note:

- a) the location is only noted as Kuwait since the area of inhabitancy of Kuwait is quite small.
- b) Information that may identify the interviewees is kept confidential. Only information that is significant for the thesis, but not confidential, is included for some of the informers.

1. Interview with A.A.1. Kuwait, April November 2008 and April 10.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen of 29 years).
2. Interview with M.2. Kuwait. April 2010.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen, middle aged).
3. Interview with Fawas., Kuwait, August 10, 2009.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen of 31 years, who identifies himself as Bedu and is currently working in the Ministry of Defence).
4. Interview with G. Kuwait, November 3, 2009.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen, middle aged).
5. Interview with I. Kuwait, February 5, 2010.  
(male Kuwaiti 'bidoon' who just acquired Kuwaiti citizenship, middle aged).
6. Interview with A.A.2., Kuwait, April 4, 2010.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen, middle aged).
7. Interview with H., Kuwait, April 7, 2010.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen of 31 years).
8. Interview with R., Kuwait, November 2009.  
(female Kuwaiti citizen, of her late 30s, who traces her husband's ancestors to the Ottomans)
9. Interview with a Syrian man working at KOC, January 2010  
Middle aged.

10. Interview with the K.O.C. Local Relations Department, Kuwait, January 2010.
11. Interview with K. Kuwait, August 7, 2010. And Istanbul, Turkey.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen, middle aged).
12. Interview with M1. October 9, 2009.  
(male Kuwaiti citizen, middle aged, with strong tribal roots).
13. Interview with N2, Kuwait, June 13, 2009.  
(female, Bidoon, also of around 30 years, working as a teacher in Kuwait).
14. Interview with Fatima. Kuwait, November 2008 and May 2009.  
(female, Kuwaiti citizen of mid 30s, who identifies herself as Bedu).
15. Interview with N.1. Kuwait, February 12, 2010.  
(female, Bidoon of around 30 years, working)
16. Interview with H2. Kuwait, October, 2009  
(male, Iraqi citizen of around 35 years)
17. Interview with Exhibitor of Maps, April 7, 2010.
18. Interview with conference organizers for the *Patriotism, Muwatana Conference*, February 20-21, 2010.
19. Interview with Sudanese man from Darfur, Kuwait, December 2007.  
(male, 50s).

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