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“The Door that Cannot Be Closed”:
Citizens *Bidoon* Citizenship in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

This project traces how and why people "without" [*bidoon*] citizenship emerged as a problem in the United Arab Emirates in the 2000s. It examines the reasons the government refuses to grant them citizenship despite regular complaints that citizens are "outnumbered" by migrants. Chapter 2 draws on archived British documents and other sources to show the new forms of sovereignty over territory and population that emerged as colonial interests shifted from control of waterways to control of land and fossil fuels. It analyzes the shifting power dynamics between British colonial powers and local rulers, and the legal developments that preceded the formation of the federation in 1971. The historical approach demonstrates the fluidity in power relations and the later tensions produced by multiple jurisdictions that were in fact encouraged by British colonial rule. Chapter 3 draws on scholarship, government sources, news, laws and decrees to show how the *bidoons* were casualties of a larger population project related to consolidating "federal" rule. It considers citizenship-related UAE laws and procedures between 1971 and 2011 and discusses turning points and major sources of demographic and political tension and the ways these have produced the problem of the *bidoon* in the UAE. The chapter also discusses state "security" discourse and cultural anxieties felt by Emirati citizens in relation to non-citizens and migrants and how *bidoons* articulate their frustrations and make claims for citizenship online. Chapter 4, which relies on blogs and news outlets, focuses on the dominant explanatory accounts for why *bidoons*, who speak the regional Arabic dialect and have lived there for

generations, are refused citizenship. Ultimately, these accounts are insufficient as explanations for why the *bidoon* problem remains.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As an ethnically Palestinian dual citizen of the United States and Jordan, and a legal resident in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, questions of citizenship and national belonging have always intrigued me. When asked where I come from, my response is often “Do you mean where do I live? Where are my parents from? Or what country I am a citizen of?” In my time growing up in the Middle East, I’ve learned that the answer to the last question was rarely sought. I am a Jordanian citizen as a result of international negotiations that brought the Palestinian city of Nablus and surrounding villages under Jordanian control in 1950. Jordan’s King Abdullah gave all West Bank residents at the time, including my paternal and maternal grandparents, Jordanian citizenship. I am a U.S. citizen because my mother visited the U.S. one summer while pregnant with me and gave birth in the U.S. In my personal experience, citizenship does not necessarily determine or encompass all of one’s cultural ties and communities. In fact, most people who surrounded me were part of families that left countries of origin to pursue citizenship possibilities in Western countries like the U.S., Canada, Australia, or England. When asked to identify themselves, they would typically describe their ethnic or ancestral origins. Affiliations based on documentation and passports are less relevant than attachments to particular places, groups, and histories.

It is indeed odd that generally, people turn to documented citizenship in a recognized sovereign state as evidence of solidarity and ties when there is nothing natural about rules of nationality and citizenship. Jacqueline Stevens contends that

birth right citizenship can, in no way, imply “a specific intergenerational people existentially distinct from others.”¹ She argues that the institutionalization of citizenship binds an individual to a territory, creating fixed perceptions of ethnicity, nationality, and race, and prohibits recognition of “the contingencies of these affinities.”² We typically understand citizenship throughout the world to be acquired through one of two forms: *jus soli*, the “right of the soil,” or *jus sanguinis*, the “right of blood”. The *jus soli* citizenship regime, applicable in countries such as the United States and Canada, establishes the right of citizenship by place of birth. *Jus sanguinis* citizenship, on the other hand, determines citizenship through the nationality of the father, the mother, or either parent.³ But in all cases, as indicated by Stevens, citizenship “rights” are created or decided by a government or ruler. They are *legal constructs* that vary from state to state and across historical periods.

People living in the British-colonized areas that later became the United Arab Emirates expressed their identity through oral accounts of genealogical roots and tribal affiliations. When the UAE state was established in 1971, leaders of the federation decided that citizenship would be determined based on regional “Arab” genealogy, affiliation, and loyalty to rulers. In the United Arab Emirates and most Arab countries, citizenship regimes follow the *jus sanguinis* principle, but in a gendered fashion whereby only men can pass citizenship to a non-citizen spouse and the children issuing from that marriage. Like many other Gulf countries, the

¹ Jacqueline Stevens, *States without Nations: Citizenship for Mortals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 213.

² Stevens, *States without Nations*, 77

³ Amitai Etzioni, “Citizenship Tests: A Comparative, Communitarian Perspective,” *The Political Quarterly* 78 (2007): 353.

UAE harbors disproportionate numbers of long-time residents and workers of Arab and non-Arab ethnicities and nationalities who cannot acquire UAE citizenship, even if born there (I discuss this issue at length in Chapter 3).

Beyond foreign husbands of UAE citizen women and their children, there are people without any citizenship who are born and live in the “sovereign” territories of the UAE but are not documented citizens and are refused such recognition. They are known as *bidoons* in Arabic, a shortened categorical distinction derived from the phrase “*bidoon jinsiyya*,” or “without citizenship.” *Bidoon jinsiyyah* was an official designation first applied by the government of Kuwait after independence in 1961 to people who did not qualify for state citizenship when citizenship laws were enacted in 1959. The meanings and implications of terms such as “citizen” and “national” vary with historical shifts, context, and individual users and, in this thesis, I try to be particularly attentive to such differences.

The remainder of this chapter discusses my methods of research and analysis, and the sources I draw on. In the section, “Colonialism, State, and Sovereignty,” I discuss theories related to the concept of the “state” and state-crafting mechanisms and legitimization techniques. In the section, “Laws, Documents, and Statistics,” I discuss the role of paperwork and bureaucracy to show how standardization allows modern states to facilitate, centralize, and extend political authority. I draw on the theories and research of political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and legal experts. Since the term *bidoon* was first used in Kuwait, the penultimate section discusses the emergence of this

category. The conclusion outlines the main findings and arguments in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 to provide the reader with a sense of my overall project and argument.

Research, Analysis & Sources:

Much of the historical scholarship that this thesis relies on clearly reflects a British pro-colonial perspective, and while recent scholarship is often more critical and nuanced, it still frequently relies on British pro-colonial archival accounts. This project also draws on original historical documents (treaties, personal reflections, and letters and correspondences between government and colonial officials), and contemporary state and elite discourse as found in newspaper articles, activist blogs and other online discussions related to the *bidoon* question in the UAE. The UAE is not a democratic context and lacks a tradition of independent expression and scholarship, so one can discern among “insider” scholarly and policy accounts an ideological range, from pro-regime to careful and often oblique critique. I examine all the accounts through a variety of reading methods, including analyzing silences, ideological assumptions, and rhetorical language.

In studying the historical scholarship on sovereignty and state power on the UAE and its colonial “pre-history,” I found that little attention is paid to resistance dynamics and internal obstacles *unless* they can be attributed to individuals that are easily pathologized by the empire. Moreover, when these counterforces and voices *do* appear in the scholarship/historical archives, they are presented as exceptional anomalies or the work of pathological individuals. This was the case when local rulers in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and elsewhere refused to comply with British demands. Such scholarly representations are strongly impacted by colonial frames

that render native peoples, migrants, and the non-powerful invisible, constantly devaluing them, or treating them as childlike and irrational. Not surprisingly, then, there are few accounts of indigenous ideas and systems of leadership, law, and community that were not ultimately invested in the power of the sheikh, tribal leader, empire, or nation-state or [Westphalian] forms of “national” sovereignty.

Most of the historical scholarship focuses on changes driven by the British, the major colonial power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or the internal political machinations of local elites. These two “sides” are not opposite forces, but rather mutually reinforced each other’s goals. Local elites were more likely to compete with each other over influence, resources, and control than to challenge British rule, since it served to protect individuals agreeable to the British. Neither local nor colonial elites had much interest in accountability, in the democratic sense, to people who lived and worked in the area.

While there is significant scholarship on *bidoons* in Kuwait, mainly because they emerged as a problem in the wake of the first Gulf War in 1991, *bidoons* are usually discussed only peripherally, if at all, in Emirati scholarship. Indeed, I believe this thesis is the *first substantial* scholarly analysis of the *bidoon* in the Emirates, although the academic work of Noora Lori, Neha Vora, and Manal Jamal have provided crucial insight on citizenship discourse in the UAE.

Given that the UAE is not a democracy, I am constantly questioning and interrogating the underlying rationale behind government statements, emirate level and federal websites, and laws. I also rely personal blogs and forums that operate on the margins of state censorship. Whether private or owned by the state, news and

other media outlets in the UAE work under considerable government restrictions, which means that critique usually does not directly challenge the rulers. The government uses state media venues to justify the legal status quo and its refusal to naturalize *bidoons*. Bloggers on *bidoon* issues, on the other hand, use diverse rhetorical strategies to make claims on citizenship rights and national belonging. Unlike the news articles, which come from English and Arabic language sources, all the blogs, forums, and citizenship-related decrees and laws since 1971 that I draw on are originally in Arabic, but I've translated into English for this project.

There are some personal blogs that I draw on more than others. Emaraty Bidoon⁴ is one such blog that is founded and moderated by Ahmed Abdel Khaleq, is an outspoken *bidoon* activist from the Emirates. The blog lists 72,000 visitors and is updated regularly. I divided the 133 posts on his blog into two categories. The first type of posting delivers news the UAE government will not publicize, including arrests of Emirati activists, and information about the blocking of dissenting blogs and websites by the national telecommunications services provider. The second type of postings consists of personal reflections and public appeals regarding his situation as a *bidoon*. His last post was in 2012, indicating that the blog may have been closed by the government that year. On November 18, 2014, the blog was completely removed from the Internet. The blog materials from this site that I analyze come from saved screen shots.

The emaratybidoon blog's list of "recommended sites" links to eight other websites, and several of these are also dedicated to *bidoon*-related matters. I have

⁴ See www.emaratybidoon.blogspot.com

tried to incorporate as many voices from the blogosphere as possible and some come from a UK-based site titled “Campaign in Support of the Seven Nationals: Sons of the Emirates,”⁵ the rhetoric of which I analyze in Chapter 3. The bloggers on this site are UAE citizens, all men, who were *stripped* of their citizenship at some point. Whereas the blog functions as a space for *bidoon* individual expression, online forums such as *UAE Goal*, *Emaraty Katib*, and *The UAE Law* provide spaces for community discussion, since any member can initiate a thread on a particular topic. Forum posts and questions that concern *bidoons* and the challenges they face throughout their quest for citizenship have been helpful for capturing pro-government reasoning against extending citizenship to *bidoons*.

Colonialism, States & Sovereignty:

An extensive body of scholarship, often informed by Foucauldian theory, contests the notion of the state as a fixed and stable institution and stresses the non-linearity and fluidity of state-formation. Many social scientists stress the fact that “the state is a contingent form, always in question, always changing in relation to discourse.”⁶ Keeping in mind the contingency of state-formations is crucial for understanding how the state and citizenship rules emerged in the United Arab Emirates. Much of the available historical scholarship on the UAE, in contrast, relies on a deterministic framework such that there is an ideal of “modern” statehood and citizenship that inevitably unfolds. In the UAE’s case, these processes are often understood to have been “distorted” or foreclosed by oil, tribalism, or imperial

⁵ See <http://sevenuuae.blogspot.co.uk>

⁶ Edwin Amenta, Kate Nash, Alan Scott, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 112.

history. Luís Trindade, in his work on Portugal's formation, highlights two consequences of linear state formation narratives:

On the one hand, all historical phenomena take place as if there was no society, that is, concrete social conditions, in-between the initiative of individual agents and singular events. On the other hand, an enormous burden is placed over the State as the guarantor of – or, again, from a conservative perspective, an obstacle to – progress as historical necessity.⁷

Such narratives place “state” and “society” in more or less rigidly opposed positions, concealing the ways in which they are mutually defined and negotiated, and eliminate the colonial, international, and transnational dynamics that produce “the state.” Timothy Mitchell argues that treating the state as an entity separate from society disregards the complex process by which political and social power are maintained. Although he denaturalizes the idea of the state as an object with universal characteristics, Mitchell also emphasizes that the state is everchanging. As he explains:

A construct like the state occurs not merely as a subjective belief, incorporated in the thinking and actions of individuals. It is represented in everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers. The cultural forms of the state *are* an empirical phenomenon, as solid and discernible as a legal structure or a party system.⁸

James Scott is also committed to non-linear state formation narratives, offering a powerful account of the ways states gain control over subjects and make their power legible. Scott challenges “development” and top-down accounts of state planning, showing how these cannot succeed without “local how-to and

⁷ Luís Trindade, *The Making of Modern Portugal* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 8.

⁸ Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics,” *The American Political Science Review* 85 (1991): 82.

knowledge.”⁹ At the same time, however, state systems resort to techniques that simplify, codify, and standardize these local practices. As Foucault argues, modern state power “is exercised... by *comparative measures* that have the ‘norm’ as reference.”¹⁰ Scott identifies four elements that are necessary for the state to establish such control and legibility: *administrative order* in relation to nature and society; *high-modernist ideology* committed to the value of scientific intervention; willingness to use *authoritarian state power* to effect large-scale innovations; and a *prostrate civil society* that cannot resist such plans.

The most relevant element for my case is the limited space for expression, political pluralism, and opposition during colonial rule and in the UAE as an independent state. In the “eyes” of the state, Scott argues, administrative order serves as a clear and neat roadmap that facilitates the achievement of political and economic objectives. But in the geography today called the UAE, colonial powers were mostly interested in establishing rule based on *limited* administrative order. This colonial relationship worked within the fiction of “indirect rule” in order to limit the costs in men and treasure for an empire stretched in many parts of the world and interested in maximizing resources.

As part of this process, the British concluded treaties with dominant local individuals on the Omani coast in what became known as the “Trucial States” in the 1800s. These were defined as “states” with “sheikhs” who signed “truces” with each

⁹ James Scott, *Seeing like a State*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 6.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books), 193.

other under the supervision of the British, who initiated the process.¹¹ The main objective was to secure imperial sea routes. Labeling locals of the Trucial States as pirates, barbarians, and slave owners allowed the British to detain, board, and search ships on suspicion of violence, piracy, or slave-trading.¹² Terms like *pirates*, , similar to today's *terrorists*, are often instrumentally invoked by state and imperial powers to distinguish "legitimate" violence and extraction from other unauthorized forms. In this context, piracy and terrorism can be seen as the "weapons of the weak."¹³

According to Matthew David Penix, who studied the language of the truces, the British objective of "ending piracy" also allowed them to extend and assert control for their economic interests by "monopoliz[ing] the steamer trade into the Gulf" and excluding foreign influence from their European and Ottoman rivals. by allowing the British to "exercise a veto over any other naval presence in the Gulf, simply by saying that such a presence was a threat to one of the protected sheikhdoms."¹⁴ Recent scholarship suggests that the only piracy forces in Gulf waters at the time were in fact the British, who frequently resorted to the same activities they condemned: they boarded locally operated vessels, shot cannon balls at docked ships, and ultimately took control of the sea trade that had been

¹¹ Mubarak Al-Otobi, "The Qawasim and British Control over the Arabian Gulf" (PhD diss., University of Salford, 1989), 56.

¹² Aqil Kazim, *The United Arab Emirates A.D. 600 to the present: A Socio-discursive transformation in the Arabian Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Book Centre, 2000), 144.

¹³ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 14.

¹⁴ Matthew David Penix, "The Ottoman Empire in World War I: A Rational Disaster" (MA thesis, East Michigan University, 2013)

dominated by the Qawasim who previously disrupted passage of ships on British sea routes.¹⁵

In the process of negotiating and communicating with the powerful families along the Omani coast, the British constituted acquiescent leaders, new sovereignties over people and land, and extended the influence of the local tribal leaders that served as their “allies” and dramatically altered the political dynamics of the region. It is important to emphasize that tribal power structures were not simply assimilated into the British administrative grid; they were shaped, and in some cases produced, by British colonial intervention. Leaders were key informants on local affairs, although we can assume that they did not tell their sponsors everything. As Scott has shown, so long as local affairs do not obstruct their commercial and economic interests, states and imperial powers ignore and do not accurately describe the social realities on the ground.¹⁶ This helps explain the absence of scholarship on social life in the British Foreign Office records and documents for the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century for the region.

The importance of local knowledge in state-crafting is enlightened by Scott’s account of French colonial practices, which “relied heavily on the advice of local trackers – the nobles and clergy in the Crown’s confidence – who in turn were not slow to take full advantage of their power.”¹⁷ Such a method proved successful when Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah expressed sympathy for the Arab League in the 1960s, which was established by the nationalist Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The

¹⁵ Jane Bristol-Rhys, “Emirati Historical Narratives”, *History and Anthropology* 20 (2009), 111.

¹⁶ Scott, *Seeing like a state*, 92.

¹⁷ Scott, *Seeing like a state*, 29.

rulers of Qatar and Bahrain reported the incident to British officials in order to reign in the Sharjah leader.¹⁸ As the British Political Agent of Dubai wrote to the London office in May 1965:

[Saqr] had little or nothing to thank the British Government for over the years; he blandly rejected the Minister's strictures that, by allowing the Arab League to open an office on his soil against the repeated advice of the Political Resident and myself, he was in breach (as Mr. Thompson made emphatically clear) of his obligations under the Treaties.¹⁹

A month later, Sheikh Saqr was deposed and replaced. This is not a unique incident. In 1966, Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi was also deposed. Historical texts paint Shakhbut as a "difficult" conservative whose meager spending habits supposedly frustrated his family members, and placed great costs on British oil-extracting firms due to the inactivity of Abu Dhabi's economy.²⁰

British colonial powers often assimilated local power relations to their interests and in the process changed them, leaving a fragile and often contested local leadership system that prevailed even after British withdrawal. Although tribal power dynamics in the Trucial States were perhaps "traditional," Scott demonstrates that such "local, particular, and adaptable" power relations are the very reason they often continue to survive with "microadjustments" to accommodate to changing social and political contexts.²¹ An understanding of the power relations in the Trucial States during the colonial era offers a historical

¹⁸ Helene von Bismarck, "A Watershed in Our Relations with the Trucial States," *Middle East Studies* 47 (2011): 3.

¹⁹ Despatch from Balfour-Paul to Luce, No.5 Confidential, 15 May 1965, FO 371/179916.

²⁰ Christopher Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 35.

²¹ Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 34-35.

perspective on the tensions and struggles for legitimacy and political power that led to the current system.

Law, Documents & Statistics:

To ensure that the locals had no knowledge or power advantages over British colonial officials in areas important to colonial rule, “clarifications” were often undertaken through legal or bureaucratic mechanisms. In colonized Muslim societies, sharia, or Islamic jurisprudence broadly defined, often posed a problem to colonial powers because first, it is flexible and second, legitimacy is not lodged in state authorities or a sovereign figure. Prior to his death in 632 CE, the Prophet Muhammad was the leading source of authority and knowledge for Muslims, leading by example, interpreting Quranic verses and explaining their significance in conducting social affairs. Due to its reliance on interpretation, Islamic jurisprudence for Sunni Muslims has emerged as four main schools, and some smaller schools that remain influential in the lower Arabian Peninsula. In addition, there are many indigenous Shias in the region and they follow their own dominant systems of authority.

The interpretive dynamism of sharia and its lack of attachment to state authority, as Brinkley Messick shows in his study of Yemen, shaped a social world “based on interpretive relations of hierarchy and power.”²² Moreover, state law, known as *qanun* during the Ottoman Empire, was considered to have less legitimacy than religious law. Indeed, state authorities often had to make a case as to why they

²² Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 34.

should have jurisdiction over certain areas of life and appointed religious scholars and judges to the ruling court in order to acquire some legal legitimacy and control.²³

Both Scott and Messick emphasize how states establish legibility and their own centrality through standardization. This is particularly evident with the mid-nineteenth century Ottoman reforms that codified many parts of sharia, which increasingly became seen as “problematically vast, difficult to access, and generally inappropriate for the times.”²⁴ Loose legal principles were placed in the “structural grid of numbered code articles,” lending to a legible administrative grid that would facilitate central control.²⁵ Standardization, argues Messick, worked to “silence the open-ended argumentation of sharia jurisprudence.”²⁶ This process also eroded the independent bases of authority of Muslim jurists and scholars in modernity.²⁷ Nonetheless, this assimilation of sharia was never fully achieved by colonial or state rulers, certainly not in the UAE, because it holds a sacred legitimacy that supersedes the power of any state.²⁸

In the nineteenth-century Trucial States, customary and traditional courts were run by respected local judges who were not necessarily formally trained but worked “in accordance with a loose system of Sharia.”²⁹ This system co-existed with

²³ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Barbara Freyer Stowasser. *Islamic law and the challenges of modernity* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 83; Messick, *The Calligraphic State*, 60.

²⁴ Messick, 54.

²⁵ Messick, 55.

²⁶ Messick, 56.

²⁷ Sadakat Kadri, *Heaven on earth: a journey through sharia law from the deserts of ancient Arabia to the streets of the modern Muslim world* (London: Bodley Head, 2011), 207.

²⁸ Frances Hasso, *Consuming Desires* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 29; miriam cooke, *Tribal Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 40.

²⁹ Husain Albaharna, *The Legal Status of Arabian Gulf States* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1968), 7.

tribal chiefs who settled disputes as needed. The “arbitrariness” and illegibility of this system posed a problem for British powers, especially when British subjects from Britain and its many colonies lived, worked, and circulated through the Trucial States. As discussed in Chapter 2, to maintain control, the British established parallel courts by which British jurisdiction in legal matters extended to all foreign persons. This is arguably the first moment when the “native” is legally categorized, but in the negative or subtractive sense. That is, by defining the “foreigner” subject to British jurisdiction, the “native” remained.

New forms of local bureaucracy emerged, especially in the city-state of Dubai, in the twentieth century. Local rulers established sharia courts at city centers to deal with increasingly complex societies. For example, the instability of the Qajar regime in southern Iran in 1870 resulted in the relocation of “entire families, merchant communities, urban quarters and villages” to the Arab coast.³⁰ Furthermore, the boom of the pearling industry following 1875 and the rising global demand for Gulf pearls made many coastal towns centers of production and commerce: “Tribes, agricultural communities, and mercantile groups [...] particularly from Iran, India, and East Africa” all arrived at the Arab coast eager to partake in the industry and make a living.³¹ Indeed, by 1905, the population in Dubai had grown to 10,000, from 800 residents in 1834.³² Local courts and bureaucracies co-existed with British offices and officials whose rules and

³⁰ Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 110.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

jurisdiction evolved with the development of military and civil airpower and the discovery of petroleum in the first fifth of the twentieth century.

As discussed more deeply in Chapter 3, in the UAE, demographic statistics are important tools for the rulers because they produce fears of being “outnumbered” among the natives citizens. James Scott contends that statistical knowledge is a technique of simplification that does not simply describe a reality but also manipulates it in attempts to produce a “more suitable population.”³³ In the Emirati state imagination, this more suitable population consists of Emirati women married to Emirati men and their “fully” Emirati babies. Simplification necessarily entails “collapsing or ignoring distinctions that might otherwise be relevant.”³⁴ In the UAE, it ignores inconvenient facts such as the many successful “mixed” marriages. It also hides inequalities embedded in the system, for example, the fact that male citizens have significantly fewer legal restrictions on their sexual and marriage choices (see Chapter 3). In the name of “demographic imbalance,” the government punishes Emirati women who pursue exogamous marriages and their children and husbands are stigmatized and excluded from participating in the sociopolitical “national” space.

The rationale behind the standardization initiatives taken in law and bureaucracy prior to the establishment of the federation is not too different from the rationale behind the UAE government’s efforts at standardization in the 2000s (see Chapter 3). Standardizing the population and documenting its members centralizes and legitimizes state authority. Through these mechanisms, the state

³³ Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 92.

³⁴ Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 81.

does not only regulate members of its society, but also constructs them in a way that is politically advantageous by creating official population categories. People who fall outside these categories, such as the *bidoons*, are rendered invisible in the eyes of the state.

Genealogy of a Word: People “Without Citizenship” in Kuwait

The word *bidoon*³⁵ did not appear in any scholarly work I could find in English until 1992 and, when it did appear, it pertained only to people with no documented citizenship in Kuwait. When Kuwait acquired independence from British rule in 1961, the committee responsible for citizens distinguished two different categories: first-class citizens and second-class citizens. First-class citizenship applied to the “originals” who resided in Kuwait before 1920, while second-class citizens were those who immigrated to Kuwait between 1920 and 1948. Neither class of citizenship corresponded to religious sects, with Sunnis, Shias, and Christians, among others, becoming citizens.³⁶ Since 1962, only the first category of citizenship, however, had the right to vote for municipal councilors and to fill government posts. Second-class citizens, “the more radical and urban-oriented Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians,” were not allowed voting rights because the policymakers feared that they would vote against the ruling family.³⁷

Groups excluded from the citizen category consisted mainly of Palestinians who had travel documents but lacked state citizenship; other Arab migrants with

³⁵ Also spelled as *bedoun*, *bidoon*, and *bidoun*

³⁶ Helen Rizzo, Katherine Meyer, Yousef Ali, “Changed Political Attitudes in the Middle East: The Case of Kuwait,” *International Sociology Journal* 22 (2007): 302.

³⁷ Shafeeq Ghabra, “Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change,” *Middle East Journal* 51 (1997): 364; Ahmed Abdullah Saad Baz, *Political Elite and political development in Kuwait* (George Washington University, 1981), 107.

citizenship in their states of origin; and non-Arabs who lived or worked in Kuwait. The people who became known as *bedoons* were considered *potential citizens* and issued documents and cards in the early 1960s that identified them as “temporarily without citizenship.” They were, according to a 1995 report by Human Rights Watch, “to be treated exactly as citizens with the exception of the vote.”³⁸ Until 1986, this group of people, like first and second-class citizens, were granted free education and healthcare. An excerpt from the report elaborates:

During the period preceding 1985, Kuwaiti authorities treated Bedoons as citizens and distinguished them not only from other foreign residents but also from other groups of stateless residents, such as Palestinians from Gaza who carried Egyptian travel documents. The rights of foreigners, including those with stateless status other than the Bedoons, were governed by legislation regulating foreign residence and employment. Before 1985, there was no attempt to apply those laws to Bedoons.³⁹

So, what led to the shift in designation from “potential citizens” to “stateless residents”? The 1979 Iranian revolution and internal instability resulting from the 1980-1986 Iran-Iraq war gave rise to insecurities and xenophobic tendencies in the Kuwaiti ruling family. Kuwait is itself an undemocratic kingly principality established by the British Empire at the end of World War I after it was severed from the Iraqi province of Basra. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was particular suspicion directed against “potential citizens” on the grounds that they were “Palestinians whose political interests focused on their own homeland.”⁴⁰ Since the *legal* allegiances of potential citizens were technically not determined, their neighborhoods were the first to be raided when, at the height of the Iran-Iraq war

³⁸ Human Rights Watch, *The Bedoons of Kuwait: citizens without citizenship* (HRW, 1995), 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰ Giacomo Luciani, *The Arab State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 381-382.

(1982-86), a series of terrorist attacks were carried out in Kuwait.⁴¹ The Iran-Iraq war also created antagonism against Shia groups “whose loyalty to the state was questioned at the time”.⁴² These events led to a series of amendments in Kuwait’s Citizenship Law that made it increasingly difficult for *bidoons* to be naturalized.⁴³

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 further exacerbated tensions and mistrust despite the fact that *bidoons* often took on jobs that were unpopular among Kuwaitis during the war and even accounted for about 80% of the country’s army personnel.⁴⁴ After the war, the situation of *bidoons* in Kuwait continued to decline.

As Yousef Ali, notes:

Immediately after the war, when Kuwait's first and second-class citizens received new ID cards, the Bedoons' ID cards were not renewed. Furthermore, many were deported or arrested. Not only did they lose their residency permits in postwar Kuwait, but also they lost their jobs in the public sector and the military, as well as the limited health care and education they had received using their ID cards.⁴⁵

The blatant maltreatment of *bidoons* in Kuwait in the 1990s caused major uproar, both in Kuwait and abroad, and considerable scholarship on the topic emerged immediately afterwards.

In the context of the United Arab Emirates, the word *bidoon* does not emerge in scholarship until about 2008 for reasons I examine in more depth in Chapter 3.⁴⁶

In the media, the word is used loosely to mean “without citizenship” starting in the

⁴¹ Rizzo, Meyer, and Ali, “Changed Political Attitudes in the Middle East: The Case of Kuwait,” 368.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.* 294

⁴⁴ Al-Najjar, Ghanim. Challenges of Security Sector Governance in Kuwait (CAF). Conference Paper. 2004. Pg. 5

⁴⁵ Helen Rizzo, Katherine Meyer, Yousef Ali, “Extending Political Rights in the Middle East: The Case of Kuwait,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 35 (2007): 179.

⁴⁶ Michael Castellano, “To Be Unwelcome in One’s Own Home: Statelessness in International Law,” *The Monitor*, 2008, 46.

early 2000s. For example, an article published by the UAE newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat* in June 2001 reports that the UAE cabinet “approved the issuance of special labour cards to the children of female citizens married to foreigners who are undocumented and are known as the category ‘Bidoons.’”⁴⁷ This reference to “foreigners” is probably quite literal, as they are husbands who do not have Emirati citizenship and their Emirati wives are not allowed to transfer it to them or their children. The larger difficulty of naturalizing the husbands and children of Emirati women in marriages with men holding citizenship in other states is regularly raised in the blogosphere and differs from the discussions of naturalizing “*bidoons*.” *Bidoons* have no citizenship in any state but argue claim genealogical origin or long residence in the territories that became the UAE. Much like in Kuwait, people without any citizenship became a problem category in response to perceptions of external and internal dangers to the political system.

Chapter Outline

Three central questions guide this thesis. The first is: How did rulers in the UAE come to conceive of citizenship, sovereignty and populations? Chapter 2 provides historical analysis of the relationship between people, land, and rulers in the Trucial States from the 1800s to 1971 when the areas were British “protectorates.” It shows the foundations of the relationships between people, land, and rulers and how the current political and legal power structure came to be.

⁴⁷ Taj-el-Din Abdelhaq, “UAE: Procedures to resolve the problems of the sons of Emirati women married to foreigners,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, archive.aawsat.com, July 11, 2001, <http://bit.ly/1E6jc0D>

Residents in the Trucial States include British colonial subjects from other parts of the world, migrant laborers who moved relatively freely for work, “locals,” and British and other European individuals. New forms of territorial sovereignty and population control emerged as strategic and political colonial interests shifted from control of waterways to control of land and fossil fuels. I analyze the shifting power dynamics between British colonial powers and local rulers and the legal developments that preceded the formation of the federation in 1971. My historical approach in this chapter seeks to emphasize the fluidity in power relations and the later tensions produced by multiple jurisdictions that were in fact encouraged by British colonial rule.

When and why did the *bidoon* become a legal, social, and economic problem and category in the UAE? Chapter 3 pays close attention to the key citizenship laws, policies, and changes enacted by various state bodies and political elites between 1971 and 2011. This question is particularly challenging because of a number of gaps in the discourse on *bidoons*: the *bidoons* emerge and become articulated as a people without a legal right, thus legal language and rulings do not mention or recognize the situation of *bidoons*. Moreover, the setting is not democratic, which limits free expression and scholarship, as well as the possibilities for access to decision-making reasoning and records. This chapter is particularly focused on turning points and major sources of demographic and political tension and the ways in which these have produced the problem of the *bidoon* in the UAE. I also discuss state “security” discourse and cultural anxieties felt by Emirati citizens in relation to non-citizens and migrants, both of which increased in the 1990s. Finally, I discuss

the day-to-day struggles of living without citizenship in the UAE and how *bidoons* articulate their frustrations and make claims for citizenship online, often anonymously. I argue that *bidoons* were essentially the collateral damage of legal and political devices enacted between 2004 and 2008 under Abu Dhabi's form of "federalism." These devices were designed to "resolve" the historical tension between emirate-level power and "federalism."

What are the dominant explanatory accounts for why *bidoons* became and remain a problem? This requires a critical assessment of the available primary sources – local news articles, blogs, and forum posts – that allow us to contextualize existing dialogue between *bidoons*, citizens, and the government. Chapter 4 focuses on the dominant explanatory accounts for why *bidoons*, who speak the regional Arabic dialect and have lived there for generations, are refused Emirati citizenship. These accounts are expressed in online news outlets, blogs, and forums. I identify three lines of argument in these accounts: "Glitch in the system", "The Iranian will always be Iranian", and "The Greedy Fraud". Ultimately, I conclude that these three types of accounts are insufficient as explanations for why the *bidoon* problem remains. The primary reason *bidoons* continue to exist in a legal limbo in terms of citizenship is, I argue, the government's fear that *bidoon* demands for citizenship, if fulfilled, would expand the population and reinforce "citizen" and non-citizen demands for inclusion and accountability. As stated in one blog post by a pro-regime account, , this may be a "door that cannot be closed." I argue that the refusal to grant citizenship to *bidoons* is ultimately about maintaining the existing political system.

Chapter 2

Sovereignty and Citizenship Under British Colonialism

After 140 years of colonial rule, the British government announced in 1968 that it would be withdrawing from the region, setting the stage for the eventual formation of the United Arab Emirates. Features of state sovereignty in the Westphalian sense include the delineation of borders, rule over people and resources within those borders, and the regulation of “entry” across these borders. Increasingly by the nineteenth century, throughout the world, these features necessitated a system of “national” or state-level enumeration and identification, which, in turn, required bureaucratic structures and new legal norms. This part of state formation—perhaps better understood as an *assertion* of territorial political control since there is nothing inevitable or natural about it—involves dividing and grouping the population into more or less consistent legal and social categories of citizen, resident, and migrant. These categories are legal fictions produced and adjudicated by the sovereign state.

People who fall under the *bidoon* rubric in the United Arab Emirates are difficult to define because they have no legal bond to any state, and many of them report they never did. It is helpful to think of the status of *bidoons* as the space left by a missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle. One way to understand this legal status of lack is to try to identify its edges by accounting for how the rest of the citizenship puzzle was built in the UAE. With this purpose in mind, this chapter historically traces the critical legal, bureaucratic, and political developments related to sovereignty, leadership, and citizenship in what is today the United Arab Emirates. The goal is to

show that the emergence of *bidoon* as a lack, or category of exclusion is linked to the ways in which political formations in the region were established and developed over time.

To this end, I examine the long history of Britain's colonial ties to various actors on the Omani Coast and focus, in particular, on the "peace" treaties of the 1800s, the "non-interference" policy, and British legal distinctions between "natives" and foreigners. These historical processes and dynamics eventually inform the ways rulers in the UAE came to conceive of citizenship, sovereignty, and populations. A key theme that emerges during the colonial period is the competition over power that took place both within and between local elites in response to British imperial interests. The rise and fall of certain tribes or their leaders was largely the result of the economic and political factors in play at particular historical moments. Since citizenship is guarded by the powerful, this chapter is concerned with *how* and *why* the power structure came to its specific configuration in the UAE.

Britain's "non-interference" in the Trucial States

Prior to the UAE's establishment in 1971, the region was known as the Trucial States, a configuration that developed out of British commercial interest in the Gulf dating back to 1763. For approximately a century and a half, the Trucial States were part of Britain's informal empire in lower Asia Minor. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 forced Britain, a maritime power that lived by international trade, to conquer naval bases that would secure control over the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean and help lay "the foundations of [Britain's]

assertive superiority.” that would last beyond the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ It was on this basis that the British government established formal relations with the sheikhdoms in 1819. In response to several raids on their fleets, the British persuaded local sheikhs along the Omani Coast to agree to the 1820 General Treaty that banned “piracy.”⁴⁹

Power struggles continued in the nineteenth century as the British Empire sought to control the waterway passage and tribal rulers competed with each other over power and resources. In 1833, for example, the Al Bu Falasah subsection of the Bani Yas tribe in Abu Dhabi defected to establish a separate sheikhdom in Dubai, initiating a longstanding friction between the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai that continues to challenge modern federalization projects in the UAE.

The Trucial States are also referred to in documents and scholarship about the British period as the Trucial Coast, Trucial Oman, Trucial States of the Coast of Oman, and Trucial Sheikhdoms.⁵⁰ They are called “Trucial” because of the truces and treaties that were signed between the British and local rulers in the 1820s and 30s. Seven of the nine rulers included in these nineteenth century truces were given responsibility by the British for the territories that today represent the “emirates” of Ras al-Khaimah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, and Umm al-Quwain, as well as the Kingdom of Bahrain which is its own country today run by a self-installed ruling family from central Arabia. Two additional “states” included in the treaties, Zyah

⁴⁸ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 163 – 165.

⁴⁹ Al-Otobi, “The Qawasim and British Control over the Arabian Gulf,” 56.

⁵⁰ James Onley, “Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms” (Doha: Georgetown University, Center for International and Regional Studies, 2009), 9.

and Jorat al Kamra, were later absorbed by Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, respectively.⁵¹

It is important to note that while tribal systems did not customarily give local sheikhs “sovereign” power over land and people in the Westphalian sense, the conclusion of these “truces” bolstered the authority of local rulers over people without giving the people any particular say in this process. Moreover, this bolstering of local authority was limited in the sense that the British [maintained the power to repress any] “local” interference with their imperial interests.

Upon establishing relations with local tribal leaders, the British made it very clear that they were committed to “non-interference” as an official policy.⁵² Since the relations were primarily established to protect British commerce, the British had no reason to organize a cohesive internal political administration, delineate territorial boundaries for the separate sheikhdoms, or introduce infrastructure and subsequent services to the local population as long as their trade routes at sea were not compromised. Indeed, they had learned from other imperial settings that such attention was costly in a number of ways. Rosemarie Zahlan explains the the consequences of this policy for the local population:

The policy of non-interference meant that British officials were not involved in the introduction of any of the much-needed socioeconomic reforms. No schools or hospitals, no public services of any kind were introduced by the representatives of the British government: this perpetuated isolation of the region.⁵³

⁵¹ See 1820 General Treaty. Fujairah broke away from Sharjah in 1952, and Bahrain became independent in 1971 upon the establishment of the UAE federation.

⁵² Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 15.

⁵³ Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 15.

The British policy prior to the twentieth century also encouraged separatism *between* the sheikhdoms and affected tribal ties *within* them. As they had done in other imperial settings, such as Africa and India, Britain adopted the strategy of “divide and rule” in their administration of the Trucial States, exploiting religious and ethnic antipathies.⁵⁴ Treaties were signed and negotiated with each sheikhdom’s ruler separately, limiting contact and the possibility of a unified front against the British. The British selectively approved and disapproved of local rulers, fortifying existing tribal ties and, in this way, extended and maintained British power over rulers.⁵⁵ James Onley notes that Britain’s defense of local rulers’ domains depended on these “culturally sanctioned protector-protégé relationship,” whereby local rulers recognized Britain as their “protector” and ordered their tribesmen to not attack British vessels. In turn, the British would “behave, on the whole, as the rulers expected the protector to behave,” that is, they provided subsidies to the local leaders for their cooperation, further reinforcing their control.⁵⁶

The treaties the British signed with the separate sheikhs also required rulers to sign on behalf of their heirs, thus securing British support in the dynastic terms that remain to this day in the modern “independent” states of Asia Minor.⁵⁷

Tracing and examining the genealogy of Britain’s techniques of control in the Trucial States helps us understand some of the current administrative dynamics and

⁵⁴ James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 412.

⁵⁵ Andrea B. Rugh, *The Political Culture of Leadership in the United Arab Emirates* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10.

⁵⁶ James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

⁵⁷ Yemen is an exception.

tensions, including those between Emirates, in the UAE. First of all, by issuing travel cards and identity papers specific to particular sheikhdoms, the British influenced the manner “by which each state became politically and socially self-contained” and lay the groundwork for the differing legal systems across the Emirates.⁵⁸ The imperial techniques of governance strengthened the positions of local rulers⁵⁹ and distorted existing forms of tribal leadership. The result was that sheikhs gained a new kind of exclusive legislative, executive, and judicial authority they did not previously have, which they used to buttress their authority over local populations as necessary.

Legal Mechanisms: Tensions in Plurality

The nineteenth century legal system in the Trucial States is examined by Dr. Butti Al-Muhairi, who describes it, perhaps informed by his own modernization assumptions, as “so rudimentary that it was almost non-existent.”⁶⁰ Most disputes and agreements were resolved in traditional or customary settings. Merchants and pearl divers had their own customary commercial courts to settle disputes. Criminal matters were handled differently depending on “whether the offender was caught or whether he escaped and sought refuge with another tribe.”⁶¹ When there were disputes among tribesmen, one of three agents was called in: the local sheikh of the involved tribe, the British-authorized ruling sheikh, or the local judge, who typically relied on the broad principles of Islamic jurisprudence. The *qadi* or local judge was not necessarily formally trained but rather “educated from a very limited number of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 16.

⁶⁰ Butti Al-Muhairi, “The Development of the UAE Legal System,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 11 (1996): 122.

⁶¹ Ibid., 122.

written sources in addition to the Quran.”⁶² Generally, all three agents administered justice “in accordance with a loose system of sharia, interpreted by either rulers or religious qadis.”⁶³ Nonetheless, the qadi and the ruler rarely became involved in disputes as norms dictated that matters should, if at all possible, be resolved on the family or tribal level. The decision of the tribal chief in disputed matters could be accepted or rejected by involved parties.⁶⁴ This practice set limits to the “sovereign” power of the “state” and its rulers.

The legal system’s dependence on the local tribal sheikh posed a problem in the late nineteenth century when people who had no tribal links – for example, migrants and British citizens – were involved in a dispute. The British responded by enacting the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890, which provided the basis for their extra-territorial jurisdiction in lower Asia Minor. Prior to 1890, Britain could only enact its laws in foreign territories that were ceded, conquered, or annexed. The Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890 gave the legal basis for enacting laws even in territories that are only in *treaty relations* with the British government, such as the Trucial States, which were considered British protectorates.⁶⁵ The Act stated that any foreigner who was involved in a dispute would be tried by special British tribunals that were independent of local courts, which were now restricted to use by “native” inhabitants.⁶⁶ This marks the first legal distinction between foreigner and native.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Albaharna, *The Legal Status of Arabian Gulf States*, 7.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁶ P.A. Howell, *The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council 1833-1876* (Cambridge, 1979), 78.

But the British were not the only sources of legal pluralism. The success of the pearling industry toward the end of the nineteenth century attracted enough immigrants to necessitate new *local* legal systems as well. An increase in economic activity led to an increase in “criminal offences, disputes caused by marriage between non-related families, and disputes over property.”⁶⁷ Each sheikhdom’s ruler found it important to establish sharia courts that superseded tribal allegiances; and these would be focused on penal, family, financial and property-related matters.⁶⁸ Authorities in these courts used legal rulings from Sunni Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Shia jurisprudence. When faced with situations or disputes that were not covered by previous rulings, these traditionally trained Muslim jurists “interpreted and extended the law of God” instead of creating new laws.⁶⁹ Courts also differed in their procedural rules, since the judges applied them “as they deemed would best determine justice.”⁷⁰ In this system, parties to the dispute were “entitled to reject a decision which did not satisfy their interests,” and the ruler of the sheikhdom would “refer the case to another sharia court judge selected by him.”⁷¹ Moreover, parties to a dispute were permitted to refer their case to Islamic centers in Egypt, Mecca, or Qatar if they preferred.⁷² The transnational reach of sharia, along with its flexible and expansive nature, challenged the idea of a single

⁶⁷ Al-Muhairi, “The Development of the UAE Legal System,” 123.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 34

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Al-Muhairi, “The Development of the UAE Legal System,” 124.

⁷² Ibid.

cohesive legal system and facilitated the emergence of legal systems across municipalities in the twentieth century with mutual recognition of orthodoxy.⁷³

These developments illustrate the competing interests and multiple internal and external factors that influenced legal discourse and bureaucracy, unintentionally or deliberately, leaving many gaps and ambiguities that played out contingently in any number of directions.

Mapping Colonial Power: From Sea to Air to Land

Since British revenue was dependent on securing sea routes in the nineteenth century, “local” processes and inland affairs were largely neglected unless they impacted British sea trade. Jane Bristol-Rhys notes that the labeling of the region the *Pirate Coast* from the eighteenth century “underscored the fact that the British focus was entirely on the coastal region, while the interior [...] was ignored and the inhabitants dismissed as Bedouin.”⁷⁴ When the British political agent, Julian Walker, was tasked with settling the frontiers in the 1950s and 1960s, he noted that “there was a tendency for the maps near the coast to be dotted with innumerable names.”⁷⁵ Variations of names on the coast reflect the countless claims made by numerous families and individuals. Walker adds that deeper inland areas were by contrast “largely blank” or they would have only “two names given by different tribes who seldom met.”⁷⁶ Economic power and societal dynamics were certainly concentrated in coastal areas, but it is important to note that inland areas

⁷³ Adnan Hamoodah, *Nazrahfe al-Tanzeem al-Qadaeiwa al-Tashreeife Emarat al-Khaleaj al-Arabi* (Damascus: Dar al-Hayah, 1969), 7.

⁷⁴ Bristol-Rhys, “Emirati Historical Narratives”, 111.

⁷⁵ Julian Walker, “Practical problems of boundary delimitation in Arabia: the case of the United Arab Emirates,” in *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States*, ed. Richard Schofield (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 111.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

were only “blank” to Walker because they were irrelevant to British rulers and mappers.

British emphasis on the sea ultimately affected power hierarchies along the coast. The thriving ports of Ras Al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Ajman were of strategic concern to the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁷ Families in these key coastal towns, such as the Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-khaimah, extended their control to tribes with whom they had no direct ties or blood links, challenging genealogical or “natural” definitions of sheikhdoms or tribes.⁷⁸ When the Qawasims, known to command approximately 900 vessels and 8,000 men, threatened British trade fleets in the late eighteenth century, a new British “antipiracy” campaign emerged that resulted in “agreements” to halt future attacks.⁷⁹ The signing of agreements with the Qawasims in the 1800s paradoxically articulated and confirmed their naval dominance, political power and relevance in local affairs on the Omani Coast.⁸⁰

British imperial concern with control of land increased after oil was discovered in Persia in 1908 and especially with the growing importance of this resource during the Great War.⁸¹ The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire established British control over Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan (created at this point), and much of lower Asia Minor. France took control of Syria and Lebanon, which had been comprised of multiple provinces in the Ottoman Empire. After the war ended,

⁷⁷ Al-Otobi, “The Qawasim and British control of the Arabian Gulf,” 25.

⁷⁸ Walker, “Practical problems of boundary delimitation in Arabia,” 110.

⁷⁹ Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 6.

⁸⁰ Onley, “Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms,” 7.

⁸¹ Aryeh Yodfat, *In the Direction of the Persian Gulf: The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf* (London: Routledge, 1977), 1.

the British made new “agreements” in 1922 with sheikhs of the Omani coast that stipulated that no oil concessions in the Trucial States could be granted to non-British entities without British approval.⁸² The promise of striking oil in the Trucial States prompted the British to start paying more attention to local affairs. The significance of oil is reflected in the writings of French diplomat Victor Henri Berenger who, in 1924, predicted that “he who owns the oil will own the world, for he will rule the sea by means of the heavy oils, the air by means of the ultra-refined fuels, and the land means of gasoline and the illuminating oils.”⁸³

Oil companies entered the Trucial States in search for concessions in the 1930s, when large commercial quantities of oil were found in Bahrain.⁸⁴ Faced with a full-scale global depression in 1929 and Japan’s invention of artificial pearls, the pearling industry was in crisis and local rulers needed alternative sources of income.⁸⁵ In 1937, the sheikhs of Dubai and Sharjah became the first coastal rulers to grant concessions to foreign companies, with Abu Dhabi following two years later,⁸⁶ although the start of the war in 1939 disrupted oil exploration. Oil was not discovered in Abu Dhabi until 1958 and in Dubai until 1966.⁸⁷ Concessionary deals between individual sheikhs and the British government heightened tensions and jealousy among rulers, and exacerbated separatist and competitive tendencies.⁸⁸

⁸² Fuccaro, *History of City and State in the Persian Gulf*, 110.

⁸³ Barrett Tillman, *Forgotten Fifteenth* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2014), 81.

⁸⁴ Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), 258.

⁸⁵ Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 30.

⁸⁶ Oil concessions were concluded with the other Emirates later: Ras al-khaimah (1945), Umm al-Quwain (1945), Ajman (1951) and Fujairah (1953).

⁸⁷ James Onley, *The Infrastructure Informal Empire* (University of Oxford, 2001), 38.

⁸⁸ Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 17.

The importance of oil grew when the Second World War broke out. Erwin Rommel, a prominent German general during World War II reportedly forced by Hitler to commit suicide in 1944,⁸⁹ writes, “We knew that our moves would be decided more by the petrol gauge than by tactical requirements.”⁹⁰ The Allied Oil Campaign of World War II targeted the destruction of vast oil reserves in Germany, highlighting the strategic importance of oil in warfare and inspiring the pursuit of alternative supplies of fuel by all warring parties. For the British, this meant their interests in the Trucial States now extended beyond the sea and coastal towns.

Sovereignty over the air space also became increasingly important to the British. During the interwar period, the British India Office was concerned with securing an air route from Britain to India and acquiring rights for the landing and refueling of British military aircraft. The expansion of the civil aviation and air communication industries in the 1930s shifted the relationship between the British and local subjects. Winston Churchill was particularly interested in controlling a Cairo-Karachi route, exploring alternative routes, for example, through Persia and Arabia.⁹¹ The Indo-European Telegraph Department on the Persian coast, which managed a series of Anglo-Persian telegraph lines, gave the Persian route a slight advantage in terms of security.⁹² The Trucial States alternative for air access and landing agreements became important in 1931 when the Iranian government

⁸⁹ Ian F. W. Beckett, *Rommel Reconsidered* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books), 137.

⁹⁰ B.H. Liddell Hart, ed., *The Rommel Papers*, trans. Paul Findlay (1953: reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 198.

⁹¹ John Peterson, *Defending Arabia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 16.

refused to renew Britain's permit to fly over Persian territory.⁹³ Air power remained "a principal British tool for providing both internal and external security" to the sheikhs until Britain withdrew in 1971.⁹⁴

Britain's need for air-landing rights in the sheikhdoms unintentionally shifted the hierarchy of the rulers of the Trucial States in relation to each other and the British. Upon mapping out the Arab route in the late 1920s, the British concluded that Ras Al-Khaimah's location and facilities deemed it the most suitable town to set up a landing station, and proceeded to build a rest house for British travelers in Ras Al-Khaimah. The British Political Resident tried to pressure the ruler to concede landing rights, but Sheikh Sultan bin Salim al-Qasimi was "unyielding in his refusal to allow use of his creek by a civil air service".⁹⁵ Negotiations with Dubai also proved unsuccessful as Sheikh Said bin Maktoum admitted that he "could not get the assent of his relatives" in granting air landing rights.⁹⁶ Abu Dhabi's ruler, Sheikh Shakhbut Al-Nahyan, also refused to grant air-landing rights until 1935, when the British threatened to blockade pearling vessels, Shakhbut's main source of income.⁹⁷ Thus, the first landing site was set up in Sharjah only after a 1932 agreement with Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr that affirmed Sharjah's official possession of the territory of Kalba.⁹⁸ In 1937, Dubai became a stopping point on the Imperial Airways route, as Sheikh Said bin Maktoum

⁹³ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 476.

⁹⁴ Peterson, *Defending Arabia*, 13

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ David Commins, *The Gulf States: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 154.

⁹⁸ Commins, *The Gulf States: A Modern History*, 154; Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 65.

exchanged air-landing rights for fees.⁹⁹ Taken together, these events demonstrate how political power and dominance were negotiated by local elites in competition with each other and in relation to British imperial interests.

The shift of British focus from the sea to the land prompted administrative bureaucratization and territorial demarcation, to keep closer track of political developments during rising Arab nationalist movements, and to address internal disputes over territory. But bureaucratization and institution-building were also locally initiated. The 1930s was a defining decade for the ruling Maktoums and Dubai. Sheikh Said used air-landing fees and income from oil agreements to finance and implement development projects, including the first schools in the Trucial States, established in 1937. In 1938, the merchant class, struggling with the decline of the pearling industry, campaigned for the ruler to allow them to manage some of the wealth of the city. With Said's approval, they set up a 15-member council to "oversee Dubai's finances and recommend channels of fiscal management and wealth distribution."¹⁰⁰ This council was dissolved a year later when its members overstepped the bounds by attempting to limit the amount of income going to the Maktoum family. Nevertheless, they had by then implemented "a new municipal council, a social security system, a new method of election for customs officials, and made significant contributions to the state educational system."¹⁰¹ These developments contributed to the early accession of Dubai as a dominant economic,

⁹⁹ Peterson, *Defending Arabia*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Alejandro Ortega, "Dubai: The Case of Tribal Modernism," *Stanford Journal of International Relations* (2009): 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

political, and cultural force in comparison to the other sheikhdoms.¹⁰² Christopher Davidson argues that the British were relieved to see the fall of the council because it signaled an autonomous political movement outside the circle of their allies, the Maktoums.¹⁰³

While not unaware of the concept of territorial division, the sheikhs considered boundaries implied and agreed upon between them. It became clear that these boundaries were contested when Abu Dhabi and Dubai engaged in armed conflict over their borders in 1947 because of concessionary questions. The result was the first borderline within the Trucial States, between Abu Dhabi and Dubai in 1947. It was drawn by the British Political Agent after negotiating with both rulers and excluding a disputed territory that remained a buffer zone until a formal compromise was reached in 1979, eight years after the establishment of the federation.¹⁰⁴

The responsibility of further territorial demarcation fell on a 24-year-old British official, Julian Walker, who arrived in Sharjah in 1953. An excerpt from his personal reflections offers insights on the mechanisms of frontier delineation, his colonial subjectivity, and British intentions. For Walker, territorial demarcation through mapping was, in the end, necessary¹⁰⁵ to peaceful frontier delineation. He warned against determining boundaries by having two claimants meet on disputed

¹⁰² Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 68.

¹⁰³ Christopher Davidson, "Arab Nationalism and British Opposition in Dubai, 1920-66." *Middle Eastern Studies* 43 (2007): 883.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, "Practical problems of boundary delimitation in Arabia," 112-115.

territory.¹⁰⁶ The best solution, in his opinion, was for the British to map the territory. His reflections make clear how haphazard the process was:

I had to make my own maps, and started by climbing mountains, where these existed, to sketch the countryside around me. A useful book called *Hints for Travellers*, published by the Royal Geographical Society, gave me clues about surveying, and I borrowed alidades, plane tables, range finders, clinometers, and other instruments from the Directorate of Overseas Survey. In the end, the need for speed overcame hopeless attempts towards perfection, and I relied on compass traverse and the milometer in the Land Rover. [...] The final product was neither artistic or particularly accurate, but certainly better than working without any maps at all.¹⁰⁷

The fixation of boundaries through the crude techniques Walker describes rigidified shifting flows of influence and people. James Scott considers mapping to provide the dominant political power with the “information and administrative grid” necessary for the regulation of movement and people within a territory.¹⁰⁸

The British were increasingly active from the mid-twentieth century in establishing new agencies, modifying the legal system, and issuing identity certificates and travel documents to residents or visitors across the region. Nelida Fuccaro contends that in Bahrain, which was one of the nine Trucial States, “British agencies functioned as passport offices [whose] services often overlapped with those offered by the local sheikhs who issued traditional safe passages.”¹⁰⁹ These post-Second World War processes, usually supported by the local elites, indicated an end to Britain’s “non-interference” policy. When the British were forced to leave India in 1947, the responsibility for the “Gulf Resident,” or British colonial authority, transferred from New Delhi to London. At that point, according to James Onley, “the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ James Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 23.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

British Government adopted the attitude that it was morally responsible for the internal development of the Gulf sheikhdoms and Oman, even if it was not legally responsible.”¹¹⁰

Sir Hupert Hay, the first Political Resident in Bahrain, articulated the shift in British policy concerning management of the Trucial States when he declared in a letter to Sir Winston Churchill:

[U]ntil the early thirties of this century we studiously refrained from all interference with the internal affairs of the Sheikhdoms [...] The construction of an airport at Sharjah and the grant of concessions to an oil company forced us to modify this policy to some extent [...] We are in effect, in contradiction to our declared policy in the other Sheikhdoms, tending to treat the Trucial Coast more and more as a Protectorate and whether we like it or not we shall, I feel, find ourselves compelled increasingly to assume responsibility not only for the maintenance of law and order but also for administration and development.¹¹¹

What is striking in Hay’s account is the recognition of the need to shift British policies towards the Trucial States given the emergence of oil. Although the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890 already extended British jurisdiction to foreigners in the Trucial States, the growing presence of “British aircraft and their passengers and crew, British oil companies, merchants and civil officials” in the 1940s necessitated establishment of a separate legal space outside the local sharia courts.¹¹² The 1946 and 1949 Trucial States Order in Council rulings by the British explicitly articulated a native/non-native distinction and consolidated British jurisdiction over non-natives by establishing three courts to handle disputes and agreements between non-natives: The Court for the Trucial States and the Chief Court of the Persian Gulf,

¹¹⁰ Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 13.

¹¹¹ FO 371/121370, EA 1053/7 letter from Sir Rupert Hay to Sir Winston Churchill. 25.6.1953.

¹¹² Al-Muhairi, “The Development of the UAE Legal System ,” 125.

which were first instance courts, and the Full Court of the Persian Gulf, the highest appeal court. In cases that involved natives and non-natives, the British established two additional courts, the Joint Court and the Joint Court of Appeal, which had jurisdiction over all criminal and civil cases where the parties included natives and non-natives.¹¹³

Shifts in British focus from the sea to air and land, coupled with the plurality of legal systems across the emirates, influenced internal political competition at elite levels. Negotiation of air landing rights and the signing of oil concessions turned relations between the British and Trucial leaders into a two-way street, whereby local rulers negotiated and bolstered their positions in an unprecedented manner. Finally, the lack of a single body of legal norms across the sheikhdoms invited further British involvement in administrative matters such as resource management and policing.

Instabilities and Shifts in Sovereignty

The Trucial States Levies (later Trucial Oman Scouts) were established by the British in 1951 to “defend Trucial States against external aggression, as well as maintain internal security.”¹¹⁴ After Dubai and Abu Dhabi set up functioning police forces in 1957 and 1958, respectively, the British hired Major Jack Briggs from the armed police in Qatar to create a police wing under the Trucial Oman Scouts to patrol Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. Rulers of these northern towns, however, rejected British policing operations in their territories. In 1965, Briggs finally accepted an “invitation” from Sheikh Rashid bin

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Hawley, *The Trucial States* 174.

Said Al-Maktoum to become the commandant of Dubai's police force. While refusing British policing forces, some of the northern rulers sought British assistance in establishing armed forces of their own. "The British agreed to Sheikh Saqr of Ras al-Khaimah's request to acquire 50 rifles for a proposed police force and supported the proposal that his son, Sheikh Khalid, visit British police establishments to learn more about policing methods."¹¹⁵ As the Political Agent of the Trucial States wrote in a letter to his colleague at the Bahrain Residency, "It is essential that the Ruler should feel he has our positive backing in launching his police force."¹¹⁶ Why did the British facilitate and enhance the coercive instruments of local rulers? The answer lies in the relationship between British officials and Trucial leaders and their shared security interests (prior to British withdrawal in 1971) in protecting the rulers from external and internal threats. Policing also became an important job opportunity for local men.

The Trucial States Council, considered to be "the direct ancestor of the present day UAE Supreme Council," was also created in 1951 under the chairmanship of the British Political Agent. A year later, rotation of chairmanship was allowed among the rulers of the shaikdoms.¹¹⁷ The council's function was merely consultative to the British. It had no independent executive or legislative powers, but rulers were able to meet, discuss, and issue resolutions, bringing them

¹¹⁵ Ash Rossiter, "Britain and the Development of Professional Security Forces in the Gulf Arab States, 1921-71: Local Forces and Informal Empire" (MA thesis, University of Exeter, 2014); TNA FO 371/179941, Hugh Balfour-Paul (Political Agent, Trucial States) to J.R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 8 May 1965;

¹¹⁶ TNA FO 371/179941, Hugh Balfour-Paul (Political Agent, Trucial States) to J.R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 8 May 1965.

¹¹⁷ Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 36.

closer together “with the possibility of their forming some political or economic association in the future”.¹¹⁸

From the 1950s and onward, many people in the Trucial States became aware of upheavals in the region through Egyptian teachers who were imported to staff newly established local schools.¹¹⁹ In May 1963, the first labor strikes took place in Abu Dhabi following the exposure of British Petroleum's wage discrimination on Egypt's nationalist “Voice of the Arabs” radio program. Natives were particularly unhappy that BP was paying Indian, Jordanian and Lebanese employees more for the same jobs.¹²⁰ They were perhaps also unhappy with Sheikh Shakbut's “meager spending” on Abu Dhabi's development.¹²¹ The labor strikes heightened British worries about the rise of Arab nationalism. The sheikhs were divided in their stances on Arab nationalism. The leaders of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah were bold proponents, seeing that nationalism “offered an escape route for the Qawasim sheikhdoms from centuries of British control and humiliation.”¹²²

In 1965, the Arab League, established in Cairo by Abdel Nasser, expressed intentions to open an office in the Trucial States that would administer and distribute money for local development. The British were convinced, probably rightly, that Abdel Nasser's main goal was to kick the British out and “destroy the system of sheikhly rule in order to establish Arab socialist regimes subservient to

¹¹⁸ Fatima Al-Sayegh, ‘International Relations and the Formation of the UAE’, *Journal of Social Affairs* 21 (2004): 47; Hawley, *The Trucial States*, 173.

¹¹⁹ von Bismarck, “A Watershed in Our Relations with the Trucial States,” 69.

¹²⁰ Noora Lori, “Unsettling State” (PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 2013), 91.

¹²¹ Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 37.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 38.

Cairo.”¹²³ Fearful of the Nasserist threat, the British created the Trucial States Development Fund in 1965 to offset the Arab League’s plans¹²⁴:

It was believed that the best way to prevent Arab League from opening an office in the Trucial States was to tell the Secretary-General that there was already an institution in existence which was responsible for the supervision of the use of foreign aid and for the implementation of development plans. The Arab League should be informed that whilst financial contributions were welcome, the opening of an Arab League was counterproductive.

The Trucial States Development Fund allocated funds to “modernize” administration in the Trucial States.¹²⁵ Economic surplus from crude oil in the 1960s gave sheikhs more opportunities to influence regional affairs, allowing institution-building, social welfare funding, and exercising of “some sort of independence in action, though discreetly.”¹²⁶

Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah was the only ruler who was a fervent anti-colonial. He allowed the opening of an Arab League office in his territory in May 1965. The British feared that the other rulers might follow suit.¹²⁷ Readers may not be surprised that in June 1965 Sheikh Saqr was deposed by his family and replaced with a more agreeable sheikh. While it is likely that the British played a role in the deposition, British reports continue to be classified.¹²⁸ In 1965, the British separated

¹²³ von Bismarck, “A Watershed in Our Relations with the Trucial States,” 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 107.

¹²⁶ A.O. Taryam, *Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950-85* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 52, 57.

¹²⁷ von Bismarck, “A Watershed in Our Relations with the Trucial States,” 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 20.

from the Trucial States Council and the Trucial Development Fund was placed under the Council's direct administration.¹²⁹

Sheikh Shakhbut in Abu Dhabi challenged British authority in a different way. He halted the construction of infrastructure by British companies in his territory and banned foreign and regional businesses from entering Abu Dhabi.¹³⁰ He also condemned the British-officered Trucial Oman Scouts, maintaining that they only provided protection for the oil companies, and established his own separate Abu Dhabi Defense Forces in 1965.¹³¹ Within a year, he was replaced by Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan¹³², a more agreeable figure to the British.¹³³ By 1968, the newly assigned director of each of the Trucial Council's departments¹³⁴ managed the budgetary provisions, and gave local subjects an unprecedented opportunity at "national" resource management on a "federal" level.¹³⁵ Recent scholarship and original sources demonstrate that British "development" projects allowed them to "safeguard" their interests.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, they also paved the way for self-governance, but in a controlled way that was led by local elites agreeable to the British.

Managing Migration Flows

¹²⁹ Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 48.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31, 33, 37.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³² Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan became the first president of the UAE. When Zayed died in 2004, his son Khalifa bin Zayed became President of the UAE and remains in this position at this writing.

¹³³ Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*. 37.

¹³⁴ These departments included Agricultural and Veterinary Services, Technical Education, Scholarships, Health, and Public Works and Fisheries Department; Hawley, *The Trucial States*, 229.

¹³⁵ Christopher Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 37.

¹³⁶ von Bismarck, "A Watershed in our Relations with the Trucial States," 2.

In controlling the flows of migrants into the Trucial States, the British urged constant vigilance and “pre-emptive security measures,” including the application of extensive surveillance.¹³⁷ Indeed, migrant populations were linked to anti-colonial and anti-corporate security threats as early as the 1940s.¹³⁸ A 1946 population estimate shows that Persians made up 40% of the population in Dubai, 25% in Sharjah, 10% in Abu Dhabi, and about 5% in the remaining Trucial States. Indicating this ruler’s sensitivity, Abu Dhabi required Iranians to obtain visas to legally reside in his territory. Dubai and the Northern sheikhs, in contrast, considered them subjects of their Trucial state and granted them passports.¹³⁹ Visa-free access was particularly important for Dubai due to the economic power of its merchant communities, of which Persians were a large fraction. The British accused the rulers of selling passports to non-natives for the sake of profit. As a result of British coercion, Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras al-Khaimah cancelled all passports in 1965 and required their populations to apply for new ones.¹⁴⁰ Notably, when the sheikhs came together to establish the federation in the late 1960s, a central point of contention between them was whether or not to recognize Persian-origin people as citizens. Some rulers – particularly in Abu Dhabi – claimed a desire to maintain the “ethnic composition” of the new federation. However, the distribution of power within the union was a major factor in rulers’ reluctance to naturalize these large populations.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 75.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 101-108.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

During the pearling and oil eras, because migrants largely came to work, the British developed a “joint system of residence permits and labor contracts.” Archival records show that the British had been issuing “No Objection Certificates” (NOCs) in the Gulf since the 1930s that native employers who wanted to hire foreign migrants had to acquire.¹⁴² The purpose of these certificates was to make sure that only migrants specifically recruited for a job could enter the Trucial States. The concept and system of NOCs set the foundation of the *Kafala*¹⁴³ or sponsorship system that is currently in place.¹⁴⁴

In 1967, the British mandated that visas of migrants were to be “checked even prior to passengers landing on the Trucial coast.”¹⁴⁵ In the same year, British officials began referring to Arab migrants as “undesirables.”¹⁴⁶ There was not much the British could do, however, if rulers sent an individual an invitation letter that allowed them to enter at a border. The simultaneous use of such formal and informal mechanisms led to “a system of split jurisdiction” and “multiplied the visa loopholes that individuals could use to enter into the territories of the Trucial States,” argues Noora Lori.¹⁴⁷

Tensions at the Establishment of the United Arab Emirates

The British announced their intention to withdraw from the Trucial States in 1968 following parliamentary debates about expense and the capacity of the

¹⁴² I. J. Seccombe and R. I. Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” *International Migration Review* 20 (1986): 560.

¹⁴³ This is the sponsorship system that regulates residency and employment of the workers in the GCC countries by legally binding migrants to their sponsors, or local employers.

¹⁴⁴ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 97.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

existing naval force to defend the British abroad.¹⁴⁸ Many sheikhs were concerned about the end of British assistance in governmental, administrative, and foreign affairs. Unsurprisingly, the Maktoum ruler of Dubai and Nahyan ruler of Abu Dhabi, who had continued to benefit politically and economically from British support, “vehemently opposed British military withdrawal from [what became] the UAE.”¹⁴⁹

Along with the absence of a powerful security apparatus, the threat of territorial disputes heightened worries among rulers about emerging ambitions and rivalries among one another. The result was “a state of mind among the Rulers [that] certainly encouraged them to draw more closely together.”¹⁵⁰ Increased “cohesion,” in the words of a high-ranking official of the UAE, would protect “against possible danger” and offer “a guarantee for the region’s safety and security.”¹⁵¹ The practical necessity of creating a federation seemed inevitable if rulers wanted national “sovereignty” that allowed them to maintain political power despite withdrawal of British protection.

Rashid Al-Maktoum of Dubai and Zayed Al-Nahyan of Abu Dhabi took the lead roles in coordinating the new “national” project. They met in 1968 and produced the Union Accord that merged the two territories.¹⁵² They also invited the Trucial rulers of Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah and Bahrain, as well as the ruler of Qatar, to join the union. Rulers of the less influential emirates, such as Ras al-Khaimah and Umm al-Quwain, feared jeopardizing their

¹⁴⁸ von Bismarck, “A Watershed in our Relations with the Trucial States,” 213.

¹⁴⁹ Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 25.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁵¹ Taryam, *The Establishment of the UAE: 1950-85*, 198.

¹⁵² Robert Govers and Frank Go, *Place Branding* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 77.

“states,” relinquishing sheikhly power, and ceding resources to a “federal” entity dominated politically and economically by Abu Dhabi’s Nahyan family.¹⁵³ In order to convince rulers of the smaller five states to join the federation, therefore, Sheikh Zayed promised to fund their development in many areas (infrastructure, economy, education, etc...)[specify. in what sense? of what?] with Abu Dhabi’s oil wealth. Furthermore, the British government announced that without a union, these five states would not be recognized.¹⁵⁴

After extensive negotiations between the rulers of the mini-states, the United Arab Emirates was announced in December 1971 and included Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain and Fujairah. Ras al-Khaimah joined a few months later in February 1972. A provisional constitution, set to expire five years later, was adopted by the rulers, and established Abu Dhabi as the temporary seat of government, with its ruler, Zayed, becoming President of the new state. Meanwhile, Rashid of Dubai became Vice-President and his eldest son, 28 years old at the time, became the first prime minister due to his “heavy [involvement] in the 1968 Union Accord negotiations.”¹⁵⁵ The ruling families of Abu Dhabi and Dubai were the richest, due to oil and commerce, respectively, and had the most people living in their territories [at the time, facilitating their influence in the union].¹⁵⁶

This collaboration between Nahyan and Maktoum did not imply concurrence or lack of competition between the two emirates. The extent to which each ruler

¹⁵³ J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 204; Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 105-106.

¹⁵⁵ Govers and Go, *Place Branding*, 77.

¹⁵⁶ Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 16.

was dedicated to the concept of “federalism” — which I will argue is driven by Abu Dhabi was highlighted in the constitutional debates that followed. In 1976, Rashid Al-Maktoum, wanting to maintain Dubai’s independence and limit Dubai’s commitment to the federation, refused to ratify the permanent constitution.¹⁵⁷ Above all, Dubai feared that federal organizational laws would restrict its commercial focus and limit its “open-door policy” in relation to trade.¹⁵⁸

The Emirate-based rulers of the new state held that the federal authority should be limited to the management of foreign affairs, external defense, education, health, and infrastructural development. The provisional constitution that was drawn up reflected these goals and ensured that the individual emirates maintained powers that were stronger than the federal authority. In essence, therefore, the provisional constitution was a “reaffirmation of the independence and the internal sovereignty of the individual emirates.”¹⁵⁹

The centralization of authority in 1971, albeit limited, transformed tribal towns into “territorial and membership organizations” and institutionalized a set of new “national” and Emirate-level legal categories and boundaries. The process of granting UAE citizenships in the wake of 1971 was part of a “ruling bargain” where subjects would relinquish all political rights in exchange for dependency on “benign” welfare-oriented rulers.¹⁶⁰

To prepare new federal and municipal legislation in the form of statutes and codes, the rulers invited legal specialists from neighboring Arab countries such as

¹⁵⁷ Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States*, 97.

¹⁵⁸ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 103.

¹⁵⁹ Taryam, *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950-85*, 201.

¹⁶⁰ Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation*, 26.

Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, and Iraq.¹⁶¹ The majority came from Egypt where the legal system is based on the French civil code, which explains why Britain's Common Law system did not take hold despite their long history of control in the region. The Abu Dhabi and Dubai Courts Laws were issued in 1968 and 1970, respectively, and were charged with handling municipal civil dispute settlements. According to Al-Muhairi, such laws were significant turning points in the history of the UAE because they extended secular jurisdiction over sharia matters.¹⁶²

The fact that many natives continued to rely on sharia courts for all matters, however, led rulers to issue "informal orders" allowing such sharia court jurisdiction.¹⁶³ As a result, these laws became "voluntary arbitrational rules and institutions, rather than enforceable ones."¹⁶⁴ Because of disagreements, different legal systems continued to flourish and co-exist across the emirates, highlighting tensions between federal and emirate-level sources of authority. During the law-making decade that followed 1971, long-standing tensions between constituent emirates over jurisdiction, nationality and citizenship continued to surface.

Conclusion:

British imperialism instantiated new forms of sovereignty over people and land, as well as distinctions between "native" and foreigner, especially in legal terms. These distinctions have been continuously negotiated in the UAE in legal rulings, practices, and decisions. Britain's "non-interference" policy before the

¹⁶¹ Al-Muhairi, "The Development of the UAE Legal System," 127.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

establishment of the UAE bolstered rulers' authority over people and established a model that encouraged sheikhs to protect their positions rather than seek legitimacy through elections or other democratic means. Internal competition and tension, fostered unless they interfered with British interests, were always present and continue today between the Emirates. Divide and conquer policies gave way to multiple seats of power that continue to challenge federalism[, as discussed further in the following chapter]. [Moreover, there is a history of different priorities among Emirati rulers, between Abu Dhabi and Dubai and between richer and poorer Emirates.]

The ruling families supported by the British in the Trucial States remain in power in the UAE. Because the ruling families of Abu Dhabi and Dubai were historically very close to their imperial protectors, they had to seek new ways to maintain and bolster their power in the absence of British support after 1971. By upholding and, in some cases, modifying arrangements that had been favorable to British rule, local rulers secured their positions and the positions of their successors. Citizenship rules remain fundamental to this process. It is important to note that the early citizenship laws in the UAE were more flexible than current practices and the rulings that followed. There is a contingent and emergent quality to the early laws, a reminder that the rulers may not have known what they could get away with, particularly with "authentic" citizens before their political hegemony was established among a portion of the population. Even without democracy, there is tension, competition, and a need for rulers to garner legitimacy. People without citizenship realize this porousness as well.

Chapter 3

Emergence of *Bidoons* as a Problem Category in the UAE

This chapter is primarily concerned with the question of why *bidoon*, or people “without” citizenship, emerged as a problem in the 2000s in the United Arab Emirates. In my research, first *official* mention of *bidoons* in Arabic or English in the UAE came in the form of a denial by the Ministry of Interior in March 2005, when a senior official stated that “[t]here is no such a category here in this country. No one can claim that he or she is a *bidoon*.”¹⁶⁵ Although the UAE has prided itself on having the most “tolerant, easy-going and conspicuously liberal social lifestyles” of the Gulf Arab countries,¹⁶⁶ the use of “tolerant” rather than “welcoming” is appropriate. This is especially true for the non-citizen majority of UAE residents who are socially and institutionally discriminated against.

As I discussed in Chapter 2 and develop more fully in this chapter, some Emirate rulers were ambivalent about the federalization of the state with its establishment in 1971. This ambivalence is well-reflected and illustrated in citizenship-related laws, bureaucracies, policies and practices in the UAE. These changed over time and remain sites of struggle about the rules of belonging and resource distribution. It became apparent in my research that people *bidoon jinsiyya*, what I term the “*bidoon* problem” to indicate its constructedness,

¹⁶⁵ Muawia E. Ibrahim, “No Stateless People in UAE,” *Khaleej Times*, March 24, 2005, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2005/March/theuae_March725.xml§ion=theuae

¹⁶⁶ Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, “The impact of globalization on Arab Gulf States,” in *Globalization and the Gulf*, ed. John W. Fox, Nada Mourtada Sabbah, Muhammad Al Mutawa (London: Routledge, 2006), 184.

intensified in the 2000s because the UAE, or at least Abu Dhabi as the seat of federal power, expanded its control over (documented and undocumented) citizens, residents, and migrants in relation to the other six emirates. Abu Dhabi's consolidation of power is best reflected by new laws, decrees, and institutions related to citizenship, residence, and passports. These changes, which impacted everyone in the UAE, produced the *bidoon* as a category. Legal developments between 2004 and 2008, highlighted by the dramatic emergence of *bidoon* as a public problem category, together indicate the most important turning point in the political structure of the UAE since its establishment in 1971.

As was the case under colonialism, the political system since 1971 is a vertical power structure that limits decision-making to a small number of people. In the UAE today, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in Abu Dhabi is the only body with the authority to deliberate on and enforce federal citizenship decisions. In her research on migrants in the UAE, Noora Lori describes the scope of MOI's control: "Since the Ministry of Interior also controls the domestic security forces, this means that the same institution that administers residency decisions also has the necessary resources at its disposal for enforcing those decisions...."¹⁶⁷ It is worth noting here that, since the 1990s, the MOI also handles applications for residency and regulates the *kafala* system that used to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor, highlighting the historical point when naturalization and labor migration came to be discussed as "national security" and not simply "demographic" concerns.¹⁶⁸ Once an

¹⁶⁷ Noora Lori, "Temporary Workers or Permanent Migrants?", *Center for Migrations and Citizenship* (2012), 14.

¹⁶⁸ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 144-169.

application for citizenship is denied, revoked, or accepted, no other government entity is called in to review or enforce the decision, giving the Ministry of Interior unilateral powers of decision-making and implementation.

This chapter first presents the crucial shifts in citizenship in the UAE in law and practice since its establishment, showing the intensification of changes between 2004 and 2008 that produced *bidoon* as a problem category. It then examines the tensions built into the legal and political system. These include emirate-level competition between Dubai and Abu Dhabi in particular over influence and power, issues of multiple legal jurisdiction, and competition between emirate-level autonomy and federalization. The chapter also discusses increased anxiety of citizen Emiratis in relation to “foreigners.” The last section is titled “Being *Bidoon*” and shows the conditions of not having citizenship and the on-the-ground struggles of people without documented citizenship. Moreover, it examines *bidoon* rhetoric as they claim rights of citizenship and belonging.

Citizenship in Law and Practice

The post-1971 conflicts over citizenship policies and procedures are evident in official legal changes and decrees, unofficial government citizenship practices, and the shifting definitions of who counts as a “citizen.” While Federal Law 17 in 1972 clearly outlines the official criteria for citizenship, rulers at the federal seat of government creatively craft strategies to control the federal citizenship and justify unwillingness to extend citizenship.

The 1972 Federal Law Number 17 “Concerning Nationality, Passports, and Amendments...” defines the criteria of citizenship and its acquisition by law, by dependence (through a male spouse or father), or by ruler discretion. In the words of Colonel Ali Al Mirri at the Department of Naturalization and Residency, committee members “who knew every person in their respective regions” were tasked with approving and rejecting applications for citizenship.¹⁶⁹ Federal Law 17 states that citizenship will be awarded to those who can present “sufficient” proof that they have lived within the borders of the current UAE since 1925.¹⁷⁰ Others who resided in the UAE since 1940 had to wait twenty years before applying for citizenship.¹⁷¹ However, Omanis, Bahrainis, and Qataris only needed to wait three years before applying for citizenship,¹⁷² while other Arabs had to have ten years of documented residency.¹⁷³

The year 1925 was allegedly] chosen to exclude “greedy” or “false” claimants who came to the region after oil was found. According to Manal Jamal, not everyone who had obtained passports from a ruler prior to 1971 could fulfill this new federal criterion of tracing lineage to 1925.¹⁷⁴ The *khulasat al-qaid*, a family book issued by the ruler in each Emirate to married men, is the document used to trace genealogical descent.¹⁷⁵ *Khulasat al-qaid* literally means a “summary of kin-links.”¹⁷⁶ Married

¹⁶⁹ Mustafa Al Zarooni, “Evolution of the UAE passport,” *Khaleej Times*, August 23, 2013, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/nationgeneral/2013/August/nationgeneral_August221.xml§ion=nationgeneral

¹⁷⁰ 1972 UAE Federal Law Number 17, Article 2(a); Al Zarooni, “Evolution of the UAE Passport.”

¹⁷¹ 1972 UAE Federal Law Number 17, Article 7,8

¹⁷² Paul Dresch and James Piscatori, *Monarchies and Nations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 141.

¹⁷³ Five of the ten years had to be after 1972.

¹⁷⁴ Manal Jamal, “The ‘Tiering’ of Citizenship and Residency and the ‘Hierarchization’ of Migrant Communities,” *International Migration Review* (2015): 22.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

women citizens, however, cannot hold the “family book” and so only the men who could present such a document were eligible to become citizens. From the beginning, therefore, legislation favored men who had a genealogical family book, issued at the emirate level, and other people considered valuable or important enough to gain citizenship at the discretion of a ruler.

Dr. Butti Al-Muhairi contends that the uncertainty and confusion regarding citizenship in the federation stems from the fact that “the Emirates’ society still had not adjusted to the idea of codified governmental legislation.”¹⁷⁷ In this reading, many residents did not register for citizenship due to unfamiliarity with documented citizenship and ignorance of its significance, lack of appropriate paperwork, or illiteracy. While it is true that, in 1970, the literacy rate in the United Arab Emirates was 27% for men and 9% for women,¹⁷⁸ it is not clear that the reasons listed by Al-Muhairi were the determining factors in who was granted citizenship. Some may have opted not to pursue citizenship registration in order to maintain “their traditional pattern of cyclical migration.”¹⁷⁹ Jamal suggests that during the colonial period, the British “found it too tedious or difficult to issue passports to nomads,” which facilitated their exclusion and consequent stateless status with the establishment of the UAE.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, it is important to note that neither the 1972 law nor the 1975 amendments *required* those eligible for citizenship to obtain official paperwork, which could also explain why many people

¹⁷⁶ Dresch and Piscatori, *Monarchies and Nations*, 145.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Muhairi, “The Development of the UAE Legal System,” 127.

¹⁷⁸ United Nations, *Human Development Report* (New York: UNDP), 1995.

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/256/hdr_1995_en_complete_nostats.pdf

¹⁷⁹ miriam cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 62.

¹⁸⁰ Jamal, “The ‘Tiering’ of Citizenship and Residency and the ‘Hierarchization’ of Migrant Communities,” 22.

in the 1970s and 1980s did not apply for Emirati nationality. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that a group of people at the time of the UAE's establishment did not officially register their presence or acquire the necessary identity papers to be recognized as citizens by the state.

The naturalization policy relied on a dual system whereby individuals first had to acquire citizenship through their emirate of residence before obtaining federal citizenship. The legal clauses that require continued residence for a certain number of years refer to residence in the *same* emirate for the entire time. Because Abu Dhabi is the seat of federal power and institutions and was apparently less inclined to give federal citizenship to residents in other emirates, such individuals were the most likely to be denied citizenship. This was especially a problem for Persian-origin residents because of the splintered immigration policy from the formation of the UAE, whereby the Abu Dhabi Emirate required them to have visas while the other emirates did not, and had often issued them passports. Such people, Lori writes that they “were never granted the federal nationality document, instead carrying birth certificates, rulers’ documents, or passports that have not been renewed as the responsibility of issuing documents devolved to the federal government in Abu Dhabi.”¹⁸¹ Federal Law No. 10 of 1975 (“Concerning Amendment of Certain Articles of the Nationality and Passports Law No. 17 for 1972”) revised the 1972 law to allow Emirati citizenship to be granted to “members of the Arabian tribes who have immigrated from neighboring countries” and resided in UAE for

¹⁸¹ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 17-18.

more than three years before applying.¹⁸² It also awarded citizenship to children of Emirati mothers whose fathers were unidentified.¹⁸³ The revision did not include children of Emirati women citizens married to non-Emirati men.

As indicated, subjects may also acquire federal citizenship at the discretion of the ruler. Technically speaking, this is separate from acquiring citizenship by “law” or “dependence,” but in practice ruler approval is the final step in all mechanisms of being granted citizenship. The “discretion” option allows the ruler to grant citizenship to those who do not fulfill eligibility criteria but offered “noteworthy service to the state.”¹⁸⁴ Ahmed Kanna shows how the Singapore government expected *value* in “valuable citizens,” which lay in their productivity and economic contributions. In the UAE, he argues, “valuable citizenship” is linked to state legitimation and contributions to fields that are underrepresented by citizens.¹⁸⁵ Many Arab legal specialists have been granted naturalization on this basis. Citizenship by discretion has been used to naturalize *bidoons* as a “fall back”, and avoids making fundamental changes to the legal rules. Whatever the systems and rules in place, any major decision is ultimately at “the absolute discretion of the rulers and cannot be put into judicial question.”¹⁸⁶

Perhaps even more problematically, in the 1972 law citizenship through “dependence” discriminates by gender. A non-citizen man cannot obtain citizenship when he marries an Emirati woman citizen, while a non-Emirati woman obtains

¹⁸² Federal Law No. 10 for 1975, Article 5(b), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3fba19484.html>

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, Article 2.

¹⁸⁴ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 73.

¹⁸⁵ Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation*, 103.

¹⁸⁶ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 73.

citizenship if she marries an Emirati citizen man, provided that she subsequently resides in the country for three years after her application, gives up her other citizenship(s), and receives approval from the Ministry of Interior. The children of Emirati women and non-citizen men are considered foreigners. A child cannot obtain citizenship by birth within the UAE territory, but must be a legally recognized child of an Emirati father.¹⁸⁷ Supposedly in concern for Emirati women being exploited, a 1996 order issued to the Ministry of Justice by Shaikh Zayed (the President) forbid Emirati women from marrying foreign men without the approval of the Presidential Court.¹⁸⁸ In 1997, this order was clarified to state that male citizens from Gulf Cooperation Council countries are not included in the “foreign” category for the purpose of this ruling. Such men could apply for Emirati citizenship from the ruling court upon marrying an Emirati woman on a case-by- case basis after they are “researched by the state.” Native women who choose to marry non-native and non-GCC nationals without the consent of the state risk passport revocation.¹⁸⁹

Such “protective” and highly gendered laws have produced their own category of *bidoons*. In May 2006, 40 Emirati women arrived at the UAE Human Rights Association in Dubai demanding to rectify the status of their husbands and children who lacked appropriate documents to benefit from state services.¹⁹⁰ Half of these women were married to men from other GCC countries. Even in legally

¹⁸⁷ Robert Bauman, *The Complete Guide to Offshore Residency* (Delray Beach, FL: Sovereign Society, 2009), 401.

¹⁸⁸ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 73.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ “Seeking citizenship for husbands and children,” *Gulf News*, May 2006; Dia Hadid, “United Arab Emirates: UAE national women gather to demand citizenship for their husbands and children,” *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, September 5, 2006, <http://www.wluml.org/node/2960>

accepted marriages between citizen women and men who are GCC citizens, citizenship applications are difficult, lengthy, and often unsuccessful. In some cases, the men relinquish their GCC passports prior to being issued an Emirati one and end up with no citizenship. Thus they and their children are now “without.”¹⁹¹ As a result of these laws, Ahmad Khanna writes, Emirati women “effectively have to give up their nationality, as their children will not be entitled to a UAE passport and therefore neither the children nor her husband will be entitled to the benefits of the welfare state.”¹⁹²

Government officials and pro-regime voices contend that these laws protect women from potential exploitation by foreign men seeking the economic benefits of citizenship in the UAE. For example, a woman who posted a question on a legal forum about exogamous marriages by Emirati women received the following response from someone using the handle “aalmehairi:” “I am completely opposed to these kinds of exogamous marriages [...] Emirati society believes that the woman deserves generous and respectable treatment, but most Emirati women married to foreigners, especially Arab foreigners, are treated in a way that satisfies no one.”¹⁹³

The most significant legal development in terms of marriage in the UAE occurred with the enactment of the Personal Status Law (Federal Law No. 28) in December 2005.¹⁹⁴ The law expanded federal authority over intimate life, Emirate-

¹⁹¹ “Seeking citizenship for husbands and children,” *Gulf News*, May 2006.

¹⁹² Kanna, *Dubai, City as Corporation*, 113.

¹⁹³ “Marriage of Emirati woman to a non-national and the relevant legal opinion,” *forum thread* started by “banoota qanooniya” on 25 June 2011, *UAE Law*, <http://theuaelaw.com/vb/showthread.php?t=9340>

¹⁹⁴ 2005 Federal Law No, 28, UAE Ministry of Justice, <http://ejustice.gov.ae/portal/page/portal/ejustice%20MOJ%20Portal/About%20Us/Law%20of%20Personal%20Affairs>

level judicial systems, and independent Islamic jurisprudence. It also, as Frances Hasso argues, normalized “patriarchal family structures in revised forms.”¹⁹⁵ Prior to this law, personal status matters were resolved by individual judges’ interpretation of sharia derived from “traditions and practices [which] varied appreciably among different native communities.”¹⁹⁶ The codification of these laws homogenized and rigidified once plural, contested, and fluid provisions, centralized government control, and legitimized its interventions in the “most intimate aspects of daily life.”¹⁹⁷ The law applied to all Muslim citizens and registered children of Muslim citizen men and gave non-Muslims and non-citizens the option to follow it or their country’s laws in settling their personal affairs.

The following table highlights key policies and actions related to citizenship between 1971 and 2011 in the UAE:

¹⁹⁵ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 132.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

UAE Citizenship Shifts, 1972-2011		
YEAR	ACTION	SOURCE
1972	Federal Law 17/1972 outlines who is considered a citizen ¹⁹⁸	UAE Government
1975	Federal Law 10/1975 amends 1972 law and grants citizenship to 1) migrant Arabian tribes; 2) children of Emirati mothers and unidentified fathers ¹⁹⁹	UAE Government
1982	Temporary passports granted in 1972 are denied renewal ²⁰⁰	Emirate governments
1990s	Kafala system centralized ²⁰¹	UAE Ministry of Interior
1996 – 97	Orders in Council forbid citizen women from marrying non-Emirati and non-GCC nationals without government approval ²⁰²	Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi
2004	Emirates Identity Authority established; introduces a mandatory ID system for all residents that necessitates a family book for citizens to acquire an ID card ²⁰³	UAE Council of Ministers
2005	Emirate passports are no longer renewed for individuals without family books ²⁰⁴	Dubai Government
2005	Personal Status Law is codified over personal status matters such as marriage and divorce in all the Emirates and across religious schools for Sunnis and Shia ²⁰⁵	UAE Government
2006	Presidential Decree to naturalize 1,294 <i>bidoons</i> on case-by-case basis ²⁰⁶	Sheikh Khalifa Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi
2007	Cabinet Decision 201/1 issued that set deadline of December 31, 2008 for obtaining the Emirates ID ²⁰⁷	UAE Council of Ministers
2008	Applicants for citizenship from the UAE Ministry of Interior begin receiving passports from the Comoros ²⁰⁸	Ministry of Interior, HSS holding, President of

¹⁹⁸ 1972 UAE Federal Law Number 17. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3fba182d0.html>, <http://www.gcc-legal.com/LawAsPDF.aspx?opt&country=2&LawID=3147>

¹⁹⁹ Federal Law No. 10 for 1975, Article 5(b) <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3fba19484.html>

²⁰⁰ Christopher Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst, 2013), 137.

²⁰¹ Lori, "Temporary Workers or Permanent Migrants?" 14.

²⁰² Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 73.

²⁰³ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 157-159.

²⁰⁴ Jamal, "The 'Tiering' of Citizenship and Residency and the 'Hierarchization' of Migrant Communities," 6.

²⁰⁵ Federal Law No. 28 of the UAE Personal Affairs for 2005. <http://www.gcc-legal.org/DisplayLegislations.aspx?LawID=3128&country=2>

²⁰⁶ United Nations, *The situation of stateless persons in the Middle East and North Africa* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2010), 31, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4cea28072.pdf>; "UAE grants citizenship to 1300 'bidoon'," *Al Arabiya*, October 7, 2007, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/10/07/40038.html>

²⁰⁷ "The ID is necessary for all bank transactions," *Emirates Identity Authority*, August 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1Co9iFI>

²⁰⁸ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 178-180.

		Comoros
2011	Presidential decree grants children of Emirati mothers and non-Emirati fathers the right to apply for citizenship after the age of 18 ²⁰⁹	Sheikh Khalifa Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi

Federal Decree (2) of 2004 established the Emirates Identity Authority (EIDA) which, in the same year, introduced the national ID card project.²¹⁰ The law divides the population into five groups and mandates that every person in the UAE apply for and carry an identity card. According to the Emirates Identity Authority website, Emirati citizens are divided into two groups, nationals with and without social insurance, and the remaining three groups are GCC nationals, UAE residents, and expats.²¹¹ As of 2006, non-citizens in the Emirates are required to apply for identity cards based on whether they belonged to one of four groups: highly qualified professionals, administrative-level employees in the private sector, domestic workers, and construction workers.²¹² The law requires those applying for a citizenship ID card to show passports and the family book. According to a Cabinet Decision issued in September 2007, Emiratis who failed to register by the December 31, 2008 deadline would be penalized in order to address non-compliance.²¹³ The deadline was widely advertised according to non-citizen Emirati residents I interviewed who did not apply for their ID cards until 2008.

²⁰⁹ Wafa Issa, "Children of Emirati mothers, expatriate fathers offered citizenship," *The National*, November 30, 2011.

²¹⁰ Emirates Identity Authority, www.id.gov.ae

²¹¹ Emirates Identity Authority, Services for Individuals, <http://www.id.gov.ae/en/services/services-for-individuals.aspx>

²¹² Lori, *Unsettling State*, 158-159.

²¹³ UAE Cabinet Decision no. 201/1, 2007; Binsal Abdul Kader, "No extension plan for expatriates who do not register for identity card," *Gulf News*, November 17, 2008, <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/11/18/10260596.html>. Other sources say the deadline is January 1, 2009: <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/your-id-card-questions-answered-1.43777>, <http://emiratesid.blogspot.com/>

The new system officially rendered the emirate-level and federal passport insufficient proof of UAE nationality. Only Emiratis who possessed family books could obtain the UAE ID. Emirates such as Dubai halted processing the renewal of passports starting in 2005 for individuals who could not present a family book.²¹⁴ According to the websites of the Dubai Government (www.dubai.ae) and the General Directorate of Residency and Foreign Affairs in Dubai (www.dnrd.ae), Dubai passports continue to be issued on the emirate level but require an individual to present his “UAE Family Registration Record” or family book.²¹⁵ In the Emirati context, a *jawaz* (passport) does not necessarily indicate *jinsiyya* (nationality), legally documented membership in a state. The newly introduced requirement of a family book made the official distinction between passport holders with and without “nationality” (*jinsiyya*). As Jamal point out, this left people who had previously been qualified as citizens in a “precarious grayzone:”

...passport holders are no longer full citizens of the UAE, but may become permanent residents granted whatever rights the individual emirate is willing to confer or allow, or they may be stripped of their permanent residency status and any associated social and economic rights.²¹⁶

Thus the family book, rather than the passport, now determines who is a “national” and allowed to apply for education, health, and housing resources and have access to certain welfare services.²¹⁷ It is not only federal and emirate-level

²¹⁴ Jamal, “The ‘Tiering’ of Citizenship and Residency and the ‘Hierarchization’ of Migrant Communities,” 6.

²¹⁵ Application for an ordinary passport for citizens, <http://dnrd.ae/en/Services/ServicesGuide/Pages/AudianceService.aspx?ServiceId=10&AudianceId=1>

²¹⁶ Jamal, “The ‘Tiering’ of Citizenship and Residency and the ‘Hierarchization’ of Migrant Communities,” 6.

²¹⁷ Noora Lori, *Unsettled State*, 190; Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai’s Indian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) 60.

government institutions that require the family book, however. Private companies and independent educational facilities also ask Emiratis to present their family books for enrollment purposes. For example, St. Mary's Catholic High School, which is scheduled to open in September 2015, lists the family book as a requirement for admission for all Emirati students.²¹⁸

According to Col. Ali Al Mirri, family books were present since the early 1980s. Local sharia courts issue family books within 24 hours of a citizen man's marriage – even when it is to a non-citizen woman – to confirm that the government has sanctioned the marriage.²¹⁹ In law, mention of the family book is absent until May 2007, when Ministerial Decision 249 outlined marriage licensing procedures to registrars for the first time.²²⁰ Article 11 states that the man's family book or national ID is required for issuance of a marriage contract between two parties. By implication, the decision reiterates that Emirati women citizens cannot receive the family book because it only refers to men. Article 25 explicitly prohibits issuing marriage contracts to Emirati women married to foreigners without documented government approval.²²¹ In 2011, a Presidential decree granted children of Emirati mothers and non-Emirati fathers the right to apply for citizenship after the age of 18.²²²

Federal Decree (2) of 2004 produced a crisis for Emiratis who were either

²¹⁸ School website, "Admissions Process", www.stmarysmuhaisnah.com/admissions-process

²¹⁹ Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance* (New York: Freedom House, 2010) 519.

²²⁰ Ministerial Decision 249/2007 (Arabic), <http://law-zag.com/vb/lawzag21587.html>; "Report: Ministry of Justice to enact comprehensive legislative system" (translated from Arabic), *WAM*, November 25, 2011, <http://www.wam.ae/ar/news/emirates/1395272999668.html>

²²¹ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 189-190; see Ministerial Decision 249/2007 (Arabic), <http://law-zag.com/vb/lawzag21587.html>

²²² Issa, "Children of Emirati mothers, expatriate fathers offered citizenship".

undocumented citizens or had citizenship and passports from an emirate but not a family book. They are not included in the five categories for Identity Card holders outlined by the decree. In 2008, the UAE government secretly agreed with the government of the Comoros Islands to an arrangement that transformed such applicants for federal citizenship and identification holders into foreign residents.²²³ Ministry of Interior officials and other government representatives informed *bidoon* applicants for Emirati ID cards that they should first apply for citizenship from the Comoros Islands. The Comoros, a member of the Arab League located off the southeast coast of Africa, is considered the seventeenth poorest country in the world and perhaps the most politically unstable, with over 20 coup attempts in the past 30 years.²²⁴ The investment groups Dubai-based HSS Holding, Dubai World, and Kuwait-based Comoro Gulf Holding (CGH) have injected billions of dollars into the Comoros to develop infrastructure, education, and healthcare. In 2008, Dubai World announced extensive investment plans to develop tourism in the Comoros starting with a \$70 million luxury hotel project and the development of “22.5 hectares of adjacent prime beachfront, with 100 new upscale residential villas and townhouses.”²²⁵ In 2011, the Dubai branch of Hill International was awarded an \$89 million five-year contract for development projects in the Comoros, “with the client

²²³ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 181.

²²⁴ International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook* (Washington D.C.: IMF, 2013); Carlson Anyangwe, *Revolutionary Overthrow of Constitutional Orders in Africa* (Mankon: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2012), 141.

²²⁵ “\$70m in Comoros project,” *Gulf News*, March 4, 2008, <http://gulfnews.com/business/sectors/construction/dubai-world-to-invest-70m-in-comoros-project-1.89806>

being Dubai-based HSS Holding and the Government of the Union of Comoros.”²²⁶

The secret deal with the Comoros President to “offshore citizenship,” as Lori puts it, resolved a citizenship problem for the UAE federal seat in Abu Dhabi while offering the Comoros millions of dollars.²²⁷

The undocumented applicants for UAE citizenship with a Comoros passport could now travel, but could only apply for an Emirates ID card and work permits as non-citizens. The Comoros legislature made it clear when they learned of the deal that these Comoros passport holders had no right of residency or citizenship in the Comoros.²²⁸ This Ministry of Interior arrangement, argues Lori, was designed to “maximize and further entrench Abu Dhabi’s power in the UAE federation.”²²⁹ Prior to the 2004 ID law, individuals seeking citizenship acquired it first through their emirate of residence and then through Abu Dhabi’s Ministry of Interior. Now, applicants for citizenship must go directly to the Ministry of Interior but must have a locally-issued family book. According to Lori, this requirement “effectively veto[es] the citizenship decisions of the remaining emirates.”²³⁰

The new laws and decrees eliminate emirate-level competition over jurisdiction in citizenship policy, which has been a continuous point of contention between the seven emirates even prior to the UAE’s establishment. It appears that Abu Dhabi won this longstanding struggle and that the major losers are the *bidoon*,

²²⁶ “Dubai firm wins \$89m Comoros Islands contract,” *Construction Week Online*, July 24, 2011, <http://www.constructionweekonline.com/article-13311-dubai-firm-wins-89m-comoros-islands-contract/>

²²⁷ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 178.

²²⁸ “Stateless Arabs lose bid to call Comoros home,” *Al Arabiya News*, July 27, 2007, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/07/27/53824.html>; Lori, *Unsettling State*, 206-207.

²²⁹ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 25.

²³⁰ *ibid.*

who continue without substantive citizenship anywhere in the world. Although tensions within the UAE have usually been framed in terms of “federal vs. emirate,” it appears that “federal” translates into “Abu Dhabi.” Sheikh Zayed who was not only the President of the UAE, but also the ruler of Abu Dhabi when he issued the 1996/1997 orders that forbade women from marrying foreigners. After his death in 2004, Abu Dhabi’s Ministry of Interior shifted the definition of citizenship and introduced new requirements, such as the Emirates ID and family book, arguably facilitating Abu Dhabi’s tight control on the country’s population and citizenship. Abu Dhabi was able to bolster its political influence by employing strategies and implementing policies in the name of “federal” interests in the face of long-standing struggles for power among the constituent Emirates, and political, legal, and economic tensions in the UAE’s federal system, the focus of the next section.

Sources of Tension in the UAE Political System

At the federation’s inception, the size of each emirate’s citizenry determined its political standing and influence in the UAE, which has worked over time to facilitate the power of the Abu Dhabi and Dubai emirates. These two emirates are the main competitors with each other institutionally since they have independent economic bases of power. Despite changes in demographics and economy, the Abu Dhabi government appears to enact laws and decrees in the name of “federal” interests. Nevertheless, the federal seat of government in Abu Dhabi also allowed emirate-level laws to prevail until the early 2000s, producing a multiple and fragmented system. Cosmetic democratic changes were at times introduced to state

bodies that have no authority, but the primary goals appear to be maintenance of rule and loyalty to the system. Abu Dhabi and Dubai are also interested in social and cultural control, including over national image and family life. Rulers work to manage the demographic imbalance of citizens to non-citizens, which they appear to prefer to expanding citizenship.

Federalism:

The UAE Constitution specifies the powers of federal institutions, which were largely funded by the ruler of Abu Dhabi in the 1970s. Federal political bodies today include the Federal Supreme Council (FSC), the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), and a parliamentary body in the form of the Federal National Council (FNC). Although these institutions have representative members from all seven emirates, the hierarchy is evident in the proportions of members from each emirate as well as the functions that only some emirates may employ.

The Federal Supreme Council (FSC) is the highest legislative, executive, and constitutional authority in the UAE and responsible for approving federal legislation. Although it is composed of hereditary rulers from each of the seven emirates, the rulers of Abu Dhabi (President) and Dubai (Vice President) have veto power over its decisions. This means that “no decision would be taken without the agreement of the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai”.²³¹ The president and vice president of the UAE are technically chosen by the FSC to serve a five-year term, but they may be re-elected indefinitely. The president is responsible for appointing the prime minister, deputy prime minister, and council of ministers. The council of

²³¹ Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to the United Arab Emirates*, 375

ministers is comprised of 21 members who may draft laws and decrees but cannot approve them. The cabinet is appointed by the president and led by the prime minister. Since 2006, members of the al-Nahyan family hold five of the 21 ministerial posts, and members of the Al-Maktoum family hold two.²³² While the positions of prime minister and vice president are currently held by the same person, Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktoum, this has not always been the case.

The Federal National Council (FNC), comprised of 40 members, reviews legislation proposed by the cabinet and proposes amendments but cannot enact or revise legislation; it only serves an advisory and consultative role. Prior to December 2006, all members were appointed by the rulers of the seven emirates to serve two-year terms with the possibility of renewal. The leaders of Abu Dhabi and Dubai are each able to appoint eight members, Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah each get six members, and Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, and Fujairah each get four members. In December 2006, 20 of the 40 members of the FNC were elected for the first time in the country's history. The rulers selected 6,689 citizens – 1,189 of them women – to run and cast votes for half of the FNC positions. The remaining 20 council member positions continue to be appointed by the leaders of each emirate. The government-appointed 20 FNC council members appointed on February 4, 2006 included eight women.²³³ When the second FNC elections took place in September 2011, only 28% of the eligible electorate cast their votes, and one woman was elected to the new council. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President of the UAE and ruler of Dubai,

²³² "President okays new cabinet," *Khaleej Times*, February 10, 2006, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2006/February/theuae_February276.xml§ion=theuae&col=

²³³ *ibid.*

endorsed an incremental process in response to criticism: “We are taking steady steps. By God’s will, we will continue progress and expand the powers of the Federal National Council.”²³⁴

The UAE political system requires loyalty to rulers and the system itself. After the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the 1991 Gulf War, applicants for naturalization were increasingly understood by rulers and citizens to be “motivated by the economic benefits of citizenship and without sufficient allegiance or loyalty.”²³⁵ One could argue that the Gulf War was less a turning point for the government than for Emirati citizens in this respect. The war encouraged a new regime language of “national security” and “national allegiance” as bases for citizenship, and facilitated demographic restrictions as citizens became more fearful and resentful of migrants, residents, and undocumented people. This facilitated “popular support” for stringent citizenship policies.²³⁶

In September 2008, the Minister of Interior Shaikh Saif bin Zayed Al- Nahyan explicitly framed naturalization as a national security issue and stated in the Arabic newspaper *Emarat Alyoum* that “allegiance is a condition of naturalization.”²³⁷ With the 2011 Arab uprisings, different actors in the UAE feared different possibilities. Citizens and non-citizen residents were motivated by the democratic promises and rulers feared democratic and Islamist movements that might undermine the system. In geo-political terms, UAE rulers today paradoxically support “secularist” militarist

²³⁴ Mahmoud Habboush, “UAE's second election has low turnout,” *Reuters*, September 24, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/24/us-emirates-elections-idUSTRE78N2MK20110924>

²³⁵ Lori, *Unsettling State* 14.

²³⁶ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 123.

²³⁷ Samy Alrayami, “Saif bin Zayed: Allegiance is a condition of naturalization,” *Emarat Alyoum* (translated from Arabic), September 25, 2008, <http://www.emaratalyoum.com/local-section/2008-09-25-1.232244>

rule in Egypt and the Wahhabi ruling family in Saudi Arabia. In turn, they fear an empowered (Sunni) Muslim Brotherhood and Shia Iran. Their concerns expand to include the Iran-allied Assad government, secular revolutionaries, and Islamist revolutionaries in Syria, all opposition networks in Lebanon and Palestine, and similar organizations from around the region.²³⁸

Legal Unification:

Legal unification at the federal level in the UAE was complicated by the desire to maintain emirate-level autonomy from the beginning. The mixture of Islamic legal principles, imported norms from Egyptian and other legal traditions, and local values that predate the establishment of the UAE resulted in a complex and pluralistic judicial structure.

The UAE legal system has civil, criminal, and sharia courts at the federal level and local levels for most emirates. The federal system has jurisdiction over civil matters in all the emirates except Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah. The latter have their own local and appellate civil courts with jurisdiction over matters that the constitution does not specifically reserve for the federal authority. Thus, these emirates do not refer cases to the Federal Supreme Court for judicial review.²³⁹ There is overlapping jurisdiction between sharia courts and emirate-level and federal civil courts due to a lack of clear functional distinctions in the legislative

²³⁸ Michael C. Hudson, "The Gulf Engulfed," in *Globalization and the Gulf* ed. John Fox, Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, Mohammed Al-Mutawa (London: Routledge, 2006), 157.

²³⁹ David Commins, *The Gulf States: A Modern History*, 210-211; Sabah M.A. Mahmoud, *UAE Company Law and Practice: Fifth Edition* (London, 2014), http://www.gulf-law.com/uaecolaw_legalsystem.html

texts.²⁴⁰ So while all emirates have their own sharia courts, the matters that they cover differ depending on the emirate. In Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Ras Al-Khaimah, for example, sharia courts consider civil, commercial, and criminal matters in addition to personal affairs.²⁴¹

As indicated in this section and in the earlier discussion of personal status law and citizenship, the Abu Dhabi seat of government has focused in the 2000s on centralizing most aspects of rule and law as it seeks to eliminate loopholes created by multiple spheres of influence and legal systems, which were built into the UAE system from its inception. However, what often passes as “federalism” may to some degree to be about Abu Dhabi hegemony, muddying the division between federal and local laws and jurisdiction.

National Culture, Families, and Labor:

Differentiations between migrants based on ethnicity and religious affiliations at the inception of the UAE in 1971 “were far less rigid” than they are today.²⁴² The UAE as a federal entity has been persistently interested in constituting an ethnically homogenous citizen population and an ethnicity-based “national” identity, which has required “clear” distinctions. Often, these distinctions are made based on loyalty to the political system and rulers and not simply on ethnic, religious, or family belonging. Emirati citizens make up less than 13% of the country’s population, which illustrates the success of a constricted naturalization agenda and the difficulties of constituting an “authentic” ethnic national identity.

²⁴⁰ Mahmoud, *UAE Company Law and Practice: Fifth Edition*, http://www.gulf-law.com/uaecolaw_legalsystem.html

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

²⁴² Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 17.

The emphasis on a “culturally authentic” Emirati identity is found in many aspects of Emirati society and is the driving force behind museums and architecture that are designed to “reconstitute tradition.”²⁴³ State-sponsored cultural and media production focus on pastimes such as falconry, pearl diving, fishing, and nomadic practices as signs of authentic and unifying national identity and heritage. This repackaged utopian image of a simple national past and identity is constantly reiterated in local newspapers, museum installations, national cultural center websites, statements by public officials, and other state-sponsored projects²⁴⁴.

miriam cooke argues that state-sponsored cultural events are often broadcast as “explicitly *national* performance[s]” where rulers are “praised for their concern to revive ‘our authentic popular heritage’.”²⁴⁵ *The National*, a prominent English-language Emirati newspaper, has a special section titled “Heritage” devoted to posting news about actions the UAE has taken to “preserve” its “fleeting” culture. Saoud Al Mulla, a prominent Emirati filmmaker, notes in an interview: “nearly all of the early UAE films [since the 1980s] concentrated on issues of national identity and culture [where] directors are trying to reinforce their identity.”²⁴⁶ Kanna contends that the emphasis on “culturally authentic” state projects is a legitimizing tool by a ruling elite “who have historically struggled to legitimize themselves as representatives of the populace.”²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Hasso, 15

²⁴⁴ See <http://www.government.ae/en/web/guest/culture>, <http://www.qasralhosnfestival.ae/>, <http://www.uaeinteract.com/culture/>

²⁴⁵ miriam cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 105

²⁴⁶ Bardsley, Daniel. "Frame-by-frame look at nation's movie history." *The National* 10 Nov 2009, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/education/frame-by-frame-look-at-nations-movie-history>

²⁴⁷ Kanna, *Dubai, City as Corporation*, 124.

Paul Dresch writes that Gulf countries “with large non-citizen populations inside their frontiers, must now draw the line by other means.”²⁴⁸ The lines that the government attempts to draw are evident in restrictive citizenship, marriage, and labor laws, and the increasingly difficult requirements for the basic procedures of daily life, such as school registration or driver license renewal. These methods allow Emirati ruling families to control population and resources and maintain their power, although the dominant arguments express concern with maintaining “cultural” integrity. The marriage and divorce practices of Emirati men and women are central to this concern with drawing lines. In 1992, Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi established the Sheikh Zayed Marriage Fund (*sanduuq al zawaj*) to grant subsidies to young Emirati grooms in an effort to incentivize marriage with Emirati women.²⁴⁹ Financial incentives are designed to encourage “natives,” particularly men, to marry Emirati women, who remain single at high rates.²⁵⁰ In a November 2013 article titled, “Marriage Fund: A driving force for social stability,” the UAE’s official news agency *WAM* outlined two of the Fund’s purposes:²⁵¹ “to alleviate the wedding expenses for young Emirati couples so that they avoid borrowing from banks; and to start a happy trouble-free life.”²⁵² The Assistant Undersecretary of the Marriage Fund, Jamal bin Obaid al-Bah, communicates these goals in an interview with Hasso: “This [Marriage Fund] is aimed at bolstering the [native] population. The number of

²⁴⁸ Paul Dresch, “Foreign Matter: The Place of Foreign Strangers in Gulf Society” in *Globalization and the Gulf* eds. John Fox, Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, Mohammed al-Mutawa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 200.

²⁴⁹ Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, 60; Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 79-80; www.zawaj.ae

²⁵⁰ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 106.

²⁵¹ Although the article is no longer accessible on the *WAM* website, it was circulated and is available on other national news agencies’ websites.

²⁵² “Marriage Fund: a driving force for social stability,” originally found on *WAM.ae*, November 23, 2013, retrieved from UAEinteract.

immigrants is three times more than citizens. In the long term, the demographic policy is in danger.”²⁵³

The UAE government also engages in a labor-market nationalization policy called “Emiratization,” which Faisal Devji argues is “affirmative action for the ruling minority.”²⁵⁴ By the late 1990s, the government set “soft” industry-based quotas to hire Emirati citizens.²⁵⁵ The banking sector had a mandatory citizen employment quota established in 1999.²⁵⁶ In April 2004, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs imposed quotas for citizen employment in the private and public sectors with penalties charged if quotas were not met.²⁵⁷ Under the Emiratization program, private companies are *required* to hire UAE nationals as human resource and personnel managers, and as secretaries, among other professions.²⁵⁸ By August 2006, the Ministry of Labor cancelled approximately 300,000 worker visas that year as part of the Emiratization initiative.²⁵⁹ What were once considered benefits for expatriate workers, such as certificates that inflated salary levels to facilitate the receipt of family visas, were diminished, ostensibly to decrease migration flows into

²⁵³ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 80.

²⁵⁴ Faisal Devji, “Dubai Cosmopolis,” *Open Democracy*, April 19, 2007, https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/dubai_cosmopolis_4543.jsp

²⁵⁵ “The Implementation of Labour Quotas in the Gulf Cooperation Council,” *Towers Watson*, September 2013, 3, www.towerswatson.com/en/Insights/IC-Types/Ad-hoc-Point-of-View/2013/12/The-Implementation-of-Labour-Quotas-in-the-Gulf-Cooperation-Council

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Shireena Al Nowais, “Year-end deadline for employing UAE nationals,” *Gulf News*, December 21 2004, <http://gulfnews.com/business/sectors/employment/year-end-deadline-for-employing-uae-nationals-1.342341>; UAE Cabinet Decree No. 1/259; David Gallacher, “The Emirati Workforce: tables, figures, and thoughts,” *Zayed University*, 2009, 42-43. http://www.academia.edu/5813970/The_Emirati_Workforce_Tables_figures_and_thoughts

²⁵⁸ Abdulaziz Sager, Christian Koch, Hasanain Tawfiq Ibrahim, *Gulf Yearbook 2006-2007* (Jeddah: Gulf Research Center, 2005), 205.

²⁵⁹ Jamal, “The ‘Tiering’ of Citizenship and Residency and the ‘Hierarchization’ of Migrant Communities,” 5.

the country. Indeed, visas became more expensive for companies that do not employ a certain percentage of Emiratis.²⁶⁰

Any search for high level jobs in the UAE indicates the requirement to show a family book, as results from a UAE recruiting platform (*www.laimoon.com*) demonstrate:

The image displays four job listings from a UAE recruiting platform, all of which require applicants to be Emirati nationals with a family book. The listings are as follows:

- The Abu Dhabi Police GHQ's Selection and Recruitment Department Interpreters:** Requires original passport copy, identity card, and family book for Emirati nationals. Location: Abu Dhabi, posted 4 days ago.
- Confidential company Emirati Accountant - Accounts Payable - Inspire Selection:** Requires being an Emirati with a family book. Location: Abu Dhabi, posted 21 days ago.
- Qurum business Group PRO- Emirati / UAE Nationals - MAles:** Explicitly states the job is for UAE Nationals with a family book only. Location: Dubai, posted 16 days ago.
- Hays Sonographer:** States only Emirati applicants with a family book will be considered. Location: Abu Dhabi, posted 30+ days ago.

Despite such efforts, state wealth and control over resources, demographic imbalance between citizens and non-citizens, and a generous welfare system for citizens means that many are not in the workforce. In 2006, 9 percent of the UAE workforce was comprised of UAE nationals (8 percent of these worked in public

²⁶⁰ Vora, *Impossible Citizens*, 111-112.

sector in jobs such as teaching and policing)²⁶¹; in 2011 Emirati citizens comprised 4.2 percent of the overall workforce.²⁶² Emirati citizens are more attracted to public sector employment conditions, which include higher salaries, better job security, and flexible working hours, leaving the private sector dominated by expatriate workers.

DNA imaging is the latest government attempt at population management. The UAE is the first country in the world to build a biometric database of all residents. In 2009, the Emirates Identity Authority announced plans to implement a system of civil biometrics and “categorize the population into genealogical sub-groupings associated with different levels of threat”.²⁶³ In launching these initiatives, governments are less concerned in maintaining the country’s traditions, culture and national identity, and more in “strengthening national and individual security in the UAE.”²⁶⁴

Restrictive citizenship, marriage, and labor laws allow the UAE government to manage and identify the population in a way that sustains the ruling family’s power over land and resources. These divisive mechanisms, while employed in the

²⁶¹ Kasim Randeree, “Workforce Nationalization in the Gulf Cooperation Council States,” *Center for International and Regional Studies*, Georgetown University of Foreign Service in Qatar, Occasional Paper No. 9, 2012, 8.

<https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558218/CIRSOccasionalPaper9KasimRanderee2012.pdf?sequence=5>

²⁶² Forstenlechner and E. J. Rutledge, “The GCC’s “Demographic Imbalance”: Perceptions, Realities and Policy Options,” *Middle East Policy* 18 (2011): 25-43.

²⁶³ Lori, *Unsettling State*, 74; Marten Youssef, “Police look at database for DNA of all residents,” *The National*, September 30, 2009, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/police-look-at-database-for-dna-of-all-residents>

²⁶⁴ “Emirates ID receives certificate of its possession of world’s largest database of civil biometrics,” *Emirates Identity Authority* Press Release, December 12, 2012, <http://www.id.gov.ae/en/media-centre/news/2012/12/12/emirates-id-receives-certificate-of-its-possession-of-worlds-largest-database-of-civil-biometrics.aspx>

name of maintaining security and cultural authenticity, fuel citizen anxieties toward members of Emirati society who do not fit state-designated categories of belonging. In essence, political allegiance to the UAE and cultural “authenticity” become key components in determining citizenship. As I show in the next section, this often pushes *bidoons* to emphasize their deep loyalty and patriotism when claiming a right to citizenship.

Conclusion: Being *Bidoon* in the UAE

Bidoons' day-to-day struggles are as important as the legal and political developments that exclude and subordinate them. Their voices and thoughts are often absent in scholarly discourse and media accounts, due to government-placed restrictions on expression and research. In this thesis, I use the term “*bidoon*” to refer to people who “fell through the cracks” with the establishment and consolidation of the UAE. The roots of these people generally trace back to nomadic Arabs, Iranians or Southeast Asians who moved to and lived in the area long before the UAE was founded in 1971. The *bidoon* category emerged as a result of legislative and political processes designed to limit citizenship.

As discussed above, prior to approximately 2004, federal citizenship documentation was not necessary for “nationals” to apply for jobs, enroll in schools, or consume services in the UAE. At this point, a national identity card and a family book became increasingly significant for access to all resources. Not having such access is most significant for people of limited economic means.

A tab on the Abu Dhabi e-government website titled “Benefits for Nationals” outlines who is considered eligible for state services such as housing and healthcare.

The Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme is one of 11 national housing projects designed by the Urban Planning Council (UPC). It provides “deserving UAE national families” with one of three options: a government-provided house, an interest-free loan to purchase a house, or a refundable grant to renovate an existing house.²⁶⁵ In 2008, UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, announced that approximately \$4 billion (15 billion dirhams) would be earmarked for a new program to construct 40,000 new villas for UAE nationals.²⁶⁶ As of 2013, the combined cost of the UPC’s housing projects is approximately \$6 billion, with plans to construct over 50,000 houses for UAE nationals in the coming decades.²⁶⁷ In March 2015, the Cabinet approved the increase of housing loans for nationals from approximately \$136,000 to \$218,000.²⁶⁸ The first few required documents to apply for housing benefits are a personal photo, a family book (original and copy), and a passport (copy).²⁶⁹ *Bidoons* – including families headed by an Emirati mother and a foreign or undocumented father – are excluded from such UAE housing schemes.

UAE documented citizens are also covered by the government-funded health care program, while non-nationals since 2008 are required by the government to purchase private health insurance. The World Health Organization estimates that

²⁶⁵ Abu Dhabi e-government website, https://www.abudhabi.ae/portal/public/en/citizens/benefits_for_nationals/land_and_housing?_adf.ctrl-state=7hayi1iva_4&_afzLoop=14452949708289806; Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies*, 51.

²⁶⁶ Neville Parker, “PM orders 40,000 villas for nationals, hints at cabinet reshuffle,” *Khaleej Times*, January 17, 2008.

²⁶⁷ Jen Thomas, “Free villas for 5,000 families to be handed over from 2012,” *The National*, May 12, 2011.

²⁶⁸ Samir Salam, “Housing loan be increased to Dh800,000,” *Gulf News*, March 25, 2015,

²⁶⁹ “Applying for land or housing allocation”, Abu Dhabi e-government website, https://www.abudhabi.ae/portal/public/en/citizens/benefits_for_nationals/housing_for_nationals?_adf.ctrl-state=158frnxpjh_4&_afzLoop=14454548239438546

the UAE government funded 77 percent of public health care expenditures in 2011, with overall health care spending expected to increase from an estimated \$14.0 billion in 2013 to \$19.6 billion in 2018.²⁷⁰ UAE citizens are issued *Thiqa* [“trust” or “confidence”] cards to receive free healthcare services. Coverage includes “treatment for inpatient and outpatient care in hospitals, clinics and emergency centers; cost of equipment and medical devices; nutritional therapy; physiotherapy; medication; psychological treatment in outpatient clinics as well as screening for early detection of disease.”²⁷¹ In 2013, nationals who did not present a *Thiqa* card because it was lost or expired complained about being denied treatment by healthcare providers. In response, Marwan Al Nabulsi at the Health Authority Abu Dhabi (HAAD) told providers to “accept an ID card or family book as a provisional alternative.”²⁷² Allowing a family book or an ID card (the acquisition of which requires a family book), as opposed to an emirate passport, is one of the many UAE “processes of differentiation based on ethnicity and family history.”²⁷³ Without a family book, *bidoons* cannot access the insurance card or free healthcare.

Marriage grants from the UAE Marriage Fund are only available to citizen men who must show, among other things, a copy of the marriage deed attested to by the relevant court and “a copy of the family book with the name of wife added.”²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ GCC Healthcare Industry, *Alpen Capital*, 2014, 12.

²⁷¹ “Special Needs Expats to benefit from health insurance scheme,” *Khaleej Times*, July 11, 2009, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2009/July/theuae_July237.xml§ion=theuae

²⁷² “Hospitals told to stop turning away Emiratis with expired Thiqa cards,” *The National*, March 3, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/health/hospitals-told-to-stop-turning-away-emiratis-with-expired-thiqa-cards>

²⁷³ Vora, *Impossible Citizens*, 60.

²⁷⁴ Marriage Fund Website, “Required Documents,” <http://zawaj.gov.ae/eng/Marriagegrants#.VRrolTvF-IJ>

Marriage contracts where the grooms are *bidoon* are not authenticated by the state since parties to a marriage “should bring their national ID and passports for proof of their identity and visa status”.²⁷⁵

Other important bureaucratic procedures, such as the acquisition of a birth certificate and driving license, are available only to documented citizens, passport holders and those with resident visas. Given that *bidoons* do not have passports unless they have received one from the Comoros, and cannot obtain residence visas due to lack of passports, they are not eligible to work in government institutions or apply for government resources, with a few exceptions.²⁷⁶

The frustrations that come with being citizens without citizenship have pushed Emirati *bidoons*, especially men, to online spheres where they offer anonymous dissent. Some *bidoon* rhetorical strategies are confrontational and assertive. This is especially true for long-naturalized Emiratis whose passports have been revoked for “security” reasons, such as bloggers at www.sevenuae.blogspot.com. These men had their passports confiscated in December 2011 after the Abu Dhabi government claimed that their organization, Al-Islah, was linked to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood and thus posed a major security threat.²⁷⁷ Their first blog post called the government’s accusations “pure fabricated slander” made by “corrupt security apparatuses and bribed prosecutors in countries of dictatorship and tyranny.” The post continues,

²⁷⁵ Government of Dubai Website, “Procedures for Marriage,” <http://www.dubai.ae/en/Lists/Articles/DispForm.aspx?ID=23&category=Citizens>

²⁷⁶ “Bidoun problem is not as big an issue in UAE as in other states,” *Khaleej Times*, March 23, 2006, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2006/March/theuae_March771.xml§ion=theuae

²⁷⁷ Muhammad Salah, “Citizenship with a Gag Order,” *Al Akhbar*, April 14, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/6217>

We have been in our beloved country before the establishment of the Union, and we held the passports of our Emirate from which we are originally. And if we were given nationality of our country unjustly upon the inception of the union (through naturalization), the heads of our tribes made all strenuous efforts to undo the injustice, and the truth was realized, and the injustice was lifted, and the way we gain citizenship was adjusted to the rule of law. The action has been taken to withdraw citizenship from us, despite the presence of the text that, in summary, binds us to citizenship by way of law. We call on the people of all the tribes that have gained citizenship in this way to stand with us, with the rights that have been given to us as authentic tribes, and to ward off the temptation to differentiate between [and divide] the people of our beloved country, after forty years of the Union, for the reason that every one of them faces the possibility of undergoing such a procedure despite acquiring citizenship by law.²⁷⁸

The post, while strongly worded and confrontational [elaborate / specify], accuses in the passive voice (“the action has been taken to withdraw citizenship from us”) in order not to outwardly offend the responsible government individuals. It calls on fellow Emiratis to separate themselves from the institutions that undermine “authentic” tribal ties and legitimate citizenship, warning that their passports were also at risk.

Another *bidoon* activist published an article on *The New Khalij*, an independent news website in the Gulf, titled “Imposed Home: Deporting Emirati ‘Bidoons’ and ‘Islahis’ to the Comoros Islands.” In his article, Salim Bu Shhab compares citizenship revocation to “a sword hanging on the necks of activists.”²⁷⁹ However, unlike the UAE 7 bloggers, he praises UAE President Sheikh Khalifa and condemns Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Minister of Interior, deeming his set of

²⁷⁸ “Second statement of Emirati Al-Islah advocates whose nationalities have been withdrawn,” *Seven UAE Blog*, December 23, 2011, http://sevenuae.blogspot.com/2011/12/blog-post_7960.html

²⁷⁹ Salim Bu Shhab, “Imposed Home: Deporting Emirati ‘Bidoons’ and ‘Islahis’ to the Comoros Islands”, *The New Khalij*, November 11, 2011, <http://www.thenewkhalij.com/ar/node/5210>

citizenship policies and procedures as “traps” for *bidoons*.²⁸⁰ Bu Shhab deplores government intentions to give *bidoons* “skimmed Comoros passports without rights or privileges.” He argues that this is an inadequate attempt to rectify the status of *bidoons*, who “haunt government officials in their sleep.”²⁸¹ The article goes on:

Without it, we choose death. We will not accept any nationality other than our nationality. Even if you took away our souls, we will not accept. We are Emirati citizens with Emirati ancestors even if you forged our papers and hid our documents.²⁸²

In his writing, Bu Shhab draws on the language of authenticity and belonging to describe the seven Emiratis whose naturalization was revoked and, at the same time, turns the tables on officials who claim that *bidoons* have destroyed their own paperwork to obtain Emirati nationality. He suggests that, in fact, the government has been forging documents to make it seem as though Emirati *bidoons* are originally from elsewhere. He takes the language of belonging and allegiance quite far when he writes: “we choose death. We will not accept any nationality other than our nationality.”

Ahmad Al Balooshy also attributes the *bidoon* crisis to corruption, specifically the “manipulation and favoritism in granting passports during what was known as the identification of tribes.”²⁸³ In a 2013 article in *Watan*, a weekly Arab-American newspaper, he contends that individuals who did not belong to a certain tribe paid bribes to those officially tasked with identifying tribal members in the 1970s and 1980s to facilitate successful citizenship applications: “Any person who did not pay

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

²⁸¹ *ibid.*

²⁸² *ibid.*

²⁸³ Ahmad Al Balooshy, “Bidoons in the Emirates,” *Watan*, October 10, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1Pd1FvE>

the bribe, and was not member of a tribe, was thus excluded. [...] This is what led to a tightening of security procedures and their complexity, which was really detrimental for the category of Bidoons.”²⁸⁴ In this account, many *bidoons* find themselves undocumented and stateless because they could not or did not participate in such dishonorable methods.

Indeed, as mentioned above, many *bidoons* use the authorized language of authenticity and loyalty to argue for citizenship rights since many Emirati citizens have accused *bidoons* of seeking to “cash in” on national wealth and welfare services. As the blogger Abdullah Abdelkhaleq states in a 2012 interview with Reuters, “We demand our right to live, our right to have a nationality. We don't want land or money, only the right to be citizens.” Children of Emirati mothers and non-Emirati or undocumented fathers shared similar sentiments in February 2010 in their comments on a news article titled “Naturalizing Children of Emirati women.”²⁸⁵ In a comment titled “unrequited love,” a user with a passport from another Gulf country passionately writes,

Your true country is not the one you are a national of; your true country is the one you were born and raised in, the one whose anthem you sing every morning, and whose national festival you celebrate every year, whose happiness and sadness you share... We know every inch of the Emirates, we know its sheikhs, their positions, their news, the country's facts, its domestic and foreign meetings... We fell in love with the Emirates, not for its money or wealth.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ “Naturalizing children of Emirati women,” *Al Ittihad*, February 11, 2010, <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=14596&y=2010>

²⁸⁶ “Naturalizing children of Emirati women,” *Al Ittihad*, 11 February 2010, comment by *bila hawiyya*, December 2010, <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=14596&y=2010>

Another commenter on the article, Ali Al Kethairy, shared a post titled, “Emirati even if my nationality is not Emirati:”

It’s not for financial reasons we want the passport, it’s for nationalistic reasons... The eye tears when the UAE is sad, and the heart rejoices for all successful national events whether in sports, politics, or trade... We are protective over the country’s reputation... What is this called? Is it not nationalism?²⁸⁷

Bidoons use online space to disrupt a narrative that is largely controlled by state media and pro-regime users. They challenge claims that they are dangerous or motivated by greed and emphasize their belonging, authenticity, and right to nationality and citizenship. The rhetorical strategies range, however, in their use of sentimental language and the degree to which they pose direct challenges to rulers or state authorities.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the key policies, laws, and practices of state bodies and government officials in relation to the legal, social, and economic standing of *bidoons* in the UAE. The content of legislative texts and written rules and procedures are often circumvented as needed and many decisions are taken secretly. Rules frequently change and new requirements are often imposed. Tensions arising from long-standing ambivalence about federalization encouraged the co-existence of multiple rules and jurisdictions. Over time, the state increasingly centralized the regulation of family affairs, incentivized endogamous marriages, nationalized labor requirements, and established a biometrics system to register the population. Most importantly, the state limits the expansion of its citizenry and

²⁸⁷ “Naturalizing children of Emirati women,” *Al Ittihad*, 11 February 2010, comment by *Ali Al Kethairy*, December 2010, <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=14596&y=2010>

instead encourages migrant residency even as anxiety is expressed about national culture and purity. This chapter also shows the practical difficulties and restrictions associated with being *bidoon* in the UAE.

The political system that emerged following British withdrawal gave the rulers of the most populated emirates with the greatest resources (Abu Dhabi and Dubai) a large portion of control and influence over the remaining emirates. Nevertheless, it also allowed for plural jurisdiction and authority. Over time, Abu Dhabi as an emirate, as the seat of federal government, seems to have benefited more than Dubai and the other emirates. As Lori's work shows, "federalism" sometimes operates as a guise for reinforcing Abu Dhabi's power[, specifically in terms of citizenship]. Between 2004 and 2008, in particular, there was an intensification of federal/Abu Dhabi efforts to consolidate, centralize, and expand authority over issues like citizenship, empowering themselves in relation to other emirates. *Bidoons* were essentially collateral damage in this process. They are the leftovers of a system where multiple jurisdictions were centralized in a context where few people are granted citizenship anyway.

Chapter 4

Explanatory Accounts: “Glitches,” “Iranians,” and “Greedy Frauds”

When defending their tight control on federal citizenship, government officials often maintain that *bidoons* are responsible for their own situations because, as a senior official in the Ministry of Interior argued in 2005 in an English-language article, “anyone must be knowing where he or she belongs to. Everyone knows where his roots go.”²⁸⁸ Brigadier Hakhir Al Muhairi went on, “Nobody buys this. This is the age of technology and our systems, entry and exit points, as well as our records show whether a person is a UAE citizen or not.”²⁸⁹

The non-democratic setting of the UAE has encouraged the proliferation of digital spaces for the anonymous and often veiled expression and dialogue of dissent between different ideological positions over the past 15 years. Blogs have been particularly important, offering crucial sites for emotional venting, political analysis, and the release of information, while protecting the identity of participants. Of course, the government can shut down these sites — which is what happened to Ahmed Abdelkhaleq’s emaratybedoon.blogspot.com in November 2014 — but such blogs and forums continue to emerge and remain effective in providing a domain for critiquing the regime and its practices. In spite of the anonymity that these sites offer, *bidoons* typically use careful language to express critique or ask for amelioration of their situations. Citizens of the UAE, by contrast, are more likely to

²⁸⁸ “No Stateless People in UAE,” *Khaleej Times*, 2005, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2005/March/theuae_March725.xml§ion=theuae.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

use online forums to state their support for regime positions and racial and other anxieties. Government officials, for the most part, avoid openly or directly addressing the concerns that *bidoon* activists raise on these blogs. Instead, officials count on state-controlled news media outlets and government websites to thwart criticisms, strategically release pro-government news stories, and stir up fear to sway public opinion and garner support for further restrictions on citizenship.

In my analysis of materials available online, including blogs by or sympathetic to *bidoon* matters, corresponding comments and discussions, and pro-regime discourse, I found three distinct kinds of narratives about the *bidoon* “problem.” In what I think of as “glitches in the system” accounts, *bidoon* status is always attributed to unintended or inefficient legal and bureaucratic matters and the proposed solutions typically call for new decrees to rectify old oversights and grant citizenship to at least some *bidoons*. Another common version argues that “Iranians will always be Iranians,” that is, that no matter how long *bidoons* have lived in the UAE, they are still foreigners (and children of foreigners) whose loyalties lie elsewhere. If these people are naturalized, the argument goes, they would threaten the stability and security of the country. Tighter citizenship control is rationalized by tapping into already existing racist and sectarian anti-“Persian,” -“Iranian,” or -Shia sentiments and suspicions. Finally, a third category of explanatory account assumes that the majority of *bidoon* claimants for citizenship are greedy frauds. According to this narrative, *bidoons* are impoverished opportunists who

conceal their “true” identities to use up the “limited” wealth of the country. They have little national loyalty or commitment to the UAE.

These accounts do not address what may be considered the heart of the matter, the usually unstated political dangers to the government of offering citizenship to approximately 100,000 Arabic-speaking Muslim *bidoons* with long ties and deep attachments to communities and places in the UAE.²⁹⁰ Because it is not possible to freely conduct randomized surveys on this matter, we do not know what most citizens of the Emirates think about the *bidoon* question. In this respect, the explanatory accounts may be treated as different versions of one hegemonic discourse that offer multiple kinds of insights. In what follows, I examine what they express, how they express it, their unstated assumptions, and their elisions. These elisions include the possibility that expanding the community of citizen claimants empowers tendencies among *current* citizens for expanded forms of representation and accountability. The glitches, destabilizing “Iranians,” and “greedy frauds” accounts conveniently hide the threat that the *bidoons* actually pose to the regime. Why else would Arab Muslims with long ties to the region be considered dangerous to fully enfranchise? Giving citizenship to *bidoons* “opens the door” to a range of potentialities, not least of them from citizen men and women.

²⁹⁰ Some reports estimate the stateless population of the United Arab Emirates to be as high as 100,000, while the UAE government estimates the number to be around 10,000. Zainab Fattah, “UAE denies 100,000 residents access to riches from oil boom,” *Bloomberg*, March 31, 2008 http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a_ciA0ISxo0Q; Rym Ghazal, “The frustration of being a ‘Bidoon’,” *The National*, November 6, 2008, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/the-frustration-of-being-a-bidoon>; Anna Zacharias, “Bidoon celebrate National Day as Emiratis,” *The National*, November 24, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/heritage/bidoon-celebrate-uae-national-day-as-emiratis>

Explanation 1: “Glitch in the system”

The “glitch in the system” account blames the *bidoon* problem on bureaucratic inefficiencies assumed to be the result of historical oversight. This kind of account is usually produced by government officials, although nationalist bloggers and some *bidoon* forum participants also state that the government is “doing its best” to straighten out problems in the legal system that prevent *bidoon* from acquiring Emirati citizenship. The underlying premise is that naturalization rules came into being on their own and exist outside of the political process. Elites are assumed to have minimal influence on improving the situation for *bidoons*.

Some *bidoon* bloggers attribute their lack of documentation and vulnerability to the incompetence of employees who work in the offices responsible for setting citizenship requirements and reviewing applications, rather than blaming the larger system or a named leader. A great example of this line of reasoning is a letter published in 2008 by “Hassan Ebrahim,” a *bidoon* from the UAE, on emaraty.katib.org, a forum sponsored by The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information.²⁹¹ The letter, addressed to the UAE government, is titled “Save us from the negligence of officials, we call on Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed to rectify our situation.” Rhetorically, the author frames the problem in a way that presents Sheikh Khalifa, President of the UAE, as being unaware of the way the Ministry of Interior is handling *bidoon* matters and requests. Addressing Sheikh Khalifa directly, beseeching him to intervene, he continues: “Look at how Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al

²⁹¹ *The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information*, <http://anhri.net/>

Nahyan, Minister of Interior, manipulates the feelings of *bidoons*, granting citizenship depending on his mood.”²⁹²

The language and nature of the pleas in these posts and comments render supreme political elites blameless for the *bidoons*' status as non-citizens. Instead, they criticize government agencies, officials, and apparatuses and use flattering, praising and using obsequious language when addressing the President.

In this case, compliments may offer some protection for indirect critique, since direct critique is subject to punishment. Abdelkhaleq's first blog post in January 2011 was a link to a YouTube video that is 1:04 minutes long and titled “A Bidoon's Letter to Sheikh Khalifa.” The video, which includes instrumental background music to emotionally evoke the viewer, presents a brief letter pleading with the Sheikh and Ruler of the United Arab Emirates to solve the problem of the *bidoons*. The blog post itself is captioned: “We ask your highness to put an end to the suffering of the *bidoons* and find a just solution to their humanitarian cause, because you, my generous father, are of the good people.”²⁹³

In response to *bidoon* demands for citizenship, government representatives often point to legislation enacted in the past that has improved the situation but is slowed down by external factors. Major General Nasser Al Awadi Al Menhali, Assistant Undersecretary for Naturalization Department in Abu Dhabi, explains that the biggest reason for the delay in issuing citizenship to *bidoons* is that many registered their citizenship application “under a series of varying names on more

²⁹² “The Bedoon in the Emirates – an interview with Ahmad Mansour,” *emaraty.katib.org*, comments section, August 2008, <http://bit.ly/1Gw31Om>

²⁹³ “A Bidoon's Letter to Sheikh Khalifa”, *Emaraty Bedoon*. January 2012.

than one occasion, believing they would be more successful, delaying those who have valid *bidoon* status.”²⁹⁴ Beyond communicating that the system is committed to resolving the problem, this account reproduces the narrative that only some claims are valid and raises suspicions of fraud to reinforce support for restrictive procedures.

In October 2007, 1,294 *bidoons* were issued citizenship on a case-by-case basis following a 2006 presidential ruling. In 2008, an additional 51 *bidoons* were issued citizenship.²⁹⁵ These ad hoc responses are often used as an example to show that the government is doing its best to protect the rights of “true” Emiratis and “valid” *bidoons*. In 2009, for example, Nasser Al Alawidi of the federal naturalization department in Abu Dhabi stated, “[The 2006 directive] included three conditions for people to get citizenship. One of them was to prove they have been in the UAE consistently since before 1971. People who show us real documentation and cooperate with us and prove good intentions, the country will give them a hand.”²⁹⁶ Government officials who congratulate and commend newly naturalized citizens often produce a rhetoric separating “the system” from the rulers, representing that system as having no authors or actors. Government statements explaining the limited number of successful applications imply that *bidoons* are the source of their own problems.

²⁹⁴ Claire Ferris-Lay, “Born Identity?” *Arabian Business*, July 13, 2009, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/born-identity--16083.html>

²⁹⁵ United Nations, *The situation of stateless persons in the Middle East and North Africa*, 31; “UAE grants citizenship to 1300 “bidoon”,” *Al Arabiya*, October 7, 2007, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/10/07/40038.html>; James Exelby, “The UAE creates 51 new citizens,” *Arabian Business*, October 20, 2008, <http://m.arabianbusiness.com/uae-creates-51-new-citizens-84729.html>

²⁹⁶ Ferris-Lay, “Born Identity?”

The website www.uaegoal.com, which is ostensibly devoted to sports commentary, has also hosted forum discussion threads on citizenship and national belonging in the Emirates. In reply to criticism that the government is “arbitrary” in its naturalization decisions, an Emirati citizen writing under the handle of “Son of the Emirates” [*walad al emarat*] insists in a July 2012 posting, “There can be no such thing as random naturalization. Applications go through scrutinized security procedures and committees. Solutions are available which have made this year the year of localization/naturalization.”²⁹⁷ The author of the post could be a government representative or a pro-regime citizen but, either way, the message is that the quality and legitimacy of applications determines whether or not the applicants are naturalized. By emphasizing the “scrutinized” process, he justifies delays and difficulties associated with naturalization, suggesting that the government is not “resisting” granting *bidoons* citizenship but, rather, doing due diligence in carrying out the process in order to avoid “arbitrary” naturalization.

Government officials and loyalist bloggers defending existing naturalization rules often refer to Hassan Abdul Rahman as someone who has benefited from resolving “glitches in the system” by taking creative action. As an Emirati *bidoon* who obtained a passport from the Comoros Republic in 2008, he was commended by the Minister of Interior, Lieutenant-General Shaikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan: “We appreciate the initiative of Abdul Rahman, who has shown himself to be a law-abiding person. The fact that he sought to correct his status to stay and work legally

²⁹⁷ “The Comoros Islands passports that are given in the country, and the infiltration of Iranians to obtain this citizenship,” forum thread started by “Albitar”, June 2012, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t314430.html>

in the country proves that he is well-intentioned.”²⁹⁸ This public announcement was an indirect encouragement of other *bidoons* to apply for such Comoros passports instead of UAE citizenship in order to receive work permits in the UAE without officially revealing details of the UAE/Comoros Islands agreement discussed in Chapter 3. The “glitch in the system” argument is also used without naiveté by some *bidoons* as a rhetorical strategy to make their case for citizenship in hopes for an individual solution. When used in regime or pro-regime statements, however, it seems designed to foreclose calls for more radical political and legal change and deny government responsibility. It assumes imperfections rather than fundamental flaws in the system, or blames applicants for any delays. Finally, it hides the central actors and power holders over citizenship rules and practices.

Explanation 2: “The Iranian will always be an Iranian”

A second category of explanation for *bidoons*’ lack of naturalization is that they are not “authentically” Emirati. No matter where they were born, how long they have lived in the Emirates, or how flawless their Arabic, their loyalty is framed as *really* being to another country and identity. Thus they are constituted as a security threat in ethnic/religious or ideological terms. Before 1975, belonging was legally determined by being Arabic speaking, of good character, and enduringly connected to the “Trucial States” broadly conceived through family, work, and other

²⁹⁸ Shahm Sharif, “The Emirati Ministry of Interior recommends granting citizenship to an Emirati from the Comoros islands,” *Arabian Business*, July 9, 2008, <http://arabic.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/2008/jul/9/7913/>; “Stateless person to get UAE citizenship on ‘clean record’,” *Khaleej Times*, July 9, 2008, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2008/July/theuae_July314.xml§ion=theuae

relations. In this account, however, *bidoons* are permanent threats to the “political stability” and “security” of the country. “Security” is a widely used basis to revoke citizenship and withhold its granting in the UAE. For regime representatives and their supporters, it is an excellent reason to maintain tight eligibility requirements for citizenship. This kind of explanation often relies on derogatory, even racist, anti-Shia and anti-Iranian language despite hundreds of years of multiple religions, ethnicities, and languages, as well as mixing, especially on the Northern coast.

“Security” and authenticity often come together in explanatory accounts for refusing or revoking citizenship. In April 2011, naturalized Emirati male activists wrote a petition addressed to the President and signed by 130 Emirati citizens. The petition called for political reforms and the establishment of an elected legislature with full powers. In December 2011, the government in Abu Dhabi confiscated their passports and revoked the six men’s citizenship, arguing that they had links to “suspicious regional and international organizations and figures,” some allegedly listed by the UN as financing terrorism. In April 2012, authorities detained the six men after they refused to sign a pledge to search for a new nationality.²⁹⁹ They were brought to the Naturalization and Residence Department to sign a pledge that they would seek citizenship in another country since they were made illegal residents in the UAE. Officials argued that the men were “originally” nationals of Iran and Yemen

²⁹⁹ AFP, “UAE detains Islamists linked to terror funding,” *Al Arabiya*, April 10, 2012, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/04/10/206745.html>; Muhammad Salah, “UAE: Citizenship with a Gag Order,” *Alakhbar English*, April 14, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/6217>; “The Emirates revokes the citizenship of 6 people,” *bdo0on.net*, forum thread started by “Eman”, December 2012, <http://www.bdo0on.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-10701.html>; “UAE: Crackdown on Islamist Group Intensifies,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 18, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/18/uae-crackdown-islamist-group-intensifies>

who became citizens by naturalization in the 1970s and 1980s, and the law allows their citizenship to be revoked if they engage in acts that “threaten the safety and security of the country.”³⁰⁰ The incident was part of a larger crackdown on Al-Islah, an Islamist body that government officials say is affiliated with Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, which makes it *Sunni* rather than Shia or Iran-affiliated.³⁰¹ The six Emiratis, along with an additional former member of Al-Islah, started a blog in December 2011 under the title “UAE 7.” Many pro-regime commentators refer to this blog. Expressing support with the government’s decision, “bu hamdan” writes in a December 2012 post³⁰²,

They deserve it. I swear if this happened in Iran, we would see them hung. But Praise God for the goodness of Shaikh Khalifa, who only revoked their citizenship. May God protect our country, the UAE and other Muslim countries from the treachery of the rawafid.

The derogatory term *rawafid* is used by these Sunnis to refer to Shia Muslims who are “rejectors” of the Sunni Caliphate that succeeded the Prophet Muhammad in leading Muslims after his death. In the post above, “Muslim countries” clearly does not include those countries that are predominantly Shia or states led by Shia Muslims. Since Al-Islah is identified as a Sunni Islamist organization, by illogically and paradoxically affiliating the activists with Shia and Iran, pro-regime users fuel domestic tensions and anxieties about “hidden” dangers. The use of the word *rawafid* perhaps also implies that these citizens reject the current ruling power, in

³⁰⁰ Salah, “Citizenship with a Gag Order”.

³⁰¹ Ali Rashid Al-Noaimi, “Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE,” *Al-Monitor*, October 15, 2012.

³⁰² The Emirates revokes the citizenship of 6 people,” *bdo0on.net, forum thread started by “Eman”*, December 2012, <http://www.bdo0on.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-10701.html>

the same way that Shia rejected the rule of the Caliphate successors of the Prophet Muhammad, which interestingly analogizes the legitimacy of the ruling family of the UAE with the legitimacy of Muhammad and the Sunni dominance that followed.

When Ahmed Abdelkhaleq, founder of emaratybedoon.blogspot.com, was asked about government refusal to naturalize *bidoons* in October 2012, he responded, “Every time the State assigns a committee to deal with *bidoons*, it is done from a security aspect; we tell them, ‘you need to deal with this from a humanitarian aspect, [*bidoons*] are human beings, not experimental lab mice.’ And every time, the committee is not serious in finding a just solution to the problem, because it is dealt with in terms of security....”³⁰³ This demand for a “humanitarian” and “just” resolution of the *bidoon* matter in the UAE strategically assumes a narrow definition of “security,” whereby *bidoons* are falsely deemed dangerous as ideological and “cultural” threats against the government *and* citizens of the UAE. Abdelkhaleq’s demand is less effective if expanding the proportion of citizens is by definition deemed dangerous *to the security of the ruling family*.

Emirati citizens who speak publicly seem less likely to challenge the government and often reinforce “command in power” if they believe the government is acting to protect them “from all potential evil.” As “rafi’i alshan” writes in a December 2010 reply to a *bidoon* sympathizer,

³⁰³ Dina Abulma’arif, “First activist deported from the UAE “bidoon”: the security mindset runs the country and deludes the public that “Islah” follows the Muslim Brotherhood,” *El Watan News*, October 11, 2012, <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/60316>

Dear fellow, if it were only about a passport I would give them the passport, but there is a command in power whose priority is the safety and security of its citizens and their protection from all potential evil, thank God.³⁰⁴

Emiratis in the blogosphere point to threats from Shia, Iranians, and Islamists to the “purity” of “original” Emiratis and the political stability of the country. “Reem” on *emaraty.katib.org* blames *bidoons* for their situations, defines them as permanently Other even if naturalized, constitutes their “ancestors” as “illegal” during the colonial period before the establishment of the Emirates as a sovereign entity, and expresses a language of sectarian fear:

What is the government to do if [*bidoon*] ancestors have entered this country illegally and have not tried to rectify their own status? [...] The Iranian will always be Iranian even if naturalized, and it is the role and right of the original Emiratis to be afraid from Shia and other threats.³⁰⁵

In August 2008, a user with the handle “dalou” starts his post by claiming that “most of the *bidoons* who took the Comoros passports are Shia” and ends by expressing his own anxieties about the recently apparent Comoros passport “solution” for *bidoon* applicants for citizenship: “The most important thing is that the government remain cautious regarding the Comoros passport holders. They are ticking time bombs living in our society, be careful.”³⁰⁶ As discussed in Chapter 3, this solution was not publicly announced by the UAE government or sought by *bidoon* applicants for UAE citizenship. Moreover, it seems designed to delay indefinitely the possibility that most UAE *bidoons* will receive citizenship. Assuming

³⁰⁴ “Are we going to see Emiratis living in the Comoros Islands in the future?” forum thread started by “ae_dxb”, January 2010, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t261242.html>

³⁰⁵ “The Bedoon in the Emirates – an interview with Ahmad Mansour,” *emaraty.katib.org*, comments section, August 2008, <http://bit.ly/1Gw310m>

³⁰⁶ “The Bidoon in the Emirates – an interview with Ahmad Mansour,” *emaraty.katib.org*, comments section, August 2008, <http://bit.ly/1Gw310m>

“dalou” is an Emirati citizen, the post indicates a variety of false assumptions: that *bidoons* actively sought Comoros passports, these passports will lead to UAE citizenship, the Comoros passport holders are dangerous outsiders who are “ticking time bombs,” and the “government” is being tricked.

Another blogger using the handle “Albitar” initiated a thread in 2012 on www.uaegoal.com urgently titled “The granting of Comoros passports and Iranian infiltration to obtain [Emirati] nationality.”³⁰⁷ In this “investigative” post, he warns:

Today, I was on a visit to the place where registration for the Comoros passport is done. I discovered a dangerous thing: the infiltration of Iranians to take that passport. Please be aware that the menace of these Iranians, who have recently come to the country applying for Comoros citizenship, will be greater if they obtain Emirati citizenship. The newcomers should not be [considered the same] as those who were born and have grown up in the UAE. Officials at the Comoros Ministry of Interior should be cautious in classifying who gets citizenship (*jinsiyyah*) and who does not.³⁰⁸

It is not clear from this post whether Albitar is a citizen or a *bidoon*. He could be a citizen who assumes that all *bidoons* are Iranian infiltrators and the Comoros “solution” facilitates this danger – thus he does not approve of it. Or he could be a *bidoon* applicant for UAE citizenship frustrated with the Comoros passport “resolution,” who therefore argues that it confuses the legitimate claims of “real” Emirati *bidoons* -- “those who were born and have grown up in the UAE” – with Iranians gaming the system. On either reading, Albitar seems to disapprove of the UAE’s decision to use the Comoros passport system for Emirati *bidoons*, but uses indirect language that urges “caution” by the *Comoros Ministry of Interior*. This takes

³⁰⁷ “The Comoros Islands passports that are given in the country, and the infiltration of Iranians to obtain this citizenship,” forum thread started by “Albitar”, June 2012, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t314430.html>

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

blame away from the UAE government and places it on the Comoros government, as if it is responsible for the project. “Boy/Son of the Emirates” very knowledgeably responds to Albitar’s concern regarding Iranian infiltration through the Comoros passport system:

The process of naturalization is not as easy as you imagine. There are security checks and procedures that are scrutinized by 4 bodies, with a designated committee, and conditions in place. It’s not like one can go to the Comoros Republic, and immediately afterwards be naturalized. There are laws kept in place by the Ministry of Interior and the rest of the parties. May God strengthen them; nothing big or small gets past them.³⁰⁹

“Boy/Son of the Emirates” refers to “the Ministry of Interior and the rest of the parties.” Unlike “Albitar,” he does not modify “Ministry of Interior” with “Comoros,” indicating that he refers to the UAE Ministry of Interior. Moreover, his use of “naturalization” is unclear since Comoros passports do not grant citizenship in the Comoros Islands or in the UAE, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Attaching contentious labels such as “Iranian” and “Shia” to people who demand citizenship, dispute revocation of their citizenship, or are forced into “offshore citizenship”³¹⁰ aims to legitimate government actions and garner citizen support. A March 2011 YouTube video titled “The Emirates sells the *bidoon* group to the Comoros Islands,” criticizes the government for “human trafficking.” User “2ssss4” comments, “The Shia who is loyal to Iran knows who he is, and the country knows who he is too.”³¹¹ The comment implies that there were legitimate reasons the government took the actions it did: *bidoons* are dangerous people who have no

³⁰⁹ [ibid.](#)

³¹⁰ Noora Lori, *Unsettled State*, 32

³¹¹ “The Emirates sells the *bidoons* to the Comoros Islands,” YouTube Video, comments section, March 2011, https://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=4L08zmsX_fU

loyalty to the country because they are Shia or Iranian origin. They deserve whatever the government decides to do.

Other posts are more direct in their xenophobic and even racist sentiments against Iranians and Shia. A post in May 2011 by “shwele7” reads, “Let's be realistic... If you're in Dubai, most of the problems come from Shia *bidoons* who are not necessarily *bidoons*.”³¹² These “traitor spies” and “dogs of Iran”, as one pro-regime user³¹³ calls them, have allegiances to Iran and/or Shi'ism that trump any nationalistic allegiance to the United Arab Emirates.³¹⁴ As “bu aisha” writes in a December 2009 post, “The Shia’s loyalty is to his community, whether he lives in this country or in Saudi Arabia, or even on Mars, and there still remains a deep malice in his heart against the Sunnis, because his original loyalty isn’t to his country of citizenship, the wealth of which he eats.”³¹⁵ In a February 2011 post, “realistic citizen” notes the “gross injustice” of having Emirati Shia citizens “who vilify this country while holding its passport.” He self-righteously continues, “This demonstrates that the proof of loyalty to a country is not in a passport or citizenship, but in one’s behaviors and actions.”³¹⁶

In the UAE, social and institutional discrimination against Sunni citizens whose origins trace back to the Persian coast (known as *ajam* or *ayam*) and the

³¹² “Bidoons, please enter here,” forum thread started by “realistic_citizen”, February 2011, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t293777.html>

³¹³ The user is “realistic_citizen”, but the forum thread is different than the earlier one.

³¹⁴ “Praise the Emirates, and may the rest of the Gulf countries follow,” forum thread started by “mortichlago”, June 2008, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t298299.html>

³¹⁵ “Bidoons, please enter here,” forum thread started by “realistic_citizen”, February 2011, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t293777-3.html>

³¹⁶ *ibid*.

approximately 16 percent of citizens who are Shia is still prevalent.³¹⁷ Sunni-Shia sect and Arab-Persian ethnic distinctions became more rigid since the 1960s and especially since establishment of the modern state of the UAE, as Emirates with different ethnic and religious compositions lobbied for influence and power within the new state. Noora Lori argues that the “Persian” matter was one of the main reasons the new state could not be fully federalized at its inception.³¹⁸

Federalization remains an issue, as I discuss in Chapter 3, since the less oil-wealthy Emirates (that is, all except Abu Dhabi) have more Shia citizens and more ethnic mixing. Ahmed Kanna and Frances Hasso have also discussed the specific tensions attached to being of Persian or Shia origin in the UAE in relationship to citizenship and marriage.³¹⁹ The fear of the Iranian or Shia “danger within” works as an ethnic, sectarian and ideological chimera with very little basis in reality.

Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi, a member of Sharjah’s royal family, is a commentator on Arab affairs and a prominent figure in the Middle East, with a Twitter following exceeding 330,000 in March 2015. In 2013, he published an op-ed in a local newspaper that called for citizenship to be expanded to foreign residents “who contributed greatly to society.” In response, dozens of outraged tweets slammed al-Qassemi using the Arabic Twitter hashtag, “this writer does not

³¹⁷ Michael Dempsey, *Castles in the Sand*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 72; Eric McCoy, *Iranians in Bahrain and the UAE: Minorities, Migration, and Identity* (University of Arizona, 2008), 9; “United Arab Emirates,” US Department of State, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171747.pdf>

³¹⁸ Noora Lori, *Unsettled State*, 17-18.

³¹⁹ Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation*, 145; Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 16-17, 54.

represent me.”³²⁰ Jalal Binthaneya published a response article to al-Qassemi on gulfnews.com urging al-Qassemi to avoid using “remedies from the West” to solve the UAE’s social problems. He continues, “Creating unnecessary divisions within society is exactly what western style immigration law would do in the UAE.”³²¹ Of course this assumes that there are not already multiple divisions and inequalities in the UAE.

Adopting a similar position, Abdullah Al-Muhairi, an unsuccessful candidate for a Federal National Council (FNC) seat from Ras al-Khaimah, argued that the UAE “have no political parties, no political problems” and warned against naturalizing foreigners who might disrupt this unity and fail to recognize the “importance of stability.” Why change what is not broken?

Another Emirati politician, Musbah al-Qetbi, an elected FNC member from Sharjah, maintained that foreigners, even after naturalization, could not be loyal to their adopted country since “love of the homeland has very deep roots in every citizen (*muwatin*).”³²² Here “citizen” does not seem to be a legal category but, rather, a kind of essentialist ethnic-ideological category.

The UAE government fabricates a homogenous national identity rooted in a state-produced “authentic” history and culture.³²³ This creates a point of reference

³²⁰ Results for “this writer does not represent me” Arabic hashtags on Twitter, <http://bit.ly/1byP5HR>

³²¹ Jalal Bin Thaneya, “Citizenship to expats presents challenges,” September 29, 2013, <http://m.gulfnews.com/opinion/citizenship-to-expats-presents-challenges-1.1237072>

³²² Mahmoud Habboush, “Call to naturalise some expats stirs anxiety in the UAE,” *Reuters*, October 10 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/10/10/uk-emirates-citizenship-feature-idUKBRE99904J20131010>

³²³ miriam cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 12.

for Emirati citizens to identify with and feel more anxious about maintaining an existing system where very few people have citizenship, citizenship is difficult to acquire, and citizenship is easily stripped. Furthermore, a homogeneous national identity instills nostalgia among citizens for a past that never was, fuelling Emiratis' need to "protect" or "revive" the "once pure" national identity.³²⁴ This serves the regime by aligning citizens with the government against naturalizing any "outsiders," *bidoons* or otherwise, who comprise most long-term residents.

The matter of "Iranians" and "Shia" discussed in this section is problematic in two ways. First, it reproduces an essentialized approach to identity, ethnicity, and religious belonging that is not consistent with the ways in which people lived or built communities in the areas now known as the UAE. Second, ethnic/religious difference frequently becomes confounded with ideological threat, even when it is illogical, as in the case of the Sunni citizens who called for political reform and were stripped of their citizenship. It is important to note in concluding this section that there are probably many Emirati citizens who do not fully or at all believe in the language of "purity" and "Shia devils" but nonetheless prefer a cautious approach to citizenship because they do fear the possibility that the political system would ideologically or materially change in unpredictable ways if citizenship were expanded.

Explanation 3: Cautions against "the Greedy Fraud"

The third common explanation produced by regime representatives and pro-regime citizens posits that most *bidoon* claimants are not "salt-of-the-earth"

³²⁴ Ibid., 47.

Emiratis without documentation. Rather, they are imposters who have an economic interest in receiving Emirati citizenship. The assumption is that most *bidoon* applications are fraudulent, motivated by desire to access the resources of the state's welfare system, which looks after citizens from "cradle to grave" and privileges them in access to resources and jobs. Government officials frequently warn against "greedy immigrants" who are financially incentivized to seek Emirati citizenship even as the government and corporations eagerly seek such workers and residents. Government officials often emphasize the responsibility of citizens to protect the wealth of the country against the claims of non-citizens. As Abu Dhabi's Shaikh Khalifa, the President of the UAE, put it to an imagined audience of authentic citizens in February 2013: "We [Emiratis] all share the responsibility of building this country, protecting its sovereignty and safeguarding the gains."³²⁵

There is great concern, at least among some commentators, about the distribution of welfare resources. For example, in a 2013 discussion about expanding citizenship in the UAE, a number of people raised worries about the increased government expenses such an act would entail, noting that the UAE already spends "tens of billions of dollars each year" on welfare services.³²⁶ From this perspective, as "Reem" comments on www.emaraty.katib.org:

It is the government's right to grant citizenship to whoever it desires depending on the standards the responsible officials set for naturalization, and we are extremely grateful if they have granted passports to certain people in the past, and it is not anyone's right to object or claim something

³²⁵ "Ambitious Goals to make the UAE an even better place to live," *The National*, February 13, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/ambitious-goals-to-make-the-uae-an-even-better-place-to-live>

³²⁶ Habboush, "Call to naturalise some expats stirs anxiety in the UAE".

that is not with his rights.³²⁷

According to another commentator, who writes as if he/she may be a government official,

Security sources of the United Arab Emirates believe that the other section of this [*bidoon*] category have deliberately concealed their original nationalities and identification documents in order to obtain the nationality of the United Arab Emirates.³²⁸

Those who fear “infiltration” by *bidoon* are quick to commend the difficulty associated with obtaining Emirati citizenship. Some raise suspicions about citizenship seekers’ accounts and refer to personal experiences to testify to excellent government intentions and efficiency in sifting out legitimate naturalization applications. An “Emirati *bidoon*” posted the following account on a forum for Kuwaiti *bidoons* in June 2010, for example,

This one man entered the country in 1990, and his father is Iranian, and he has a brother who is Iranian, but he says he is *bidoon*. How does that make sense??? Look my father is old, and he has documents that date back prior to the Union in 1965. We have 3 local passports issued from Sharjah, and until now, they did not call my father to rectify his situation by acquiring a Comoros passport. And if they did, he would not comply. [The Naturalization department in] Abu Dhabi does not call on people whose papers are old and intact, they call on people who are suspicious and have no old papers, who pose security problems.³²⁹

In a comment responding to a 2009 article discussing *bidoon* citizenship-seekers, the writer assumes they are frauds, pointing to their presumed dire situations *prior* to arriving to the Emirates: “This is the result; honestly, what do you expect from the hungry and homeless who was expelled from his country and found

³²⁷ “The Bidoon in the Emirates – an interview with Ahmad Mansour,” *emaraty.katib.org*, comments section, August 2008, <http://bit.ly/1Gw31Om>

³²⁸ Taj-el-Din Abdelhaq, “UAE: Procedures to resolve the problems of the sons of Emirati women married to foreigners,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, archive.aawsat.com, July 11, 2001, <http://bit.ly/1E6Jc0D>

³²⁹ “Bidoon from the Emirates,” forum started by “emaraty bidoon”, June 2010, <http://kuwaitibedoons.com/vb/showthread.php?t=10241>

himself indulging in Dubai's wealth?"³³⁰ Another comment on the same thread contends that the deserving do not include those "who greedily seek citizenship to obtain financial perks and improve [their] standards of living."³³¹ Anxieties about fraudulent applications and documentation by *bidoons* include concerns that claimants might change their last names and tribal affiliations to obtain citizenship and access the wealth and privileges limited to citizens. These accounts often assume that the applicant is hiding another citizenship. Such fakery is frequently taken for granted, as indicated by a thread from July 2007 on forum.uaewomen.net:

For the one that modifies his genealogy, such that he adds his name to the name of an Emirati relative, to obtain citizenship to the country only for the sake of financial advantages, despite already having documents and citizenship from another country: he must return to his original documents that contain his real genealogy, and must not commit such a crime in the name of greed.³³²

Base motives are similarly assumed in a 2008 comment on emaraty.katib.org by someone using the handle, "Daughter of Abu Dhabi":³³³

If you've left your own countries because of a lack of resources, it is possible that you will toss the Emirati passport in the trash once the oil runs out. There is no loyalty within you people, you are not to be trusted. Where were you when people were dying of poverty and hunger? The original Emiratis did not receive a helping hand at that time. Why didn't we see you ask to join them in their poverty and hunger at the time? Of course, once prosperity surfaced, everyone wanted a slice. And not only that, they say "I have a right

³³⁰ "Did things reach this terrifying and horrifying extent," forum thread started by "maharib alnoor", February 2009,

<http://al3asefah.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=19175&st=72>

³³¹ *ibid.*

³³² "He couldn't find work so he changed his name and joined another tribe," forum thread started by "zakhrawiya 90", July 2007,

<http://forum.uaewomen.net/showthread.php/403918-إلى-وانتسب-اسمه-فغير-عملا-يجد-لم-أخرى-قبيلة>

³³³ "The Bidoon in the Emirates – an interview with Ahmad Mansour,"

emaraty.katib.org, comments section, August 2008, <http://bit.ly/1Gw310m>

to be a citizen and enjoy the wealth of this country.” Honestly, if I were in the authorities’ place, I would not give a single *fil* [unit of coin] to you.

This argument against *bidoon* seekers of citizenship is similar to arguments supporting laws that prohibit Emirati women from marrying men without Emirati or GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council countries) citizenship. It is argued that legal prohibitions protect Emirati women citizens from being financially exploited by their foreign husbands. For example, when a presumably Emirati woman citizen asks on a legal forum in August 2009 whether her passport (*jawaz*) can be revoked for marrying a non-Emirati man, “aalmehairi” responds: “the primary objective of foreigners marrying Emirati women is access to wealth and the Emirati passport, no more and no less. [...] I’ve seen the most intricate schemes whereby foreign husbands take financial advantage of their Emirati wives.”³³⁴ While this anxiety and condemnation extends to exogamous marriages by Emirati men, such marriages are not legally restricted.³³⁵

Government officials and their supporters claim that the restriction of citizenship is motivated simply by the desire to protect the economic wealth of citizens from greedy applicants who use a variety of strategies to fake their affiliation with the UAE. But distribution of economic wealth to more citizens does not seem to be the main issue, particularly given the degree of wealth controlled by the government and the willingness to use that wealth for a variety of purposes. These purposes include assuring that *bidoon* applications for citizenship are instead

³³⁴ “The marriage of an Emirati woman to a non-Emirati and the legal opinion concerning the matter,” forum thread started by “banoota qanooniya”, August 2010, <http://www.theuaelaw.com/vb/showthread.php?p=50965>

³³⁵ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 74.

bypassed through a paid arrangement with the Comoros government, which gives *bidoon* applicants for citizenship in the UAE passports from the Comoros instead. This in turn allows them to receive work permits as “foreigners” in the UAE, as Lori shows.³³⁶ The UAE government also uses a discourse of demographic crisis where Emiratis are represented as “outnumbered” by foreigners and Emiratis are cajoled and paid to marry and reproduce Emirati babies through a variety of state-sponsored projects. Given these stated demographic concerns, why not increase the number of Emirati citizens by naturalizing stateless Arabic-speaking people from the UAE? My point is not that non-Arabs and non-*bidoon* Arabs should not also have opportunities to be naturalized. Rather, the *bidoon* case makes it more difficult to see the restrictions on citizenship as simply motivated by worries about demographics or the economic challenges of giving welfare benefits to more citizens.

Conclusion: “The door that cannot be closed”

When examining the public discourse on *bidoons* to identify the dominant explanations for why they should do not receive citizenship in the UAE, I found three common regime-influenced stories. The first deflects attention from systematic problems by projecting the matter onto lower level political actors or small “glitches” in the system that can be resolved on a case-by-case basis by officials or “quick fix” presidential decrees. The problem, in this account, is not related to systematic deficiencies, ideology, or political leaders. This kind of explanation is used for different reasons by *bidoons*, citizens, and government

³³⁶ Noora Lori, *Unsettling State*, 200.

officials. A second explanation category paints claimants as not “truly” or “authentically” Emirati in biological, genealogical, geographical or identification terms. Typically, *bidoons* in such accounts are instead represented as permanently Iranian, Shia or holding real allegiance to other communities. Whether they already have citizenship or receive it, they are a threat to the “security” of the UAE and its citizens. They are “dangerous Iranians” or “evil Shia.” The third kind of explanation accuses *bidoon* claimants of being greedy frauds rather than undocumented and stateless people from the region. Their “real” goal, in this account, is to acquire “national” resources such as education, healthcare, and employment and possibly ruin the existing stable system.

There is another possible reading, however. *Bidoon* naturalization debate helps deflect political challenges to the government by focusing citizens’ attention on potential competitors for the material resources and benefits attached to citizenship. The essentialist and impostor accounts in particular tap into citizen insecurities that are arguably *produced* by political elites. Given the outnumbering of citizens by non-citizen migrants, workers, and residents in the UAE, one would think that an expansion of Arabic-speaking citizens with long ties to the UAE would assuage widespread demographic anxieties about the foreigner. But what if *bidoons* threaten not the citizens of the UAE but the political system, which must regularly reinforce itself against the claims-making of citizens and non-citizens? What if expanding the citizenry by naturalizing *bidoons* is more dangerous than bestowing citizenship on non-“indigenous” people?

In the authoritarian political system of the UAE, the political system is controlled by hereditary dynasts. The constitution prohibits the formation of unions, civic organizations, and political parties.³³⁷ As citizens are a small minority of long-term residents, the potential of political uprising by the foreign majority is perceived as a permanent threat. Naturalization, on the other hand, may increase political pressure from *citizens*, empower existing citizens, decrease their sense of being outnumbered, and make them less afraid to challenge the existing system of rule. This would explain the “glitches in the system” accounts, which forestall fundamental changes in citizenship rules for any category, whether *bidoons*, long-time residents from other ethnicities, or the husbands and children of Emirati women who marry men without citizenship.

All the accounts discussed in this chapter seem designed to maintain centralized decision-making in the country. Blaming the system, raising security concerns, and warning of fake greedy *bidoon* applicants for citizenship may function to increase support for citizenship restrictions *especially from citizens*. Restrictions on the naturalization of *bidoon* may be most important in controlling demands for political reform or representation by *citizens*. As a commenter on a blog thread by the pro-regime “Albitar” obliquely writes in November 2006: “Chances of naturalization have opened a door that cannot be closed; its consequences will follow in years to come.”³³⁸ But as indicated in this chapter, different doors are

³³⁷ Jim Krane, *City of Gold* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 59.

³³⁸ “The Comoros Islands passports that are given in the country, and the infiltration of Iranians to obtain this citizenship,” *forum thread started by “Albitar”*, June 2012, <http://www.uaegoal.com/vb/t314430.html>

opened by offering citizenship to *bidoons*. The “consequences” invite us to ask, “Consequences for what?” and “Consequences for whom?”

The “door” of naturalization may open the floodgates to different long-term residents – migrant workers, expatriates, immigrants – who might be empowered to make their own political demands for inclusion. Recognizing and naturalizing members of the *bidoon* category of lack or “without” may also motivate others to destroy citizenship documents, it’s true. But this is an unlikely path and not the most dangerous problem for the political system. Increasing the body of citizens swings open the door of increased demands for accountability that may undermine the system. Because UAE rulers distribute wealth to citizens in a manner that silences resistance and calls for political reform,³³⁹ the government may fear those who prioritize political accountability over financial advantages. A commentator on a controversial op-ed by Al-Qassemi that calls for the naturalization of foreigners reflects these anxieties concerning political instability. He or she asks, “After being granted citizenship, would political rights be the next step forward?”³⁴⁰ When resisting *bidoon* demands for citizenship, government officials and loyalist bloggers may in fact be most wary of a *political* door that cannot be closed.

³³⁹ Hasso, *Consuming Desires*, 17.

³⁴⁰ Mahmoud Habboush, “Call to naturalise some expats stirs anxiety in the UAE”.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

It would be difficult to argue that the establishment of the UAE state in 1971 either replaced or solidified a primordial “old system” of tribalism. Rather, the new state was grafted onto a complex system of governance developed over the course of 140 years of British colonial rule. Family-based rule was itself changed by colonial interests and, of course, like all ruling elites, the rulers had age-old interests in consolidating their own power and resources both in relation to each other and to the populations under their rule. There were, therefore, significant disagreements among rulers about future jurisdiction and distribution of authority when the UAE was established. These differences are reflected in the many gaps and ambiguities that are evident in the state’s official laws and codes until the 2000s.

A common understanding of politics in the Gulf is that political loyalties once tied to a particular tribe developed into “loyalty to the state as an abstract political concept” through the legal category of nationality.³⁴¹ My thesis challenges such an understanding in a number of ways. First, the idea of tribe assumes unchanging primordial and ancestral connections, but I show that the nature of tribal affiliations was dynamic and flexible. In fact, the British were particularly interested in attaching loyalty to tribal rulers, which facilitated their economic interests and colonial divide and rule. Moreover, in the Trucial States, there were other important communities and affiliations beyond the tribal, including the merchants, pearl divers, and religious leaders. Second, in neither colonial nor postcolonial settings

³⁴¹ Ali Mohammed Khalifa, *The United Arab Emirates: unity in fragmentation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 99.

was loyalty to the *state* per se encouraged. Rather, what was and remains most valued in the UAE is allegiance to particular rulers. Third, this thesis raises many questions about “the legal category of nationality.” What we see is a goal to limit expansion of citizenship as much as possible through legal rules, decrees, procedures, and practices, many of them undertaken secretly. The “legal category of nationality” is inconsistent and arbitrary.

What becomes clear is that the primary issues in the UAE are not about demographic imbalance, proportion of citizens, or cultural authenticity in a country with a high proportion of non-citizens. The UAE government can easily expand its citizen numbers by granting citizenship to tens of thousands of *bidoons* who are very much part of the cultural fabric of the region. They can also choose to grant citizenship to the husbands and children of Emirati women citizens. But they do not because they worry it would “open the door” to wider claims that change the political calculus in a country with few citizens. Paradoxically, having such a limited number of citizens may work to increase the anxieties of these citizens, who feel outnumbered, and then help garner support for government restrictions.

I learned from this research that the crisis of *bidoons* was emerged as a result of UAE’s efforts to close loopholes and worked to unify/federalize the laws of citizenship. The UAE government keeps a tight control on citizenship in order to avoid creating new citizens that would undermine the existing political power structure. Indeed, the apparent battle between emirate-level and federal power seems to actually be about Abu Dhabi advancing its own agenda, since it is the emirate that controls the seat of federal government. Written rules, laws, and

practices seem to be about managing citizenship in order to bolster Abu Dhabi's position within the UAE. In many ways, developments between 2004 and 2008 indicate the dramatic success of this project.

One question worth asking is why Dubai has acquiesced to this "federalization" given the long competitive struggle between Abu Dhabi and Dubai? It may be because Dubai, as a commerce-based economy, is more vulnerable to shocks in the global capitalist economy. To give a minor yet dramatic example of Dubai's dependence on Abu Dhabi: following the 2008 financial crisis, Dubai faced a shortfall in funds allocated to complete building the "tallest building in the world", which it planned to call Burj Dubai (Dubai Tower). Abu Dhabi agreed to bail Dubai out of this crisis, but apparently required that this iconic building be named Burj Khalifa (Khalifa Tower). Interestingly, although the tower's name was changed to honor Abu Dhabi's assistance, the name refers to President Khalifa, ruler of Abu Dhabi, rather than Abu Dhabi itself.

Although it is often framed as a fundamentally irresolvable problem, the *bidoon* category is linked to political and legal interests. Without citizenship, *bidoons* are easily dealt with by the government through imprisonment, expulsion, firing, and offshoring.. My focus on the *bidoons* is therefore not about the *bidoons* only. In fact, I show how the *bidoons* are, to use an economic term, externalities to a larger Abu Dhabi project invested in consolidating power and control. Government responses to the people known as *bidoon jinsiyya*, and who in increasing numbers began to call for citizenship in the 2000s, are an extreme example of the use of citizenship rules to maintain political power.

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