Sulaiman H. Al-Farsi holds a PhD in Politics and International Studies from the University of Leeds.

DEMOCRACY AND YOUTH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Islam, Tribalism and the Rentier State in Oman

Sulaiman H. Al-Farsi

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2013 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

Distributed in the United States and Canada
Exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

Copyright © 2013 Sulaiman H. Al-Farsi

The right of Sulaiman H. Al-Farsi to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by the author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Library of Modern Middle East Studies 126

ISBN 978 1 78076 090 2

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress catalog card: available

Typeset by Newgen Publishers, Chennai
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

CONTENTS

Figures viii
Glossary ix
Acknowledgements xiii

1. **Introduction** 1
   Background 1
   Research Questions 11
   Methodology 11
   The Structure of this Book 13

2. **The Context of Democratisation in the Arab World** 16
   Introduction 16
   Democracy: The Debate 19
   The Democratic Issue in the Arab World 23
   Democracy and External Intervention 26
   Democracy versus Authoritarian Regimes 29
   Democracy and the Rentier State 31
   Islam and Democracy 35
   Democracy and Civil Society 40
   Conclusion 44

3. **The Omani Context** 46
   The Omani Tribes: Origin and Politics 46

Social Transformation in Oman since 1970 55
Traditional and Contemporary Political Processes in Oman 62
The Basic Statute of the State 72
Majlis Oman (Council of Oman) 75
The Electoral Principle and the Electoral Committees 81
The Annual Royal Tour 84
Conclusion 86

4. **The 'Top-Down' Model: Challenges to Its Success** **88**
Reasons for Adopting the Political Process from the Top 88
Traditional and Contemporary *Shura*: Similarities and Differences 105
Respondents' Critique of the Contemporary *Shura* 110
Challenges to the Contemporary *Shura* 123
Future of the *Shura* in Oman 135
Conclusion 140

5. **The Traditional Model: Theology of *Ibadism* and Modernity** **142**
Introduction 142
The *Shura*: Origin and Practice 142
Political Regimes in *Ibadism* 150
The Traditional and Contemporary *Shura* 167
Democracy and Globalisation and the *Ibadi*'s View 179
Conclusion 182

6. **The 'Bottom-Up' Model: Ambitions and Challenges** **184**
Introduction 184
The Younger Generation's Views of the Traditional *Shura* 185
The Younger Generation's Views of the Contemporary *Shura* 188
The Younger Generation's Political Views and Demands 201
Conclusion 212

7. Conclusion 214
The Democratisation Problem in Oman and the Arab World 214
Reasons for Adopting the *Shura* from the Top Down 215
Religious Intellectuals Legitimise the Contemporary *Shura* 216
Satisfaction of the New Generation 219
The Shortcomings of the Contemporary *Shura* 221
The Future of the *Shura* in the Post-Oil Era 224
Conclusions 226

Notes 229
Appendices 240
Bibiliography 254
Index 262

FIGURES

2.1.	Social Divisions versus Democracy	22
3.1.	The Socio-Political History of Oman since the Advent of Islam	48
3.2.	Map of Oman	50
3.3.	The Omani Government Structure	74
3.4.	The Omani Government and *Majlis* Oman Authorities until 2010	75

GLOSSARY

Adnani	One of the two main branches of Arab tribes, also known as the Northern tribes.
Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd	The name of the Islamic Council of Elite.
Ameer	Prince or a mastering *Sheikh*, above *Tamima* in ranking.
Aqidah	Faith.
Asabiyyat	Faction or kinship.
Asnaf	Islamic guilds.
Awqaf, (sing. *Waqf*)	Religious endowments.
Azd	The name of the main Qahtani tribe that migrated to Oman and ruled the state.
Baitawiah	The concept of giving priority to *Ahl Al-Bait* or Ali's family in ruling the Islamic state, adopted by the *Shi'a* sect.
al-Bay'a	Pledge of allegiance.
Bedu	Bedouin people.
Falaj	(pl. *Aflaj*) An open water channel that carries water from the source to the fields.
Fiqh	Jurisprudence.
Ghadaf	The old name of the Rustaq area, which is regarded as the home of the Qahtani tribes.
Hadhar	People living in settlements.
Hodoud	Sanctions.

Ibadat	Worshipping.
Ibadism	An Islamic school of thought that calls for non-hereditary rule and the implementation of the *Shura*.
Iftaá	Islamic advice-giving.
Ijma'a	Consensus.
Ijtihad	Deriving new legislations from the fixed texts of *Shari'a*.
Imam	Title of the ruler within *Ibadism* and some other Islamic sects.
Imamah Ghaebah	Absent Imamate.
Imamate Kitman	Hidden Imamate.
Imamate Dhohor	Explicit Imamate.
Imamate Difaá	Defensive Imamate.
Jahiliyah	The time preceding the emergence of Islam.
Jebel Akhdhar	The Green Mountain, located at the centre of Oman's interior.
Khalifah	(pl. *Kholafa'a*) The title of the Islamic ruler during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties.
Kafir	(pl. *Koffar*) Non-believer.
Kofr	Blasphemy.
Madanee	Civil.
Majlis Al-Dawlah	The State Council.
Majlis Al-Istishary lid-Dawlah	The State Consultative Council.
Majlis Al-Shura	The Shura Council.
Majlis Al-Zira'a Wal-Asmak Was-Sina'ah	The Agriculture, Fish and Industry's Council.
Ma'rab	An ancient dam in Yemen that, upon its collapse, started the great migration across Arabia.
Mofti	Head of the religious institutions.
Muaamalat	Dealings.
Nizwa	The centre of the Imamate and the home of the Adnani tribes.

Qahtani	One of the two main branches of Arab tribes, also known as the Southern tribes.
Quraish	The tribe of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh).
Qurashia	The concept of giving priority to the *Quraish* tribe in ruling the Islamic state, adopted by the *Sunni* sect.
Rasheed	A tribal ruler, below *Sheikh* in ranking.
Rustaq	The home for the Qahtani tribes, located at the base of Jebel Akhdar on the Batinah side.
Sablah	Local gathering area.
Saqifet Bani Saedah	The name of the place where Muslims gathered, practised *Shura* and selected their first ruler after the death of the Prophet.
Sayyid	Lord.
Shaff	Inter-tribal alliance.
Shari'a	The Islamic law.
Shi'a	An Islamic sect that calls for keeping the Islamic leadership in the hands of the descendents of Ali bin Abi Talib.
Shura	Literally, 'consultation'; politically, 'a political system through which people enjoy the right of political participation'.
Souq	Market.
Sunnah	The Prophet's sayings and actions.
Sunan al-Bahr	Sea norms.
Sunni	An Islamic sect that calls for keeping the Islamic leadership in the hands of the Quraish tribe, that of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh).
Surat	A chapter of the Quran.
Tamima	Sheikh that dominates a large tribal alliance.
Tawheed	The oneness of God.
Ulama	Islamic intellectuals.
Umma	Nation; in Islam, 'the combination of faith and community'.

Wahabism	A branch of the Hanbali sect that was established in Saudi Arabia during the last three centuries.
Wali	Local governor.
Zakat	Alms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to my beloved country, Oman, and to my wife for everything.

I also convey my most heartfelt, sincere thanks to those who responded to this study in Oman, for sharing their time in spite of busy schedules and for their contributions to the study; to those who played a part in making arrangements for the interviews to take place; and to others who contributed to this book in one way or another.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

This book examines the growing influence of democratisation and concepts of democratic power on the rentier – mainly oil-producing – states in the Middle East in general and in Oman in particular. Over the past four decades, the legitimacy of rentier states has rested upon an implicit social contract (seen as part of an Islamic tradition called *al-bay'a*: the pledge of allegiance) between people and regimes. In this contract, the regimes provide the people with some subsidies and decent jobs in the public sector and do so with little or no direct taxation, although it is at the expense of democratic forms of political participation. This implicit social contract has resulted in significant constraints being placed upon the development of democratic institutions and indeed upon the development of civil society itself in most rentier states. At the very least it has aided its reduction to a very artificial form of parliamentary representation wherein such parliaments have only minimal authority. At the same time, it has allowed such states, particularly in the Gulf region, to establish and maintain the public infrastructure, to incorporate advanced technologies, to produce a larger educated class, to increase the quality of public health and, in turn, to contribute to a growing population in the region.

In some rentier states, such as in the Sultanate of Oman, oil production is now in decline due to the sharp reduction in realisable

oil reserves; oil in Oman is expected to run out in a few decades.[1] Here, the argument is put forward that such states now face, to various degrees, an increasing pressure to meet hitherto expected living standards, and some of the rentier states are likely to struggle to meet these expectations. With the number of university graduates increasing and the ability of the public sector to absorb them becoming increasingly limited by the decrease in oil revenues, greater dependence on the private sector to provide such employment seems inevitable, particularly because, unlike the people in some other Gulf States, Omanis do not typically object to working in all job levels in the private sector. The consequential growth of associations, syndicates and unions, together with calls for political reforms, signal a great change in the existing social contract, and thus a significant challenge is currently posed to the legitimacy of some rentier states. Therefore, greater pressure for democratisation can be expected in some oil producing states, in line with the respective decline in levels of oil production, as popular demands for self-empowerment increase and governing elites seek new forms of political legitimacy.

Despite the deep-rooted history and conservatism of Oman, from the beginning of the twentieth century until Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, the country witnessed a period of weakness at political, economic and cultural levels. Subsequently, many Omanis have left the country in a search of better education and employment, and many of the values that used to exist in Oman have been damaged – not least the firm sense of Omani identity.[2]

In respect of the decline and crisis which had swept across the country at the time, the few years prior to Sultan Qaboos's reign witnessed at least two important events: the conflict between the government of the Sultanate at that time and the followers of the Imamate on the Jebel Akhdar and the government's conflict with Marxist rebels in the Dhofar governorate.[3] The former Sultan Said bin Taymur had been able to unify the country for the first time in modern history by the end of the 1950s. (Since the signing of the *Seeb* Agreement in 1918, Oman had been divided between the Sultanate that rules the coastal areas and the Imamate that rules the interior.) However, the conflict in the Dhofar governorate persisted until the mid-1970s. The other

pre-eminently important event in that period was the discovery of oil in Oman in vast commercially significant quantities.[4]

The political changes which resulted from Sultan Qaboos acceding to the throne and from the economic changes after the discovery of oil helped to repair the ravages of the decades which preceded 1970. Omani people restored their identity and culture through the deployment of formal education, which quickly established national curricula. The curricula reminded citizens of their history, values and traditions and assured them of the sovereignty of their country throughout history. Therefore, the development which took place and is still underway in Oman, this book contends, is not due solely to the discovery of oil reserves as some theorists of the rentier state model have argued. It is also a function of the reformulation of the nation's history after a period of decline; the cultural and economic activities of Oman in terms of trade and industry were present throughout history and were not solely a product of the modern era.

The establishment of Oman as a modern state was embarked upon at all levels after 1970. It was therefore necessary to reformulate the political structure of Oman but in line with its current stage of development. Oman had been opened to the world at all levels; the slogan adopted by the country was 'to start from where others have ended', and this motto was applied to education, health and modern management systems and therefore had to be applied to the political system as well.[5] The Sultanate realised that the era of authoritarian political systems was over and that an era of political pluralism based on democratic values had arrived. The government recognised two important facts: firstly, the Omanis who had left to study and work before 1970 had become aware of the importance of political reform; and secondly, Oman was suffering from having a distinctly weak civil society (as was the case in other Arab countries).

The opening up of the political horizon in a tribal society based mainly on tribal legitimacy, which fights any sort of centralisation of power even if it comes in a democratic form, may well serve to evoke negative reactions and results, not least with regard to the social and political system in the state. Therefore, the intended project of political democratisation was to be exercised through a gradual opening up of

the political horizon alongside progress in the development of civil society, but crucially in keeping with tradition and other historic values of the country.[6] As will be discussed in Chapter 2, it was necessary and obvious (at least to its architects) to choose the Islamic *Shura* as a model for policy making in the country, particularly since Oman is the only country which has maintained the *Shura* practice throughout its history; indeed, its demise could lead to much social upheaval in Oman as the legitimacy of any political system in the country is based on the extent to which it recognises the *Shura*.

From 1970 onwards Oman witnessed a new 'top-down' democratisation process which juxtaposed the traditional democratic practice of *Shura*, derived from Islam, with the concepts and institutional practices of modern Western democracy. Omanis were allowed to vote en masse, for the first time in the Sultanate's history, in 1991. It is a new political phenomenon for the *ordinary* Omani people to directly practise *Shura* at the national level, and it is a process which has been introduced from the top down. In the traditional Islamic *Shura*, participation – at the national level – was restricted to elites and notables who claimed representative legitimacy on behalf of various tribal confederations. Ordinary people in the past were restricted to providing nominal mandates once the *Shura* had been formed and decisions had been taken. Nevertheless, all Muslim people can practise *Shura* at the hierarchically lower levels as it is regarded as a norm of living (to the extent that all have a right even to criticise the ruler if he is found wrong).

Since the 1990s, however, it would seem that a process of democratisation, which embraces all segments of Omani society, including the clergy, has come to be accepted by most sections of society. Significantly, though, this process is relatively new, and some, especially the educated younger generation, feel that current democratic reforms remain insufficient in terms of addressing the challenges which Oman faces in the twenty-first century. By employing the resources of websites, the media, and other open forums, this emerging educated and technocratic elite has begun to push the government towards making more substantive political reforms. This phenomenon represents a nucleus of 'bottom-up' democratisation approaches, reflected for example in the

manner in which its agents are initiating contacts with regional and international human rights organisations.

This book therefore identifies three types of democratisation taking place in contemporary Oman: the traditional, led by the religious institutions; the top-down, led by the government; and a bottom-up process which is emerging slowly amongst the younger generation. Oman, it can be argued, is passing through a transitional period in which all three processes react against and struggle with each other in order to reach a certain compromise or settlement. The presence of this unique phenomenon offers a very interesting opportunity to examine these democratisation processes. The following paragraphs explain the contest oriented around the concept of the rentier state and the process of democratisation in Oman – involving the three different actors. This all takes place against the backdrop of *Ibadism* – a source of consistency in the Omani state and Omani society.

Oman, regardless of its limited oil reserves when compared with its neighbours, is regarded as being one of the rentier states of the Gulf region, but its declining oil reserves clearly threaten the ability of the Sultanate to continue to arrange political discourse and participation around a 'rentier state model'. The country might fail to fulfil its duties in the implicit social contract, and the legitimacy of the government might well soon be affected. According to some reports, the decline in oil production rates will start within a decade.[7] (Some Omani officials are still optimistic, hoping that new technology will allow for the extraction of the heavy oil reserves available in big, untapped reservoirs in the country.) But even if oil production rates remain at the same level or oil prices rise, some Gulf States in general and Oman in particular might not be able to continue with the rentier model as population growth outstrips oil income and the capacity of the public sector, which employs a vast proportion of the citizenry, is hindered.

As will be detailed in subsequent chapters, Oman has been ruled for over ten centuries by *Ibadi* Imams and has never been under the sovereignty of the great Sunni Islamic dynasties – except for the four decades that followed the end of the first Imamate state in the eighth century – beginning with the Umayyad Dynasty and ending with Ottomans.[8] The majority of the population has in the past followed

the *Ibadi* sect which serves to determine the religious and cultural borders in terms of state and society.[9] *Ibadi* people suffered throughout history from continuous attacks from the different Islamic dynasties, especially from the Umayyads and the Abbasids. Attempts were made to destroy the *Ibadi* state, which was seen as a threat to the hereditary rule practised by the respective dynasties.

Ibadism's understanding of *Shura* is different from that of other Sunni sects. The latter – except perhaps in the work of the Sudanese scholar Hassan al-Turabi and some of the renaissance era scholars in Egypt during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – see *Shura* as a process that never exceeds the offering of consultation by the ruler. *Ibadis*, by contrast, take *Shura* as a political agenda in which the ruler (Imam) is elected, thereby denying legitimacy to the idea of hereditary rule. Moreover, *Ibadism* genuinely practises the Islamic principles of *Ijma'* (consensus) and *Ijtihad* (diligence), a fact which has allowed them to adapt core Islamic values to suit a dramatically changing environment in the contemporary globalised era. This attribute of *Ibadism* exhibits its best qualities when it comes to *Ibadi* tolerance towards other religions and cultures.

Other attacks came in different forms such as in attempts to convert *Ibadi* people to the Sunni sect (attempts that still manifest themselves today in the proselytising of Saudi Wahabism). But such proselytising has met with limited success in the remote provinces of the Sultanate, where because of the particularly low levels of literacy, the people are deprived of a deep understanding of the differences between *Ibadism* and *Sunnism* and hence accept the proselytising calls. *Ibadism* represented to the followers of the Imamate a locus point of opposition to Western encroachment. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the reliance of the Sultanate on formal treaties with the British – who realised the strategic importance of Oman and of course the Trucial Coast and its significance in terms of protecting British interests in the Indian Ocean – provoked the anger of successive Imams, who challenged the legitimacy of the ruling order.[10] According to the *Ibadi* notion the *Imamate* never dies but takes different forms which allow it to survive 'implicitly' or 'explicitly'. An *Ibadi* Imamate can be absent (*Imamah Ghaebah*) when *Ibadi* people are in a status of weakness;

hidden (*Imamate Kitman*) during times of threat or fear; explicit (*Imamate Dhohor*) during times of peace; or defensive (*Imamate Difaá*) during times of war or conquest. With this mindset, *Ibadi* people, represented mainly by the religious scholars, jealously guard the heritage that has served to shape Omani identity – religiously, politically and culturally – throughout Islamic history.[11]

The current Al-Busaidi dynasty has been ruling Oman since 1744, when Imam Ahmed Bin Said, the founder of the Al-Busaidi Dynasty, was elected by Omani notables according to the *Ibadi* tradition. After his death in 1783, his son Said bin Ahmed ruled only for few years before his brother, Sultan bin Ahmed, deposed him and moved the capital from the Rustaq, in the interior to Muscat. Breaking with *Ibadi* traditions, Sultan bin Ahmed proclaimed himself *Sayyid* (lord). This incident marked the beginning of the period during which Oman had two ruling systems, originating from the same ruling family in Oman: Sayyids in Muscat and the other coastal area and Imams throughout the interior.[12] In 1806, Sayyid Said bin Sultan became the ruler and, breaking with tradition again, adopted the title Sultan instead of Imam, although he used both titles at different occasions. During his time, Oman reached its greatest position in terms of economic and political power, and the Omani Empire extended from parts of Pakistan and Iran to parts of East Africa.[13] The Sultan managed to open the country to the outside world, and during his time, the British and French vied for influence throughout the region. The Omani Empire had two capitals at this time, Muscat and Zanzibar.

The *Ibadi* followers of the Imamate, however, feared the growing ties between the Sultan and the British in particular,[14] and they despaired over the agreement signed later between London and Muscat which led to Zanzibar being lost to British control. They therefore initiated a revolution in 1868 known as the Revolution of Imam Azzan bin Qais, who came from the same Al-Busaidi ruling family. This incident renewed the struggle between the Sultans and the Imams. It is worth mentioning that the Sultans are also *Ibadis* and believe in the *Ibadi* principles and values, but they, in their quest to establish a modern state, established themselves as independent from the religious intellectuals' control and concentrated on sea trade, especially before

1970.[15] There have been periods in Omani modern history, however, when Sultans and Imams have cooperated with each other, particularly after signing the 1918's *Seeb* Agreement.[16]

Most Gulf States have witnessed conflicts between those tribes who migrated to urban areas and thus tended to be better educated (*hadar*) and those living in deserts (*bedu*) and, again, between rulers and merchants.[17] In the case of Kuwait, for example, the *hadar* tribes benefited more from the oil boom and controlled the oil revenues with the protection of Great Britain, which served the interests of the ruling families. The case of Oman, however, was slightly different, as the tension was not between *hadar* and *bedu* or rulers and merchants. It was instead a political conflict over the issue of legitimacy since the Imamate people of the interior were well educated by the traditional means and, indeed, have left behind a very rich tradition of scholarly work in theology, Arabic language literature and history which is still widely read throughout Oman. What differences did exist between the coastal Sultanate people and the interior Imamate can be attributed to two main factors: the respective sources of income of the two regions and their foreign policy strategies. The Sultanate, dominating as it did the coastal areas, was dependent on seafaring as the main source of income and proved flexible and indeed cunning in its dealings with foreign states, not least in signing treaties of cooperation and friendship with the British. Whilst this implied some compromise over full sovereignty, Oman retained a degree of political independence which marked it out from what became known as other Trucial States, where the role of Britain was far more transparent in ensuring the survival of a particular dynastic order.[18] By contrast, the Imamate depended on an agrarian-based economy and eschewed overt reliance on outside powers which could potentially undermine the sanctity of the *Ibadi* order. Accordingly, the Imams were ill placed to benefit from the economic boom which resulted from the discovery and exportation of oil in commercial quantities from the mid-1960s onwards.[19]

In 1970 Sultan Qaboos came to power, three years after the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in Oman. He was born to an *Ibadi* father and a Sunni mother from the Dhofar governorate, which, from the late 1950s onwards, had been the scene of a growing

insurgency, increasingly influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology and dedicated to the overthrow of the Sultanate. His *Ibadi* background undoubtedly helped in attracting legitimacy from powerful northern tribes. Equally, the fact that his mother was from Dhofar gave the Sultan an appeal among Dhofari tribes whose initial attraction to the insurgents was driven less by their ideological message and more by frustration at a Sultanate which had hitherto refused to address the socio-economic needs of the wider Omani society. While continuing to conduct the war against the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), Sultan Qaboos set out to use the increasing rent derived from the sale of oil to modernise the Sultanate.

The aim of PFLOAG was to overthrow the dynastic order, as had been done in other Arab states such as Egypt, Iraq and Libya, as well as South Yemen, and in the process drive out British imperialism. The Sultan dealt with the situation through two different policies: first, by strengthening the armed forces and seeking help from friendly states such as Britain, Iran and Jordan; and secondly, through developing the country which helped in pulling the carpet from underneath the PFLOAG.[20] The Sultan called on the PFLOAG members and the other Omanis who resided in the neighbouring states to come back to their country and participate in the process of building up the country's political and economic infrastructure. The vast majority returned to the country, with some going on to play important roles in the process of state development and even reaching ministerial ranks in later years.

From 1976 through to the 1990s, it can be argued that the rentier state model enjoyed a golden era in Oman, following the successful defeat of the PFLOAG. The 1990s, however, brought other challenges, but this time from a younger generation which had benefited from the rentier state. Some of this younger, better educated generation found themselves unable to rely on the government to provide employment as world oil prices declined; with this decline a drop occurred in rent which had until that point underpinned the social contract between ruler and ruled. Increasingly, employment opportunities could mostly be found in a small but burgeoning private sector or by working individually. Accordingly, young Omanis found themselves partly freed from the political and economic authority of the state, as their source

of income came from non-governmental sectors. This process emerged simultaneously with the political reform which took place across the Sultanate in 1991.

Thus, a host of events and initiatives played a part in the formation of the new bottom-up democratisation process, in which young Omani people began to push for substantive political reform; significant amongst these developments should be noted the decline in employment opportunities in the public sector; the economic diversification policies; the rapidly growing population; the decline in the oil production rate; the rise in the price of commodities; the increasing number of graduates; the technological and media revolution; the growing independence in the means of living; the local political reforms; and the wider context of regional and international democracy promotion.

In an attempt which was seen as a step towards the preservation of the tradition of the *Ibadi* sect, Sultan Qaboos specified, through the different five-year development plans, that part of the national income would be dedicated to preserving religious worship and to the teaching of *Ibadism*. He also preserved the *Ibadi* traditional process of *Shura.* This was institutionalised by establishing the newly introduced democratisation process (the *Shura* Process). In addition, the Sultan had not appointed an heir. Instead, in the Basic Statute of the State it is asserted that, after the death of the Sultan, the Royal Family members will meet and select from among themselves the future monarch, a process which is directly influenced by the *Ibadi* way of electing the ruler. *Ibadi* scholars have participated in both the process of building up the state and the newly introduced top-down democratisation process.

This book sets out to analyse the relationship between state, religion and democracy. It examines democratisation under the rentier state model, explores ways in which the democratisation process might form an alternative model in the post-oil era and speculates on the capacity of democratisation to enhance stability and security in Oman in the longer run. By examining competing democratisation processes in the Sultanate, this book furthermore explores the extent to which an indigenous political process which employs existing forms of legitimacy and identity (based around the Sultanate and *Ibadi* Islam) can emerge in the light of the pressure for more wholesale reform.

Essentially this book is motivated by the need for the Omani people to realise an effective political model, one best suited to the Sultanate in the era of the post-rentier state.

Research Questions

Oman has witnessed a stable, secure and prosperous era under the rentier state model. Prosperity has become an accepted staple of Omani life and is regarded as still being crucial to political stability in the post-rentier state model era. However, ensuring the legitimacy of the Sultanate is arguably contingent on a path of democratic reform which currently embraces three distinct (though not always necessarily exclusive) democratic theories and modes of participation. It is the bargaining between these processes which will determine the extent to which an indigenous democratisation process is able to evolve and to define the political landscape of Oman. Therefore, this book addresses the following questions:

- In a post-rentier state model era, does a coherent democratic discourse based on three different forms of popular participation now define the political landscape in Oman?
- Why is the Omani government adopting a top-down democratisation process now, and to what extent can it be deemed successful?
- What impact has the traditional practice of *Shura* had on the recent democratisation process in Oman?
- Why has a younger generation of Omanis initiated a bottom-up democratisation process?
- To what extent might the *Shura* political process – with its traditional characteristics – model successful participatory processes to modern Western democracies?

Methodology

In its analysis of the relationship between state, religion and democracy, this book examines policies, cultures and social behaviours. Through an interpretative paradigm, it adopts a qualitative research

strategy. In addition to the methods of document analysis, the study adopts semi-structured interviews which provide contextual flexibility for the researcher and give interviewees opportunity to develop and elaborate their answers. In keeping with this qualitative frame, I use first person pronominal to give my own interpretation and analysis of the data related to this thesis.

I undertook preparatory fieldwork by conducting 13 interviews during the 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Oman with a range of officials, candidates and voters. As might be expected, the Omani public was not fully conversant with the terms of the issue of democratisation, and their ability to engage was somewhat limited; consequently their participation was restricted to simplified questions, which in turn were based upon a thorough briefing I gave before the interviews commenced. Overall, the preparatory fieldwork process was beneficial as most of its problems were avoided when conducting the main interviews of the study.

For the main study, I selected a small purposive sample, consistent with a qualitative approach which seeks depth and detail. The sample was identified to elicit responses from across perceived representatives of the top-down, traditional and bottom-up democratisation processes arguably evident in Oman. The respondents' views are not by any means representative views, so it should not be taken that I am generalising about the populations from which each sample is drawn. I am merely drawing on these categories of respondents to indicate broad trends from within each category to support my analysis. Respondents thus include:

A. Government elites, which have a close relationship with the top-down political process taking place at the moment in Oman. This group is constituted by representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the *Dawlah* (State) Council, the *Shura* (Consultative) Council, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Manpower and some other government members (see Appendix 1). They will be referred to in the analysis chapters as GR government respondents.
B. Senior members of the religious institutions which represent the traditional model, among them key people from the *Iftaá* (Islamic advice-giving) Office, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious

Affairs, the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Islamic Culture and some others (see Appendix 2). They will be referred to as RR (Religious Respondents).

C. Those outside Groups A and B, who currently represent the bottom-up model, among them those responsible for some internet blogs, heads of civil society organisations, writers and cultural activists (see Appendix 3). They are referred to as YGR (Young Generation Respondents).

The sample was purposively selected to reflect the Omani spectrum of orientation to the democratisation process as conceived in the design of the study. The sample targets people from different tribes, of both genders, of different ages, from different working sectors and from different backgrounds and cultures. The selected sample represents people mainly in relatively high professional standing formally within the three categories, with few exceptions; as such, they may be perceived to have a significantly sophisticated understanding of the political process because of their greater level of participation in the politics of Oman.

The Structure of this Book

This book consists of seven chapters. Following on from this introduction, Chapter Two deals with the relevant literature on issues of democratisation in the Arab world in general. This is particularly important because Oman shares some common factors with the rest of the Arab states, such as a weak civil society, compared with stronger states that at best adopt minor participatory systems. It is also an Islamic state, where Islam embraces the *Shura* principle, which is seen at least by some Muslims as the Islamic alternative to Western democracy. The link between tribalism and oil is another common factor that Oman shares with the rest of the Arab world.

Chapter Three deals with the Omani context in particular. It sheds light on the tribal nature of the Omani society and its political history. It also explores the social transformation process that took place in the country from 1970 and how that is challenging the contemporary political process adopted by the government from the top down and

affecting the implicit social contract embracing the rentier state model. It also reviews the available literature around the Omani political process and explores the legal and administrative organisation available for the contemporary political process. It is important to reflect to what extent there is a solid base available for the sustainability and development of the political process.

The next three chapters are built on extensive empirical work gathered through interviewing different categories that represent the three democratisation processes developing in Oman. Chapter Four presents an analysis of data gathered from respondents identified with the top-down model. From their contributions, some clear insights can be drawn about the basis of the contemporary political process and its chances to evolve in future and adapt to the requirements of the time. It concentrates on the reasons that made the government adopt the political process from the top-down and the challenges this process is now facing from the traditional *Shura* or from the younger generation.

Chapter Five analyses data gathered from the religious respondents. It focuses mainly on their contributions about *Shura*, its origin, practices, flexibility and adaptability. It also elaborates the Imamate system that challenges dynastic systems and explores how it might tolerate the other hereditary systems and none-Islamic pluralistic systems such as democratisation processes. It pays particular attention to how they see the current political process and whether it is contradicting the traditional Islamic *Shura*, as well as to what extent they are capable of accepting the different means of modernity, including globalisation and urbanisation.

Chapter Six analyses the data contributed by the younger-generation respondents. It explores the younger generation's satisfaction with the contemporary *Shura* process. This group may be seen to represent the future, as they have experienced education to a high level and had access to the different means of telecommunication, including the internet, and hence can give an indication about the chances for the *Shura* to survive or otherwise be replaced by other imported pluralistic systems such as Western-style democratisation processes. The chapter also reports their knowledge of Oman's history and tradition to see how they are linked to it and to what extent they retain and identify

with the traditional understandings of the *Shura*. It also sheds lights on the improvement in the social mobilisation and civil society associations and how these engagements improve political participation in the country.

In the final chapter, there will be an outline of the main themes of this study and how it is that they link together, drawing an overall conclusion concerning the democratisation processes at play in Oman.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATISATION IN THE ARAB WORLD

Introduction

The literature on democracy and the process of democratisation in the Arab world has, over the past two decades, been dominated by attempts to frame a causal link between these terms and the process of state legitimisation and stabilisation in the region. In particular, with what some regard as the decline of the rentier state model as a unique form of social contract in the oil-producing states of the Gulf region, alternative methods of control and governance have increasingly started to shape political agendas. At one end of the spectrum, a process of deeper democratisation is now seen as crucial to ensuring the longevity of the dynastic regimes whose legitimacy should and could be embedded in particular, locally acceptable, pragmatic forms of popular participation. At the other end of the spectrum of debate, Islam is now seen as the main agency of social change, its most radical manifestation brooking little or no compromise with concepts of sovereignty derived from man, as opposed to those derived from God.

To be sure, political evolution in many of the Gulf States is uneven, with tribal practice often juxtaposed with particular interpretations of Islam providing forums of varying legislative weight. Thus in Kuwait, for example, a functioning parliamentary system contrasts starkly with

the rather styptic mechanisms of political participation found in Saudi Arabia. What is notable, however, is that such debates have tended to focus on the extent to which Islam, be it Shi'a or Sunni, is or is not compatible with the secular democratic ideal. Moreover, there is an innate assumption that such participation is, by definition, an expression of social discontent with the existing forms of governance which tend to circumscribe popular participatory politics; in short, political change has to be bottom up rather than top down.

In contrast, Oman provides a unique case study in the Arab world where the process of political reform is driven mainly from the top down, and, moreover, the relationship between religion and the state is not a function of either Sunni or Shi'a religious perspectives, but of *Ibadism*, a creed of Islam with its own particular codes of religious and political behaviour. How *Ibadism* can embrace both religious conformity and popular participatory politics serves, as has been mentioned in Chapter One, is a focus of this book. Even so, to fully understand this process, note must be taken of the wider process of state legitimisation, Islam and democratisation in the wider Arab world and context.

Although little has been published regarding the democratisation process in Oman, this country is part of the Arab world and shares most of its characteristics with the other Arab states, especially in terms of language, religion and culture. Therefore, what has been published about the issue of democratisation in the Arab world is to a great extent applicable to Oman. However, there is still one aspect of political science in the Arab world which has not been studied in detail: the *Ibadi* religious and political norms. Most scholars tend to focus on certain specific angles of the Islamic political vision. For example, when they talk about Islam, they look at it from the Sunni and Shi'a perspectives. Similarly, when they talk about ruling regimes, they concentrate mainly on dynastic systems or republican regimes, specifically those in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. This is because these states have regional influence and have influenced or been direct participants in key events which have shaped the region over the past five decades, such as the Arab-Israeli Wars, the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian Revolution and the Saudi role in successive Gulf Wars.

However, this does not negate the role that other states have played in the political development of the region, and Oman remains a particular case in point. With its geostrategic position at the entrance to the Gulf, the Sultanate of Oman was itself the bloody battleground for a series of insurgencies from the 1950s through to the 1970s which had both local cause and wider international effect.[1] Its turbulent contemporary history aside, Oman is distinctive in so far as it is the main centre of a unique form of Islam which has its own philosophy, political norms and cultural perspectives: *Ibadism.* How *Ibadism* can accommodate a democratic process and the limits of its ability to separate religion from state are major themes discussed and evaluated in this book.

How Omani people – both policy makers and citizens – look at and evaluate democracy is crucial to understanding the current process of political reform throughout the Sultanate. But such opinions and views cannot be taken in isolation from wider debates over democracy, regime legitimacy and Islam, around which much of the present discourse across the Middle East is configured. As such, it is necessary to investigate and explain what is understood by the term *democracy*, and it is imperative to discuss these interpretations in the light of the different circumstances which pertain in the Arab world (Chapter Three will examine the case of Oman in more detail and how the current political system has come to be shaped by political, economic, cultural and religious variables particular to the Sultanate). The literature review in this chapter, therefore, is divided into eight main sections following this introduction; the second section deals with the broad conceptual debates on democracy, while the third section examines the democratisation processes in the Arab world. As the Arab world is regarded as the most penetrated region of the world, the fourth section analyses the topical relationship between democracy and external intervention. Also, as most Arab regimes are considered authoritarian, the fifth section discusses the pertinent issue of democracy and its relation to authoritarian regimes. The existence of oil reserves in the area necessitates the need to examine in the sixth section the concept of the 'rentier state' and its relation to democratisation processes. The seventh covers the relationship between Islam and democracy, and the eighth

section describes the ties between democratisation processes and civil society in the Arab world.

Democracy: The Debate

'Democracy' linguistically comes from the Greek word *demokratia*, wherein *demos* means *people* and *kratos* means *rule*. In this sense, unlike other systems such as monarchies and aristocracies, democracy is a political system which derives legitimacy in its purest form through the majority expression of popular will, usually within a defined geographic area and/or fixed community. Beetham and Boyle argue that a state can only be called democratic 'if its government is accountable to the people through competitive election to public office, where all adults have an equal right to vote and to stand for election, and where civil and political rights are legally guaranteed'.[2] Strong democratic systems should also include a functioning society, where people and civil society organisations have an influencing role in the political process. However, it should be understood that this system is not ideal since its ability to offer solutions to all social and political problems which other systems may have failed to address is often, at best, partial and piecemeal. There is no one definition of democracy as every state across the world practises the process through structures which often reflect particular, locally contextualised values. In some states, the head of state is popularly elected, while in others the prime minister is selected from among those representatives of the dominant party. Moreover electoral systems themselves, as well as the electoral life of a legislature, vary from state to state. There are plural systems, the alternative vote system, the single transferable vote system, the party list system and the mixed member system.

Nevertheless, democracy remains one of few political systems which can offer people some form of participatory equality. Democracy has developed throughout history from the simple classical form of democracy, to republicanism, then to liberal democracy and finally to direct democracy.[3] Practically, Western liberal democracy is practised in different ways following three main models: parliamentarianism, as practised in Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; the

American model of pure presidentialism; and European presidentialism, as practised in France, Portugal, Finland, Italy, Austria and Greece.[4]

Such traditional forms and theories of democracy have given way in the twentieth century to more advanced expressions in a majority of Western states. Democracy in modern history can be defined as a system which 'entails the twin principles of popular control over collective decision-making and equality of rights in the exercise of that control'.[5] Beetham and Boyle, in their large body of work, outline the key pre requisites for a functioning democracy, alongside those factors most likely to impede its establishment. In this regard, the majority of conditions that they set could be easily fulfilled in the Arab world, and of these only a few would seem to contradict Islam and its cultural norms in the Arab context.

Freedom is the first condition, as Beetham and Boyle set no limits for its expression. In short, the individual has the right to do anything so long as this does not affect adversely the freedom of other people. In Islam, freedom is guaranteed in every aspect except in the choice of God or religion. For example, in the Quran many verses stipulate that there is only one God, Allah, who should be worshipped and that those who consciously choose a religion other than Islam are to be considered apostates. The Prophet Mohammed similarly urged people to take Allah as the only God and described Muslims who convert to any other religion as renegades who would face execution if they did not convert back to Islam. According to Kramer:

> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, guarantees the freedom to choose one's religion and one's spouse. Both freedoms indisputably contradict Islamic law, which defines conversion out of Islam as a capital offence, and forbids marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. (In 1981, the leading fundamentalists met in Paris and put out an Islamic Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which omits all freedoms that contradict the *shari'a*.)[6]

Several scholars have examined this issue of religion and political community closely. Al-Jabri[7] argues that according to the Quran,

Muslims who change faith, betray their nation state and join hostile armed forces deserve to be killed. However, those simply changing their faith but without betraying their nation state should not face execution – though he conceded that his argument carries little weight with other Muslims. I do not think that many scholars in the Muslim world support Al-Jabri's argument here. In short, the ability of rulers to separate religion from the state when defining the political obligations of a community are somewhat limited since sovereignty in Islam is ultimately derived from Allah, and not from the people. Beetham and Boyle discuss the relationship between religion and the state but have not related it to freedom. They state:

> It can be argued that a hierarchically ordered religion, in which believers accept without question the truths that are handed down from above, will be less conducive to the democratic spirit than ones whose matters of belief are subject to lively debate and interpretation among the faithful.[8]

The presence of political parties is the second condition of democracy which contradicts the Arab cultural norms – if not indeed the essence of Islam – if set against the reality of politics in much of the Arab world. Islam can confer legitimacy on political parties, the only condition being that 'they do not represent particular whims, passions and interests, and remain within the framework of Islam'.[9] Beetham and Boyle see political parties as a necessary condition for genuine democracy; however, the social fabric in the Arab world is complicated in this regard.[10] Political parties usually work in environments based on clear horizontal divisions like social classes; in societies in the Arab world 'economically based social classes do not exist',[11] the social divisions are *vertically* divided no matter how wealthy or poor, educated or illiterate the members of a certain community are. These divisions are complicated by the fact that they are of different types, based around ethnicity, tribalism and sectarianism. They are often in competition if not indeed in sheer conflict with each other on various levels and fronts.[12] Figure 2.1 illustrates the contrast between the vertical ethnic relationships in the Arab world and the horizontal class affiliations

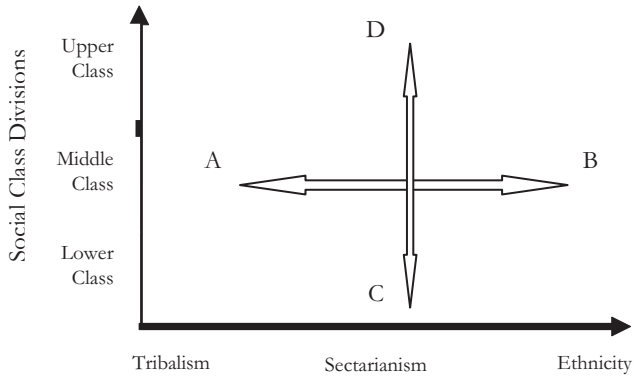

Figure 2.1. Social Divisions versus Democracy
Diagram illustrating how, in the Arab world, the relationships between people can be drawn both horizontally (A to B) and vertically (C to D), something which needs to be kept in mind when attempting democratic experiments.

that elsewhere form the influence if not the base for any successful democratic process.

Moreover, these major divisions are often overlaid with other subdivisions, such as religious sects and sub tribes. Tribal divisions illustrate how loyalty is given in those vertically divided divisions. Loyalty is always granted first to the family, and then to other relatives, to the branch of the tribe finally to the main tribe. Similarly, if we consider the subdivisions of the Sunni sect, it is formed from the Shafee, Malki, Hanbali and Hanafi sects. Similarly, the Shi'a sect has a number of subdivisions. Further investigation of the Hanbali subdivision of the Sunni sect reveals that it is divided into smaller parts and each subpart has its own scholars and particular viewpoints which cover a range of theological as well as theocratic interests; among those are moderate Wahabism and radical Wahabism which supports *jihad* against what they call imperialist colonialism.[13] Under these conditions, political parties in these societies are likely to be based on vertical divisions. If this occurs, then arguably democratisation processes will bring backwardness to the communities rather than a modernisation of values and practices because social divisions will have a fertile soil to ignite political unrest due to the fanatic conflicts that may occur between them.

A good example of this is the ethnic and sectarian divisions which now dominate in Iraq, where despite free elections, people have voted for sectarian group representatives no matter how politically qualified they are.[14] One might argue that in some Arab states there are political parties which are not dominated by those vertical divisions, but they exist where the ruling party dominates the whole country and no real democratisation exists. This can clearly be seen in Egypt before the 2011 revolution, in Syria and, previously, in Saddam's Iraq. The novel goal of democracy is to guide societies to the highest form of civilisation, one that includes fairness, transparency, equality and legitimacy and leads to modernity and stability. To fulfil this goal in the Arab world, one needs to think carefully of other alternatives of popular participatory politics. In other words, these states need to develop forms of participatory politics that suit their societies. Beetham and Boyle admit in this sense that 'democracies today face considerable challenges from ethnic, religious and other divisions'.[15]

In sum, it is clear from these contextualised commentaries that democracy has no one single definition. It has evolved over time and taken different forms according to the nature and culture of the society where it is practised. It is also clear that the Arab world in general exhibits some conditions that may hinder the practising of democratisation, including the presence of the vertical ethnic groups that contradict the horizontally divided social classes regarded as important for the success of any democratisation experiment. Democratisation processes in Arab states such as Iraq and Lebanon are challenged by those vertical divisions because political process has not been built locally but has been imported from elsewhere without attention to the characteristic particularities of those societies. Of course the ideal and therefore successful alternative would be the development of a pluralistic political process that does not comprehensively break with tradition.

The Democratic Issue in the Arab World

The Middle East in general, and the Arab world in particular, has been at the centre of different political, economic, religious and social conflicts throughout its history. The contemporary Middle East can

be described as a region of lost, or at least submerged, identities, not least because great powers have been in strategic competition over this region since the seventeenth century.[16]

The great power confrontations within and over the region have resulted in tensions which continue to shape it. Most Arab countries have endured colonial rule or influence in which local identities were often subjugated by the political agenda, culture, language and ideology of the colonial power. Some of these Western states have heavily influenced the cultures of those societies and affected their social values, often leaving behind the roots of conflict which impact upon state stability and identity to this day. The best example of this is perhaps the legacy of French rule in Algeria and the Lebanon.[17] They also plundered the wealth of those countries but without any concomitant investment from which a basic infrastructure could develop.[18]

Religiously, all three of the Abrahamic religions emerged in what today is geographically considered to be the Arab world.[19] As these religions spread, they gained followers and sympathisers from outside and inside the region who have played a huge role in inflaming religious conflict within the region. During the Cold War such religious competition was sometimes exploited by the superpowers who supported authoritarian regimes, thus favouring particular social groups in such a way as to ensure their interests were met. Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia were all, to some extent, encouraged by either Washington or Moscow to use religion in order to cement tribal or societal alliances in ways ill-disposed to fostering wider political participation. While Ba'athism, for example, with its emphasis upon an ill-defined form of Arab socialism, stressed the secular nature of politics, in the case of Syria at least, it was used to camouflage an Alawite ascendancy over the Sunni majority. The direct legacy of this remains in the democratic deficit which marks popular participation levels across the Arab world.[20]

In addition, the major religions in the region have been subdivided on the basis of different values which have encouraged further divisions within the region. More importantly, people across the Middle East identify strongly with the cultural if not always the religious norms of Islam. In light of this strong religious belief, it would seem difficult to even begin imagining separating religion from the state,

which, in a Western sense at least, is seen as an important pre-condition for democracy.

Compounding the development of democratic institutions is the social structure of much of the region, with its emphasis upon ethnic and tribal identities. Each of the Middle Eastern societies has its own complicated ethnic and tribal structure, where loyalty to those social structures is not just strong but absolute. The relationships between tribal and ethnic members are vertical – such social classes as exist in the industrial West have not been clearly formed, as people from different economic levels share strong mutual relationships on the basis of tribal loyalties (tribal legitimacy) which often take priority in the making of important decisions.[21] For example, in Oman, according to my knowledge, it is commonly the case that people of extremely wide wealth differentials tend to bond firmly with members of the same tribe or ethnic group, rather than with those whose affluence would in other contexts determine patterns of influence and friendship.

Such factors, the legacy of colonialism coupled with the indigenous variables of religious, tribal and ethnic fidelity, have not only denied an effective regional voice for Arabs across the Middle East, they continue to shape the democratisation experiments in general across the region.

Western social scientists, often influenced by the ideas of Max Weber, have made great efforts in trying to understand and explain the socio-political stagnation taking place in the Middle East in general and the Arab world in particular. They found that in such traditional societies economic growth and social change are slow because of the primitive modes of production, leading to slow economic growth and slow social change. This is compounded because the relationship between peoples was mainly hierarchical, based on kinship and religious affiliation so that the role of the individual in society was determined by the status of the family into which she/he was born. By contrast, modern societies are urban and industrial with a rapid economic growth and social change, and the role of the individual is dependent on his personal capabilities. This underpins modernisation theory. They also found that modern societies were 'rational, scientifically oriented, democratic and relatively egalitarian'.[22]

Samuel Huntington argued that 'studies of modernization have shown a very high degree of correlation among such indices as literacy, urbanization, media participation, and political participation'.[23]

These social scientists, therefore, used modernisation theory to explain the process of transition from traditional societies to modern societies. They identified particular characteristics which are typical of tradition or modernity. For example, David McClelland believed that individuals in traditional societies have strong tendency towards achievement. Bert Hoselitz, however, blamed underdevelopment and poverty for causing the socio-political stagnation in traditional societies. Some scientists, including Walt Whitman Rostow, argued that traditional societies could achieve economic development if assisted by capitalist countries which could lead to social change. Most importantly, social scientists saw that traditional societies 'lack the institutions and internal dynamics which might lead to fundamental social transformation from within... Modernization theory therefore saw local elites as playing a crucial role in introducing change into their societies.'[24]

Daniel Lerner argued that 'social, economic and cultural changes which Middle Easterners were experiencing – urbanization, great physical mobility, the spread of mass media and so on – all helped foster the ability of individuals to shed their traditional styles of life and adopt the mobile and empathetic personality characteristic of people in modern societies'.[25] The modernisation theory therefore may explain the process of modernisation taking place in the Arab world at present and the emergence of pressure groups and a stronger civil society that may lead to real socio-political change.

Democracy and External Intervention

Whilst active international involvement in the politics of the region can be traced back to the late eighteenth century, it was the period between the First World War and the end of the Cold War which most clearly defined the political landscape in the Arab world. The period after the First World War witnessed increased competition across the Middle East following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the

establishment of colonial structures. The most notable features of this period were the creation of the multi-state system, the discovery of oil and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948,[26] an event which had a profound impact on the politics of the region.[27]

In term of the geopolitics of the region, the larger part of the Arab world can be seen as relatively unchanging due to ideological factors, which are deeply rooted in the resident political culture. Since the end of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, many Arab nations have adopted more than one ideology in the hope that each ideological shift would rescue them from the catastrophe of colonialism. They adopted pan-Arab nationalism, then socialism, then Islamism, but the overall effect has been a continued fragmentation of the Arab State order.[28] Difference in ideologies created what was called, during the 1960s, 'the Arab Cold War', in which some Arab states showed their eagerness to interfere in each other's internal affairs. The Arab Cold War continues to have implications up until the present time. Territorial disputes, border conflicts and the desire for expansionism such as the Syrian notion of the greater Syria, the Egyptian desire for regional leadership and the Saudi-Iranian competition for leadership of the whole Islamic World are all direct products of the regional geopolitics of this period.[29]

Furthermore, other influences have shaped the geopolitics of the region, such as the fear which exists over the relationship between strong and weak states. The vexed relationship between Syria and Lebanon is the most appropriate example, where Damascus, despite lip service to Lebanese sovereignty, has continued to exercise hegemony over the external relations and internal structure of this fragmented polity. These influences in turn has often seen weak states turn to support from the US and other great powers to guarantee survival against their Arab brothers. Such regional competition, coupled with the fear of Israel, again hinders any successful democratisation process. This has led to the strengthening of armed forces in the Arab states, which in turn has allowed the regimes to suppress their people forcefully and to deny the political autonomy required for an independent civil society to develop. Indeed, in the case of Syria at least, there exists a powerful argument that fear of Israel has been used to deny political reforms.[30]

International intervention in the region has continued until the present day,[31] though the rationale behind such involvement has evolved from a base of colonialism to that of strategic influence and now to one of 'democracy promotion'. To be sure, the latter two should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but President George W. Bush, for example, stated that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was conditioned by the stated desire to support the forces of democratisation across the region. It is doubtful if real democratisation processes can be imposed from outside and certainly not under the threat of military force. Indeed, most informed observers would agree that democratisation reforms which enjoy widespread legitimacy can only emerge in response to regional dynamics, as opposed to external force. Thus, while the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam's regime were considered by Washington as a step towards enhancing democratisation, such hopes remain far from realised. It was hoped that establishing a more pluralistic regime in Iraq would have a knock-on effect on other countries in the region.[32] However, it seems that the fateful democratisation process in Iraq created even more doubt about implementing democratisation in the region without attention to the social vertical divisions that may hinder the process.

Indeed, some observers did write of an 'Arab Spring' where demands for greater accountability marked a new politics for the new millennium. Such hopes have yet to be realised. For Arabs, the reality on the ground shows a contradiction in Washington's policy towards democratisation processes. On the one hand, it urges Arab states to be more democratic, while on the other, it continues to support states which can be described at best as autocratic.

External intervention in a certain region or state, especially if the intervention is viewed as a threat, can erode moves toward democratisation. Similarly, increasing regional hostilities lower its probability of democratisation. Poor economic performance, however, can lead to democratic transition as people tend to challenge governments over democratic grievances. This fact suggests that in rentier states, democracy is not likely to take place due to the presence of acceptable standards of living, and government initiatives to adopt democratic processes from the top down seems to be the best alternative. Moreover,

states which have had past experiences of participatory politics have a better chance of embracing a democratic transition.[33] In this regard Oman provides an interesting case study. While, as a rentier state, its economy remains strong and its population enjoys relatively high levels of affluence, oil remains a finite resource. How the Sultanate adapts to demands for new forms of legitimacy and participatory politics independent of both external and regional pressures is instructive in terms of understanding democratisation in the region.

Democracy versus Authoritarian Regimes

An authoritarian[34] system is defined by Linz as a system that adopts limited political pluralism in which one person (the leader) or a group manipulates power and exercises it without limits.[35] Authoritarian regimes can be of different forms: military, single party,[36] dominant party, personal or traditional or a mixture of one or more of these. Heydemann argues that the authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, in their response to pressures for political reforms, have evolved their authoritarian rule, a phenomenon which he calls 'authoritarian upgrading'. He describes five key characteristics of authoritarian upgrading: 'appropriating and containing civil society organisations; managing political contestation; capturing the benefits of selective economic reforms; controlling telecommunications technologies;[37] and increasing international linkages between regimes'.[38]

Authoritarian regimes in the Arab world have played a great role in suppressing democratisation moves.[39] These regimes have used every possible means to ensure their stability, often using the spectre of Western encroachment or Israeli threats to convince their people that the time is not yet right to discuss democratisation amid the perception of external threats. They blame 'foreigners' for many of the problems in the region or in their respective countries,[40] a process helped in the past by the near total grip such regimes exercise over the media. This extends to those regimes that have established some formal democratisation structures such as parliaments and elections but have not really attempted to extend genuine pluralistic practices to functioning legislatures. Those who favour reforms in Arab countries

are discredited by the regimes and are characterised as un-Islamic, 'Zionist puppets', and/or agents of American imperialism who are disloyal to the Arab cause.[41]

The question remains as to why Arab regimes in general tend to be authoritarian. It is a basic question which nonetheless requires a complex answer that invokes a matrix of political, cultural and religious factors. Politically, the Middle East has undergone great systemic convulsions, from the end of the Ottoman Empire, through Western colonisation, to the emergence of the multi-state system. State building in the region has been an imported exercise from the West, and no matter what benefits have been derived from the adoption of Western-style state enterprises, the concept remains relatively new and indeed alien. To quote Anderson, '[T]oday's Middle East states are not the result of international or regional struggles between states, but were created by European Imperialism'.[42] Owen argues also that 'colonial power first created the regional voice for Arabs across the [Middle Eastern] state, by giving it a centralised administration, a legal system, a flag and internationally recognised boundaries'.[43] Different ideologies were adopted, imported from external nations. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the region was awash with political instability as coup followed coup.

Culturally, the internal social configuration of Middle Eastern societies, including tribal, ethnic and sectarian divisions, encourages further struggle as particular groups have sought to benefit from the new state system. This struggle has encouraged the ruling elite to strengthen its authority through divide-and-rule policies or through applying particular forms of social contract made with the masses in a state or region. Religiously, the new states' secular systems seem to contradict the Islamic ruling that centres on the just ruler, obedient followers and a society marked by solidarity. This rejection of a secular order, where loyalty to the state was paramount, has led Muslims to search for different forms of unity. This explains why Islamic organisations, most notably but not exclusively the Muslim Brotherhood, have formed the basis of opposition in many states across the Middle East.

Nonetheless, Arab regimes across the contemporary Middle East cannot avoid multiple security challenges to their legitimacy based on

increasing birth rates, continued urban growth, inadequate education systems both quantitatively and qualitatively, increasing demands over gender equality, unemployment and under employment, the increasing number of graduates, an improving human development index and increasing inflation rates. These are all factors that within the forthcoming decades will force authoritarian regimes either to adopt more genuine political and economic reforms if they want to stay in power or else to anticipate violent disorder if the state fails to adapt to such circumstances.[44] In sum, Arab regimes have managed in the past to apply a firm grip on their people because the latter lacked the tools for a political change. However, there is clearly an emerging context for challenges to such regimes and a growing voice for genuine democratisation processes as this region as a whole becomes politicised. The so-called Arab Spring proved what this book predicted since I began to think about these themes in 2007.

Democracy and the Rentier State

Weber defined the state as a 'permanent organisational structure within which binding collective choices are taken and implemented over a given territory. Consisting of bureaucracies, an institutionalised legal order, and formal and informal norms, it is ultimately the sole social institution that can make decisions effective by exercising legitimate force'.[45] The rentier state, by contrast, 'is a description used in political science and international relations theory to classify those states which derive all or a substantial portion of their national revenues from the rent of indigenous resources to external clients. The term is most frequently applied to states rich in highly valued natural resources such as petroleum'.[46] The Arab world in general and the Arabian Peninsula in particular used to have their own modes of production as in any other society. In the Arabian Peninsula the pearl industry used to be a major source of income, particularly in Kuwait, where it accounted for 20 per cent of employment for the entire population in the pre-oil period, while in the Trucial States the figure was 31 per cent and in Qatar 48 per cent. The pearling industry suffered after the Wall Street crash in 1929, as the world economic depression that

followed this event lowered the demand for luxury items, including pearls.[47]

In Oman, the major sources of employment were agriculture and traditional hand crafts such as silversmithing, weaving, boat building and seafaring, as well as trade in the coastal area.[48] During Sayyid Said bin Sultan's time (1806–56), Oman was a major seafaring nation, possessing an extensive fleet of commercial sailing vessels which dominated trade in the Indian Ocean and reached as far afield as Marseilles and New York. However, Omani sailing vessels could not compete at later stages of the Victorian age with the European steamships, symbolised by the opening of the Suez Canal. As such, the discovery of oil offered some relief from the shattered economy and widespread poverty in the Arabian Peninsula after the collapse of the traditional economies. However, the discovery of oil required technical expertise that only Western nations and in particular Britain could supply. As such, with oil concessions negotiated with Emirs and *Sheikhs* along the Gulf littoral, Britain came to exercise tight control over the area.[49]

The arrival of oil companies during the 1930s had a dramatic impact domestically, regionally and internationally upon the Gulf.[50] Domestically, the rulers felt for the first time in history financially independent of their people, while at the same time dependence on Britain was increased in order to protect such regimes externally as well as internally. The production and export of oil, however, came to redefine domestic political orders, with the profit or 'rent' derived from the sale of oil used to improve standards of living, establish administrative apparatus, and build a functioning infrastructure, all the while strengthening the army and security forces.

Regionally, the discovery of oil has created a desire among some leaders, such as Abdel Aziz bin Saud, to extend their territorial areas. He laid claim to areas adjoining Saudi Arabia, most notably the Buraimi oasis in Oman, a claim based upon the suspicion that this area sat atop vast reserves of oil. It was an event that obliged the British Government's Foreign Office in London to draw borders on maps[51] that rarely corresponded to existing tribal groupings, unlike those borders in Europe, which were defined by either linguistic affinity or natural geographic barriers.[52]

The idea of a rentier state has its origins in the early 1970s, when oil states enjoyed huge revenues from the profit (rent) derived from the sale of oil. This resulted in a situation wherein only a few people in these states could be described as workers and the majority simply enjoyed the new life of the 'oil era'.[53] The revenues were controlled by the ruling elites, who used the oil money to buy political support and loyalty in their tribal communities. They distributed wealth to their citizens and provided a modern infrastructure and modern services while imposing few or no taxes on the people. In this economically prosperous situation, the ruling elites managed to preserve their positions internally by gaining the support of the population through this particular form of social contract and externally through gaining support from the superpowers. According to Ayubi:

> Having defeated, disarticulated and persecuted social forces, political organisations and/or ideological orientations that represent a serious challenge to the regime, they then co-opt their members (individually or in divided segments if possible) into the regime's politico-organisational set-up. Segmental incorporation is particularly useful as a defensive strategy when coercion alone cannot sustain control over groups with competing interests, aspirations or socio-cultural agendas.[54]

The oil revenues changed the social contract in oil-producing countries. Rulers, as mentioned above, became financially independent of their people, in some cases (for example, Saudi Arabia) forgoing direct taxation in return for complete political fidelity. As part of the emerging social contract, Gulf States established modern administrative governments and created attractive employment opportunities mainly in the public sector. The relationship between the rulers and the ruled became implicitly drawn through this social contract. In return for the emergence of a modern infrastructure (with its free education, public services and minimal taxation), political participation and the emergence of any functioning civil society worthy of the name were for the most part prohibited.[55]

Despite the continued importance placed on oil, the social contract is expected to be redefined, and as it is exposed to the forces of

globalisation, expectations regarding participation will begin to shift, particularly among the mercantile or middle classes. Karl argues that 'dependence on a particular export commodity shapes not only social classes and regime types … but also the very institution of the state, the framework of decision-making, and the decision calculus of the policymakers'.[56] Even so, people in oil-producing states increasingly feel responsible for the distribution of the oil wealth and have, in the case of Kuwait, for example, pushed for more accountability and participation in decisions related to the oil industry.

The rentier state model of development has had both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, it has helped create modern state institutions, not least in health and education. The under-five mortality rate, for example, has been reduced in Oman from 200 per 1,000 births in 1970 to just 12 in 2003; immunisation of one-year-old children has increased from 65 per cent in 1985 to 98 per cent in 2003. In Bahrain average life expectancy rose from 59.9 years in 1970 to 73.2 years in 2000.[57] On the other hand, the rapid rise in population brought about by such comprehensive health care has resulted in a real decline in employment opportunities in the public sector and increased demand for free public services.[58] Oman's population, for example, has risen from less than one million in 1970 to 2,340,815 in 2003, and school leavers have increased from just a few hundred in 1970 to 53,000 in 2003.[59] The number of government employees has increased in Kuwait from 22,073 in 1966 to 145,000 in 1980, while in Saudi Arabia the number increased from a few hundred in the 1950s to 245,000 in 1980,[60] and in Oman the number reached 139,000 in 2006.[61]

As a result, concern has been expressed over the levels of discontent among the younger generation of Gulf Arabs as unemployment or under employment has begun to rise. Official adult unemployment rates in 2001 reached 3.9 per cent in Qatar and 5.5 per cent in Bahrain.[62] Following the oil price 'shocks' of the late 1980s and the dramatic rise in populations, the rentier states feared their over dependence on oil as the only source of income had led to a reliance on a bloated public sector. This led to poor development outcomes and became known as the 'Dutch disease'.[63] As such, other modes

of development were considered that were centred around diversification and nationalisation policies. These encouraged small-scale private industries; in Oman, for example, such industries claimed a steadily increasing proportion of GDP, rising from 1.0 per cent in 1981 to 8.1 per cent in 2003. These projects were related to gas-intensive industries and included a fertilizer plant, an aluminium smelter and a petrochemicals facility.

Islam and Democracy

The *Shura* in political Islam is regarded as the second source of legitimacy. The first source is the *Shari'a* with its two sub sources: the Quran and the *Sunnah* (the Prophet's sayings and actions). The *Shura* is not only confined to consultation as linguistic meaning may suggest, rather it is a comprehensive system where *Umma*, which is a combination of faith and community, remains in full control of the political system in order to determine its destiny. *Umma* retains the power to elect, advise and depose the ruler of the Islamic state. It remains politically active at all times and does not surrender to comfort after pledging allegiance to the ruler. As such, *Umma* exercises *Shura* at two levels: the legislative level and the leadership level. At the legislative level, *Umma* can interpret, through *Ijma'* and *Ijtihad*, religious texts in order to cope with the requirements of time. At this level, *Umma* also retains its mission to command good and prohibit evil, a mission applicable to all issues, including accountability on government's performance. Additionally, *Umma* exercises legislations in various methods such as referendum, representation through *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* and pledging allegiance to the ruler. At the leadership level, however, Imamate is a contract between *Umma* and the Imam, in which the latter serves the former – but not the opposite – through implementing *Shari'a* and wisely practising his given authorities[64].

There are different views regarding the compatibility or otherwise of Islam and democracy, and clearly as Esposito and Voll have it, 'the relationship between Islam and democracy in the contemporary world is complex'.[65] The Muslim world, however, is not ideologically monolithic. It presents a broad spectrum of perspectives ranging

from those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that Islam requires a democratic system. As Farooq states:

> The Muslim world is currently in a dysfunctional state, caught between the modern as well as the mundane aspirations of life on one hand and a disconnect from the past glories and transcending values – beliefs that these people identify with, on the other. The Muslim world would like to progress past its problems without de-linking from Islam. The western countries, currently dominating the world, supposedly prefer that the Muslim world moves forward, too, but also de-links itself from Islam except at the personal or spiritual level, and most definitely, should not upset the current global status quo.[66]

The Tunisian scholar Ghanoushi argues that if 'democracy' indicates a (Western) political system that preserves people's rights, gives them a wider space for political participation to choose their leaders or representatives and provides a system for the circulation of power, then there is no single text in Islam that contradicts democracy.[67] Equally, Iran's ex-President Khatami, noted that 'the existing democracies do not necessarily follow one formula or aspect. It is possible that a democracy may lead to a liberal system. It is possible that democracy may lead to a socialist system. Or it may be a democracy with the inclusion of religious norms in the government. We have accepted the third option.'[68] And this is by no means a modern phenomenon: scholars such as Rifa'ah Tahtawi (1801–73), Khairuddin Al-Tunisi (1810–99), Jamal ad-Din Al-Afghani (1883–97), Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), Abdurrahman Al-Kawakibi (1849–1903) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) believed that there is no contradiction between the *Shura* and democracy.[69] Therefore, it is arguably clear that there are no religious texts in Islam that contradict democracy in this sense.

What is apparent from the above argument is that democracy is not necessary antithetical to the Islamic world, but how it is practised and indeed developed cannot simply simulate Western concepts of democracy, where religion is divorced from the state. Such an approach

to democracy, with its apparent dilution of religious and social values integral to the very basis of Islam, would only provoke widespread political disorder. This does not mean, however, that Muslim states cannot adopt constitutional, participatory and accountable forms of governance: what matters are core beliefs and values, not labels or semantics. Except for some Muslim scholars who regard any form of popular participatory politics as an apostasy, Muslim people do view moves towards greater political participation with favour, as a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press concluded:

> The post-war [Second Gulf War] update finds that in most Muslim populations, large majorities continue to believe that Western-style democracy can work in their countries. This is the case in predominantly Muslim countries like Kuwait (83 per cent) and Bangladesh (57 per cent), but also in religiously diverse countries like Nigeria (75 per cent).[70]

Those who think that Islam and democracy are incompatible hold that, ultimately, the construct of sovereignty is derived from God, rather than from man. In short, the Quran is the constitution, and human beings are the mere executors of the will of God. As such, those who do believe in some form of participatory system are regarded as *shirk*, or polytheists.

However, this deterministic view of Islam's central characteristics has been challenged, not least by scholars in the Muslim world itself. Those who believe in the compatibility of Islam and democracy turn to the roots of Islam and its pluralist heritage and claim that Islam and democracy are not just compatible but that their connection is unavoidable; this is because an Islamic political system is based on *Shura* (mutual consultation).

It is extremely important to understand the source of legislation in Islam, particularly the concept of *Shura*, which is integral to an understanding of political Islam. A discussion of this principle may explain why movements toward pluralism, liberalism and democracy have been relatively weak in the Arab world. In addition, the relationship between religion and the state, according to most Muslim

scholars, is close and cannot be separated, though some enlightened Muslim scholars suggest a separation between the state and Islam is possible. For example, the Egyptian scholar Ali Abd Al-Raziq in his book (*Islam and the Roots of Government*) claims that Mohammed was a prophet and not a statesman, that Islam is a religion and not a political movement and that Islam therefore should have nothing to do with politics.[71] Other scholars, such as Ali Shariati, argue that following the concept of *Tawheed* (the oneness of God), it is not possible to separate different aspects of life into separate sections. This separation will cause a spiritual vacuum which would allow military regimes to abuse their power, as Saddam Hussein's Arab Ba'ath party did in Iraq. However, this concept of *Tawheed*, although preserving the sovereignty of God, also preserves the sovereignty of man as all people are equal in the presence of God. Therefore, the concept of *Tawheed* practically requires some sort of political equality between people, and accordingly a democratic regime is best placed to fulfil this goal as it denies making obedience to the rule of just one individual an acceptable norm.

The Islamic *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) is divided into four main branches: *fiqh al-Aqidah* (faith), which includes faith in God, Angels, Holy Books, All Messengers, Second Life, Good and Bad Destiny; *fiqh al-Ibadat* (worshipping), which regulates the relationship between the individual and his creator and which essentially forms the five pillars of Islam – the professions of faith, prayers, fasting, almsgiving and the pilgrimage; *fiqh al-Muaamalat* (dealings), which covers other aspects such as economic, political and family life; and lastly *fiqh al-Hodoud* (sanctions). The first two types are fixed, eternal and immutable and have never been revised since the death of the Prophet. The second two are flexible and can be adapted to the changing requirements of the time and locality. Islamic scholars are allowed and are in fact urged to look deeply into them and apply them in a manner that makes life easier for people by making use of the Islamic principles of *Ijtihad* (diligence) and *Ijma'* (consensus). *Muaamalat* (dealings) is extremely important in informing the discussion over democratisation in the Arab world as much as it is flexible. *Ibadi* scholars have, throughout Islamic history, used the principles of *Ijma'* and *Ijtihad*, which have allowed

them to adopt a traditional democratic agenda. Therefore, political Islam, according to Islamic legal theory, is flexible and can arguably be adapted to democratisation within the Arab world.[72]

Furthermore, according to the Quran and the Prophet's Instructions (*Sunnah*), many principles are found in Islam which coincide with democratic values, especially justice, mutual consultation (*Shura*), equality and freedom. However, freedom, as mentioned earlier, is guaranteed as long as it does not go against God or Islam. In relation to systems of government and authority in Islam, all people are born equal, having been installed as *Khalifah* (God's vice-regents on earth); government exists to ensure Islamic life and enforce Islamic law; sovereignty ultimately rests with God alone, who has made the laws and defined good and evil, the licit and illicit. The authority to apply God's law has been transferred to the community as a whole, which is therefore the source of all power, and the head of the community or state is the mere representative, agent or employee of the community that elects, supervises and, if necessary, deposes him. It is clear in this sense that *Shura* is not just a theoretical principle but a practical code, and it can be applied at different levels of authority; that is, at both community level and state level.[73]

To most non-*Ibadi* Muslim scholars the principle of *Shura* in the early history and traditions of Islam primarily involved consultation in all matters private and public. *Shura*, however, was used immediately after the death of the Prophet Mohammed to select the first four Caliphs who preceded the establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty. According to Farooq:[74] 'Since the time of Mu'awiya,[75] the *Khilafat* turned into *Mulukiyaah* (hereditary monarchy). This was an important turning point, because this replacement of *Khilafat* with *Mulukiyyah* was actually a counter-revolution against the revolution of the Prophet Muhammad.' Until the Turkish reformer Kemal Ataturk abolished the Caliphate following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the political title Caliph, was used (and abused) by almost all Islamic rulers in order to gain legitimacy, not least in their claims to be the successors to the Prophet. The continued use of the title throughout twelve centuries of Islamic history made it a divine concept in people's minds.[76] Caliph, or *Khalifah*, means God's stewards, and Caliph may

be any man. Adam, the father of all human beings, was described in the Quran as *Khalifah*, and people are described in other verses as *Kholafaa* (plural of *Khalifah*). In the Quran, the term caliphate refers to the extensive tasks of humans as stewards of God's creation on earth. But it is also the point where democracy begins to conflate with Islam. Every person in an Islamic society enjoys the rights and powers of the caliphate of God and in this respect all individuals are equal.

Democracy and Civil Society

There is little agreement between scholars on what defines civil society. However, the majority of scholars seem to agree on what the main features of civil society are. These are described by Diamond thus:

> The realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. It is distinct from 'society' in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold state officials accountable. 'Civil Society' is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state.[77]

The concept of civil society is a Western notion which first appeared in the late eighteenth century. The conceptualisation of civil society is rooted in Hegel's approach, in which it was posited as a manifestation of the bourgeoisie's attempt to organise and harmonise conflicting interests between state and society. While a state may function to expand its authority, civil society organisations function to prevent state hegemony over personal autonomy. Civil harmony is possible because of the ideological compatibility between the state and civil society.[78] Kharajah claims that the phrase 'civil society' has no existence in the Arabic language and that this reflects its socio-political understanding in the West. The linguistic definition of *civil* in Arabic is *mujtama*, which refers to the place and time where the meeting '*ijtima*' amongst

society members took place. This definition does not include any reference to an interaction or interrelation that assumes civil society as an intermediary between the individual and the different organising forces of the society. Civil is equal to *madanee* in Arabic, which means change from the state of primordial to a state of modernisation and reflects the values of urban dwellers.

Civil society is also defined as the space in which a *mélange* of groups, associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, unions and parties come together to provide a buffer between the state and the citizens; civil society organisations must be secular in ideology, civil in their behaviour, legally recognised and supportive of democratic reform.[79] These types of civil society organisations would appear to be a prerequisite for democracy to work properly in the Arab world. The only problem here however is the expectation that such groups or syndicates are secular in nature. Where such organisations exist in the Arab world, it is often the case that many of their members, such as the lawyers' syndicates in Egypt, are also members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Some Islamic organisations have nonetheless shown a willingness to participate in the democratisation process, as discussed previously. The suspicion remains, however, that fidelity to such values is transient and may well be a secular means to securing an Islamic end.[80]

Hence, civil society in Arabic refers to assembling in cities in contrast to Bedouin and rural life. The term does not suggest any political meaning for this assembly such as political or social mobilisation or collective action to organise or manipulate life in the city, whereas in the West *civil* is not functionally derived from processive 'civilization' but rather from 'civic', which designates the old city in Latin. The notion is of course related to citizenship, or the individual's legal position in the state as a citizen – an active member of civil life, regardless of whether she/he lives in the city or in the village.[81] These differences in definitions are not the real issue, however; rather it is a misinterpretation of the apparently cognate phrases by the Arab jurists, social scholars and scholars of linguistics who are responsible for this translation. Clashes in definition can be mitigated if proper and agreed terminologies can be used instead. Ultimately, however, the main issue

is perhaps one of cultural relativism: whilst the West concentrates on the individual, Muslims concentrate on the collective of *Umma* (the Islamic nation).

In general, civil society is not an alternative to the state unless the state becomes authoritarian and stops offering anything in return for the society's support of its agenda. But civil society is a necessary condition for democracy; it works as an inter-medium which acts to consolidate the democratisation process. Therefore, according to Kharajah genuine civil society, anywhere, has the following characteristics:

- It enjoys an independent status with regard to the state. This does not mean a weakening of the state but merely limiting its practices within the structure of the constitution and the law.
- It consists of institutions independent from the political authority, institutions which organise relations among individuals themselves and between individuals and the state.
- The individual is not obliged – as is the case with kinship and hereditary institutions – to affiliate with any institution; participation is voluntary.
- It has to be connected to human rights, political participation, freedom of expression, citizenship, the peaceful circulation of authority and pluralism.

Applying all of the above in the Arab world, where most regimes are either authoritarian or adopt the rentier model, civil society has little chance of emerging in the same way as in the West. This is because the former forcefully deny any political liberty to their citizenry and the latter apply a social contract where they become welfare states at the expense of political participation. Even if its institutions are found in some Arab states, its efficiency is limited because kinship relations will always be dominant.[82] Al-Najjar argues that 'several such organisations (civil society organisations), in a number of Arab countries, are nothing but fronts for tribal, religious, ethnic or sectarian groups'.[83]

In summary, there are few real civil society organisations in the Arab world at present, particularly in the Gulf States. Instead, there

remain dominant strongly tied vertical divisions such as those of tribalism which impede democratisation processes. By contrast, democracy from the bottom up needs a horizontally divided society with genuine civil society organisations. The case of Oman therefore offers an opportunity to examine the extent to which democratic reform can be developed top down, rather than bottom up.

Despite all the factors mentioned above that serve to hinder the emergence of a strong and effective civil society in the Arab world, the rapid growth of urban societies in proportion to rural societies in recent decades has not only reduced tribal and ethnic authority but also widened people's needs. Their interests, both personal and in relation to the state, have changed. This change requires consumer protection, and charitable, social, entertainment, cultural and professional organisations. This change has been accompanied by advanced communication technologies, the media and improved levels of education; it has resulted in the growth of societal networks in the form of organisations, unions and coalitions.[84]

Civil society in the Arab world has importantly and inevitably been affected over the past two decades by the myriad aspects of globalisation, (in all the senses in which politicians, economists, anthropologists and others use the term to conceptualise pan-geopolitical and cultural integrations and alignments).[85] Fox et al. define globalisation as 'how various populations intersect with internationalisation along a scaled continuum – running from the macro or global on one end through several intermediate levels to the micro level or local on the other end; each level, such as the regional or national, has its own regulatory mechanisms and symbols for organising people'.[86] The Gulf States in particular were not immune to this influence[87] and have arguably been affected more than others because of their conservative nature and their financial capacities, which have facilitated accommodation of new technologies,[88] bringing new cultural attitudes and challenges to the political and cultural status quo.[89]

In summary, the extent to which civil society in the Arab world is effective differs from one state to another and remains contingent on the political space afforded by governments, educational standards, economic well-being and the wider participatory experience of the

respective societies in what remains the most penetrated region in the world today.

Conclusion

This chapter showed that the problem of democratisation in Oman coincides to some extent with the problem of democratisation in the wider Arab world. However, Oman has a political uniqueness which sets it apart from other countries. In terms of the wider Arab world, there are political, religious and social factors that affect the issue of democratisation and its development. The Arab world is regarded as one of the most penetrated regions globally due to its strategic location and its main economic resource: oil. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the mandatory and colonial period, the Arab world witnessed a new reality which led to its political and cultural fragmentation into smaller states and nations. This situation led to an identity vacuum and to conflictual relationships between many states and nations due to differences in ideology and religious thoughts among the ruling regimes. Many of these states, under different political guises, use national revenues to exercise complete hegemony, manipulating the media and using the army to crush weak oppositional movements, and keeping civil society weak and fragmented.

In addition, the establishment of the State of Israel and successive defeats at the hands of the Jewish state, as well as the growing influence of Saudi Arabia throughout the 1970s, have led to the emergence of Islamic organisations which have become very influential at the community level across the Middle East. In Iran, Egypt, and of course Palestine, they form the strongest oppositions to ruling regimes and have derived legitimacy from what has been called the 'Westoxification' of the Muslim world by the allegedly corrupt practices of the West. However, this does not mean that the presence of these Islamic organisations may hinder moves towards democratisation as there is no religious text in Islam that contradicts democracy.

This chapter also reasserts ways in which Oman shares social, religious and economic factors with other Arab states, ways which

affect democratic development across the Middle East generally. The next chapter will shed further light on the specific case of Oman and discuss how these common factors affect contemporary political processes in the country.

When I first began to think of themes that have come together to form this book, I received a largely negative reaction, even disapproval and criticism. This was mostly due to the fact that for many, the Middle East was understood to be a region characterised by political inaction and apathy, one that would not see the kind of change that had previously swept across Eastern Europe and Latin America. According to many observers, the Middle East could be described as consisting of 'strong authoritarian regimes versus pacific and paltry peoples'. But the events of late 2010 and early 2011 overturned many of these assumptions. What was at the time called the 'Arab Spring' has proven that the authoritarian regimes could be weak in the face of popular revolutions of the youth, a group of society that were spurred on by the tyranny of these regimes, the absence of justice, the pervasive presence of corruption and unemployment and the proliferation of new means of communication via social media. The Arab Spring has also shown that Islamic groups, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, were present amongst the revolutionaries and in fact were much more organised than other opposition forces in the aftermath of the overthrow of the ancient regimes. The electoral gains and participation of Islamic groups in the Middle East throughout 2011 and 2012 can be cited as an example to back up claims that Islam cannot be described as being in inevitable opposition to democracy.

CHAPTER 3

THE OMANI CONTEXT

The Omani Tribes: Origin and Politics

The origin of the Omani Arab tribes can be traced back to the Prophet Ismail, the son of Prophet Abraham.[1] The Arab tribes emerged from his descendents and subsequently divided into two main branches: the Qahtani Arabs, who resided in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula (also known as the Arabs of the South), and the Adnani Arabs, who resided in the northern part (known as the Arabs of the North). Both branches (Qahtani and Adnani) were in conflict throughout history prior to the spread of Islam.[2]

Before the great migration across the Arabian Peninsula, Oman was occupied by the Persians, but after the collapse of the Ma'rab dam in Yemen during the second century B.C., Qahtani Arab tribes of Azd under the leadership of Malik bin Fahm migrated to Oman. Other Adnani Arab tribes who descend from Bani Sama had also migrated from the northern part of the peninsula. In order to strengthen his position and guarantee the support of the Adnani tribes, Malik bin Fahm sought a marriage with the Abd Al-Qays northern tribe. He managed to rule Oman after defeating the Persians. Since this time, the political leadership of the country has remained in the hands of the Qahtani tribes, in particular, in the hands of those belonging to the Shanuah tribal group of Azd, such as Awlad Shams, Julanda and Yahmed (Fajh and Kharous).[3]

The political system in Oman from the time of Malik bin Fahm remained dynastic and continued through the first phases of Islam

until the end of the Umayyad Dynasty, when the Islamic Imamate emerged for the first time in Oman's political history. For the sake of clarification, the tribal conflict which in some ways shapes the contemporary political process in Oman is summarised in terms of Oman's socio-political history in Figure 3.1 below. The table shows the political history of Oman since the rise of Islam up to the present day; it concentrates on the tribes which ruled the country at various times, the different types of political systems and the tribal conflicts which occurred between the 'classical' enemies (the Qahtani and Adnani tribal groups). These conflicts have led to important historical turning points marked by disastrous tribal wars.

As is clear in Figure 3.1, the Julanda tribe comes from the Qahtani tribal group, which descends from Awlad Shams of the Shanuah Qahtani branch which ruled Oman at the time of the Prophet and his four successors. When the Prophet sent his messenger Amr bin Al-A'as to convince the Omanis to join the new religion (Islam), Oman was ruled by Jayfar and Abd (the two sons of Julanda and the king of Oman at this time). After their conversion to Islam, the Prophet preserved their ruling system. This was a sign (as interpreted later on by religious respondents) that Islam condoned dynastic regimes (for more details, see below). This situation of dynastic rule continued until the time of the Umayyad, who managed to conquer Oman after defeating its king. However, the Omanis, who had adopted the mores of the *Ibadi* sect since the time of the fourth Caliph Ali bin Abi-Talib, managed for the first time in the Islamic history to establish the Islamic Imamate in 750 A.D. The same year witnessed the end of the Umayyad Dynasty.

What is striking here is that the choice of the Imam was affected by the tribal influence of the Qahtani tribal group, who were reluctant to stick purely to the *Ibadi* notion of selecting the Imam from among the best competitors. The Omani religious scholars decided to select Julanda bin Masoud as the first Imam. He descends from the last ruling family of Julanda, which in turn descends from the Shanuah Qahtani branch. Therefore, even the first Imamate was a product of the influence of tribal allegiances. However, according to Al-Hajri, 'Even religious scholars had few qualms concerning the monopoly of

Islamic world's ruling system	Oman Ruling System			
	Ruling Tribe	Type of Rule	Details	Comments
Prophet & First Four Caliphs' Time	Qahtani (Yahmad)	Dynastic	Julanda State	
	Historic Turning Point: The first time for the Imamate to occur in Oman			
Umayyad Dynasty (661 - 750)	Qahtani (Yahmad)	Dynastic	Julanda State	Oman occupied by Umayyad for 40 years
Abbasids Dynasty (750 - 1258)	Qahtani (Yahmad)	Imamate	First Imamate of Julanda bin Masoud (751 - 753)	Ended by Abbasids' Occupation
	Qahtani (Yahmad)	Imamate	Second Imamate State (797 - 900)	Ended by Abbasids' Occupation after tribal war
	Historic Turning Point: The first Qahtani (Yamani) / Adnani (Nizari) War led to foreign intervention then occupation			
Ottoman Empire (1289 - 1923)	Qahtani (Yahmad)	Dynastic	Nabahina State (1154 - 1624)	a) Tyrannical rule b) Local Imams occurred simultaneously c) Portuguese during the sixteenth century
	Qahtani (Yahmad)	Imamate then Dynastic	Ya'ariba State (1624 - 1749)	a) Elected Imams at the beginning then dynastic towards the end b) Ended by Persian occupation after tribal war
	Historic Turning Point: The second Qahtani (Hinawi) / Adnani (Ghafri) War led to foreign intervention then occupation			
Multi - State System	Qahtani	Imamate then Dynastic	Al-Busaidi State (1753 onward)	a) Elected Imams at the beginning then dynastic towards the end b) Witnessed emergence of Yahmad Imamate in the Interior (1913 - 1954)

Figure 3.1. The Socio-Political History of Oman since the Advent of Islam

power exercised by one tribal group so long as peace, security and good governance could be maintained.'[4] And as is explained in Chapter Five, *Ibadi* jurists did not look at the *Shura* alone; they considered other factors that led to the stability of the community.

The second Imamate witnessed a sort of implicit socio-political contract between the Qahtani and Adnani tribal blocks, in which the Imams came from the Qahtani blocks, particularly the Yahmad who resided in the Ghadaf (Rustaq) area on the other side of Jebel Akhdar (the green mountain) in the interior. But the Imam was to be selected by the *Ulama* (scholars) of the Adnani block, particularly those belonging to the Bani Sama, the major Nizari tribe residing mainly in the Nizwa area of the interior. These *Ulama* stipulated that the Imamate governance centre had to be in Nizwa, which was surrounded by Adnani tribes, in order to make sure that there were no shortcomings when it came to protecting the Imamate rule from suffering at the hand of any malpractitioners.[5]

Nevertheless, although the Imamate system is controlled by the tribal system, and indeed Imams descend from one tribal block (the Qahtani) and its divisions, the system itself is not hereditary, and Imams are not necessarily genealogically related.[6] This arrangement between the two tribal blocks was seen by jurists as important to keep the stability and security of the state and was not seen as a flaw to the practice of the *Shura* (discussed in Chapter Five). It seems that this implicit arrangement that occurred towards the end of the eighth century continues until the present time. Even the Imamate rule that occurred in 1913 had chosen both Imams from the same Shanuah group of the Qahtani tribal bloc although Adnani leaders such as Sulaiman bin Himyar Al-Nabhani had attended the pledge.

The choice of Nizwa as the governance centre had also been made because it offered the only possible geographical access at that time to the main Omani tribal regions. The map in Figure 3.2 below shows the location of the Imamate governance centre and the other regions that are separated by the huge Jebel Akhdar and the rest of the western Hajar Mountains and represents the political forces that were available during the time of the first and second Imamates. It clarifies why Nizwa had been selected to be the home for the Imamate as

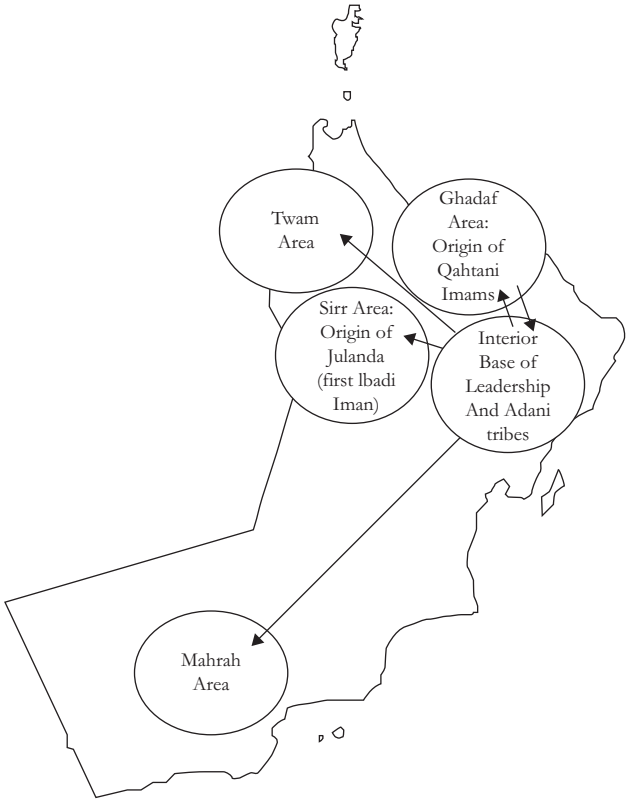

Figure 3.2. Map of Oman

it provided good communications access through the valleys cutting through the huge Hajar Mountains and also because it was the centre of Bani Sama (the Adnani tribal block) that supervise the performance of the Qahtani Imams from the Ghadaf (Rustaq Area).[7]

The harmonious relationship between the Qahtani and Adnani tribal blocks did not last long. The deposition of Imam Al-Salt bin Malik (Yamani-Qahtani) in 892 A.D., which was exercised by his Supreme Judge Mosa bin Musa (Nizari-Adnani), led to the emergence of what became known as the *Nizwani* and *Rustaqi* schools of thought.[8] The former supported the deposition of the Imam, claiming that he was incapable of ruling the country due to his old age. The latter, however, believed that although the Imam was old, he still possessed

his physical and mental capabilities to a sufficient degree. They also believed that Mosa bin Mosa's pledge of allegiance to the new Imam Rashid bin Al-Nadhar was not conducted properly, as he did not liaise with the other scholars of that time and the *Ibadi* sect requires the agreement of more than two scholars for a pledge to be legitimate. This incident created some insurgencies on the part of the followers of the deposed Imam against the new Imam and his Supreme Judge Mosa bin Mosa. The incident led after five years to the deposition of Imam Rashid bin Al-Nadhar.

A new Imam, Azzan bin Tamim, was selected, and he quickly got rid of the Supreme Judge Mosa bin Mosa, who consequently went to his home village in Nizar Fort in the Izki area and began to call for insurgences against Imam Azzan. The Imam, in order to maintain order in the country, sent armed forces to Izki and Mosa bin Mosa was killed together with many of the Nizari/Adnani people. The minority, who managed successfully to flee the massacre, sought help from the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mu'atadid, who was of Adnani origin. They urged him to protect the Adnani tribes from the Qahtanis, and he responded by sending a considerable troop to Oman to engage with the Imam's forces. Imam Azzan was killed and his head carried to the Caliph in Baghdad. This incident marked the end of the second Imamate state and the end of the Qahtani/Adnani implicit socio-political contract. It also signified the beginning of a long tribal conflict which lasted for around five centuries and marked a turning point in Omani political history.[9] This conflict was known as the Nizari-Yemeni conflict, though this term is in danger of diminishing the importance of the conflict, which was in fact a substantial and sustained conflict between the Qahtani and Adnani tribal blocks.

The Yahmad tribal group of the Shanuah branch of the Qahtani block adopted the belief, after this conflict, that an Imamate rule which fights against a centralisation of power is not a valid system in tribal society, because tribalism fights against any centralisation of power for its own interests. Thus they sought to change the type of rule back to that of a monarchy. They initiated, in 1154, the Nabahina State, which lasted for about five centuries. Towards the end of the Nabahina State, the coastal areas of Oman were occupied by the Portuguese.

The Ya'ariba, another family from the same Yahmad tribe which descended from the Shanuah Qahtani tribal block, took over and expelled the Portuguese from the country and the nearby territories. The Ya'ariba war leader Nassir bin Murshid had been given the pledge of allegiance by the *Ulama* at that time to initiate a new Imamate state. Towards the end of the Ya'ariba state the members of the ruling family fought among themselves for the Imamate crown and Sheikh Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Ghafri (Adnani) abrogated to himself the status and title of Imam with support from Nizwa's tribes. He was opposed by Sheikh Khalaf bin Mubarak Al-Hinai (Qahtani), and this opposition led to another tribal war known as the Ghafri-Hinawi tribal war, though this was a repetition of the classical Qahtani-Adnani tribal war, albeit in a seemingly different form.[10] This situation marked another historical turning point in Omani political history and led to the Persian foreign invasion.[11]

Ahmed bin Said Al-Busaidi (Qahtani), the founder of the current ruling family, fought against the Persians and rescued the country from the tribal wars and from foreign occupation. The *Ulama* of his time agreed to pledge allegiance to him, and he became an Imam in 1753 A.D. The situation changed later on when his descendents called themselves *Sayyids*, then Sultans. This rule, though, continued until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the *Ibadi* religious and tribal leaders decided to initiate a new Imamate in the interior. In 1913, Salim bin Rashid Al-Kharousi *(*Yahmad/Shanuah/Qahtani*)* was selected as an Imam, and upon his assassination Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Khalili *(*Yahmad/Shanuah/Qahtani*)* was chosen as the new Imam. The Imamate continued to rule the interior up until the Imam's death in 1954, whilst the coastal areas were ruled by the Sultans.

As for the sub divisions of the tribal system in Oman, each major tribe resided in a particular part of the country, and that part became essentially a sovereign territory for the tribe. The history of Oman at this point witnessed many tribal wars over this issue of territorial sovereignty, each tribe trying to extend its territory at the expense of others. The main reason behind this was to try and gain two important things, the geographical territory and of course more followers, which in turn would improve the wealth of the tribal leadership and the level

of its political authority. Generally speaking, throughout its history Oman can be divided into three main economic sectors: the interior, dependent on agriculture; the coast, dependent on sea trade and fisheries; and the desert, dependent on grazing. All these sectors are poor, and this has led to tribal struggle aimed at securing economic security for the tribal rulers and subjects. The amount of wealth generated marked the strengths and weaknesses of the respective tribes and their tribal alliances, locally known as *Shaff*. The tribal hierarchy itself is divided into four ranks, although this depends on the strength of the tribe. It starts with *Rasheed*, then *Sheikh*, *Tamima* and finally *Ameer*. The *Rasheed* may rule a small tribe and the *Sheikh* a bigger tribe. The *Tamima* normally rules more than one tribe under the law of *Shaff* and dominates a big territory. The *Ameer*, by contrast, can dominate part or even the whole state.[12]

Working in the context of this tribal hierarchy, the tribes nowadays reside in the different *Wilayat* (singular *Wilayah*, which means a district).[13] However, this geographic positionality should not be allowed to obscure the fact that tribalism in Oman depends initially and crucially on blood ties and then on the political coalitions and tribal alliances (*Shaff*) that tribes are able to command. As Rabi puts it:

> In Oman, any presentation of the tribe as a 'descent' group, a broad group of kinsmen organised on the basis of blood ties and genealogical descent, is too simplistic; an in-depth examination of the Omani arena illustrates patently that this is not the case. The tribes in Oman (as in other regions of the Arabian Peninsula) exhibit not only various modes of existence, they also constitute diverse descent groups organised in a broader, multi-tribal political structure. The term 'community group', that is, an assortment of various descent groups that maintain connections among themselves on the basis of patronage relationships, political alliances and economic cooperation, is useful in discussing the tribal fabric of Oman.[14]

This form of 'tribal fabric' in Oman is the one that still serves to affect some of the national Omani policies, including the *Shura*

Council's elections. It is predicted that it will influence further steps in the political process, such as in the election of the *Shura* Council's chairman. In addition to tribalism, some scholars, such as Valeri, talk about modern fanaticisms (*Asabiyyat*) in Oman today. These result from the origin of each group. He points to the competition, indeed the hatred, which can be seen occurring between the native Omanis, the Banyan and Lawatiya of Indian origin, the Baluchis who came from the Baluchistan Territory in Pakistan, the Zanzibaris who migrated recently from East Africa, and the Dhofari Omanis.[15]

Three important summary insights emerge from the discussion in this section:

(1) The *Ibadi* scholars, in their aim to restore security and order in the country, did not mind leaving power in the hands of a single tribal grouping or even a single tribe. This is why Omani political history has witnessed different political systems.

(2) All ruling systems throughout Omani political history were under the Qahtani block, and since the beginning of the second Imamate state in 797 A.D., the political authority has remained largely in the hands of the Yahmad/Shanuah group belonging to the same Qahtani block. The Adnani block, by contrast, has produced the most supreme religious scholars who have worked in an expediency council which is locally known as *Majlis Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*.

(3) The Imamate recurrently emerges as a 'national ideology' following each setback in the political situation of the country. It served each time to rescue the country from tribal wars, tyrannical ruling systems and foreign invasion.[16]

What can also be discerned is that although the Imamate system fights against a centralisation of power, which suits the tribal leaders' desires, Omani history did not witness at any point a genuine sort of security and prosperity, except during those rules which had created strong armed forces; in other words, during those systems that

centralised power. The reign of Imam Al-Muhana bin Gayfar of the second Imamate state, the reign of the first part of the Ya'ariba State and Sultan Said bin Sultan's time, represent good examples of this. This may be because the maintenance of order provided a chance for the leadership to focus on economic issues. This helped to improve the living standards and pulled the rug from underneath tribal leaders. In other words, in tribal societies where tribes fight against the centralisation of power so as to serve their own interests, strong but not tyrannical ruling systems are required to maintain security and order, and thus, tribalism's anti-centralisation predisposition hinders the political process in Oman because it prioritises the tribal interest above all others – including that of the nation.

Social Transformation in Oman since 1970

Oman's population has increased from being less than one million in 1970 to being at around 3.2 million in 2008. A majority of the population lives in the governorate of Muscat (the capital area) and on the Batinah coastal plain region, which is located northwest of the capital. The southern governorate of Dhofar is home to around 200,000, and around 30,000 live in the remote Musandam peninsula on the Strait of Hormuz. Around 550,000 expatriates live in Oman, most of them guest workers from South Asia, Egypt, Jordan and the Philippines. According to Oman Economic Studies[17] the age structure shows that those aged to 14 years make up 41 per cent of the population (male 508,681; female 489,453), those aged to 64 years make up 57 per cent (male 856,062; female 535,123), and those aged 65 years and over make up just 2 per cent (male 30,083; female 27,243). The population growth rate is currently at 3.45 per cent. The birth rate is 37.98 births per every 1,000 people. The death rate is 4.29 deaths per 1,000. The sex ratio at birth is 1.05 male(s)/female, under 15 years it is 1.04 male(s)/female, 15–64 years it is 1.6 male(s)/female, 65 years and over it is 1.1 male(s)/female. In the total population it is 1.33 male(s)/female. The infant mortality rate is 24.71 deaths/1,000 live births, and according to UN surveys[18] the under-five mortality rate decreased to 12 per 1,000 births in 2003. Life expectancy at birth for the total population is

71.3 years (male: 69.31 years; female: 73.39 years). The total fertility rate is 6.11 children born/woman.[19]

Islam is the state religion, as indeed affirmed by the 1996 Basic Statute of the State (BSS). The 1996 BSS stipulates that *Shari'a* is the basis of the legislation, and it preserves the freedom to practise religious rites in accordance with tradition provided that such freedom does not breach public order. Discrimination against individuals on the basis of religion or sect is prohibited. Most citizens are *Ibadi*, and the *Ibadis* form around 75 per cent of the population, again according to the Oman Economic Report.[20] The majority are Sunni Muslims, but there is also a minority of Shi'a Muslims. Non-Muslims are free to worship at churches and temples built upon land donated by the Sultan. There are many Christian denominations, which utilize two plots of donated land in the capital area, and two Roman Catholic and two Protestant churches have been built. Hindu temples also exist on government-provided land. Land has been made available to Catholic and Protestant missions in Sohar and Salalah. Finally, Arabic is the official language, whilst English, Baluchi, Urdu and several other Indian dialects and languages are widely spoken.

Since 1970, the government has given especially high priority to education. This prioritisation has been designed to a develop skilled domestic workforce, which the government considers to be a vital factor in the country's prospective economic and social progress. In 1986, Oman's first university, Sultan Qaboos University, opened. Other post-secondary institutions include technical colleges, a banking college, teacher training colleges and a health sciences institute. As of 2010, as many as 200 scholarships were being awarded each year for study abroad. The functional literacy rate is currently 80 per cent.[21] There are now 21 private universities and colleges – three private universites in Nizwa, Sohar and Dhofar as well as two under construction.

Since the 1970s the Omani government has worked hard to promote the rights of women. In 1970 there were no schools for girls in Oman, and 85 per cent of the female population was illiterate. According to the Oman Economic Studies, just over three decades later the literacy rate among females had significantly improved to approximately 73 per cent. There has also been a marked increase in the number of females

pursuing formal education. In fact, over 60 per cent of girls in recent years were enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary schools and other institutions. In the 1997–98 school year, female students constituted approximately 50 per cent of the total number of students attending state schools. Women constitute roughly half of the 5,000 students at Sultan Qaboos University. In November 2009, 600 women and 524 men received bachelor degrees.

Increased levels of female education have also translated into a greater proportional representation of women in the workforce. They now make up approximately 33 per cent of all civil servants. Moreover, educated women in Oman now occupy many middle- and upper-level positions in all sectors of society. In both the public and the private sectors, women are entitled to maternity leave and equal pay for equal work. They now have the right to vote and stand for election without restrictions and have gained equal opportunities in many of the country's economic sectors. The 2003 parliamentary elections were the first in which women were allowed to participate without restriction. Whilst as few as 5,000 women were registered to vote in the 2000 election, around 95,000 were registered in 2003.[22]

Since the early 1970s, Oman's economy has depended mainly on oil revenues. Its economy has repeatedly fluctuated due to the rise and fall in oil prices and/or in oil production rates. During the oil price drops between 1980 and 1986, Oman managed to survive by increasing its oil production rate from 283 million barrels a day to 498 million barrels a day.[23] The same positive production pattern occurred during the end of the 1990s, when Oman managed to increase its production rate from around 600,000 barrels to 900,000 barrels a day. Since 2004 the oil production rate has dropped dramatically from nearly one million barrels a day to 700,000 barrels. This is due to the maturity of the major oil fields. A large decline in Oman's oil output could occur at any time, given the downturn in production of recent years. Given that the annual deficit during the 1980–2001 period reached nearly one billion US dollars in some years;[24] the rise in oil prices since 2006 effectively rescued Oman from total economic turmoil.

Liquid gas industries and the other non-oil industries – such as tourism, ports, industrial areas, privatised electricity, telecommunications,

water, the application of indirect taxation on municipal services, health and housing, as well as foreign investment – have partly compensated for the fall in oil production rates over the last few years.[25] The country's proven natural gas reserves stood at 24.24 trillion cubic feet in 2004. The production of natural gas increased by 15 per cent to 1.1 trillion cubic feet in 2006, and the value added by the gas sector grew by 16 per cent in nominal terms. Exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) surged ahead by 28 per cent to 9.1 million tons in 2006. Deficits of a few hundred million Omani riyals annually – as mentioned above – have been recorded, but recent years have seen the presence of good surpluses. The Omani government is using those surpluses to improve the efficiency of the old oil fields and to explore new oil fields, as well as to prepare the infrastructure for the post-oil era by constructing five airports and developing a more diverse petrochemical industry. The use of enhanced recovery techniques is expected to arrest the oil production rate fall by 2010. In its dedication to economic diversification, the government also currently pays increased attention to the tourism sector:[26] it has set an ambitious plan to increase the number of airports and to enhance the coastline areas by constructing more hotels.

The real GDP growth has stayed at around 6 per cent since 2006, and it went up in 2007 and 2008 before dropping slightly again. The nominal per capita GDP (US dollars) rose from $12,012 in 2005 to $16,930 in 2010. It was expected to reach $20,488 in 2011. Oman has faced higher international prices for some non-oil commodities such as food items, along with rising import costs due to the weakening of the US dollar against other major currencies. As a result, inflation had been expected to pick up in 2008, averaging about 7.6 per cent, compared with an estimated 5.8 per cent in 2007. A good amount of the profits which are being accrued from the rent of oil have been used to offset increased salary costs.[27]

The recent 'monetary easing' in the United States has increased Oman's difficulties in terms of containing price pressures. With the US Federal Reserve lowering interest rates by 100 base points since September 2007, interest rates in Oman followed a similar adjustment pattern, which triggered a large influx of liquidity and ultimately

resulted in higher prices for various types of assets. The asset price inflation has become an increasing concern for Oman, especially with regard to its stock market and real estate. Efforts to dampen liquidity growth have been met with only limited success, and this will remain a challenge at least in the near future. The consumer price index (CPI) rose by 3.2 per cent in 2006 and continued its upward trend during 2007, increasing by 5.3 per cent from the 2006 levels. The heavily weighted food and housing categories, which represent more than 50 per cent of the basket of goods and services, rose by 10.2 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively.[28]

The Omani currency (riyal), which has been pegged to the dollar at 0.385 riyals per US dollar since 1986, has come under pressure due to the recent weakness of the US dollar as against other major currencies. With the dollar's depreciation, the riyal (and other Gulf currencies fixed to the dollar) has fallen relative to other currencies such as the euro and the British pound. This has resulted in rising import costs. Several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries already face high inflation rates, stemming from the surge in growth and investment which has occurred over recent years. Expatriate workers have also witnessed the value of the remittances they send home in the fall. This is again due to the weakness of the US dollar. This may lead Oman to rethink its policy in terms of pegging the riyal to the dollar. The credit crisis which began in October 2008 has affected the oil prices and the value of the different currencies. The crisis may negatively affect the Omani economy by lowering the oil prices whilst oil production rate in Oman is still low. It may, however, have a positive effect in so far as the value of the Omani riyal, pegged to the US dollar, may be strengthened, and thus the inflation rate in the country may thereby drop to its previous levels. In all cases, the unrest in the economic situation has a direct influence on the political process in Oman.

Clearly, the Omani economy is still heavily dependent on oil revenues. And whilst the government's diversification policies are promising, they need time in order to be successful. Social indicators show much progress in the fertility and birth rates, which push up the population, whilst the economic indicators show less progress. It is

not only the national revenues that need to be boosted, however; the employment sectors need also to be widened so as to accommodate unemployed citizens in the future.

Many scholars regard the modernisation[29] and social transformation processes taking place in oil-producing states as a direct result of the windfall of oil revenues. This is to some extent questionable because there are oil-producing states that have arguably misused oil revenues, such as Libya. There is no doubt that oil revenues have played a very significant role in improving the living standards of the citizenry in these states. This includes Oman, but this fact does not negate the notion that there is a certain political will standing behind the socio-political process. In the case of Oman, as was explained in the previous section, the presence of tribalism and its fight against the centralisation of power has required the government to undertake a certain type of strategy in order to guarantee the success of the policy of centralisation of power (during the 1970s in particular).

Oil revenues, which were not massive during the 1970s, had been used to finance the war against the rebels in the Dhofar region, to establish a modern infrastructure and to improve the living standards of people via the public sector employment policy which became known as the 'implicit social contract'. This policy, on the one hand, helped to quell the rebellions and on the other hand helped to acquire the national loyalty of essentially tribal people. In this process of building national identity, the Sultanate followed a policy of containment – in contrast to other states of the Middle East – wherein the leaders of the opposition in Dhofar and the master tribal leaders (*Tamima*) were given a role in building modern Oman and were explicitly included in the process.

This containment policy, in addition to the implicit social contract and the improvement of the educational levels of the people, has helped to consolidate the national identity and reduce (to some extent) the influences of tribal fanaticism.[30] Urbanisation has also played a part, in the sense that territories which were under the control of major tribes are becoming urbanised and increasingly inhabited by people belonging to different, alien tribes. In other words, the tribes have lost two important pillars, and this loss has benefited the cultivation of a

national identity: first, the territory itself and, secondly, to some extent the loyalty of the people. However allegiance to the Qahtani/Adnani tribal blocks has not been removed, and competition between the followers of the two tribal blocks is still implicitly and latently present in Omani politics and society. (It should be noted that the centralisation of power and the enforcement of the state of law forced this competition to remain implicit and latent, as the law forbade the inciting of tribal fanaticism.)

Once the government managed to control the situation in this manner and higher education started to produce a sufficient number of graduates, the policy concerning the centralisation of power started to change and the government adopted some forms of political participation. It has been observed that in the urbanised areas the levels of political participation were higher than in the rural areas. Urbanised areas are inhabited by a more cosmopolitan mixture of people from different regions and different tribes; people here are more educated and concomitantly urbanised and less affected by the influence of tribal fanaticism. In this sense, women were able to reach the *Shura* Council in the governorate of Muscat, but not in the other areas.

In addition to greater improvements in education and the process of urbanisation, which are supported through an application of state law and the culture of national identity, globalisation has played a significant part in the improvement of the political participation process. Economically, the Sultanate's joining of the WTO and the FTA required the government to enact particular legislation, such as that which enforced labour rights and introduced labour unions, which undoubtedly improved the political environment in terms of levels of participation. Culturally, globalisation, through the means of telecommunication, has enlightened Omani citizenry in terms of their awareness of their political rights; importantly, it has provided them, in addition, with the techniques to acquire those rights. This, in turn, has obliged the government to accelerate the political process in proportion to the social transformations taking place in the country.

In light of this discussion, the next section draws on a (largely non-native) literature which examines traditional and contemporary political processes in Oman.

Traditional and Contemporary Political Processes in Oman

In this section, the discourses which are critically examined are dominated by mainly non-Omani scholars. Whilst one may expect to see the political opinions of the different groups in the Sultanate in the daily newspapers or in various publications, in fact, none of this appears in Oman: publications made by the religious scholars are typically wary of trespassing the teachings of Islam, and the *Ulama* do not write about politics at all. The only thing of this sort that can be witnessed is a vague criticism of some essentially administrative issues in the media or the responses of the younger generation (who are disguised by nicknames in websites) to particular socio-political issues. A few of them have recently begun to talk more openly on the foreign TV satellite channels, offering critiques of certain issues related to the political situation in the country. This general absence of social and political critique can be explained in different ways: it can be seen as reflecting a situation where Omani citizens are satisfied with the current political culture; or it could be assumed that they feel that there is a 'red line' which prohibits the discussion of sensitive issues; or it might more cynically be assumed that Omanis are simply apathetic and that they do not care about politics as long as the implicit social contract between the rentier state and citizens works profitably for them.

Since 1970 Oman has witnessed dramatic changes due to the discovery of oil and Sultan Qaboos's ascendance to the throne. Sultan Qaboos benefited massively from the oil revenues and undoubtedly managed to establish a 'modern' country with a unique political philosophy which combined both tradition and modernity. He embarked on this project by first bringing Omani citizens from different origins, sects and ideologies together and convincing them to build a modern state. His Majesty also initiated what become known as the Annual Royal Tour, in which HM and most of the government ministers travel from the capital area to the different Omani districts. (Further details about the Annual Royal Tour are given below). The Sultan also began his rule by establishing different councils in order to allow for an extension of political participation. All of this is seen as a real practical articulation of the philosophy of *Shura.*[31]

As to the precedent of tradition, the conventional Omani political system (of Imamate rule) started in the eighth century and developed over one thousand years. It is regarded as one of the oldest participatory systems in the Arab world and the legitimate successor of the early Islamic leadership patterns, which can be witnessed historically immediately after the death of the Prophet Mohammed, wherein a group of the most respected people met and decided to choose Abu-Bakr to be the *Khalifat* (ruler). They conveyed this to the people, who supported the decision and offered allegiance (*al-bay'a*). The Omani Imamate is predicated on three essential principles:

- The principle of authority derived from the sub principles of consensus (*Ijma'*), contract (*Aqd*) and the free election of the Imam;
- The principle of 'homeland', which states that for *Shura* to be practised a territory is needed; this is why the concept was formulated, embedded and realised in Omanis' culture at a very early stage;
- The principle of autonomy and sovereignty; this explains why Oman remained independent throughout the majority of her history, and why Oman did not become a composite part of the various wider Islamic dynasties.

These three principles underpinned the practice of the 'Islamic political participatory system' (*Shura*) for twelve centuries.[32]

Within this jurisdiction, the quite particular Omani *Shura* is anchored on seven principles:

(1) the consensus and homage to Imams;
(2) the free election of Imams;
(3) the written statutes;
(4) the establishments of the Imamate (i.e. councils);
(5) the sovereignty of law and equality;
(6) the law of *Zakat* (alms or tax);
(7) the disbandment of the army in peacetime.

The *Ibadi* statute was written during the seventh century, and the Imamate councils were formed at the same time. These were composed

of the scholars' council and the elites' council. Imamate rule relied on the Omani tribal 'social fabric', which formed the basis of the political establishment of *Shura*; tribalism was thus also responsible for developing *mores* (custom constitution) regarding daily affairs, which has led to the view that – at least in the case of Oman – tribalism does not necessarily hinder democratisation processes but tribal fanaticism certainly does.[33]

The Shi'a believe that the Imam should come from the same family as the Prophet and that the office of Imam is divine and cannot be subject to elections, while the Sunni believe that the successor to the Messenger should be from the same tribe (Quraish) but not by necessity or law from the family of the Prophet. *Ibadism*, by contrast, posits that the office of Imam is not divine but temporal, and it therefore does not recognise a hereditary system as legitimate. *Ibadis* also believe that the Imam does not necessarily have to come from the same tribe or family as the Prophet but can be any Muslim so long as people elect him as Imam through the process of *Shura.*[34]

Oman is the only Arab State which is ruled by the *Ibadi* form of Islam (i.e. not Sunni or Shi'a). It is known for being a conservative sect, but it is also tolerant towards others, including non-Muslims. It should also be noted, especially in the contemporary era, that *Ibadism* has historically been moderate as far as war is concerned and has been opposed to violence. Since the advent of Islam, Oman has embraced *Ibadism*, and accordingly the relationship between the state and the official religion has been close, if not always harmonious.

Growing ties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between the Sultanate and Great Britain created tensions between the Imams and the Sultan. This conflict continued from the 1850s to the 1950s, with the Imamate controlling the interior, particularly the surrounding area of Jebel Akhdar, from 1913 to 1954, and the Sultanate controlling the coastal areas supported by the British.[35] However, since Sultan Qaboos came into power in 1970, the religious institutions have in the main supported the government. This importantly suggests that they do not reject a combination of traditional *Shura* and the modern participatory process. People, including supporters of the Imamate, work together in the current *Shura* process,

which implies that a reconciliation now defines the relationship between the Sultanate and the Imamate. It could be argued that acceptance of the Sultanate is ultimately a reflection of where real power, including a monopoly over the use of force, now resides - namely, with the state. Even so, the fact that the hinterland tribes of Oman now participate in the political process, even though this is not obligatory, suggests that a broad acceptance of *Shura* has become a central feature of state legitimacy across Oman. As for the contemporary *Shura* process that started in the 1970s, Cecil observes:

> One hears a lot these days about promoting the spread of democratic institutions in the Arab world. In evaluating these efforts some observers seem to imply that the standard by which they should be judged is the degree to which practices or institutions resemble the American or other Western Models. A look at more than three decades of evolution in the political institutions of Oman suggests that the steady growth of participatory government, guided by a farsighted leader, may offer a solidly grounded foundation for establishing the institutions, practices and attitudes needed for representative government, with little if any reference to Western models.[36]

By comparison with other Gulf States, Oman has a distinctive culture. It has gained its difference 'from the historical continuity of the nation State', as well as from its social traditions and its cultural heritage. It has preserved its historical buildings, and people still wear their national dress on all occasions. The conservation of culture and heritage is reflected in the Omani national identity which, while shaping political reforms, nevertheless regards the preservation of Omani culture as sacrosanct.[37] In *Ibadism*, unlike in the Sunni political ethos which dominates Gulf States, where leadership is inherited through a certain hierarchy, the leaders in Oman have to be elected according to the teaching of *Shura*, which includes the principle of *Ijtihad* (diligence). As such, *Ibadi* forms of Islam tend to be more flexible and tolerant towards other religions and cultures; in addition, *Ibadism* can be said to offer a fertile ground for the implementation of a democratisation process.[38]

With regard to citizens' involvement in government affairs, Oman has been developing a participatory process since the 1970s, when the Council for Agriculture, Fish and Industry was established. This was followed by the establishment of the State Consultative Council. The members of the two councils were indeed nominated by the government, but this does not negate the fact that they were given some genuine authority to discuss important issues related to development policies. The participatory process which took place within those councils contributed to citizens' knowledge of the new forms of political participation. A municipal council was founded in Muscat (the capital) in the 1940s, and after 1970 a municipal council was formed in almost every district (*Wilayah*), in which citizens were involved in the conduct of government affairs. This thereby widened the level of popular participation in governmental processes.[39] The process of consultative participation is practised at different levels, as *Sheikhs* (tribal leaders) in their local *Sablah* (meeting hall) discuss tribal problems and find solutions for them. At higher levels, there are other methods and practices, such as the Businessmen's Council and the Oman Chamber of Commerce.

The participatory process also includes the Annual Royal Tour, in which Sultan Qaboos spent more than one month a year in the different towns and villages of the Sultanate, following the progress of development, meeting his people and taking part in a process of consultation with the political community (to be discussed in detail below). The introduction of the tour was followed by the establishment of the State Consultancy Council during the 1980s, consisting of appointed members. In the 1990s, the *Shura* Council was founded, in which all members were elected but the franchise remained limited as only some selected people were allowed to vote but not the entire people. Later on, all people over 21 years old were allowed to participate as voters or indeed candidates. In 1997 the State Council was formed with appointed members, mainly constituted of ex-senior officials who had gained extensive experience from their previous careers (both councils are discussed in detail below). Neither council has legislative power, but they can initiate proposals, review draft laws and conduct studies to help implement development plans. They can also suggest solutions for economic and social problems.

Considering the recent political changes in Oman, the reform process may seem to be slow in comparison with that of some other Gulf States. In fact, it is proactive, but the intimacy of Oman's people with its cultural and historical traditions serves to shape the nature of the change and often inhibits the process. Oman is implementing the *Shura* process step by step in order to avoid 'cultural shocks' and to allow sufficient time for people to adapt themselves to the emerging forms of participation. Nonetheless, there is a genuine participatory process taking place in the country, especially as compared with other states in the Gulf.[40] Cecil concludes:

> The pace with which Oman's political institutions have evolved – gradually over a generation – may well be a lesson for those who would have it take place faster . . . the Omani example may serve to demonstrate that a policy of gradualism, firmly rooted in local tradition, can be implemented in a way that offers citizens an expanding role in managing the affairs of their country without opening the doors to uncontrollable political and social pressures.[41]

Katz and other scholars argue that *Majlis Al-Shura* (the Consultative Council) has been given an extremely limited authority and is not empowered to address issues such as defence and foreign affairs; rather, it is only allowed to discuss issues related to social and economic problems. It cannot initiate legislation but can only review and comment on legislation initiated by government ministries.[42] This argument in fact can be challenged, and this response will be developed in subsequent paragraphs of this chapter. Also, during the course of an international press conference in October 2007, Sayyid Saud bin Ibrahim Al-Busaidi, the Minister of Interior at the time, criticised such debates when he said that Oman had a very good and peaceful relationship with the rest of the world and that it has a defensive force only to protect its territory. So even given the fact that the Sultan is the one who controls the military and the parliament, the fact that there is little Omani aggression against other states means that the need to discuss military issues in the parliament is less pressing. This is most unlike

the situation in Western states. As such, there are few issues regarding foreign policy and national security that are worthy of discussion by the *Majlis Al-Shura*. The Minister may have forgotten to mention that the national five-year budget, including the amount spent on defence, is sent to the *Shura* Council for revision, so the council does consider the defence budget. Whilst one may take issue with this statement, Jones suggests that the parliamentary authorities in Oman should not be judged according to Western standards, arguing that the council has been given real power even if it is not prescribed or codified in a statute.[43]

Katz also mentions that candidates are forbidden to use the mass media to gather political support when contesting a seat and that the voter turnout is low because Omani people still do not feel they have a real political voice.[44] Sayyid Saud (the former Minister of Interior), however, noted that candidates were allowed to introduce themselves and their political agenda during the 2007 election via the mass media. The conditions of participation were a need for all candidates to recognise and respect alternative view points and positions and, more broadly, to ensure that their political platforms included respect for the Omani environment. In short, the participatory process cannot become a platform which could impact adversely on Omani cultural values and on Oman's environmental beauty. In other words, they do not mind seeing advertisements in newspapers or on electronic boards or alongside roads but will not tolerate their display upon walls or in road lighting poles.

In respect of other aspects of the participatory process, the Basic Statute of the state, as mentioned above, was published in 1996. It guarantees political and human rights, including the right for non-Muslims to practice their religions, though not to carry out 'proselytizing activities'. The statute also permits the establishment of non-governmental associations, and as of 2010 more than one hundred such associations had been established; these include, for example, the Writers Association, the Journalists Association, the Physicians Association, the Women's Associations and the Labour Union. Lastly, the constitution codified equal rights in terms of gender. Women already have equal rights in law, work, and income side by side with men.

Because of tradition, however, they still face some discrimination from a society which remains resistant to the notion of gender equality.[45]

Looking at Oman as a rentier state, some scholars, such as Rabi, argue that the improvements which have occurred in Oman since 1970 in agriculture, fisheries, industrialisation and social services are simply the result of oil revenues.[46] Having said that, Rabi concludes that unlike other rentier states, the Omani government established a chamber of commerce in 1978 to allow greater political participation to emerge (though not at the cost of circumscribing the role of traditional elites). One of the main characteristics of the rentier state concerns the replacement of the old elites (mainly merchants and dignitaries) with a new generation that can help fulfil the social contract peculiar to the rentier state. In light of the above, it can be argued that Oman is not a typical rentier state because the position of the old elites has not been significantly affected by the discovery of oil and the productivity of the nation is acceptable.

Analysing both the *Al-Shura* and *Al-Dawla* councils (the two houses of parliament), Rabi argues that their emergence is the result of political pressure as well as the decline in oil reserves. With oil set to run out over the next decade, Oman, like other rentier states, cannot continue to financially support a growing populace by using the rent derived from oil sales. Omani officials say that the Sultanate retains big oil reserves. The national oil company in Oman (Petroleum Development Oman) has developed new technologies with the assistance of Shell, which utilize the injection of hot steam and other chemicals to dilute the heavy oil. Using this process, oil began to be extracted in 2008. Of course, writing in 2002, Rabi could not anticipate this new technology, but his argument is certainly being challenged now in its wake. Nevertheless, he argues validly that the participatory process that Oman is developing is a combination of both the royal and traditional ruling system and is different from the Western democratic tradition. In reality, what Oman is witnessing today is a concatenation of traditional *Shura* and modern participatory processes deployed under the sponsorship of the dynastic state.

With regard to Omani elections, it is easy to draw the conclusion that Omani elections and *Majlis Al-Shura* are not genuine expressions

of democratisation. It would, however, be wrong to make such a judgement, based on political relativism, without understanding the local identity of the state. The Omani *Shura* practice is being built up gradually and is an experimental and open ended process, which suggests that there is genuine room for a participatory process across Oman to evolve.[47] The election process is discussed in detail below.

With regard to the foundation of political parties, according to article 33 of the Basic Statutes of the State they may readily be formed but must contingently manifest an open support for the status of the Royal Family and respect for the statute that protects rights and religious freedom. Parties are forbidden from adhering to an openly theocratic platform and should remain 'open-ended', in keeping with the gradual nature of the general democratisation process.[48] However, given the historic legacy of political parties across the region, Omanis themselves are uncomfortable with the idea of such organisations and point to the excesses of the Ba'ath party in Iraq and Syria as a justification for such concerns.

Islamic societies place communal interest before individual need, which is in a sense the reverse of the ethos prevalent in Western societies. Oman therefore needs to adopt a participatory process which does not contradict the vertically divided society since it is these very divisions, such as tribalism, that can help in the stabilisation of society. Given this symbiotic relationship between religion and the state, Oman provides a good case study for exploring the extent to which the notion of *Shura* offers an alternative to Western models of democracy.

In sum, the problem of democratisation in Oman coincides to some extent with the problem of democratisation in the wider Arab world. However, politically speaking, Oman has its own uniqueness which sets it apart from other countries. Religiously, Oman shares features with other Arab states that affect democratic development across the Middle East: all three Abrahamic religions emerged in the Arab region, but the dominance of Islam (which stipulates that sovereignty belongs to God and not to people) has ensured that political behaviour has never been fully separated from religious injunction. Political Islam has its own *Shura* principle, one that affords people some level of participation, although there is no shared vision between different Islamic sects as to how to articulate this principle in practice.

In terms of its social structure, Oman is well known for the vertical divisions it shares with the rest of the Arab world, which are mainly formed on the basis of ethnicity, sectarianism and tribalism. People are socially divided according to these vertical divisions, which play the role of prioritising loyalties. A major political problem is that most Arab states contain some or all of these divisions and subdivisions.[49]

But whilst Oman shares these features with the other Arab states in relation to democratisation processes, it also remains unique and somewhat at an advantage. There are two main differences: (1) the distinct religious and cultural tradition of the *Ibadi* sect and (2) a concomitantly different political history which includes a *traditional* participatory system. This difference has implications both for the behaviour of its people and for its political culture. Religiously, Oman is the only Arab country which embraces the *Ibadi* form of Islam, and this sect is the only one which believes that *Shura* in Islam is a practical principle which can incorporate a traditional participatory ruling system; other sects believe that it is only a consultative principle and cannot go beyond this remit. The *Ibadi* sect allows more flexibility and adaptability in terms of the practice of *Shura* in an executive form. The extent to which this flexibility can generate bottom-up approaches towards participation or else is limited to top-down approaches towards democratisation forms the focus of the forthcoming chapters.

Oman has practised *Shura* (traditional political participation) for more than ten centuries. This practice has helped mould the tribal social fabric to serve a political participatory practice; as such, tribalism in Oman should not be seen as necessarily anti-democratic. Moreover, Oman has been gradually implementing a participatory process since the 1970; this implementation has involved the Royal Annual Tour and the establishment of different councils. Oman is now witnessing a new participatory process that judiciously mixes the traditional *Shura* and the concepts of modern democracy. This has enabled ordinary people to vote for the first time in Omani history from 1991 onwards. This is a new form of popular participation for the Omani people, which has been enforced gradually from the top down, whereas in the past only elites and notables were able to participate in decision

making. These newly introduced elements of the participatory process seem to be going well, especially given the fact that many diverse groups in society, among them the followers of the religious institutions and different tribes, are participants in the process.

The Basic Statute of the State

An examination of the Omani Basic Statute of the State (BSS), especially the articles relating to the political, economic and judicial aspects, is necessary for any significant critical analysis of the relationship between the state, religion and democracy. For the assertion of the *Ibadi* principle of *Shura*, article 9 of the Basic Statute of the State (BSS) stipulates that 'Rule in the Sultanate shall be based on justice, *Shura* and equality. The citizens have the right – in accordance with this Basic Statute and the conditions and provisions stipulated by the Law – to participate in public affairs'.[50]

It is clear that *Shura* is regarded as one of the state's premier political values. To fulfil article 9 of the BSS, Oman adopted the system of having two parliamentary chambers, which are the *Majlis Al-Dawlah* (the State Council) and the *Majlis Al-Shura* (the *Shura* Council). Both councils form together a bigger entity called *Majlis* Oman (the Council of Oman). The bureaus of both councils meet together once or twice a year, and both of them meet occasionally also with the Council of the Ministers.

Economically, the BSS, in article number 11, determines economic policy. The article states that 'the national economy is based on justice and the principles of free economy. Its essence is the constructive and fruitful co-operation between public and private activity. Its objective is the achievement of economic and social development in order to increase production and raise the standard of living of the citizens according to the State's general plan and within the limits of the Law. Freedom of economic activity is guaranteed within the limits of the Law and the public interest in a manner that will ensure the well-being of national economy'.

The BSS has also consolidated justice and equality for the citizens in several articles which are significant in any popular political

process. Article 12 states that 'justice, equality, and equality of opportunities for Omanis are the pillars of the society and are guaranteed by the State'. Article 17 asserts that 'all citizens are equal before the Law and share the same public rights and duties. There is no discrimination between them on the ground of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile, or social status'. Article 59 affirms the supremacy of the law by stating that 'the supremacy of the Law shall be the basis of governance in the State. The dignity, integrity and impartiality of the judges are guaranteed for the preservation of rights and freedoms', and articles 60 and 61 confirm the independence of the judiciary and the freedoms given to judges:

Article 60: 'The judiciary is independent and its functions are exercised by the different types and grades of courts which issue judgments in accordance with the Law'.

Article 61: 'Judges are subject only to the Law and cannot be removed except in cases determined by the Law. No party can interfere in law suits or matters of justice, such interference shall be considered a crime punishable by law. The Law shall determine prerequisites to be fulfilled by whomever exercises judicial functions, the conditions and procedures for appointing, transferring and promoting judges, the guarantees accorded to them, the cases where they cannot be removed from office and all other relevant provisions'.

It is clear that the Basic Statute of the State has set down solid ground for a genuine participatory political process in the country, and *Shura* is seen as a prime political value and championed by the state. What is also clear is that a strong civil society is concomitantly needed to practise it in a proper manner and develop it over time.

It is worth noting that no diagrammatic illustration of the structure of the current Omani government can currently be found either in the literature or in government publications. As it is essential to show the position of the Council of Oman in comparison with other government entities, Figure 3.3 represents my attempt to provide a systematic view of the whole governing structure (whilst not charting the kinds of authorities given to the Council of Oman, which are explained in Figure 3.4).

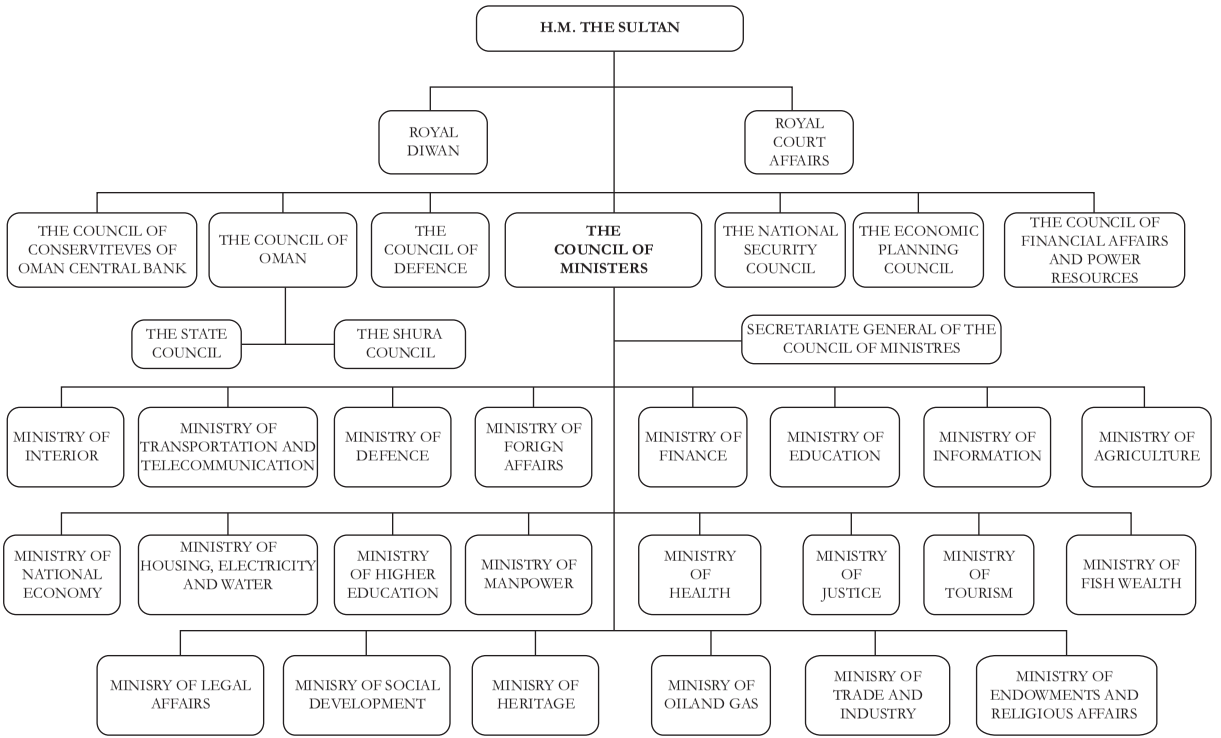

Figure 3.3. The Omani Government Structure

Majlis Oman (Council of Oman)

The overarching dome of *Majlis* Oman consists of *Majlis Al-Dawlah* (State Council), which acts as an upper chamber, and *Majlis Al-Shura* (*Shura* Council). The Council of Oman meets once a year under His Majesty the Sultan in the presence of the Royal Family members, the Council of Ministers' members, the military and security leaders, the state and consultative councils' members, and the foreign ambassadors in Oman. The Sultan and occasionally also the chairmen of the state and the consultative councils give addresses which are regarded as setting out plans for the coming period. Figure 3.4 illustrates the relationship between the three major political entities in the country. Until 2010 the initiatives and recommendations which come from the State Council and the *Shura* Council are not binding. They are left to the government, and the government alone decides whether to accept or reject them. By contrast, the decisions made by the government are binding although most of them are normally revised by the two

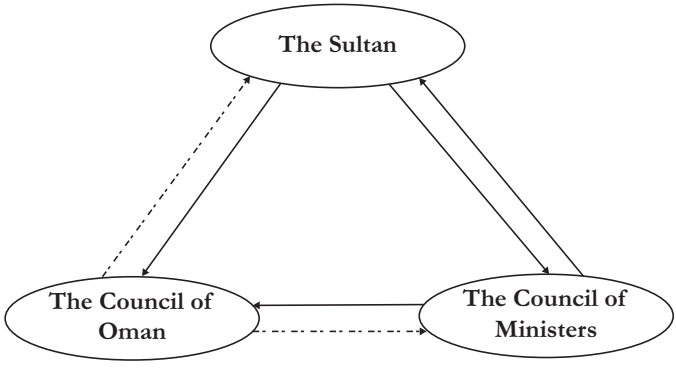

Figure 3.4. The Omani Government and *Majlis* Oman Authorities until 2010

councils before issuance. The situation has changed since 2011; most strategic policies and laws are now sent directly from the State Council to the Sultan for approval.

Majlis Al-Dawlah *(State Council)*

The State Council was established in 1997. Its chairman and members are appointed for a term of four years.[51] Its membership mainly comprises former ministers, undersecretaries, ambassadors, senior military and police officers, tribal leaders, dignitaries and academics. The objectives of the establishment of the State Council are to assist the government in implementing the overall development strategy, to contribute to maintaining the values and the heritage of Omani society and to help preserve the achievements of the country and uphold the principles of the Basic Statute of the State. The State Council, according to article 18 of the Royal Decree for its establishment, is responsible for the following:

- Preparing studies which contribute to the implementation of development plans and programmes and assisting in finding appropriate solutions to economic and social challenges.
- Submitting recommendations for encouraging investments in the production, services and resources development sectors.
- Conducting studies and submitting recommendations related to human resources development and the enhancement of the administrative efficiency of the state organs in order to meet national objectives;
- Reviewing draft laws before their promulgation, with the exception of some specific laws which necessitate referral directly to His Majesty the Sultan. The council also submits its recommendations on draft laws which are referred to it by the Council of the Ministers.
- Examining issues of national interest that are referred from His Majesty the Sultan of Oman or the Council of Ministers.

The State Council functions through the council's Bureau and the specialised committees. The Bureau comprises the State Council chairman, two deputies and four members who are elected via secret

ballot by the council in its first ordinary session of the term. It holds periodic meetings upon the invitation of the chairman. Emergency meetings can be called if and when necessary. Decisions of the Bureau are taken by a majority of members present. Government officials may also attend on invitations to discuss specific issues concerning their departments, entities and/or ministries. The following are the main functions of the Bureau:

- Drawing up plans and supervising the activities of the council and its committees, as well as providing assistance to members in carrying out their duties in a manner that ensures the smooth functioning of the council.
- Rendering assistance to the council's committees, approving regulations governing their conduct and coordinating their activities. The Bureau serves as the authority that proposes the formation of committees and submits these proposals to the council for approval during the first sitting of the session.
- Authorising committees to study specific issues, submit reports on findings and correlate recommendations. The Bureau, after receiving and studying such reports, may decide to submit the reports to the council for debate or take other measures it deems appropriate.

The State Council forms its permanent committees in the first sitting of its first session of the term. The Bureau proposes members of each committee at the first annual session of each term. The composition of the committees takes into account the specialisation and experiences of its candidates. The council, in accordance with its by-laws, may decide to form ad hoc committees to address specific issues. Such committees are dissolved on completion of allocated assignments or upon a decision issued by the council. Besides the permanent and ad hoc committees, the chairman may refer any subject to a joint committee for examination. The activities of the committees form the actual output of the council, since through their regular meetings, they conduct studies covering the various issues that are to be addressed. They submit findings in the form of a report, which includes sources, results, and

recommendations. At the beginning of each annual session, each committee proposes a list of topics that fall under its remit which require examination. The State Council had five permanent committees until 2010:

- The Legal Committee
- The Economic Committee
- The Social Committee
- The Human Resources Development Committee
- The Committee for the Follow-up of the Implementation of Development Plans

The State Council, through its different committees, has reviewed and studied draft laws since its establishment in 1998 up to February 2008 (see Appendix 4).[52]

Majlis Al-Shura (Shura Council)

In 1991 His Majesty Sultan Qaboos established the *Shura* Council, a 60 member body representing the 59 Omani districts in addition to the chairman.[53] The *Shura* Council superseded the appointed 55 member State Consultative Council (*Majlis Al-Istishari Li-Dawlah*), which had been created in 1981 and offered significant regional and popular, as well as official, representation.

Following the first national census in Oman in 1993, it was decided that districts with populations not exceeding 30,000 would be represented by 2 members. This step added more than 20 members to the council. The process of electing the members has developed gradually. The increase in the number of members from 59 in 1991 to 83 in 2007 is expected to rise even further in the future due to the rise in the Omani population. In addition, the government no longer involves itself in the selection of 1 of the 2 members elected by the people in each district, nor in the selection of 2 of the 4 in the districts whose populations exceed 30,000. The whole election process has in fact become direct and free; from the second term in 1994, women were allowed to stand for election first in the capital area and later on in all districts.

In addition to having financial rights, all members of the council possess parliamentary immunity, and they can express themselves freely and have the right to question the government members when they are invited to speak by the council.

The *Shura* Council functions through the council's Bureau, the council's Office, specialised committees, and the Secretariat General. The Bureau is comprised of the *Shura* Council chairman and two deputies who are elected by secret ballot by the council in its first ordinary session of the term. The main functions of the Bureau involve:

- Preparing the annual reports for His Majesty the Sultan and other reports for the Sultan or for the Council of Ministers.
- Supervising the annual financial budgetary.
- Calling any or all of the specialised committees to ratify their reports.
- Inviting the ministers to the council and announcing the issues that the council members would like to raise.
- Presenting the suggestions raised by any member of the Council in front of the council members if they are found to be suitable.
- Calling the council to ratification and controlling its sessions.

The council's Office comprises the *Shura* Council chairman, two deputies and six members who are elected by secret ballot by the council in its first ordinary session of the term. The main functions of the Office involve:

- Drawing up plans and supervising the activities of the council and its committees, as well as providing assistance to members in the carrying out of their duties in a manner which ensures the smooth functioning of the council.
- Offering assistance to the council's committees, approving regulations governing their conduct and coordinating their activities. (The Office serves as the authority which proposes the formation of committees and submits these proposals to the council for approval during the first sitting of the session.)

- Authorising committees to study specific issues, submit reports of their findings and correlate recommendations.

The Bureau, after receiving and studying such reports, may decide to submit the reports to the council for debate or take other measures it deems to be appropriate. The *Shura* Council had five permanent committees until 2010:

- The Legal Committee
- The Economic Committee
- The Health and Social Committee
- The Education and Culture Committee
- The Committee for the Services and the Development of the Local Communities

As is the case in the State Council, the *Shura* Council may also decide to form ad hoc committees designed to address specific issues; such committees are dissolved upon the completion of allocated assignments or upon a decision issued by the council. The council also has the right to form other permanent committees when necessary; for example, in 1992 the council formed two new committees – the Wording Committee and the Sessions' Assessment Committee. During the second term the council formed two other committees – the Assessment and Follow-up Committee and the Environment and Human Resources Development Committee.

The *Shura* Council's committees are regarded as the real element through which the council makes use of its authorities. The awareness of the committees regarding the authority they possess allows them to conduct in-depth studies, and they benefit from the power given to them to follow up any matter and meet any persons who may help in the completion of their job. The reports of the committees are discussed in the council, and if they are found to be satisfactory, the chairman sends them to the Sultan.

Beside the plethora of checks and balances which guarantee the independence of the council – among them the financial and administrative independence, the full time membership of the members, the parliamentary immunity – and the freedom of expression for members

– the Royal Decree for the establishment of the *Shura* Council determined the authorities given to the Council, which are:

- The capacity to review the economic and social bills which are initiated by the ministries before their final submission.
- The right to define what the council deems to be suitable for the improvement of the current economic and social laws in the Sultanate.

These authorities are better than those granted to the previous appointed State Consultative council during the 1980s, which was only assigned to offer opinions (not to revise or initiate new ideas) of the economic and social laws/bills which were initiated by the government ministries. Having benefited from those authorities, the council revised the draft laws as shown in Appendix 5.

The *Shura* Council also participates via the offering of opinions in terms of the issues directed by His Majesty the Sultan and/or the government. Most importantly, the council plays a significant role in the preparation of the five-year development plan and in the preparation of the national budget of the Sultanate. The council also practises its duties via calling upon government ministers to discuss certain issues. Examples of these invitations are shown in Appendix 6. In addition to the achievements mentioned above, the council also studied and sent reports to the government regarding the different issues shown in Appendix 7.

From the detailed illustration above it should be clear that the *Shura* Council has been given a genuine power with which to practise its duties efficiently. The government has responded to almost all the issues initiated and/or studied by the council.

The Electoral Principle and the Electoral Committees

The Omani *Shura* experiment is profoundly distinguished by its gradual expansion in terms of political participation and the authorities granted to the people. After the appointment of the members of the State Consultative Council in the 1980s, the *Shura* Council began

in 1991 to have 'semi-elected members', whereby the people of each district elected two candidates and the government selected one of the two. Participation was not open to all citizens in the 1991 elections, but invitations to vote were sent through the *Walis* (local governors), to the tribal leaders, dignities, and to some graduates. Military personnel were excluded. Some women were allowed to participate in the elections as voters but not as candidates. In the 1994 elections, yet more citizens were allowed to participate, and women from the capital area were allowed to run for a seat. This reflects the policy of gradualism, as rural areas are regarded as not being ready to accept women candidates running for a seat. Since 2002 participation has been expanded quantitatively and qualitatively. For the first time in Omani history, in 2002 all citizens over 21 years of age were allowed to vote. The number of male voters thus increased from 9,500 in 1991 to 822,000 in 2002. The government did not interfere in the election process, and as Oman follows a pluralist system, whoever acquires the highest number of votes therefore represents the people, and the results are announced directly from the voting stations on the same day. The whole election process since then has been subjected to thorough judicial supervision. All restrictions on female participation across the whole of Oman have been rescinded.[54] There are different factors that variously underpin this process of gradualism: it could be a response to globalisation, a response to the changes in the region after the Gulf Wars or a response to the internal demographic and cultural transformations and urbanisation.

The government, represented by the Ministry of Interior, administers and regulates the election process via an announcement of the election date well in advance, by registering candidates' names, by explaining the election rules to candidates and voters, by setting up the different committees required for the election, by purposively informing people through the media committee about the significance of their participation – held to be both a political right and a national duty – and finally, by declaring the day of the election as a national holiday for those who wish to participate.

The election process passes through three main stages. The first stage includes the foundation of the electoral registry and the approval

of the list of voters for each district. It is stipulated that each voter should have inhabited his/her district since birth or be currently residing in the district. Each voter has the right to vote only in one electoral station. The second stage includes the sending of the applications of candidature membership to the Ministry of Interior, which in turn directs them to the Master Committee (discussed below). The Master Committee returns the names to the Ministry of Interior, excepting those candidates who have criminal histories. The third stage includes the election day and the announcement of the results. The voting time given on the election day lasts for 12 hours. The voting boxes are sealed at the same time over the whole country. The election boxes are carefully designed and have two locks; the head of the local election committee keeps the keys for one of them, and the head of the local sorting committee keeps the key for the other lock. The candidates attend the sorting process, and their names (at the end of the day) are organised into descending order. If two of them score the same number of votes, the sorting committee draws lots in front of them in order to announce the winner.

It is necessary to explain in detail the organisation of the elections, including an exploration of the different committees and their duties, in order to establish to what extent the whole process is genuine and reliable.

The Ministry of Interior forms one master committee headed by the Ministry of Interior's vice chancellor and includes others who are mainly judges and solicitors. The duties of the master committee include the supervision of the other *local* committees in the various districts, dealing with the different issues sent to it by the local committees, approving all candidatures and voter lists for all districts, making decisions regarding any unfairness claims sent by the candidates, deciding on the best means for making the election process clearly manageable and readily accessible and sending the voting results of all districts to the Minister of Interior for their announcement.[55]

Similarly, the Ministry of Interior forms local committees to ensure the smooth operation of the election. In each district there is one main committee and three subcommittees. The main committee is headed by the *Wali* (the local governor) and involves other members such as

a judge, the deputy *Wali* – and two heads of any government civil departments in the district. The duty of this main committee includes the conduction of the preparation required to make the election process successful. This includes the supervision of the three sub-committees, the organisation of the coordination between local citizens and the master committee in the Ministry of Interior, the distribution of the sorting results to the master committee – and the composition of a final report to the Ministry of Interior.

The other three sub committees are the organising committee, the voting committee and the sorting committee. The organising and voting committees are each headed by a member of the main committee. The sorting committee is headed by the judge member of the main committee. The organising committee is responsible for the preparation of the voting foyers, the control of the entrances and exits, the general maintenance of the voting station and its proper conduct and the distribution of the final report to the main committee. The voting committee is responsible for making sure that voting boxes are empty before the beginning of the election, submitting the voting forms to the voters, punching the voters' cards, signing and stamping the voting forms, and watching carefully over the process of the insertion of the voting forms in the boxes, the sealing of the voting boxes by the end of the day and the distribution of a final report to the main committee. The sorting committee is responsible for sorting and counting the votes and preparing a detailed report on the results.

The Annual Royal Tour

As mentioned briefly above, His Majesty initiated (during the 1970s) a unique form of political participation, in which HM and most of his government members move from the capital area to the various Omani governorates. This has become known as the Annual Royal Tour. The Sultan meets up with tribal leaders and dignitaries in order to discuss their needs and listen to their suggestions regarding matters related to their local areas or even to larger-scale national affairs. The ministers move around the towns and villages to listen to the different

needs of the citizens. Accordingly, prior to the end of the tour, the Sultan announces the different development projects which have been identified during the consultative process of the tour.[56]

This tour is – at least locally – regarded as a form of direct democracy; locally, people call this tour the 'Omani casual parliament'. It is also regarded as a unique form of leadership which serves to strengthen the national unity between the Sultan and the citizens; during the meetings between the Sultan and the citizens, they engage in unprompted and direct dialogue. Constructive criticism is encouraged, and the Sultan listens to his peoples' ambitions and sufferings and concomitantly conveys his directives to the government members and to the citizens. The Annual Royal Tour thus has the following characteristics:[57]

- The physical taking of the ruling regime with its different sectors and highest power directly to the citizens in their local areas.
- The provision of casual and direct meeting between the Sultan and the citizens.
- The thorough discussion of the country's general policies and exploration of development issues jointly by the government and its citizens.
- The development of these issues through casual questionnaires which lead to the re-prioritisation of national plans.

Different national symposia have been held alongside the royal tours, designed to discuss other specifically significant issues. For example, in 2001, 2003 and 2005, symposia were held to discuss finding suitable employment vacancies for the national human resources; this resulted in a fully resourced initiative known as the '*Sanad* Project' which has succeeded in finding jobs for the majority of unemployed Omanis. During the 2009 tour another symposium was held to explore the empowerment of Omani women in this male-dominated culture. As a result, many recommendations were approved by the Sultan which strengthened the status of women, including their right to access government housing land. A more general outcome was visible encouragement to include women in every aspect of life and

specifically establishing women's rights to be returned as representatives in the *Shura* Council.

Through sensing the people's needs, the Sultan conveys his directives to the government ministers urgently to execute particular development projects such as those concerned with electricity, water, education, health services, housing and road paving. The daily tour of the ministers provides a follow-up of the projects under construction and involves meetings with citizens. It strengthens the national 'fabric' and manifestly 'grounds' a sense of social cohesion and national unity. In addition, it offers a model to other government agencies and agents in their quotidian dealings with citizens of how to carry out their duties properly, promptly and effectively.[58]

Conclusion

As has been discussed above, the nature of the Omani social fabric is tribal and full of tensions in relation to democratisation processes and ambitions. Whilst the majority of the Arab tribes are divided into two main blocks, the Qahtani and Adnani, tribalism does not depend on blood ties only but also on tribal alliances (*Shaff*) and political coalitions. Throughout Omani history, the relationship between both tribal blocks has witnessed times of harmony, when the Qahtani tribes ruled the country and the Adnani remained the policy makers, through the dominance of *Majlis Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*. However, when this relationship was violated by either of the two parties, the results included massacres, tribal wars and foreign invasions. Tribes have remained in competition with each other and have fought against the centralisation of power in their own interests. This is why Omani history has not witnessed times of sustained security, order and prosperity other than when the state possessed strong armed forces in order to enforce law and order and focus on issues of prosperity. With this in mind, since 1970 the Omani government has started to encourage loyalty to an Omani national identity which takes priority over and above all other loyalties, including loyalty to the tribe. It has used oil revenues to centralise power until it reached a certain stage of stability, and thenceforth the social transformation process reached an acceptable level, and

the government began to decentralise power, partly by allowing some sort of political participation, which has been extended gradually in proportion to advancement in terms of social transformation.

The performance of the Omani government, according to the data presented above, seems reasonable and relatively successful in the context of the country's economic capacity: the judiciary and the popular voting system are clear and well organised; the relationship between the government and the people, whether in terms of the Annual Royal Tour or the national election, seems to be good; and the State and the *Shura* Councils are doing genuine and functional jobs. They have most certainly been given some significant measure of authority, and they are using it prudently and effectively. The political reform process has built up gradually since 1970 until the present time, and it is expected to continue to build up in the future. There are no articles in the Basic Statute of the State which prevent the formation of political parties. Parties might be formed in the future if they can be shown to enhance political reforms. However, with the increasing number of graduates and an anticipated depressed economic performance, the younger generation in particular may not accept the current level of political reform nor the way in which it is developing; they may push for wider penetration in terms of political participation.

The economic performance of Oman is also at an acceptable level given the available resources. Oil still contributes the highest share of the national income. Diversification plans are being implemented, but other industries still fail to compete with the oil share in terms of the national income. The economic growth level appears to be slower than population growth and cultural development. This problem is especially pertinent as oil reserves are declining and are expected to start running out in about two decades. At the same time, the population has dramatically increased, and the number of graduates is increasing, leading to political pressure from the younger generation. It is supported not only by the improving levels of education but also by the urbanisation process and the different facets of globalisation. As a result, a bottom-up democratisation model is slowly emerging, challenging the contemporary top-down model and pushing for more political reforms.

CHAPTER 4

THE 'TOP-DOWN' MODEL: CHALLENGES TO ITS SUCCESS

Reasons for Adopting the Political Process from the Top

There is no doubt that there are major questions regarding the motives that have prompted the government in the Sultanate of Oman to adopt this process from the top down: chiefly, the extent to which this approach is significantly affected by economic variables, especially oil revenues, and the impact of social variables such as tribal fanaticism, education and culture. The following sections highlight respondents' views on each of these issues.

The *Shura*, with a historical form that largely restricts political participation by religious intellectuals and tribal notables, may not be suitable for application in the modern-day era without modification to reflect the ongoing overall development in the country. Sultan Qaboos promised from the early days of his rule that his people would have a role in governing the country, as is evident in his speeches. For example, in 1971 the Sultan said, 'We shall strive hard to establish just, democratic rule in our country within the framework of our Omani Arabs' reality, the customs and traditions of our community, and the teachings of Islam – which always light our path'.[1]

The government took the initiative to dictate change in the political process from the top and opened the political horizon gradually

in a phased manner that can be traced clearly every ten years. The country has chosen the Islamic *Shura* as the political process in Oman. As GR6 (6 February 2009) said:

> There was a clear desire for public participation in the political process in Oman not to be like the experiences of other countries. There was deep research into the mechanisms of participation and there was deep research conducted in order to find suitable criteria.

The different political systems that ruled Oman throughout history are all Islamic and *Ibadist*. These systems all believed in the principle of *Shura* and applied it, but in different forms as proportionate with the type of rule. This, in addition to the fact that Oman is the only known Islamic state that has applied the political *Shura* practically for twelve centuries, renders the alienation of this ancient legacy by any newer political system impossible. This is because the Omani people would be expected to reject any alternative system to the *Shura*, which is seen as the cornerstone of the legitimacy and authority of the state.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the surrounding area was populated with different ideologies, where many systems of rule had been changed through military coups, from monarchies to republics. Some Arab states had adopted variants of socialism, others republicanism. It was therefore necessary for the political leadership in Oman to balance these factors in order to maintain the legitimacy of the current ruling system.

In the process of redrafting the Islamic *Shura* in Oman, the leadership adopted some of the foundations of modern democracy, such as elections and parliamentary institutions. This was made possible by the existence of commonalities between *Shura* as a principle and the essence of democratic process – commonalities such as the election of a people, the foundations of justice, and concepts of equality and human rights. Arguably, this was aimed at presenting *Shura* as a model which accords with some of the recent democratic principles whilst at the same time preserving the values of the society.

The semi-structured interviews demonstrated that the government has clearly decided to dictate change in the political process from the

top down for the following reasons: the historical legacy of the *Shura* in Oman, the growing number of graduates, urbanisation and globalisation. The following sections present an analysis of the views of the government representatives, in terms of the rationale behind the Sultanate's adoption of the political process of *Shura* from the top down.

The Role of the Historical Legacy

Oman has had a unique experience of *Shura* throughout its idiosyncratic history, which has been implemented at both a political and a socio-cultural level. At the time of the re-construction of the modern nation state in the 1970s, the political process in the country drew limited international attention in terms of development and modernisation. The *Shura* had been selected as a political approach in Oman, as it constituted an important element in the political legitimacy of the ruling system and because of its long history in Omani traditional manners of organising governance. This was of particular importance as the ruling system was, at the time of the building of the modern state, facing challenges from the followers of the Imamate and the rebellions in Dhofar, as well as those of ordinary people who were influenced by certain political trends in the Arab world, particularly Arab nationalism and quasi-Marxist ideologies.

Most of the respondents agreed that the contemporary *Shura* process in Oman had been chosen because it derived from the political history of the country. For example, GR4 (28 February 2009) and GR5 (15 March 2009) said that '*Shura* in the present is an extension of the *Shura* in the past', while GR6 (6 February 2009) said, 'It links the past to the present as the present *Shura* practice is taken from the old *Shura* practice. This link helps people to accept the idea'. This supports the claim that *Shura* was an appropriate choice for the government in seeking to silence any voices that may have called into question the legitimacy of the ruling system if another political system had been adopted, especially if such a system had contradicted the historical identity of the Omani society.

Some respondents put forth further justifications for the choice of the Islamic *Shura*. For example, GR8 (4 January 2009) described *Shura*

as a historical approach: '*Shura* is an approach that Omani people have lived with throughout their deep history'. GR9 (23 March 2009) identified it as an old social and tribal legislation: '*Shura* in the Omani society is not a new thing; it was existent since before (the new state system) as a social and tribal legislation'. GR5 (15 March 2009) said, 'Oman has succeeded in implementing the *Shura* more than other countries, maybe because its historical importance in Oman makes it politically and socially viable'. If it can be claimed that, as an approach, the *Shura* is viewed as both a legislative and a historical experience, there is no doubt that to a large extent it represents the very identity of the society and ensures the legitimacy of any ruling system in the country. GR1 (24 February 2009) clearly asserts this view:

> *Shura* is not limited to Islamic regimes only, or to the modern theories of democracy that restrict the authorities of the government or country, '*Shura*' is deeper in meaning, more comprehensive in practice and further in aims and ends. The country gets power, unity and system from it. The society gets from '*Shura*' its solidarity, symbiosis and collaboration.

Some respondents spoke more explicitly of the link between the *Shura* and Islam. This connection is important as it undermines the religious radicals who may challenge the legitimacy of the ruling regime under the pretext that the contemporary *Shura* violates the *Shari'a* law. For example, GR7 (31 March 2009) said, '*Shura* has historical roots in Oman. It has started since Oman entered Islam and continued throughout Omani history. This practice rooted the idea of *Shura* in the thought, abstract conceptualisations and ambitions of the Omani society'.

These key terms 'roots', 'practice', 'thought', 'conceptualisation' and 'ambitions' demonstrate near certainty that the *Shura* as a political system is more appropriate for Oman than any other political system, because the tradition of the *Shura* means identity, stability and a symbol of dignity for the Omani people. It is the primary source of the identity of Omani society. Furthermore, in selecting the *Shura*, the legitimate government avoids potential clashes with religious

intellectuals who are still regarded and frequently function as significant social leaders.

Some respondents spoke of the important link between the Al-Busaidi ruling family and the religious legitimacy of the *Shura*, as the family always and explicitly maintained their identity with their faith. For example, GR1 (24 February 2009) said:

> The extended *Shura* practice in Oman appears in the different aspects of life and in different levels of the social network of Oman, including in the Royal Family itself, and the Royal Family does not deviate from this rule in the process of choice. The Basic Statute of the State has come to be a stabiliser of this principle.

Some of the Sultans were also called Imams or the sons of the Imams, whilst others were seen wearing the traditional white turban that is normally used by religious leaders and Imams. Some Sultans, in their Royal seal, have named themselves *Al Wathiq Be Amr Allah* (the confident in God's will). For example, GR6 (6 February 2009) said:

> The Al-Busaidi Sultans were able to distinguish between the religious dimension and the civilian dimension of their rule while staying close to the two dimensions at the same time. For example, Sultan Said bin Sultan used the title Imam/Sultan together in his written decisions. The other sultans used the title 'the confident in God's will' to legitimate their rule on religious lines. The former Sultan, Said bin Taymur, was wearing the religious personality sometimes, especially after Jebel Akhdar War. He held religious rituals in his palace and frequently wore a white turban to exhibit the religious dimension of his rule.

Other respondents explained the philosophy that underpins Article 6 in the Basic Statute of the State. This statute attributes the role of determining the new successor to the throne to the ruling family. If they do not agree on the choice of the successor to the throne, the Defence Council will confirm the appointment of the person designated by the

Sultan, in his letter to the ruling family council. For example, GR6 (6 February 2009) claimed that the Omani legislation in this regard reflects general Islamic political practice as the rightly guided Caliphs did the same thing when they prioritised certain names but left the actual choice to the nation which has sovereignty in this matter. He added that, 'the hereditary system generally provides a sort of stability. If there are multiple options but an absence of social channels and a framework that allows the circulation of power peacefully, this can lead to societal break up and destruction'. His point is that in tribal societies hereditary rules may provide stability more effectively than democratic ones.

Some respondents spoke about the process of the modernisation of the *Shura*, which accords with the overall codification of Islamic jurisprudence. Judges do not, however, depend on jurisprudence texts other than those of civil law, though the two are clearly closely related. The result of this is that despite the fact that Oman is an Islamic country, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism do not in themselves affect governance. The modernisation of *Shura* is essential to satisfying the desires of non-religious people in Oman, such as the rebels in Dhofar and the less religiously motivated followers of Arab political trends. For example, GR1 (24 February 2009) said:

> Our embrace of the march of *Shura* presently springs from the success of the process of turning this deep-rooted heritage and extended practice into an up-to-date civilised behaviour. This behaviour takes from the past its originality and from the present its benefits.

In summary, respondents stressed the point that the *Shura* stems from the depths of Omani history, and they asserted that this was the main rationale behind the government's selection of it as a political basis for the modern state system. This historical relevance of the *Shura* makes it possible for people to accept, adhere to, and interact with the contemporary *Shura* process, and it facilitates attempts to make it more successful as a democratisation institution in the future. Most importantly, the adoption of *Shura* did not provoke the social resistance that

was feared might have occurred had another, more culturally alien system, been adopted. Thus Islamic *Shura* has been modified to accord with the wider ongoing development in the country, and particularly with development in education and literacy levels. This is evident in the following section.

The Role of Education and Culture

As has been mentioned above, the few Omani people who had studied prior to 1970 in neighbouring countries encountered ideologies that were common currency across the Arab world. They posed a challenge to the legitimate ruling system because they regarded it as authoritarian, and argued for its substitution by another, such as a republican, one-party system. At the time, those educated people represented a minority, but they sought to extend their base through the educational institutions in which they occupied a large number of professional positions. The government realised this and began to adopt a pluralist approach, declaring this openly to the citizenry. This declaration, as well as the swift developments that were initiated in the various public sectors, served to weaken and placate the challenging forces at that time. However, the situation was problematic for the state-building process, in particular with regard to the political reconstruction of Omani society. It would have been difficult to ask poorly educated people, who formed the majority of the whole population at that time, to participate in any modern political process, as their political awareness and culture was not refined by modern education and their illiteracy and lack of political sophistication was likely to hinder them in their ability to work within the structures of modern political processes. That situation should be contrasted with the position of those who studied in regular schools and benefited from the curriculum in terms of the organisation of ideas and in the expansion of their understanding. Political participation of a democratic kind is particularly difficult if such people are unacquainted with modern political processes, and if such processes contradict their inherited traditions.

This may explain why the political process quite deliberately began with the Annual Royal Tours as participation in those tours did not

require a high level of education. A decade on, as the quality and quantity of education had evidently improved, the government fulfilled its earlier promise to open up the political horizon, and the process of the institutionalisation of the *Shura* began with the construction of the appointed State Consultative Council (*Majlis Al-Istishari lid-Dawlah*). It was preceded by the establishment of *Majlis Al-Zira'a Wal-Asmak Was-Sina'a* (The Council of Agriculture, Fish and Industry). The brief of the latter was limited to discussion of policies related to those three sources of living for the Omani people throughout history. The powers given to the former were wider and covered most issues related to development policies. Nevertheless, the authorities given to both councils remained essentially consultative.

The subsequent ten years saw the establishment of the elected council and further improvements in education. This was supplemented by the gradual return of the cohorts of students who had studied abroad, and the Sultan Qaboos University, established in 1986, saw the graduation of its first students. The elected *Shura* Council is still taking gradual steps in broadening political participation in accordance with the levels of education and the culture of the community.

This link between education and the gradualism of political process may appear strange to observers outside of the immediate context, but closer observers of the process of social transformation in Oman found that most of the population were in fact illiterate in the 1960s. When the building of a modern state began in the 1970s and with it a modern education system, it became necessary to fill vacancies in the public service with the personnel bearing qualifications that were now available in the labour market. For example, the primary certificate (Class 6) was sufficient for a citizen to obtain an officer rank in the army during the 1970s. After the expansion of education, a secondary school certificate became the standard, whereas now a university degree is required. This gradual development in education applies to everything in Oman and affects everything, including the political process. For example, GR1 (24 February 2009) said that 'education is used purposively to embrace the process of development in the country in general, and when the general level of education was significantly improved, appropriate qualification became a requirement

to complete the process of building a political system that could boast sophisticated judicial, executive and legislative authorities'.

The question arises as to why education in particular has this influence upon the political process and what level of education is and was intended. Apart from the limited challenges of those citizens who returned from study abroad before 1970, educated citizens are now to be viewed as better able to think systematically and less influenced by tribal fanaticism and hence may be expected to push the political process forward. This reflects a view that tribal fanaticism had previously played a role in the outbreak of internal wars and had manifested this sort of negative influence for several centuries. This education imperative is particularly relevant as those who studied in Western countries gained the insight of other more pluralist cultures, acquired social skills and obtained postgraduate qualifications.

The interview data reveals that many of the respondents focused on the importance of education in the consolidation of the modern *Shura*. This suggests that education is one of the reasons which served to reinforce the adoption of the political process by the government from the top during the early days of renaissance. GR10 (8 March 2009) said, 'Political change was unavoidable as there has been a development among Omani people in education and culture'. GR10 used the word 'unavoidable', which suggests that the government had no choice other than to open the political horizon for the participation of citizens, as graduates were challenging the political system and their number was expected to rise dramatically. It was also anticipated that they would become aware of their duties and rights. This is exactly what GR7 (31 March 2009) expected: 'The democratic process is related to the cultural and cognitive accumulation in the society; the greater the number of educated people, the more they feel the necessity of their having a role in decision making on the level of the district, region or country'.

The phrase 'they feel' used by GR7 seems to have been referring to the graduates, but it may be that he meant 'the government feels'. This assertion is given weight by the fact that elsewhere he has exhibited frustration regarding the non-legislative power given to the *Shura* Council. The implication of this is that the government feels the necessity for opening up the political horizon when educational levels

expand in society. (It is possible that he may have refrained from phrasing it in this manner in order to avoid an accusation of criticising the government's performance).

Some respondents offered justifications for the delay in opening up the political horizon despite the government's promises to the citizens in the early days of the contemporary *Shura*. For example, GR9 (23 March 2009) said, 'For the *Shura* at present, it was impossible to go directly into its new institutional form. There were priorities such as expanding education and lifting up the citizens' standard of living'. Here GR9 is saying that the government's slow progress in the *Shura* application was in order to allow an 'umbrella of education' to prevail in the country. Whilst this does not deny a view of the inflated argument of the influence of educated people on the government at the beginning of their adoption of a pluralist political system, it is a reminder of the perceived difficulty of opening up the political system whilst the majority of citizens are uneducated.

What can be gathered from the respondents' views above is that the government's embracing of the political process from the top down can be traced to the beginning of the renaissance in the 1970s, when citizens educated in some neighbouring countries before the 1960s and 1970s formed a challenge to the government. This could be seen as one of the reasons that prompted the government to open the political horizon in the first instance, but it is certain that the development of political process later became a strategic concomitant with the development of the level of education. In other words, the citizenry's progress at educational and cultural levels played a vital role in the process of opening up the political horizon. Such expansion in education has of course been reflected in wider urbanisation and globalisation processes from the 1990s onwards, not least in the enhancement of social mobility.

The Role of Globalisation

There is a great deal of debate about the impact of globalisation on the political regimes in the Middle East. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, some scholars consider that it has contributed to the process

of social mobility from the 1990s onward, thereby leading to pressure on the governments to carry out political reforms. Others feel that the political reforms in some Arabian Gulf States come from governments which are lacking in policies conducive to real social mobility. What is happening in the contemporary *Shura* process in Oman is not much different from what has appeared in this debate, although there is no academic study in particular which discusses the relationship between globalisation and the *Shura*. This being the case, a decision was made in the design of the study to introduce a question on the impact of globalisation on the current political process in Oman. It should be noted that all interviewees seemed to be aware of the meaning of globalisation, as they answered the question without asking for further clarification. Having said this, their responses tend to concentrate on the political, legal and social sides of globalisation rather than commercial aspects. This is probably because the main theme of the interviews focuses on the political process in Oman and has nothing to do with the new global trade system.

There were differing views on globalisation and its impact on the political scene in the Sultanate. Few respondents were of the opinion that it has had a direct impact on the political scene, whereas some felt that it was only effective in certain aspects of this arena, such as in the international organisations and conventions that the country has been involved with during the last two decades. Other respondents linked globalisation to the satellite channels and the internet. Finally, there are those who felt that the Sultanate's tolerance and open approach to the world throughout history have reduced the effect of globalisation. GR1 (24 February 2009) began by arguing that globalisation does not contradict Islam, and he supported this claim with a Quranic verse that calls for this sort of opening up: 'This is the law of life that has been emphasised by the Quranic verse: "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another"'.

As an attempt to reduce the significance of the influence of globalisation on the political process in Oman, GR1 (24 February 2009) said:

> Globalisation as a term may be new, but its different applications were always there and were practiced by countries and

> communities across different periods of history, although never at the same level that we see nowadays because of the great progress in the means of transportation and communication.

GR1's admission that the effects of globalisation have increased in the contemporary era suggests that it has an influence on the political scene in Oman. However GR1, arguing for a reduced actual influence of globalisation, says that Oman's external relations are more than an attempt to accrue short-term benefits. Rather, with its history of trading relations with much of Africa and the Middle East and underpinned by its strategic position in the Gulf region, Oman has always embraced new principles and ideas if these in turn support the Omani people.

GR9 (23 March 2009) endorses GR1's argument with this statement: 'We in Oman have a society that has never lived in isolation. We are in fact integrating with the world'. The phrase 'never lived in isolation' demonstrates a firm belief that Oman is not radically challenged in any way by globalisation since it has never suffered from isolation, unlike some of its more immediate neighbours. The use of the word 'integrating', however, leaves no doubt that Oman is perceived as inevitably affected by globalisation but still able to manage itself in these circumstances.

Another example which confirms the ability of Omani society to adapt itself to globalisation came from GR6 (6 February 2009): 'I think that the Omani culture and the Omanis themselves are pragmatic, i.e. they do not insist on a certain culture or a certain political framework; their aim is to reach a certain benefit or result'. GR6 aimed here to explain that Omani people are able to adjust themselves to cultural changes because they are pragmatic and tolerant towards different cultures. The majority of the interviewees agreed that Oman, through globalisation, is affected by other nations and cultures but in turn also impacts on those others. GR9 described the positive impact of globalisation, arguing that Oman knows how to blend the benefits of globalisation with growing demands for equal rights, accountability and transparency. He added that globalisation is not forcefully imposed on states by external forces. He here concentrates on the influence

of globalisation on society but not the political system. The words 'not forcefully' indicate that the society does not see globalisation as a threat, a fact that leads to the acceptance of some of the democratic values, such as equality, accountability and transparency. The embracing of such values by the society could lead in turn to an influence on the political scene in the long run through an enhancement of the levels of social mobility.

Some respondents were confident that the benefits to be derived from globalisation are greater than the potential costs. For example, GR2 (18 March 2009) said, 'All efforts are being exerted so as to harvest the economic and scientific fruits of globalisation, while thwarting, and safeguarding against, its negative effects'. She is suggesting that the Sultanate has tried to maximize the positive aspects of globalisation and minimize the negative ones. The words 'harvest' and 'fruits' reflect the notion that there are positive aspects of globalisation in the eyes of some citizens. Additionally, GR2 feels that the negative effects of globalisation can be avoided.

As for the relationship between globalisation and the contemporary political process in Oman, most respondents agreed that there is no direct relation between the two. For example, GR8 (4 January 2009) said, 'Globalisation has an impact on economic, cultural and social issues and on the means of telecommunication', by which she means that there is no further direct impact on the political arena. This is clarified elsewhere; for example, when she said, 'I do not see any impact of the international or regional events on the Sultanate, as it does not obey foreign dictations'. The word 'dictations' implies that GR8 feels that some superpowers have hidden agendas that serve their interests and that they use globalisation in order to fulfil those agendas.

The majority of the respondents agreed that there is no direct relationship between the initiation of the contemporary *Shura* in Oman and globalisation, which indicates that globalisation is not perceived as a causal factor in the emergence of the *Shura*. GR6, for example, said, 'Much of the political literature and many researches that have been carried out connect the two things (political process and globalisation). I think there is no relation between them though they may accord in time'. GR6 (6 February 2009) also said,

> His Majesty started to separate the internal theatre from external effects slowly and carefully without any interference that may hinder this vision. Therefore, I do not think that there is a clear and direct connection [between globalisation and the Omani political arena].

Some respondents, in order to deny any role of globalisation in the contemporary political process in the country, related the political steps to internal needs. For example, GR10 (8 March 2009) said, 'The political change in Oman is not connected to Globalisation but to the societal needs with concomitant adherence to *mores* and traditions'. By this, he means that the political openness in the state is the result of the evolution of internal demand, part of the educational and cultural advance in the community, and not a result of external demand. GR3 (23 March 2009) also supported this argument: 'Globalisation affected many places, but much of the development that took place in Oman is not because of globalisation and external calls'. The word 'much' possibly means that there may exist some developments which may be results of globalisation, especially in the last two decades. For example, the modified labour law and the labour union that has been recently founded are part of the requirements of the signing of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA).[2] What supports this argument still further is GR7's claim: 'Globalisation may have speeded up some political steps in the development of the *Shura* work in the Sultanate'. The 'steps' to which he is referring are perhaps the participation of women in the political process, as part of the wider establishment of a universal franchise in the Sultanate.

Some respondents, however, believed that the contemporary social movements occurring in society in recent times are partially a result of globalisation – for example, through some TV channels, such as Al-Jazeera. This obviously refers to the change in the definition of sovereignty due to certain elements, such as the introduction of the media and the internet, which challenged the old definition of the state political borders and sovereignty. Most interviewees agreed that there is a significant impact, by mass media and the global technical revolution in information, on the Omani community, which is reflected variously in

the political situation in the country. GR8 and GR10 raised the issue of the range of influences which the media and the internet revolution have affected on the political scene. For example, GR8 (4 January 2009) said:

> The media and internet revolution has had a greater influence on the political life through the creation of larger spaces of freedom for the citizen who is the axis for producing knowledge and information. Without granting him all chances of freedom, equality, justice and learning opportunities, his creative participation in development cannot be ensured so as to ensure the development of democratic institutions.

GR10 (8 March 2009) also said, 'There is no doubt that these issues (the media and the internet) have an influence upon the society and a reflection on the political scene. We accept these influences and respond to them seriously and try to organise and legitimise them'.

It is evident that GR8 felt that this openness of access to information would mean a strengthening of civil society, which is required for the improvement of political practice. The words 'respond to them seriously'; used by GR10, who occupies an executive position in the government, convey something about the influence of the media and the internet revolution on the political scene. They may also reveal something of how the government responds to that influence. Also the word 'legitimise' suggests that new legislative measures have been issued in response to the influences of the mass media and the internet revolution.

GR9 (23 March 2009) had a different view on the influence of the media and the internet revolution on the political scene, positing that the openness of information has created a careless generation:

> What is really worrying is the young generation's ambitions became strange; some of them dream of being a football player and others want to be singers and there are only very few who want to be politicians. The influence of the media and the internet revolution is only effective upon a small portion of the society. This contradicts with our desire to create a strong civil society.

She was indirectly supported by GR1 when he argued that in an age defined by globalisation, Oman had to develop mechanisms which allowed access to information but without undermining the essence of '*Omanism*' that is respect for community and for others.

Here GR9 speculates that the proliferation of recreation channels has created a generation lacking in traditional motivation and argues that these channels are not a phenomenon which can be credited for the occurrence of social mobility. This would appear to suggest that the media and the internet revolution might not best serve the interests of social mobility which could have a positive effect on the political situation in the country. GR1 (24 February 2009), with regard to the abundance of depressing TV channels, said that Oman will not use the old ways of blacking out the media and that home and community bear responsibility for the upbringing of the new generation under these conditions. He suggests that the local information institutions should offer balanced programmes which compensate for some of the negative effects of many recreational television channels.

Some of the interviewees broached the subject of the effect of globalisation on legal matters and the links between globalisation and the Sultanate's allegiance to some international organisations. Specifically mentioned was the signing of the agreement with the WTO, and mention was made of some international conventions that have taken place in the last two decades. Perhaps of most importance is the Sultanate's accession to the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. This is because some articles of those conventions stipulate the development of some laws and the establishment of certain civil society organisations. For example, GR7 (31 March 2009) said:

> Today, you sign cultural, economic, security, political and commercial charters, and these countries ask you to adhere to certain criteria of globalisation and integration among societies. Countries undergo internal and external pressures to change their policies and apply the appropriate political and social models.

The words 'necessitates' and 'pressures' indicate the direct influence of the international organisations in Oman, which agrees with the

influence of those organisations on government policies (discussed in Chapter Two). However, in an attempt to minimize the significance of the pressures that take place due to the Sultanate's signing of international conventions, GR9 (23 March 2009) said:

> Some international agreements do not add anything to our policies, the country signs them as an accompaniment in order to keep the state in the international system. Furthermore, when we sign agreements we reserve some articles that conflict with our religion or traditions, so we take the best and leave the rest. We cannot implement the American pragmatism. The collective interest is more important for us than that of individualism.

The word 'accompaniment' indicates that not all steps expressed as intentions by the government in response to given international pressures are practised in reality. The state takes them to be in line with the global system, but it does not necessarily apply them, particularly if they are contrary to the prevailing religious mood and the dominant traditions. This is the very essence of the concept of the *Umma* – the 'nation', but in a particularly Islamic context – and if the elites have this attitude towards the very strengthening of the concepts of the *Umma* and the community, then the possibility of social transformation in accordance with the values of democratisation in Oman is brought into question. GR5 (15 March 2009) supported this argument: 'Some laws have been drafted to keep side by side to what happens in the world'.

To summarise, many of the interviewees minimize the impact of globalisation on the contemporary political process in Oman on the grounds that the Omani people, through their routine contact with neighbouring nations, are made conscious of their difference from others in the region. Others felt that globalisation has not played a significant role in furthering or initiating the process of opening up the political horizon, the process adopted by the government since the 1970s. It was claimed, however, that it had in fact brought about an acceleration of some political steps in the last two decades. More importantly, some of the interviewed elite emphasised the issue of how imperative is the adherence to the concepts of the *Umma* and

community, stating that globalisation will not make Omani society surrender these principles for the sake of democratic values.

Some respondents looked at the issue from the economic influence of globalisation through signing agreements with international organisations or superpowers. They felt that signing those agreements oblige the Sultanate to draft legislation as a response to those agreements. However, other respondents played down the effect that may result from signing those agreements by saying that the Sultanate only takes from them what is suitable for its essential nature and composition. Other respondents feared the influence of the satellite channels and internet on the new generation. Overall, the respondents believe that the political process in Oman is certainly not a result of globalisation or foreign dictates and point rather to belief in the indigenous political processes which may reduce challenges from the religious intellectuals and the young generation.

Traditional and Contemporary *Shura*: Similarities and Differences

After exploring the reasons that may have influenced the Omani government's decision to adopt the political process from the top down, respondents were asked about the relationship between *Shura* in the past and in the present. There was some variation in respondents' interpretation of the question. Some focused on the relationship between the two historical phenomena and argued that the recent is a natural extension of the old. Others went on, especially when faced with subquestion prompts, to talk about the similarities and differences in the two expressions. A third group spoke of the pros and cons of the old and the contemporary *Shura*. Some others, however, drew on more than one of these conceptualisations of the question.

It was notable throughout the interviews that many of the respondents did not distinguish between the *Shura* as **a principle** (that is, as something which is derived from the traditions or the religion) and the *Shura* as **a practice** and a political application; so it is not surprising that the majority of the respondents said that there is no contradiction or difference between the traditional and the contemporary *Shura*,

as both expressions share the same principle although they are – at least partially – different in the manner in which they practise this principle. Even in the literature, there is nothing to be found that differentiates between the principle and the practice of the *Shura* except what some intellectuals on occasion express orally. GR1 (24 February 2009) said, 'There is no discrepancy between them. There has been development of that experience to cope with the modern time', GR5 (15 March 2009) said:

> The modern experiment is an extension of the old one. It passed through all ruling families that ruled Oman since ancient times till it reached the State of Al Said. It is a deep-rooted process in the Omani societal self. What happened during recent years is nothing more than development. There is no contradiction or difference between the two experiments.

Only two of the respondents noted the difference in practice in a clear and direct way. For example, GR8 (4 January 2009) said, 'There is no difference between the two in terms of principles, but there is difference in the mechanisms and the way of practising those principles', and GR4 (28 February 2009) said:

> There is no difference between the traditional and the contemporary *Shura* except in practice. *Shura* in the past was simple in its understanding and in its practice. People in each wilayat (district) used to know each other; there were no outlandish people in the society as transportation means were primitive. The harmony in society in each wilayat, due to the similarities in lifestyle patterns and the daily behaviour of people, has facilitated the system of the *Shura* in leading to united views. While at present the situation has become more complicated, as residents in districts came from different places that resulted in mixing up of inhabitants. This does not negate the presence of harmony in the society, but it resulted in complication in the process of *Shura* due to the cultural differences of people. This complicated situation necessitates the establishment of institutions for practicing *Shura*.

Apart from the similarities and differences between the traditional and the contemporary *Shura*, it is important to be aware of two points raised by GR4. His first related to the lack of strangers in the community in the past, which meant that the *Sheikh* or the *Faqih* (religious intellectual) could readily represent the people given his familiarity with their culture. With the diversity of the population at present, however, and the different cultural groups constituting Omani society, pluralism has now to be a recognised factor in the democratic representation of people. Hence, giving the traditional *Shura* legislative and executive powers may not be a risky project on the grounds that the decision makers are the elite of society, who are seen as the most knowledgeable and wise people. However, in respect of widening participation in political decision making, the new *Shura* process could make the issue of extending legislative and executive powers in the current phase very risky (see Chapter Four); such risks reflect the fact that the Oman population is relatively young, lacking in experience what also hampers the process is presence of social problems, such as tribal fanaticism, the reluctance of some graduates to participate in elections, and the buying of electoral votes.

The second point, more importantly, highlights the difficulties in geographical movement and the primitive means of transportation which have troubled Omani people in the past (see also Chapter Five). If this is a sufficient reason for explaining the lack of social leaders representing marginal groups in the process of *Shura*, it throws the very question of the process of selection of the Imam himself into question. Scientific education and the practice of religious education had been hitherto concentrated in very limited areas, far from each other, in the interior of Oman, perhaps most importantly Nizwa and Rustaq. This made the opportunity to be educated and achieve social mobility limited to the residents of those areas and its neighbouring towns. This inevitably ensured that powerful Imamate concentrated in certain families from certain areas throughout the different phases of Omani history. This does not bring into question the integrity of the selection processes of the Imams or the principle of inheritance in the *Ibadi* notion but simply provides the reasons for the fact that the Imamate has always been geographically and genealogically

concentrated. It is also worth noting that upon the death of an Imam, the people in the inner circle of the ruler are more likely to be chosen as Imam as difficulties in transportation and topography often deprive other qualified intellectuals in remote areas of selection opportunities (see Chapter Five).

Returning to the comparison between the traditional and contemporary *Shura*, some respondents detailed the differences in the practice of both processes. GR7 (31 March 2009), for example, said:

> The old *Shura* depended on religious thought in choosing the Imam and today it has become political and religious thought and these two processes helped to root the idea of choosing the one who will represent the nation, whether the Imam in the past, or the members of the *Shura* Council now.

He here addresses the distinction between the religious dimension of the traditional *Shura* and the civil dimension of the contemporary *Shura*. At the same time he adds that the two processes accord with one another in terms of the election of national representatives, such as the Imams in the past and the members of the *Shura* Council at present.

GR6 (6 February 2009) was the most objective in comparing the traditional and the contemporary *Shura*, and this is not surprising because he is regarded as a political thinker and talks from his career experience in the *Shura* Council:

> The old *Shura* made the decision process based on what is called agreement or consensus. We notice that the *Shura* Council even now rarely practices voting and there is rarely a divergence of opinion on a matter of such great gravity that there occurs what Western democracies would be familiar with in terms of disagreement. The *Shura* of the Imams was executive and legislative, as it used to take its rules from the Islamic jurisprudence and the Imams had to execute them, but its rules are compulsory to a great extent. The present *Shura* rules are not compulsory. The second thing is that *Shura* in the past was a channel for choosing the Imam and a channel for the circulation of power,

> but now the *Shura* is a constitutional institution that aims at providing the opinion that supports the government in the process of decision making and it is not compulsory too. Third, the process of choice, despite the fact that there were some similarities in the channels such as the tribe or the area, there were some differences in the real criteria. Most of the members of the council of the elite (*Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*) were religious men or scholars who are known for their social position or their financial power. The modern structure of the *Shura* from 1970 until now has not necessarily reflected the values found in old *Shura* except maybe in the beginning of the *Shura* Council, because the role of the tribe (in determining the Council's members) was clear and there were no real elections. However, now there are members from the different categories of the society, yet, the role of the tribe is still clear.

According to GR6, the traditional and the contemporary *Shura* meet in the principles of unanimity and consensus and non-reliance on the voting process in meetings and decision making. The traditional *Shura* is distinct as it provided a channel for the devolution of power through its executive authority and its binding decisions, and it was flawed, according to GR6, by the limited number of citizens who were able to participate in it. By contrast, the contemporary *Shura* is distinguished by its institutional and participative openness to all citizens. Its flaws stem from the fact that its authority is only advisory. GR10 (8 March 2009) reflects a similar view when he says, '*Shura* will be more successful if it benefits more from the traditional *Shura* whilst utilising the modern features'; he presumably means that it should be a more successful legislative and executive process and a channel for the devolution of power, though not necessarily at the level of the ruling but at the governmental level. He amplifies this belief when he speaks of the need for new blood in the government (as is shown below in Chapter Four).

In general, respondents' views show an agreement in terms of the quintessential principles shared by the traditional *Shura* and the contemporary *Shura*, both based on the religious thought and the values of society. By contrast, there is considerable variation in practice between

the two processes. In the past, the ruler was chosen to represent the people, while now members are elected to represent people in the *Shura* Council. In the past, political participation was preserved for *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, whereas it is now open to all segments of society.

Therefore, the interviewed elite did not feel that the traditional *Shura* might be a challenge to the contemporary *Shura* but rather saw the latter as a natural continuation of the former. They also did not view the followers of the traditional *Shura* as thus opposed to the government.

Respondents' Critique of the Contemporary *Shura*

Responses generally indicate that the modernisation of the *Shura* did not meet citizen and government expectations. This is because no women from outside the capital area were elected to the *Shura* Council, nor, except on rare occasions, did qualified citizens represent people in the council. The negative effects of some social factors, such as tribal fanaticism, remained significant in the *Shura* Council elections. The government, in order to balance the situation, has taken some steps, such as including qualified people (including women) in the State Council and the Council of Ministers, thus absorbing them into the governance process. The government did not rush to give comprehensive powers to the *Shura* Council. It was not easy to rely entirely on the studies and recommendations of the council, largely because of the quality of its members, and powers have not exceeded an advisory level until very recently.

It was important, therefore, for me to research views of government representatives on these aspects. Generally, interview data, as detailed below, show that the defects in the contemporary *Shura* process are the direct result of two main factors: one is related to the role of government, and the second is related to the negative/non-modern practices of Omani society.

The Role of Government

Two respondents, GR6 and GR7, spoke of the disadvantages of the contemporary *Shura*. Their views are important to this study because they derived from their daily participation in the realities of the *Shura*

Council's work. GR6 (6 March 2009) focused on three points he saw as important in terms of the improvement of the mission of the *Shura* in the future: The first point was expressed as follows:

> An effective role of the *Shura* council should appear in policy because people now are not certain that it has an effective role. This can be shown in the Royal decrees of issuing legislations, by referring to the role of the council in the creation of these legislations. There are also clear instructions to the mass media not to transmit what happens in the *Shura* Council meetings. There is, also, an agreement from the Council of Ministers that the *Shura* Council can issue a publication on condition that they should modify the press items according to the vision of the Minister of Information and the Omani News Agency.

Here GR6 expresses the opinion that it is imperative that the government give the *Shura* Council a higher effective status. This is implicit in the mentioning of the council's role in some of the royal decrees, which were related to the issuance of certain legislations; in the mentioning of the issue of broadcasting the meetings of the council; and in the mentioning of the absence of requirement setting and the potential effects of this upon the publication of the council's newspaper. GR6 intends to promote and propagate the council throughout society in order to convince people of the importance of its role in the hope of encouraging people to nominate the best qualified citizens for membership in the future.

In the second point, GR6 urges the government to promote guarantees to the members of the council after the end of the term and also stresses the need to clarify the legislation relating to parliamentary immunity so as to ensure the non-prosecution of the member after the fall of the parliamentary immunity. GR6 also here urges the government to consider the creation of a special retirement system for members which would ensure a fixed income following the end of a given membership:

> Many people are afraid of joining the Council as members because of many considerations, such as judicial pursuit due to

> the fact that the legislations related to parliamentary immunity are not clear. Some considerations also are related to occupational development and progress. If a person, for example, was a director or a general director, he cannot go back to his previous job after leaving the council and there is no retirement system or system that gives them an advantage.

There are two important points here, relative to those previously raised during interview with the Minister of Interior during the 2007 elections. The first relates to the return of a member of the council to his previous public job after the end of the term, and it is here proposed by respondents that this runs counter to the full independence of the council member. Such a policy is likely to make a member cautious in terms of his/her accountability when in government due to considerations about his/her future career. The question of creating a pension system for the members after the termination of the membership is difficult because of the high turnover rate of the council's members, which according to GR6 reaches 65 per cent. Most members in Oman rarely run for more than one session (in contrast to some developed countries where some members serve for decades). Regarding the issue of parliamentary immunity, it was argued here that the immunity law covers the members during the period of membership and ends by the end of the term and that there had not been any judicial pursuit of any former council member for his professional performance during the membership.

In the third point made by GR6 (6 March 2009), the government is urged to strengthen the infrastructure of the political process:

> The infrastructures of the political process require transparency of information, freedom of opinion, the encouragement of civil society institutions, and finding channels and civil frameworks different from the tribe. The tribe is very effective in our society and we cannot consider it negative but the social system could be based on tribal frameworks or occupational frameworks. Therefore, we should have alternative framework other than the tribal framework, otherwise it is natural to expect that

> the member that is voted for will represent his tribe first and not the area or the Sultanate and his loyalty will be for the tribe. Thus we are not following the efficiency criterion.

Therein is a call for the government to improve the social infrastructure of political process in the Sultanate. The words '[a]lternative frameworks' may be taken to mean strengthening civil society associations in order to replace tribal fanaticism as a determining factor in the elections. GR6's argument here is questionable because civil society organisations in some neighbouring countries such as Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon are dominated by different ethnic groups.

From his vantage point, GR7 (31 March 2009) claimed that 'there is a gap between the *Shura* Council and the Government, our work is flawed and our authorities are incomplete and there is a gap between us and the Council of Ministers'.

GR7 has here directed our attention to the limited powers granted to the *Shura* Council, describing it as non-legislative, and its subjection to constraints and routine is clearly a matter of concern for him. Efforts on the part of the members of the council are sometimes ignored by some government agencies, and this in turn causes frustration for the qualified members of the council. At the same time, GR7 here confirms that His Majesty does not accept the presence of such a gap between the government and the *Shura* Council and commissions his directives to avoid it. GR7 (31 March 2009) also said:

> The committees of the parliament should have qualified, professional and administrative staff. The administrative staffs in our committee consist of four simple employees, one of them is an expert and most of his time is spent on serving the higher authorities in the Council. Although the Council had its independence and administration it may still be ashamed to practice any pressure on the government to increase its budget or its authorities because the Chairman of the Council is appointed. I think that the time has come to elect the Chairman of the Council, to give the chance to the Council to practice its authorities in a wider and more comprehensive style. We should not

> be afraid of this step because the members are the core of the society and they are interested in protecting the country and keeping it away from the dangers that affect the safety and stability of the society, and they depend on the parliamentary immunity to achieve the aims selected by the government and the society equally and carefully.

GR7 speaks above about the importance of having an elected chairman of the *Shura* Council, as the chairmen appointed by the government find it difficult not only to criticise the government's performance but also to bring pressure on the government to strengthen the council's financial position. The current financial situation, it is proposed here, has resulted in a shortage of qualified administrative staff. This situation limits the ability of the council to exercise its existing powers, and it would be even more difficult were the government to decide to give greater powers to the council.

When I interviewed GR3 (23 March 2009), I put forward most of the points raised by GR6 and GR7 above. GR3 is a senior official of the Ministry of the Interior, which oversees many of the policies related to the *Shura* Council, including the regulations governing the elections, election administration, and most probably the aspects of policy-making concerning the progress of the Council. GR3's response was as follows:

> The effect cannot be denied, especially in the case of tribalism but not for sectarianism. As a government we do not interfere. The conviction of the citizens has its role. Unfortunately, voters are not looking for the best, but they are interested rather in tribal ties and affinity relationships. Hopefully, as time passes and the number of educated people increases, the effect of the tribe will decrease. We are better than some countries which have tribes. The reluctance of educated people to participate is worrying. They speak of what the Council has done and express dissatisfaction with the members. This negative attitude and reluctance of the educated citizens is the reason behind that because they are counted for changing things for the better. On the other hand, some people express their unwillingness to

> leave their jobs for a not guaranteed membership period that may be long or short. The answer to those people is that the membership means service to the nation and should not be linked to one's career. A constituency may re-elect the same member if he has proved himself to be apt. Some distinguished members are honoured, when not re-elected, with membership in the State Council, and some of them have a prominent career opportunity in the private sector. The authorities conferred to the Council are numerous but they are not exercised. Besides, members may not be familiar with the numerous powers conferred to them. It is their duty to get acquainted with them through coordination with the secretariat of the Council and to make use of them in an appropriate manner.

In addition, according to GR3, the creation of social institutional alternatives to tribal fanaticism such as political parties, as GR6 suggested, is not desirable: 'we see that tribalism is better than political parties. The tribe's loyalty is beyond question but a party might be directed by foreign ideologies'. He said that graduates showing any reluctance to participate in the political process are denying their responsibility to the nation and that their justification for giving up regular jobs is unacceptable and incompatible with the principle of sacrifice for the homeland. This is especially so since some members are absorbed by the State Council and the private sector after the end of their terms. He also added that the additional authorities of the *Shura* Council will come in a timely manner and that there are no members of the council who could be assigned with the responsibility of the presidency because of a lack of experience:

> The question of the appointment of the head of the *Shura* Council remains one of the higher policies held by government due to a lack of members who are able to take on this responsibility, and this may be changed in the near future if the legislature finds that there are members who have the abilities to assume the responsibility. The Chair of the Council, usually, is one of the qualified citizens who has served the State and who has sufficient experiences

> and skills to take on this responsibility. There are young and enthusiastic members who may have the scientific competence, but lack the sufficient experience.

Regardless of the explanations given by GR3 and the Minister of Interior, actually, in a step seen as part of gradualism of the political process, the chairman of the *Shura* Council has been elected from within the members in 2011. It is also obvious that citizens see that there are some points that people are uncertain about and need to be clarified. GR6 and GR7, themselves members of the council, have this impression, and it is certain that they sensed these concerns from the members of the council or from the public who spoke with them about the council.

The Role of Community

Oman is a tribal society, in which the tribe is the very foundation of the social fabric. It occupies, one might say, ontological priority. As GR7 (31 March 2009) put it, the tribe is considered to be a symbol of pride and honour and the origin of any citizen. It plays a significant social role in looking after its new generation and the protection of its people. It helps them to achieve their needs; indeed it provides a normative framework which defines at least non-biological needs, and it stands beside them at times of adversity and misfortunes. By contrast, the negative aspects of tribal culture includes the tribe's unequivocal support of its people regardless of the rightness or wrongness of those people's conduct and the capacity for tribes to compete with, or make alliance (*Shaff*) with other tribes in order to achieve their interests over and above the interests of others and sometimes even over and above the national interest. The tribe at times sees other social entities as having instrumental significance only, in the sense that the interests of other tribes and those of units such as the nation are of secondary importance.[3]

Despite the importance of tribalism in ensuring the social cohesion of Oman, the internal wars that the country suffered throughout history were due to tribal fanaticism. A classic example – as mentioned in Chapter Three above – is the conflict which occurred towards the end of the second Imamate state in the late era of Imam Al-Salt Ibn Malik,

which was due to tribal conflict between blocs of Nizari and Yemeni. The repercussions of this conflict lasted for more than four centuries. Another prime example is the internal war that occurred towards the end of the Ya'ariba rule due to tribal conflict between blocs of Hinawi and Ghafri. Again, the repercussions of this conflict remained until the 1970s. It is this negative side of tribalism (tribal fanaticism) that the contemporary government has sought to counter by attempting to make national loyalty take precedence over and above all other affiliations.

The construction of the contemporary *Shura* in Oman, built on the government's establishing of general rules, now awaits its completion by qualified people who can use the given powers to convince the government that the society is eligible for greater authorities. The problem occurs if the tribe or sect submits unequivocal support to their candidates in the *Shura* Council elections at the expense of the qualified candidates. GR1 (24 February 2009) said:

> This is what election enlightenment campaigns kept calling for in the last elections to prevent interference by social components which have potentially politically damaging effects and to stop these components from being controllers of perspectives in a narrow minded way that deprives the society of potential efficiencies.

This problem hinders the fulfilment of the desired goal of the *Shura*, and would probably delay the process of gaining greater powers. It might be expected that the state will not surrender its legislative powers to non-qualified citizens at a time when there are competencies and experts available for the government who are currently drafting the legislation.

The field study focused on the views of the government officials on the impact of societal malpractices on the contemporary *Shura* process in Oman. Interviews revealed that the influence of tribal fanaticism in manipulating elections towards its own interests is a concern for most respondents, including GR6 and GR7, who were seen in the last section as critical of the government steps in opening up the political

horizon. These are the sort of social vertical divisions that were cited in Chapter Two and are likely to hinder democratisation processes. By contrast, the interviewees did not seem to be concerned whatsoever about sectarianism and its concomitant problems, believing that it has no role of any type in the contemporary *Shura* process. GR6 (6 February 2009) noted more than once the negative impact of tribal fanaticism on the *Shura* Council's elections; he said, 'The role of the tribe is now clear in nominating candidates'. He means that tribal fanaticism has directed elections in its favour, which may thus effectively minimise freedom of voting. He said elsewhere, 'The role of the tribe was clear and there were no real elections'. This does not mean that the independent candidate does not belong to a certain tribe but that he undertakes candidacy independently because he feels that he is properly qualified for the job, and seeks election in the light of his skills and experience rather than his tribal origin or tribal support.

GR7 (31 March 2009) spoke in an indirect way about tribes sustaining support of their tribal brethren candidates to reach the *Shura* Council regardless of their competence: 'Most of the members of the council are not supreme because their education and abilities are very limited in thought and contributions'. Accordingly, GR9 (23 March 2009) felt that government intervention in scheduling the opening of the political horizon gradually is unavoidable, fearing that the tribal tyrannies, if the door was opened in one swift movement, could lead to chaos and tribal conflict: 'The government interference in the beginning was important because of the tribal society that may lead to tribal tyranny and control of elections'.

GR6 (6 February 2009) spoke about a timetable that some of the tribes agreed on for the electoral return of each one of their candidates at each session of the *Shura* Council: 'In some areas, tribes have a table system and the membership is circulated among them'; this process is a breach of the *Shura* process and leads to an increase in the rate of rotation of council members in each term. In addition, it deprives independent candidates of their chances in elections. GR1 (24 February 2009) also said, 'Some of the old ways still affect the process of selecting the representatives of the *Shura* council. Some of the candidates and

voters gather in the public councils found everywhere in the Sultanate to consult each other before the day of election'.

By contrast, some interviewees said that the tribe is sometimes a positive factor in elections. It prompts people to participate, and some respondents said that the tribe is part of a reality that we should live with and that tribes now are weaker than before. GR7 (31 March 2009), for example, said, 'The whole tribe participates effectively when the tribal leader asks for participation'. In fact, tribe might be a positive factor in raising the turnout in the elections, but fundamentally it is a negative factor because it denies an election its credibility by guiding the process of voting in accordance with tribal ties rather than devotion to finding the most suitable and best qualified candidate. GR9 (23 March 2009) said:

> Omani people even in big towns always tend to live as families or tribes at the same place. Even if one of them moves from the rural areas to the capital area, after some time he brings his relatives to reside next to him. This is the nature of the Omani society's tendency to kinship relations in residential areas. That is why tribes, with regard to the administrative division, remained concentrated in certain residential areas. Tribalism now does not have that previous titanic force. The Omani government is a welfare government; therefore the reliance on the tribes or the tribal leaders is lessening.

GR9, therefore, believes that while the tribe as a social fabric is part of the Omani social reality, it is now weaker as a source of social allegiance than before because people are more urbanised and also because of the welfare role that the government now occupies. This role was previously understood as a function of the tribe. This is the very essence of the implicit social contract between the government and citizens. Therefore, living in urbanised towns does not dilute these kinship relations, nor does the government social contract. It might be surmised from this that the current social transformation process in Oman will not much affect the cohesion of the social fabric.

The other phenomenon that is identifiable in Omani society, one which the respondents spoke about, is the reluctance of the educated classes, particularly graduates, to participate in elections. GR1 (24 February 2009) feels that participation is a national duty and the failure of the educated class to participate may lead to an unwanted result, such as the dominance of tribal fanaticism:

> It is a national duty to adhere to performing this task for everyone with dedication to this work and it is important to give preference to the public interest rather than to personal interest. Thus, there must be no preference to a tribe or belief if we wish to establish an effective partnership on the long run away from the disadvantages of hateful fanaticism.

It was mentioned in the previous section that graduates are not willing to sacrifice their jobs for the council's membership and that they are not sure about the future of the council's members financially and judicially. Some respondents believe that this negative attitude of graduates, and their reluctance to participate in the elections open up even greater access to the council for some of the less qualified (tribal candidates). GR3, for example, said, 'This negative attitude and reluctance on the part of intellectuals is the reason behind that [tribal control of elections], although they are counted for changing things for the better'. So GR3 argues that the reluctance of the educated classes to participate in elections enables tribal fanaticism to play an even more significant role in elections and to direct elections in such a fashion that they reflect and reinforce tribal divisions. The word 'intellectuals' that he used gives an indication that not all educated people are targeted to improve the political process in the country, only those who have the sufficient capabilities and the necessary attributes to be able to enhance the process.

Some respondents gave some explanations of the reasons behind the educated classes' boycott of the elections. GR6 (6 February 2009) felt that the poor performance and perceived lack of functionality of some former members of the *Shura* Council had a negative effect on the turnout of the educated classes to the elections: 'Some of the

ex-members were not good examples'. In addition, GR9 felt that the absence of a clear agenda of appropriate candidates for membership of the council made the educated class of voters incurious and disinterested regarding the elections: 'The absence of clear agendas of the candidates led the educated people to boycott elections'. This does not necessarily suggest a need for political parties but possibly suggests using the social and cultural space provided by law to convince people of their capabilities and their political views. Political parties are seen as incompatible with the general approach of the *Shura*. For example, GR1 (24 February 2009) said:

> The *Shura* is not monopolised by the pressure groups and parties or majorities, it is the right of everyone to participate in making decisions with regard to his future and for all members of society without differentiation between one person and another, a male or female.

As an affirmation of the importance of the role of graduates GR1 (24 February 2009) said:

> As for educated people's refrain from the last elections of the council, this will not achieve the hoped for benefits of the council. I do not know the reason behind this refrain, but I'm sure that the progress of this council and the practice of its real authorities in serving the society and the country will not be achieved in the way we desire unless everyone takes the initiative – especially the people of knowledge and experience – to join this national criterion. Its members must also make great effort to activate the Council's authorities in the required way.

Once again the words 'knowledge' and 'experience' determine what kind of educated classes are considered reliable and sufficiently competent to improve the political process in the country. It is not clear whether tribal fanaticism causes the educated classes' reluctance to participate or whether the educated classes' reluctance to participate furthers tribal fanaticism. There might be some other reasons as well,

such as the absence of clear agendas of the candidates. If we take into account, however, the youthful nature of the Omani society, we might say that the opportunity for educated classes to change the reality for their benefit, if they are willing, would be far greater. This is because educated young people who have been taught to regard the nation as the priority constitute a proportionally bigger unit than the uneducated older people who give their primary allegiance to other social units, such as the tribe. GR9 (23 March 2009) supported this argument when she said that the educated class's boycott of elections due to tribal fanaticism could be an excuse but not a reason because graduates have the same habit in civil society associations, taking into account that tribal fanaticism is not present there:

> The educated people's boycott is also obvious in the civil society organisations; this is because of the weakness of volunteering culture. We should expand their awareness of the volunteering culture; we should dedicate the culture of bonus to the national home. The public job is not a bonus from the citizen to his country because he gets salary for it. The real bonus is the one comes outside the official duties, particularly in the volunteered social service.

Therefore, it seems that the graduates' boycott of the political process does not necessarily reflect dissatisfaction with the political process itself but could be a result of carelessness due to a lack of awareness of the significance of social activities in general. This point has also been mentioned by some of the younger-generation respondents themselves (as will be discussed in Chapter Six). This problem coincides with the observation in Chapter Two about the weak civil society in the Arab world in general and their unwillingness to participate in volunteering culture.

A third phenomenon that affects the elections, one that the respondents themselves noted, is that of vote-buying. GR4 (28 February 2009), for example, said, 'I heard about some malpractices of buying votes and we need to have some strict regulations to minimize them. The Ministry of Interior is fully aware of this problem and I heard that some suspects were interrogated by the responsible ministry'.

The words 'strict regulations' used by GR4 reflect the urgency of this matter and indicate that it requires imperative, quick and firm action to check it. GR9 (23 March 2009) also considered vote buying to be a serious matter that should be addressed to ensure that qualified candidates run for seats of the council and not those who are simply able to buy their votes 'The malpractices of some candidates through buying votes affected the stature of the Council and led the educated people to run away from this unhealthy environment'. Here is another definition and articulation of precisely who amongst the educated classes are needed to improve the political process, namely those who fight vote buying and other kinds of malpractice.

In general, it is clear from these data that there are some shortcomings in the government and in the governance process of the contemporary *Shura*. On the other hand, however, the government appears to be monitoring the development of the community and does not want to widen the political space as long as social practices such as tribal fanaticism, the reluctance of educated classes to participate and the process of vote-buying are still significantly affecting the political environment.[4] Since the government has adopted this process from the outset, it may be suggested that it has a particular responsibility to take more courageous steps to promote the positives of the contemporary *Shura* in the future and to minimize the negative features which impede its efficient progress and success.

Challenges to the Contemporary *Shura*

The contemporary *Shura* is expected to face challenges from the followers of the traditional *Shura*, from the new generation and from the economic problems which Oman faces related to oil. Followers of the traditional *Shura* might feel that the contemporary *Shura* partly differs from the old one and may become sceptical regarding the secular nature of the contemporary *Shura*, given that the old one was explicitly religious and that participation was restricted mainly to religious intellectuals. Some of the new generation of Omani citizens feel that the contemporary *Shura* does not suffice to meet their expectations, and they may apply certain pressure tactics to improve it.

Economic crises, especially those related to oil, may affect the contemporary *Shura* positively or negatively depending on how those crises affect the general citizenry's standard of living. This may well have concomitant political effects and be reflected in the political process. The following sections discuss the respondents' views regarding these issues.

The Challenge of the Traditional Shura

As is well known, the *Shura* and *Ibadism* are inseparable and have been closely associated since the earliest days of the accession of Oman into the Islamic Empire. Therefore, the Imamate and the royal political systems that rule Oman share these two socio-religious identities, but they vary in their level of commitment to the application of these component principles of society and politics; they do not vary, however, in their allegiance to the principles of the *Shura*. Islam, with all its religious texts and teachings, remains the official religion of the state. This means that the principle of consultation (*Shura*) has always been practised in one way or another by these systems but that the Imamate system remains the most committed to the applications of *Shura* because of its religious nature.

Any observer of the political history of Oman will find that the Imamate did not constitute a real challenge to other systems, except for those cases in which those systems deviated or failed in their mission to honour the religion, the homeland and its citizens. If a breach of the principles of Islam is ever seen to be clear and irrefutable or the unity of the homeland is at risk due to internal or external dangers or standards of justice and prosperity for the citizens are seen to decline, then intervention of the Imamate is enabled, required and immediate (see Chapter Five).

In this respect, the followers of the Imamate, as outlined in Chapter One, formed real challenges to the Sultanate in the twentieth century: the first of such challenges occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century and ended with the signing of the *Seeb* Agreement in 1918, the second of such incidents occurred in the 1950s and ended with the defeat of the Imamate in that same decade. As, historically speaking,

this is quite recent, it may not be surprising that Omani people, especially government officials, are unwilling to talk about the Imamate for fear of occasioning embarrassment in one way or another; for if they give their opinion of the Imamate or even of the religious character of the *Shura* in Oman, they run the risk of evoking powerful and historically heated tensions. On the other hand, the suffering experienced by the Omanis in past political conflicts – and particularly those conflicts resulting from tribal fanaticism – may act to discourage such evocations given the current, if precarious blessings of unity, stability and national cohesion which are so precarious as things stand.

Despite the sensitivity of the issue of the traditional *Shura*, the government respondents did not hesitate to talk freely about it. Some of them made a comparison between the traditional *Shura* and the contemporary *Shura*. Some respondents viewed the origin of the *Shura* as cultural but not religious and suggested that it could have been found in history prior to the emergence of Islam. GR1 (24 February 2009), for example, said, 'The march of *Shura* in the Sultanate cannot be limited to a certain date or era that tells the start of its outbreak'. This is an indication that Islam might not be the real start of the *Shura* in Oman. He also described *Shura* as a 'rooted' behaviour in Omani society: 'It is deep-rooted in behaviour, heritage and the cultural stability of the Omani people. It has intervened in the simplest features of the daily life of a society that believes in the diversity of views'. We can infer from this that *Shura* describes a social behavioural trait more than it describes a religious principle. GR1 is not the only respondent who refuses to see Islam as the initiator of the *Shura* (some respondents in Chapter Five share the same view). This in fact does not represent a challenge to religious legitimacy, as Islam as a religion believes in all heavenly religions and the messengers that conveyed those religions.

Some respondents, such as GR7 (31 March 2009), however, directly credit the origin of the *Shura* in Oman to Islam: 'The *Shura* had historical roots in Oman and it is strongly connected with religious thought as the process of choosing the Imam', and here he not only linked the *Shura* not only to Islam but to the Imamate and *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, which are well-known principles of *Ibadism*, although GR7 is not

himself *Ibadi*. In fact, there are signs that the kings of Oman before Islam had conducted *Shura* with their followers, such as the case of the kings consulting their people when they received the invitation from Prophet Mohammed to join Islam.

The majority of the respondents did not hesitate to talk freely about the relationship between Islam and the *Shura* despite the religious nature of the Imamate system. They used various expressions to address it; GR10 and GR1, for example, talked about the allocation of a whole *Surat* (chapter) under the name of *Al-Shura* in the Quran as an indication of the importance of the *Shura* principle. GR10 (8 March 2009), for example, said, 'The forty second *Sura* of the Holy Quran is called *Al-Shura* and has been specified to be recited until the end of the world'. Similarly GR1 (24 February 2009) said, 'The forty second *Sura* of the Holy Quran is called "Al *Shura*" to emphasise this great human principle'. GR3, GR1 and GR10 quoted some Quranic verses that speak of the *Shura*. GR10 (8 March 2009), for example, said:

> The *Shura* in Oman rose from a pure religious spring, and it is an implementation of the Quranic order, 'and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs' and 'those who responded to their lord and practiced prayer and whose affairs are a matter of counsel'.

Furthermore, unexpectedly, a number of respondents have linked the *Shura* to *Ibadism* and particularly to the Imamate and *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, including non-*Ibadists* such as GR6 and GR7. For example, GR3 (23 March 2009) said, 'The *Ibadi* sect has had a major role in the consolidation of the idea of the *Shura*', and GR5 (15 March 2009) said, '*Shura* in Oman was practised in different ways, such as selecting the Imam by *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*'. This could be seen as indicating that Omani people currently feel the issue of the Imamate no longer constitutes a strong concern for the government. As mentioned earlier, the Imamate usually does not pose a challenge to the political systems unless such systems neglect any of their main duties – serving the Islamic mission and protecting the interests of the homeland and its citizens. This fact may well induce people to feel free to talk about the Imamate, particularly since the Imamate system is an undeniable part

of the history of Oman and the Omani government is confident about its own performance in general. However, in respect to the government's efforts to convert the *Shura* into a civil-political approach, society as a whole and of course the elite interviewed here seem to be unable to revoke the religious legitimacy of the *Shura*.

One respondent, GR6 (6 February 2009), spoke about the positive aspects of the *Shura* in the past: 'It [the *Shura*] was a mechanism for decision making as the Imam used not to take the decision and he used to execute the decisions taken by the council of the elites'. Here he describes the actual type of political participation as being one in which the Imam does not possess absolute power. This may well be, however, an inaccurately high estimation of the traditional *Shura* by the respondents. GR8 (4 January 2009) valued the traditional *Shura* even more by saying, '*Shura* has got a strong tie with Islamic faith and its principles such as freedom, justice, dignity, equality, respect of the other and human rights'. Here she linked the traditional *Shura* with some principles of modern democracy such as freedom and human rights, which reflects the degree of political warmth and enthusiasm which is exhibited by some in discussions about the traditional *Shura*.

Apart from Islam, *Ibadism* and the Imamate, some respondents linked the *Shura* as an institution with other sociological phenomena. This does not necessarily deny or minimise the relationship between Islam and the *Shura*, but it suggests that the *Shura* has been practised in Oman on two levels: the political and social. Participation in the former was dominated by the religious intellectuals, and that of the latter was oriented towards other levels of society, that is, those less religiously 'qualified'. For example, GR9 said, '*Shura* in the Omani society is not a new thing; it has been available overtime as a social and tribal legislation'. In conclusion – and following the discussion in Chapter Two – Islam as represented in traditional *Shura* does not inhibit and may indeed be seen as effectively continuous with processes of democratisation represented by the contemporary *Shura.*

The Challenge of the New Generation

The premises of this book rest upon the supposition that when an initiative to open a political horizon comes from the top, it might

mainly be the result of one of the following two factors: either a strong government or a weak society. It could of course be a result of both factors. If this supposition is applied to the situation in Oman, it helps us understand that in the early years of the renaissance in Oman, especially during the seventies and eighties, both factors were pertinent and possible causal factors in the contemporary context being discussed here. The government was strong and possessed financial stability, and it provided job opportunities for citizens in the public sector. Equally relevant was the fact that the community was weak due to the small population, the absence of a significant educated class and the absence of an alternative source of income other than that generated by and deeply involved with the state. However, in the light of an increasing population and a growing educated class, from the nineties onwards, the government's initiative to open up the political horizon from the top started to face challenges that required a change in the political plan. This coincided with the concomitant fact of the saturation of the public sector and the emergence of the private sector as an alternative to state-oriented business and income generation. This field study asked the government representatives about the impact of these factors and variables on the political process in Oman.

The interviewees did not deny the existence of pressure on the government from the new generation due to the patent increase in population which has occurred and due to a manifest increase in cultural awareness, but they felt that there were positives from that as well; GR1 (24 February 2009), for example, said, 'The internal social mobilisation is one of the most important effects that we all depend on to serve this country and achieve what its people look forward to such as progress, stability, safety and prosperity'.

This indicates that the government has planned from the beginning to respond to this foreseeable situation and that there is a distinct absence of any sense of shock resulting from the increasing pressure on the government from the educated new generation.

As for the influence of the increase in population on the political scene, GR1 (24 February 2009) said, 'The accelerating increase of population was an indicator of extending development services to all communities'. While GR8 (4 January 2009) said, 'The main feature

of the demography in Oman is that young people form more than 50 per cent [of the population], this creates burdens; maintaining development at its current levels', and GR5 (15 March 2009) said:

> The increase in population has a positive side as it enriches the experience of the political arena for the citizenry because political demands are greater and there is an expansion of the voters' priorities as well. The disadvantage is that influencing and addressing these priorities in an atmosphere of lesser consensus makes a greater strain on the polity than in the past.

The words 'influencing' and 'addressing' can be inferred as demonstrating that the government possessed more stable control of Omani society when the population was smaller. The increase in population quantitatively and qualitatively left the government in a more difficult position to maintain control, as it were, of the social contract.

Although GR1 regarded the natural increase in population as a positive indicator of successful development in the country, both GR8 and GR5 viewed this increase as causing pressure on the government. GR8 believed that the recent population increase put pressure on the development process, which in turn means that the state will not be able to continue in the welfare-oriented fashion that has characterised the implicit social contract hitherto. The consequence of this may be that the end of the rentier state model will result in increased pressure to open up the political horizon. GR5 considered this increase in population to be able to potentially enrich the political process; it was conceded that it would indeed place political pressure on the government.

By contrast, GR9 and GR6 had different opinions; GR6 (6 February 2009) said, 'it was expected that this class [the middle class] would call for reform or political change, but it was discovered that this class does not want any reform because they benefit from the present situation and change would not be to their benefit'.

He believed that any of the demographic or cultural factors discussed are unlikely to affect the political situation as long as the economic situation in the country remains strong. It is suggested here that

the concept of social mobility is too weak and unreliable to facilitate change in the political process taking place from the bottom up, as the implicit social contract in the rentier state model between the government and citizens is still a strong and dominant conception of government amongst the Omani citizenry. GR9 (23 March 2009) said, 'We have a just distribution of wealth and equality in rights; that is why we have political stability'. She has, however, therein contradicted the opinion of GR6, that the lack of social mobility is due to shortcomings in the Omani concepts of and actual expressions of distributive justice and not due to economic prosperity or lack thereof.

There is another factor in demographics which is pertinent to this thesis: the rise in the demographic proportion of foreign employees that most Gulf countries suffer from has emerged as a concern in the expostulations of some respondents. For example, GR8 (4 January 2009) said, 'Demography in Oman has not changed much if compared to some neighbouring countries where percentage of foreigners reached 80 per cent, our society, hence, still having a solid social structure'. GR4 (28 February 2009) also said:

> Expatriates now account for 40 per cent of the whole population of Oman. There are directives from the government to keep this percentage or reduce it if possible. We hope to maintain the expatriates' percentage at the current level and we encourage our people to work in the private sector to reduce the number of expatriates.

GR8 and GR4, therefore, considered the impact of the expatriate labour on population structure to be somewhat relevant although they clearly note that the proportion in Oman is not large compared with some neighbouring countries. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, foreign workers form up to 80 per cent of the whole population. GR4's words are important here because he occupies a senior post in the Ministry of Manpower. Besides the issue of labour saturation in the public sector, the foreign employees issue seems to have obliged the government to encourage Omani people to join the private sector no matter what political pressure this step might bring. For example, GR4 (28 February 2009) said, 'We have no doubt that

Omani people in the private sector share the same amount of loyalty to the government as their counterparts in the public sector. The government provides them with protection and incentives'.

By contrast, GR5 (15 March 2009) said:

> If the citizen finds a job opportunity in the private sector, they will definitely head for that sector. This is good. The only disadvantage is that the loyalty and 'belonging' of such citizens to the government would be less, as they make a living from a source other than the government. Accordingly, this will make room for independence from government. The citizen would not be concerned for their future career in the public sector.

GR5 exhibits the opinion that the citizenry's employment in the private sector may result in a challenge to the social contract between the government and the citizens. GR7 (31 March 2009) clearly, however, saw that it may initiate and facilitate social mobility, which will cause pressure on the government to open up the political horizon. He says, for example:

> Nowadays, following the employment of many citizens in the private sector, these citizens have become more independent than before and they have the ability to criticise the government. They also possess wider areas of speech, dialogue and discussion about the political affairs and *Shura* in the country.

Therefore, GR5 and GR7 felt that employment of the citizenry in the private sector could put political pressure on the government and may have the effect of reducing loyalty to the government. If this happens, then the implicit social contract will face a real challenge because such a scenario gives wider room for social mobilisation and could be the instigating factor in a real bottom-up political process. GR4 diminished this concern somewhat, however, by saying that loyalty is not affected as long as the government continues to provide citizens who are working in the private sector with protection and incentives.

The interviews also show that the political demands of the new generation are concentrated around three main issues: holding wrongdoers

responsible, increasing the powers of the *Shura* Council, and allowing civil society organisations to be formed, as well as aiding and encouraging devolution of power in order to give more opportunities for the technocrats to exercise their expertise. It must be noted, however, that some respondents viewed those demands not as a reflection of local political need but as the result of media-set agendas and external influences.

As for civil society organisations, regulations were issued in the Sultanate during the last five years which opened the way for the first time in Oman for the establishment of civil society institutions – unions, associations and syndicates. However, cultural clubs and women's associations have been established since the 1970s. Most interviewees noted that the majority of these associations are independent as far as administration and financing goes, unlike their counterparts in some of the neighbouring countries. Some respondents saw the government's financial support and provision of headquarters for these organisations as not affecting their independence, especially in light of the fact that they need this support in the early period of establishment.

Some interviewees spoke about the healthy and non-paternalistic type of control that the government applied at this stage on those organisations. GR9 (23 March 2009), for example, noted that the controls established by the government do not affect the independence of associations: 'Having regulations does not mean hindering those associations'. She has justified her view on the basis that the government's control of the associations serves to protect such organisations from the hidden agendas of some NGOs.

The Challenge of the Oil-Related Problems

Oman is regarded as an oil state; oil revenues still make up more than half of the government's income. The government has used the oil revenues to draw an implicit social contract with its citizens. The political situation went well when the economic situation, particularly surrounding oil revenues, was healthy and stable. The Sultanate suffered several economic upheavals during the 1980s and late 1990s

brought about by declines in oil prices. It currently faces the challenge of declining oil reserves. The study asked a question about the prospect of vulnerability in the political situation in Oman due to any economic shock which may result from the declining oil production, declining oil reserves or falling prices.

Oman is an oil state and 'oil is still the main source of income', as GR5 (15 March 2009) says, and as GR6 (6 February 2009) asserts, 'Oil represents 40 per cent of the total local income and 70 per cent of the governmental revenues'. Given this fact, the political situation remains vulnerable to any oil shock. However, some respondents were optimistic about future of oil in Oman. GR5 (15 March 2009), for example, felt that the oil in Oman is accessible for decades to come:

> Oil in Oman will be found for at least 40 years to come. Old studies forecasted that oil was supposed to have depleted in Oman at this present time. However, thanks to new explorations and innovations in technology, it is possible to keep the production levels up and we still have oil reserves.

The ability of the Sultanate to benefit from its oil reserves in the decades to come does not negate the existence of prior economic crises nor preclude the possibility of future ones due to a decline in reserves and production rate or a drop in oil prices. The interviewees who felt that the economic crisis is affecting the political situation produced varied opinions and prognoses. GR3 (23 March 2009), for example, said, 'If your economy is weak, this will affect your performance and would be reflected on the political arena'. He suggested that economic instability affects the 'performance' of the country and its government, but he did not want to say that it might affect the political situation. This may be due to the fact that he is a senior official and so prefers to use more diplomatic language. GR4 (28 February 2009) said, 'We get affected by crises, however the government is working on real alternatives for oil'. Herein is a clearer sign regarding the impact of economic fluctuations on the political situation, but the respondent showed some optimism regarding government steps in creating appropriate economic alternatives.

GR10 and GR7 are examples of the few respondents who have directly tied the economic crises to political instability: GR10 (8 March 2009) saw that there is a direct impact of economic crises on the political situation: 'The economic recession affects the political situation as citizens will apply pressure to ease the economic complications'. He also gave an example of the pressure exerted by citizens on the government during the time of economic crisis of 2008: 'During the last financial crisis, more than one senior official came out with announcements to calm down the citizens'. GR7 (31 March 2009) said, on the same topic:

> In times of economic crises and economic decline, the different pressures on the institutions of the country increase, especially on the government and in terms of the people's requests to the institutions that represent them become greater. The less the revenues of the country are, the less numerous the job opportunities, so hungry people will knock every door and they may turn into arsonists trying to reflect their frustration on the society, especially if they become persuaded that the government has not given them fair job opportunities and a reliable income. Legal and illegal pressures will increase and social cohesion will, undoubtedly, be affected by the economic crises.

The quotes above indicate that the social contract between the citizenry and the government could be affected in the post-oil era or during the concomitant powerful economic shocks.

Some respondents, however, did not see a direct link between economic crises and the political situation; for example, GR6 (6 February 2009) said:

> The present elite are the same old commercial elites and the existence of oil enabled them to use their power more. They had financial ability to study overseas and they are still on the side of government even now. We can see that many decision makers in the private sector are very careful about their political announcements in order to retain their harmony with the government.

> Thus, the reality is that we do not have a real private sector. The government is the basic engine of the economy.

Therefore, according to GR6, we may be inclined to think that the mutually beneficial relationship between the government and the economic elites that own the private sector reduces the chances of such crises posing real challenges to the government. GR6 (6 February 2009) also added, 'people feel grateful to the government because services are nearly free', referring to the free public services provided by the government to citizens, which indeed practically form the basis of the social contract between the two parties. This means not only that the economic elites will reduce the challenges on the government during a particular crisis but that the ordinary people who are tied by the implicit social contract are unlikely to pose a threat to political stability except in extreme circumstances. However, he believed that there is a possibility for breaking this contract: 'Change will happen if the government asks people to pay taxes. At this time people will call for change'. He stipulates that the social contract would be broken only if the government abandoned its support for free public services and demanded that citizens pay taxes.

The interviewees, when questioned about the impact of economic fluctuations on the political situation, were – quite reasonably – expected to speak about the implicit social contract between the government and the citizenry, but I noted that this was not a concern to most of them. They spoke with confidence and self-assurance about the prosperous economic future of the state. Some interviewees, as mentioned above, spoke of the persistence of oil in Oman for several decades to come. In general, the interviewees did not hide their concern about the potentially damaging effects of economic crises on the political situation. However, they put their trust in the government to overcome such situations and postulated that the impact on the political scene would be limited.

Future of the *Shura* in Oman

Although the *Shura* in Oman lasted for several centuries, the era of the contemporary *Shura* is but a few decades. The contemporary

Shura process will need more time to mature and stabilise. The community is still in the process of maturing, and there is significant hope among respondents that this will lead to the alleviation of the tribal hindrances as well as other factors which continue to play a role in depriving the *Shura* Council of its right to assign its positions to the most qualified members. The government, which embraces the contemporary *Shura* in Oman, monitors the conditions of society and accordingly opens up the political horizon step by step. However, it is unclear how long this gradual opening up will continue and where the limit will be. It is also not clear whether the *Shura* Council will be given legislative powers in the future or whether the current consultative powers will remain.

I raised these questions with government representatives.

The majority of the interviewees believed that the *Shura* will evolve in the future; GR1 (24 February 2009), for example, said:

> Development is a mode of life, so all individuals and groups should cope with this aspect, each in his position and according to his responsibilities and duties. This will help create a civilized society that sanctifies rights and respects duties. This is what the Sultanate has sought since the start of the blessed progress in 1970 AD until now.

Thus he urges the community to keep up with the government's steps in advancing the *Shura*. GR3 (23 March 2009) said, '*Shura* experience will in general evolve over time to a more advanced level in the future'. GR5 (15 March 2009) said, 'I think that in the future the political leadership will opt for developing the practice of *Shura*'. The words 'I think' may be inferred to reflect his reservation due to the realities of the political situation and not necessarily his lack of belief in the development of the *Shura* in the future, as I have reported similar reservations he expressed previously. GR9 and GR10 stressed the importance of gradualism in the development of the *Shura* in future. GR9 (23 March 2009) said, 'The *Shura* will develop in future but I wish that it comes calmly, gradually and smoothly as it does now'. GR10 (8 March 2009) said, 'I expect the *Shura* to develop in the future at a steady but gradual pace'.

Some respondents linked the development of the *Shura* in the future with the development of community awareness. GR4 (28 February 2009), for example, said:

> The coming phases will witness forward moves but in the right time frame. This depends on the maturity of the society, the cultural awareness of people, and to what extent they are aware of their rights and duties and not following the footsteps and wills of others.

He refers to the youthful demographic of the community, which indicates fear of giving them greater political space at the present time in light of the fact that such a community may be prone to misuse and/or exploitation. GR9, in a similar vein, said, 'The society is still not ready so the Council [must] be given legislative authority'. This is an implicit reference to the social ills discussed above, which affect the *Shura* Council's elections. GR2 (18 March 2009), on her part, believed that the development of the *Shura* in the future must be intimately linked to increasing the number of female members in the council: 'in the future, the success of the consultative process and the participation of the people in governing will be further enhanced by a wider participation of women in the *Shura* council as elected members'.

This point is interesting not only because GR2 is a woman and pro-women in the council but because the arrival of a greater number of women to the *Shura* Council in the future might be seen as an indication of two important facts: (1) the dwindling influence of tribal fanaticism and the male-community culture and (2) the growing awareness of the community, especially if these women come from outside the capital area. The government, in order to strengthen the status of women, held a three-day symposium called 'the Omani Women Symposium' at the sideline of the Annual Royal Tour, mentioned previously in Chapter Three.[5] In this regard, GR3 (23 March 2009) mentioned that the government earnestly seeks to strengthen the role of women through awareness-raising campaigns before the elections. The tribal community, however, clearly continues to have a different opinion:

> The view of society may differ from our view in terms of the government's support of women. We have focused in the awareness campaigns

> on the importance of women but it seems that even women did not vote for women for one reason or another and we do not interfere.

GR7 and GR9 held an ambivalent view regarding the contemporary *Shura* and what it should represent and be in the future. GR7 (31 March 2009) felt that the level of the contemporary *Shura*, sociologically speaking and in terms of cultural development, was the least developed of all areas/sectors and believed that consolidation of democratic thought should be the next step:

> This [*Shura*] is a qualitative development of the country, yet it is not enough and it is not compatible with the development that happened in Oman in the epoch of Sultan Qaboos and I think that stabilising democratic thought in Oman is the next step because it is one of the necessities of the future development.

Here it cannot be inferred that GR7 is lacking assurance of the potential of the contemporary *Shura* process and therefore wishes to bring Western-style democracy instead, as it was clear in Chapter Four, that his view recorded an overall positive attitude to the *Shura*. Most likely, through his membership in the *Shura* Council and the difficulties he faces due to the non legislative powers of the council, he is forced to call for the consolidation and practical expression of democratic thought. He may well be indicating that to give real legislative powers to the *Shura* Council would be a wise and astute move.

GR9 (23 March 2009), however, believed that the powers of the *Shura* Council must be increased but does not encourage giving legislative powers to the council, fearing that the legislation may be drafted for the benefit of certain forces. She refers to the possibility of the emergence of tribal fanaticism or sectarianism as forces which may direct the legislation towards serving the interests of those forces, as has occurred in some of Oman's neighbouring states. She noted that the enactment of legislation in Oman is not monopolised by the government, as citizens are consulted through some civil channels:

> I hope that the *Shura* Council's authorities will increase and that it will have more capable members to effectively use those

> authorities. The government does not ignore the Council's recommendations now and utilises them at times, but the society is still not ready for the Council to be given legislative authorities. Even legislations that come from deep-rooted parliaments have problems. I would prefer to hold referenda on any legislation rather than legislate it by the parliament. The current legislations in Oman are not monopolised by the government; other parties are consulted prior to their output, such as civil society organisations. In some deep-rooted parliaments some legislative measures are set to serve the bigger parties and pressurising forces and are not necessarily for the sake of the public. I hope we will not become like them; we are still on the safe side. I say that because our ministry is in contact with all facets of the social spectrum.

GR9 works in the ministry responsible for all social aspects, knows more about the potential of society and its strengths and weaknesses and has a greater awareness of possible dangers which would loom in the event that the council be permitted to enact legislation. Tribal fanaticism and sectarianism are not at present forces which are able to completely dictate the course of the government's control of the enactment of legislation. The vertical social divisions mentioned (Chapter Two), which cause real challenges for the democratisation processes in Iraq and Lebanon, support GR9's vision.

In summary, it can be said that the majority of the interviewees are optimistic about the evolution of the *Shura* in the future although they do not specify the limits that mark the full achievement of this process, nor do they delineate a schedule for such an evolution. They seem to be optimistic about the prevailing gradualism. This optimism seems to limit their fear of a challenge from the new generation looking for better political participation through a wider political space. It also emerged that some respondents do not wish to give legislative powers to the *Shura* Council, fearing that such powers would be abused. By contrast, some interviewees said that the current *Shura* still fails to match up to its nominal ambitions and that it must be strengthened in the coming period through the granting of legislative powers. Some respondents can be seen to be calling for accordance with a gradualist

approach to the *Shura's* evolution in order to avoid any shock in the community, while others stressed that the opening up of the political horizon must be proportionate to the community's awareness, particularly because the demographics of the population show the majority of Omani society to be, in relative terms, still young.

Conclusion

There are major questions about the motives that have prompted the government in the Sultanate of Oman to adopt a process of political reform from the top down. To what extent is the *Shura* process successful? And what challenges does this process face?

From material gathered through semi-structured interviews, I have established that the government decided to tackle the political process from the top down for the following main reasons: the historical legacy of the *Shura* in Oman, the growing numbers of educated classes, urbanisation and globalisation. It seems that the selection of the *Shura* was unavoidable as it has been practised in the country for several decades and is regarded as a cornerstone in the nation's identity and in the authority and legitimacy of any ruling system in Oman. The *Shura* has, however, been modified to meet the requirements of modernity and to cope with the improved and still improving levels of education and cultural awareness in Omani society.

In general, respondents' views demonstrated a consensus of sorts with regards to the fundamental principles of the traditional and contemporary *Shura*. Both are based on the religious thoughts and values of Omani society, but there is a considerable variation in practice between the two processes. In the past, the ruler was chosen to represent the people, but the political participation was mainly preserved for *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, whereas now members are elected to represent people in the *Shura* Council, and participation is open to all segments of society. This means that the *Shura* has been chosen because it has a firm connection to tradition. The practice of contemporary *Shura* has some shortcomings that need to be addressed in order to satisfy the citizenry of its legitimacy, but respondents displayed optimism about its ability to evolve in future.

As for the challenges that the contemporary political process faces, most respondents believed that the challenges were largely from the followers of the traditional *Shura* and the new generation and those posed by economic problems, particularly in relation to oil. However, interviewees reduced the significance of the challenges that might come from followers of the traditional *Shura* and found the contemporary *Shura* compatible with the old one. Respondents expected some challenges to come from the new generation because their number is increasing as the government's ability to maintain the same level of the implicit social contract is decreasing. The economic factors may challenge the current political situation during oil-related economic crises or in the post-oil era, but the respondents, in general, are optimistic of the Sultanate's ability to survive these times. This may partly answer the second research question: why the Omani government decided to adopt a political process from the top down.

The optimism gathered from the government respondents about the political and economic stability of the country, even in the post-oil era, was in fact something I had almost expected because the respondents in this chapter were government representatives and believe in the government's agenda. The following two chapters will tackle many of the same issues discussed here but concentrate on some issues more than others in order to enrich the study, depending on the respondents backgrounds. It is intended that Chapters Five and Six will say more about the contemporary political process in Oman initiated by the government from the top down and how it is evaluated from the other two segments of respondents' perspectives.

CHAPTER 5

THE TRADITIONAL MODEL: THEOLOGY OF *IBADISM* AND MODERNITY

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter One, this book's aim is to study contemporary *Shura* in Oman after 1970. However, in order to understand the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura* and the challenges it may face, particularly from the followers of the traditional *Shura*, it is necessary to highlight the origins of the *Shura* and its applications, as well as the political principles of *Ibadism*. Addressing these aspects will shed light on the debates surrounding the legitimacy of the current *Shura*, especially as there is no study to date that has explored these aspects in depth.

The *Shura*: Origin and Practice

The Shura before Islam

Some of the interviewees spoke about the existence of the *Shura* in Oman and across the wider region in historical terms. This suggests that the origin of the *Shura* is not only derived from divine Islamic principle. If this is the case, then to what extent is *Shura* an obligation?

There is no doubt that Islam has come to determine it through the Quran. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) said:

> *Shura* in the past, has been generally practiced in these terrains, and when I say terrains I do not only mean Oman, but the territories of the region. It has been practiced from Yemen to Damascus and this was a tangible reality from our readings from the God's Book. Balqis, the Queen of Saba' consulted her people when she received a letter from the Prophet Sulaiman (King Solomon). This proves that *Shura* was practiced in these areas. It has been proved through history also, that the two kings of Oman consulted their people when the Prophet called them to join Islam, and following the *Shura*, decided, they willingly turned to Islam.

Some respondents said that rulers before Islam had their own advisors that were the equivalent to the Council of Elite in Islam (*Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*) and were known as the *Mala.*[1] Therefore, it can be argued that even the Council of Elite is not an Islamic concept but that its religious members, following Islam, made it look like a religious entity. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> Prior to Islam, those giving opinion were called the '*Mala*' as came from Queen Balqis's tongue in the Holy Quran when she said: 'dear *Mala* give me your opinions, I did not use to take a decision without your advice'. The *Mala* are the elite, the notables, the sheriffs. God says to Moses in other verse 'the *Mala* are conspiring to kill you'. In the Islamic society this *Mala* phrase became substituted by *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*.

This means that the *Shura* was available before Islam, but Islam incorporated it as a political system. Even during the *Jahiliyah* time (i.e. before the emergence of Islam), the *Shura* was practised in the region among different societies. This became evident as stories in the Quran of the different prophets from Solomon to Moses. During the *Jahiliyah*

time, although known for its blasphemy (*Kofr*), *Shura* was still practised as a social norm among the Quraish tribe.

Islam and the Shura

Despite its historical roots in the region, the majority of the respondents regarded the *Shura* as an Islamic pillar in governance. This was because Allah mentions it in two verses in the Quran. In one of the two verses God clearly directs the Prophet to consult his companions. This is seen as a religious edict that cannot be ignored.[2] For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> There is no doubt that Islam paid attention to *Shura*, and regarded it as the pillar of Rule, so one cannot rule without *Shura*. Highlighting the significance of *Shura*, God mentions it in two different verses in the Holy Quran so that it be adopted; in the first verse God orders his Messenger to consult his companions when he said: 'and consult them about the conduct of affairs'. The intellectuals regard *Shura* as an obligatory system and a ruler should take *Shura* from the intellectual people.

The practice of the *Shura* by the Prophet and his companions asserted the significance of the *Shura* in political Islam; as RR3 (25 March 2009) puts it: '*Shura*, as a principle is a godly approach. The Quran came up with it and the Prophet, peace be upon him, practised it'. This is also what RR7 (17 April 2009) has said:

> Any Islamic state or community can never disregard *Shura*. It's indispensable. To do so is regarded as a lack of faith, because the person, or the community who does so, is regarded as if he/they have sold something ordained by the Almighty God and His Messenger, and used by the Prophet and the Caliphs afterwards.

It is clear the respondents regard the *Shura* as an Islamic **principle** that all Muslims should believe in and practise. However,

the respondents also agree that the *Shura*, as a **practice**, has no one form that the Quran provided; rather, it was left for the Muslim community (following the principle of *Ijtihad*) to decide how to practise it according to the interests of Islam and the community, taking into account the surrounding circumstances. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said, 'the *Shura*, as a political practice, is a result of Muslims' diligence after the Prophet's death; when the companions gathered in Saqifat Bani Saedah and decided to select one of them to be the Caliph and selected Abu Bakr'.

The interviewees made it very clear that the ruler should not necessarily be the best religious scholar of his time but that he should be the most eligible for the post, according to the people's and the state of Islam's needs. For example, RR7 (17 April 2009) said:

> There is no doubt that the 'Rightly-Guided Caliphs' of Muslims, are the best rulers ever to rule the State of Islam, being selected by the scholars, leaders and heads of tribes in the Arabian Peninsula and by the Great Quran Memorisers. They were chosen not just for their superior religious intellectuality, as there was a galaxy of great religious scholars whom may well have been better than them in these terms at the time, but they were also chosen for their other capabilities and their suitability for the post.

This means the selection of a ruler requires the activation of the principle of *Ijtihad* (diligence) in order to decide who is the most eligible for the post. This is exactly what RR7 (17 April 2009) is urging for in the political arena:

> The credo does not accept things unless through either a clear or extrapolated text. Allah, has opened the door of *Ijtihad* for Muslims, while Revelation was still coming down and the Prophet was alive and extraction and arbitration of opinion was in place. If *Ijtihad* was applied during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), it is more important to utilise it after the point when the Revelation stopped coming down and new variables emerged, particularly on the political side.

The practice of the *Shura* during the time of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, following the death of the Prophet and before the foundation of the different Islamic sects, proved there is no single method for selecting the ruler, as the four of them were selected in four different ways. For example RR5 (5 January 2009) said, 'It was evidenced by consensus, as was the case after the Prophet passed away, where the Caliphs were chosen through *Shura*, in different methods'. RR10 (13 April 2009) outlined the four ways of selecting the Rightly Guided Caliphs. They are the 'clear delegation', the 'consultation', the 'direct appointment' and the 'quick decision'. The 'delegation' is as the Prophet did, when he delegated Abu Bakr to be the Imam of prayers during the Prophet's period of sickness. People understood that Abu Bakr had the priority to be the Caliph after the Prophet. The 'consultation' took place when Abu Bakr became severely ill. He selected six of the most important companions and ordered them to consult with each other and choose one of themselves to be the second Caliph, and they chose Omar. The third 'direct appointment' way, took place when Omar was assassinated. He directly appointed Othman, who was one of the six selected for consultation by Abu Bakr. Finally, the 'quick decision' took place when Othman was killed during a time of chaos; people feared the situation of unrest and decided quickly to appoint Ali to the post.[3]

Accordingly, there are many ways of selecting the Islamic ruler. The matter is discretionary, and there are no decisive scripts. If we link this fact to the discussion that took place in Chapter Two about Islam and democracy, we can confidently say that Islam has not come with a certain political system but delegated this matter to Muslims to choose what suits their time. So, if democracy does not ruin any of the Islamic values, it is certainly welcomed although the problem that may face democratisation processes is social divisions more than Islam.

Here is a clear statement for Muslim scholars: any radical thoughts concerning the character of the Islamic state's ruler should be eradicated. Respondents cited here say he does not have to be a religious intellectual in order to be eligible for the post but should be the right person for the right time. This fact reduces the challenge of the followers of the traditional *Shura* to the government in Oman, which adopts the modernised contemporary *Shura* from the top down.

Ibadism and the Shura

Although the *Shura* was physically practised at the outset of the Islamic state (i.e. during the time of the Prophet and the four Rightly Guided Caliphs), the conflict that took place during the time of the fourth Caliph played a part in the establishment of the three Islamic sects that each adopted different political approaches.[4] The interviewees addressed this matter and claimed that *Ibadism* is the closest sect in following the Prophet and his successors' political approach. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> The *Ibadi* sect, calls for no *Qurashia* (the concept of priority of Quraish tribe adopted by the Sunni sect) and no *Baitawiah* (the concept of priority of *Ahl al-Bait* or Ali's family adopted by the Shi'a sect), meaning that Caliphate should not be restricted to Quraish as a tribe, or to *Ahl al-Bait* as a family, but is considered as a legitimate right to all qualified Muslims if they are selected by the nation. *Ibadism* sees that Imamate for the nation; the nation decides whom to put at the front and whom to put at the back and there is no divine preference for a certain tribe or family.

Similarly, RR5 supported this argument by saying that the *Ibadis*, 'through the non-limiting of Caliphate or Imamate to a certain family or tribe, helped Omanis more than others to be more politically realistic. It helped them to elect the most efficient, and the most qualified; those who possess the qualifications'.

Even though *Ibadism* seems to call for the opening-up of the domain for any qualified Muslim to rule the Islamic state, they say that if a qualified person is found in a Quraish tribe, they will give him priority. RR7 (17 April 2009) said, 'Sectarian views in governance are not confined to *Ibadis*. Even the four Sunni schools and others do not agree on the need to limit the Islamic Caliphate to the Quraish tribe'. RR5, however, said, 'They (*Ibadists*) also say that if there is one from Quraish, this one is the more deserving'. Also RR3 (25 March 2009) said, '*Ibadi* people say if the best candidate is found in Quraish they will prioritise him, but he has to be selected'. At the same time, *Ibadi* scholars do not

say that the Sunni sects do not acknowledge the *Shura*, just that they do not give it the same significance as *Ibadism* does. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said, 'To be fair, all Sunni sects acknowledge *Shura*, but when we come to the practice and space given to *Shura*, we find it has greater room with the *Ibadis*'.

Ibadism, as has been discussed, believes in choosing the ruler. The respondents, therefore, clarified the parameters that are used to select the ruler. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said, 'The verse that states: "the most honoured is the one having the most piety", represents the principle that should be followed in selecting the leader'.

The respondents also determined the legitimate method through which Imams are selected: the Council of Elite (*Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*). For example, RR5 said, '*Ibadis* think that the way by which a ruler comes to power should be legitimately right, and he cannot gain this legitimacy unless he is re-elected'. However, there is an exception for this concept (see Chapter Five). The Council of Elite by itself is not for the religious elite only, as other non-religious people can be members, such as the tribal leaders and the notables. RR1 (14 January 2009) clarified this point:

> The concept of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* shrinks and expands. For example there was a period in the Omani history when the concept was only permitted to the religious intellectuals. When the religious intellectuals were powerful, their influence on society was strong, particularly those religious intellectuals close to the Imam. In this case the concept (of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*) shrinks and becomes limited to religious scholars. The concept expands when there is power among tribal leaders, and the council is composed of both the religious intellectuals, and the tribal leaders; the former for their religious influence and the later for their tribal influence. Sometimes even the notables can be within *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, for example a well known merchant or an agricultural landlord, because they have influence on part of the society.

There are two important points that may have helped the *Ibadi* notion to survive until the present time: (1) not closing the *Ijtihad* door and (2) professing no sanctity for any human being, regardless of whether he is

a politician or a religious scholar. They do not consider any of them as belonging to the level of holiness as happens in some Islamic schools of thought, such as Shi'a, where they tend to treat their religious Imams in unusual ways, with a sort of sanctification. For example RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> The *Ibadis* know no sanctification for humans. It is nothing more than respect. And this is clear in their practices. A scholar's words are not convincing unless they are accompanied by evidence. Once the evidence is accepted, the scholar's words become convincing. So, they stressed this matter. The door of diligence (*Ijtihad*) is not closed for them, contrary to other sects, which consider the door of diligence as being closed; hence they became limited to a certain circle.

In summary, although the *Shura* may had been found in the region prior to the emergence of Islam, its having been mentioned in the Quran and having been practised by the Prophet and his companions made it a divine pillar in political Islam. However, the practising of the *Shura*, particularly during the time of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, shows that Islam arrived not with a fixed political system but instead left the situation to the Muslims to decide whom to choose using the principles of *Ijtihad* and *Ijma'*. The practising of the *Shura* at that time also suggests that the right to rule in Islam is not hereditary nor restricted to a certain tribe or family. Even Ali, the first cousin of the Prophet, who was also the husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima, had not been prioritised to be the first ruler following the death of the Prophet, but was the fourth Caliph. At the same time, scholars do not hesitate to say that if a qualified person is found in the Quraish, then they will prioritise him if he is elected. This means that there is some sort of flexibility in the practice of the *Shura*. These arguments have been used by *Ibadi* scholars in building their unique *Shura* system throughout history. Once again, this flexibility in practising the *Shura* is arguably reducing the distance between Islam and greater political pluralism and bringing the *Ibadi* political system very close to modern democratic systems of selecting a ruler.

Political Regimes in *Ibadism*

Ibadi people, in order to differentiate their ruling system from the Umayyad system, have chosen to call their rulers Imams, not Caliphs. This fact, however, does not mean that the *Ibadi* concept limits the system of governing in *Ibadism* to the Imamate alone. *Ibadism* can still contain other political systems as will be discussed in the following sections.

Some respondents spoke about reasons that might make the *Ibadi* scholars tolerate hereditary rule in *Ibadism*. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> With the presence of the *Ibadi* sect that rejects hereditary rule, Omani history witnessed different ruling systems. Among those are the Imamate states, the kingdoms and the Sultanic States. The Sultanic States and the kingdoms are hereditary systems. The *Ibadi* sect determined the issue of the legitimacy of rulers other than Imams; when Abu Malik Al-Silani, one of the *Ibadi* great intellectuals, was asked about the legitimacy of the rule of Omar Bin Abdul Aziz (the wisest ruler in the Umayyad Dynasty), he replied: It became legitimate through contentment and submission and they are more important than the homage.[5]

This means that rule through submission, under the Islamic construct of *Ijtihad* and *Ijma'*, is seen as being legitimate. Another *Shariate* legislative view that makes *Ibadi* scholars tolerate the hereditary rule is the Prophet's recognition of the Omani kings, when Oman converted to Islam. RR6 (10 January 2009) cites the statement of Allah's messenger to the people of Oman when the Omani people converted to Islam (If you join Islam, you will be safe and your monarch will be safe too). Here are two key arguments. The first is that the governance regime in Oman before Islam was a monarchy, and the second, and more important, is that the messenger agreed to the monarchical regime. Also RR10 (13 April 2009) said:

> After the sons of Julandy, Abd and Gaiffar accepted the invitation of Prophet Mohammad to join Islam, the Prophet left them

> as kings and did not substitute them with other rulers. This is the Prophet's consideration for the stability of societies. As long as the society is satisfied with a certain political authority to rule it, the Prophet (PBUH) would not change this authority. The sons of Julandy continued as kings of Oman for a long time.

Some of the interviewees tried to justify why the Prophet allowed Omani territory to be ruled by its own rulers instead of appointing a governor to rule, as he had with the other territories joining Islam at that time. For example RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> Perhaps because Oman, before Islam, was already an independent state, with its own rulers, geographical territory, customs and mores, Prophet Mohammad spoke to them as a state. They dealt with the messenger who brought the letter of the Prophet in a civilized way. That civility was also the case according to the Protocol of Contemporary States, and they sent a delegation to offer their condolences when the Prophet passed away.

From the above it is clear that *Ibadism* takes into account the social make-up of Omani society when considering political issues, as well as the Prophet's actions, in recognising the monarchical system in Oman and, above all, the stability of the society. These issues can be reached not only through a legitimate homage to the ruler but also, probably more importantly, through the wise practice of rule. *Ibadi* scholars see that the *Shura* cannot be considered without the accompaniment of other important issues such as justice and stability. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> We were talking about independence in Oman history. This independence is a crucial part of anthropology. Omanis themselves were familiar with independence and used to running their affairs themselves. This is what Prophet Mohammad noticed. He appointed *Walis* and rulers from among them. It is as if Omanis have always had the desire to rectify the political situation following every setback through returning to

> the right (Imamate) legal system of governance. This may be waived whenever the practice of *Shura* and justice is available to run the country`s affairs, leading to welfare, stability, security, livelihood expansion, scientific production and care for religious institutions, including mosques and endowments etc.

Similarly, RR2 (1 April 2009) said that a ruling system with *Ibadism* does not look at *Shura* alone but looks into other aspects that are of no less significance, such as stability, which is regarded as one of the basic pillars in rule, and justice, which is seen in Islam as a basic right to all people living in the country, including the non-Muslims. He also spoke about the way of inauguration of the Muslim ruler, which he regards as a flexible process that cannot be restricted. He supported his argument by mentioning the differences between the processes of inaugurating each of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs. He also said that rulers throughout the Omani history, be they Imams or Sultans, had practised *Shura* during their reign, and they did not tyrannise by their own opinions but consulted with far-sighted people. This means that the different systems are legitimate so long as they embrace the *Shura*.

There are some other *Shari'a* legal bases with *Ibadism* that facilitate the acceptance of hereditary regimes, and respondents have addressed these, RR4 (24 February 2009) said:

> In the religious thoughts of the Omani people, national policy itself is the religion, even though it changes and the nation's interests need to be weighed and considered. These changes that fulfil the nation's interests are seen as part of the religion, particularly in response to global changes. This was the prevailing view over the years, with any disparity in the proportions of those scales taken into account. This was recognised by the previous Omani scholars, and from it, general rules became ingrained, such as: damage should be removed, preventing corruption is preferable to bringing gain, religion is the final destination, and, if two evils conflict, the lesser damaging effect should be chosen. This flexibility has enabled the transition from the Imamates

> systems to the ones of the Sultans, without any constraints or hindrances.

What further strengthens the legitimacy of the hereditary regimes in *Ibadism* is that some of the *Ibadi* religious scholars recognise dynastic orders in their publications. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) mentioned that *Ibadi* authors accepted the Sultanic regimes, like Suleiman Ibn Abdullah Al-Barooni, the writer of the book *Blossoming Roses in the Ibadi Imams and Kings*. The title of the book professes an inherent acceptance of the *Ibadi* kings, particularly because mentioning kings in the title is seen as much stronger than mentioning it inside the publication. It is regarded as a strong recognition of the dynastic systems.

Ibadi scholars consider any Islamic ruling system legitimate as long as it recognises and practises the *Shura*. Respondents spoke about the different types of ruling systems that are seen as being legitimate in *Ibadism*. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> *Ibadism* had two types of governance. It is either an Imamate in which the *Faqeeh* (jurist) had the major role, or it may be governance by force and inheritance. If the ruler called himself an Imam, then he should consult the jurist and as a result, the door will be open for the Imam or the jurist to practise his political point of view. If the ruler calls himself a sultan then he no longer needs the *Faqeeh*. Indeed, along the *Ibadi* history and until the era of Sultan Qaboos, the jurist had his role; he is still a part of the political equation, he is not excluded. This does not mean that the Sultanate is illegitimate, we should not confuse the two matters. What I want to emphasise is that we should not limit the *Ibadi* tradition to the governance of the Imamates. We should be careful concerning this point.

What emerges from the above is crucial, as it clarifies that the tension that has always existed between the Imamate and the Sultanic state is not due to conflict over the legitimacy of the ruling regime. Rather it was due to other political reasons. What further supports this argument

is that *Ibadi* scholars recognise the title 'Sultan'. As mentioned above, *Ibadi* scholars have chosen the title 'Imam' in order to differentiate themselves from the other Islamic sects. But they do not consider other titles forbidden. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) said:

> There is nothing in the *Shari'a* law that determines the title of the Islamic ruler. He can be called Imam or Sultan or President, but he has to be ready to accept *Shura*, and implement it in the Islamic framework. This will lead to something close to the three authorities (the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary Authority), if he follows the pillars of ruling in Islam: justice, the *Shura* and considering the interests of people. This is because justice guides us to the judiciary authority, the *Shura* guides us to the legislative authority and the public interest guides us to the executive authority.

Similarly, RR10 (13 April 2009) supports this argument by saying that it is not necessary to call the Muslim ruler an Imam. The *Ibadis* were not satisfied with the Umayyad rulers, and they wanted to mark their Islamic experience with the title of Imam; this has no connection to any religious perspective.

RR3 (25 March 2009) said:

> The use of the Sultan title by the Omani people does not conflict with the title of Imam, as Sultan was mentioned in the Holy Quran, and was used by some Muslims such as the Ottomans. Even Abdul Aziz Bin Saud was a Sultan before he converted himself to a King for some reason or another.

As such, the ruling system in *Ibadism* is not confined to the Imamate non-hereditary system but can also tolerate the other monarchic systems. Of course, the Imamate system is given priority in *Ibadism*, in which *Shura* becomes an obligation for the Imam. However, *Ibadi* jurists also look into other vital issues in ruling systems; they look at the stability of the society, justice, and the nation's interests, taking into account global changes. Moreover, the way of inauguration of

the Muslim ruler is a flexible process as it does not have to be done through *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*. The title of Imam is not divine, but it was used by *Ibadi* people to differentiate him from the Caliph title that was used by the hereditary Islamic states.

The title of Sultan is not prohibited in Islam so long as he adheres to *Shura* and justice and fulfils the nation's interests. Therefore, it can be said that, on the one hand, there is no doubt surrounding the legitimacy of the current ruling system in Oman in that it has fulfilled all of the issues mentioned by the jurists above, including differences to *Shura*. On the other hand, this system might not be considered authoritarian, at least not in the same way as authoritarian regimes in the Arab world (discussed in Chapter Two), as it did not tyrannise by its own opinions but consulted with far-sighted people in accordance with the *Ibadi* notion.

The following sections discuss respondents' views of both the Imamate system and the other systems that ruled Oman in a hope to clarify the kind of relationship between the Imamate and the Sultanate and hence give an answer to the third research question.

The Non-Hereditary Regime (the Imamate)

Having discussed the respondents' views regarding the different political systems in *Ibadism*, I set out here to discuss the particularities of the Imamate (non-hereditary) system. Chapters Three and Four noted that some of the Imamate states throughout Omani history seem, at first glance, to have some sort of hereditary nature. Respondents, however, rejected this claim. RR7 (17 April 2009) said:

> Choice of the Imam is a must; *Ibadi* did not follow the inheritance of governance and the rule that appears in the form of families is not inherited, but is carried out by the pledge of allegiance, by at least some jurists. Many of the Imams' allegiances were supported by just two or three jurists.

Respondents concentrated on the principles of contract and homage in the Imamate system. The Imam cannot be considered legitimate

unless the *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* select him. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> Political authority was given by the orders of the religious elite, especially in the first epoch of Imamate in Oman. '*Faqeeh*' or the religious scholar was the main element in any government. He practiced *Shura* both theoretically and practically, by taking part in the government's affairs, yet *Shura* was still confined to the elite. The elite were the only people who could appoint the Imam or dismiss him. *Bay'ah* (homage) was an essential condition. If the Imam was not given a pledge of allegiance he could not be a ruler and he would lose his legitimacy.

Regardless of the selection of the Imam by the religious elite, the Imams themselves in *Ibadism* are different. They differ, mainly, according to the way they attain the post. RR3 (25 March 2009) explained these different types; he said that the most legitimate is the selected Imam (*Imama Aqd*), then the *Mohtasib* Imam, who is the person who undertakes the responsibilities of Imamate during the period of weakness, not for a majestic goal but for the sake of God. Finally, there is the *Mutaghallib* Imam, who takes authority by force, normally for a majestic goal. This still can be accepted if he properly implements the responsibility of Imamate, particularly justice. This explains why an Islamic ruler of any type can still be considered legitimate so long as he is found just and qualified, but the most legitimate is the one selected by *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*.

In the *Ibadi* tradition, some Imams have been regarded as strong and others weak, depending on their ability to interpret the religious jurisprudence. One of the stipulations that religious elites impose upon a weak Imam is to consult them in all affairs. This categorisation is applicable to the three types of Imams mentioned in the previous paragraph. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said, 'In *Ibadism* the appellation of strong and weak Imam does not mean he is strong or weak politically or militarily. The weak Imam is the one who has not got enough knowledge to reach the stage of conclusion and devisal, thus they call him a weak Imam'.

After discussing the non-hereditary system in *Ibadism*, some respondents discussed examples of the Imamate system that might have looked like hereditary systems. This was to clarify any misunderstandings that may have arisen around the Imamate system. For example, RR1 spoke about the two Imamate states that looked somewhat like they had a hereditary system. The first was in the second Imamate state that started with Mohammed Bin Abi Affan in (177 AH) and ended with Imam Azan Bin Tamim in (280 AH). All Imams came from one tribe (i.e. Yahmad) except one, Imam Abdul Malik Bin Humaid. Although they came from the same tribe, they did not come from the same family. The second is the family Imamate that appeared in the Ya'ariba's Imamate. Imam Sultan Bin Saif is the cousin of Nasser Bin Murshid, the founder of the Ya'ariba's Imamate, and was succeeded by his son Bil'arab Bin Sultan. Then his second son, Saif Bin Sultan, followed him, then Sultan Bin Saif the Second and so on. RR1 (14 January 2009) also said:

> Concerning the tribal rule that appeared in the Second Imamate State, it is not a hereditary system, as it may appear from the first instance. There is no doubt that homage took place to the person, not to his kinship. He is selected firstly by *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, then they gave him the homage after dictating the stipulation of Imamate on him, such as: 'Never breach the opinions of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*', and 'Rule according to the Holy Book', and to follow the footprints of his precedents. These had no hereditary intentions, it was done according to their qualifications and history has proved the adequacy of those Imams. Nevertheless we wish that it had never happened in the *Ibadi* history and in particular in the Imamate history in order to avoid any misunderstandings.

Here is an important argument that enhances the legitimacy of the non-Imamate systems. The Imamate system itself is accused of having had some sort of inheritance issues, despite their defence that the relatives of the Imams were selected by the scholars and that it was not a direct inheritance. This weakness in the position of the Imamate is a

strong point in favour of the other political systems that ruled Oman, where an heir is not nominated and the matter of occupying the throne is left to the process of selection. In this case, legitimacy of those regimes is seen as being almost equal to the legitimacy of the Imams. Therefore, according to this issue, the followers of the traditional *Shura* arguably might be in a weaker position to challenge the contemporary *Shura*, the one adopted by the government in Oman.

Furthermore, in order to stress the flexibility of the Islamic political system in selecting a ruler, respondents spoke about the long-sighted vision of the elite, in which the ruler's religious capability is not the sole parameter that qualifies him for the post. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) said:

> They did not bequest the rule on a whim, but the matter of practical implementation, the long-sighted vision for the state's future and the nation's interest, led the intellectuals to pay homage to the candidate, based on what had been noticed of their implementation of the *Shari'a* principles to ensure a calm and stable rule.

Once again, the respondents gave an example of what happened after the death of the Prophet. This is in order to show that the Islamic system is flexible and allows for the selection of the suitable person for the right time. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) said:

> If you go back to what had happened in Saqifat Bani Saedah you will find that there are essential parameters to be found in any person selected for the rule; it is well known that Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib was enriched in the science of *Fiqh* more than Abu Bakr or Omar (the first two Caliphs), however due to some other parameters other than the *Shari'a Fiqh*, they were selected as Caliphs before him. These characteristics from my point of view and from my readings are taken into account in selecting the ruler after the death of the Imam or Sultan. If these qualities are found in a person related to the ruler or close to the circle of decision making, then he will be given priority over others for

> the sake of stability and order. If the qualities are not found in a relative of the past ruler then he will not be selected and a search will take place in the distant circles of the past ruler.

After discussing the principles surrounding the non-hereditary system (Imamate), respondents raised an important issue concerning the way of practising the rule in the aftermath of homage. They saw that those theoretical principles in selecting the ruler are not sufficient to legitimise him if time proves that he is not suitable for the post. This means that although legitimate selection of the ruler is fundamental, this selection might be overruled by the ruler's wise performance afterwards. This argument is in favour of the ruling regime in Oman now and hence of the contemporary *Shura* process adopted by that regime, as discussed in Chapter Five. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> One point not known to many people is that *Shura* is also considered by *Ibadis* to be closely connected to justice. I mean it is not sufficient for the public authority, that the method is right whereas the practice is wrong. If the method by which a ruler is chosen is right and this ruler does not implement the *Shura* in a manner that leads to justice and running the country's affairs in a proper way, it would not be considered satisfactory that the method of choice was right. It does not help him that he was chosen in the right way and yet is ruling without justice.

The Semi-Hereditary Regime

As has been discussed, the *Ibadi* political system witnessed both the non-hereditary and the hereditary political regimes. I prefer to call the latter the 'semi-hereditary' system as Omani history has not had such a thing as the 'crown prince' post, which is abundant in other Arabian Gulf States, where the crown prince automatically becomes in charge after the death of the previous ruler. In Oman, the new ruler in all cases is chosen by the elites or by the ruling family themselves, and even if the ruler has a son, he is not directly eligible for the post and

has to go through the selection process. As such, the non-hereditary and the hereditary systems are seen as legitimate by *Ibadism* so long as they adhere to *Shari'a* law and recognise the *Shura*. In this section, I discuss the respondents' views about this exception in the *Ibadi* political ideal and how it comes to accept the rulers who have not been selected by the elite. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said, 'the Imamate is not an obligation unless someone is found to be suitable for it and its components are available such as *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* and the sufficient number of men and munitions are also available'.

Respondents said that the ruler might be truly legitimised if he shows good conduct towards the nation's religion and its people, even if his selection to the post was not brought about through the religious elite. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> Implementing *Shura* sometimes exceeds the issue of electing a ruler, and includes concentrating on the practice of running the country's affairs and justice, which means establishing equality among people, equality in opportunities, establishing an efficient administrative system that simplifies means of living and setting up a social system which observes prevalent customs. All this comes together to grant legitimacy and legality to a ruler.

One of the points the respondents stressed, which justifies the legitimacy of the non-elected ruler, is that the religious elite consider it to be the case that people are normally more obedient to those rulers belonging to a family or a tribe who have experience in ruling. This point in particular justifies the implicit arrangement that took place between the Qahtani and Adnani tribal blocks during the eighth century (see Chapter Three), which granted the Imamate to the Qahtani tribes as throughout the Omani history people used to submit to their rule. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> The intellectuals pay attention to the fact that people subjugate to those having precedents in terms of ruling; this is particularly so if qualifications are found in the son; among those qualifications we include education, mainly religious science,

> integrity, ability to take responsibility, impartiality, confidence and justice. These qualifications qualify the person to be the Imam, so if his father or grandfather or brother was an Imam and the people subjugated to him, therefore people will submit even more to this person because he comes from the same family.

Another point which enhances the legitimacy of the ruler is his successful performance no matter how he has reached the post. Most of the interviewees spoke about this. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> People may accept someone who has not been chosen in the right way. I mean if *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* did not meet at least and elect him and give him the pledge. He may be chosen nonetheless by some people without public pledge. However, he may make reforms, do justice to the subject, and implement the principles of *Shura* and justice in a practical way. So, they may tolerate this and see his authority over them as legitimate.

The respondents invoked examples from Omani history, wherein the religious elite legitimised one hereditary ruling tribe and refused legitimacy to another one according to their difference in performance. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) mentioned that both the Nabahina and Ya'ariba States witnessed issues of regime succession, but they legitimised the latter because it brought prosperity that became apparent as being in their interest in science, in the welfare of the community, in the increase in the modes of production and the religious and agricultural aspects, in addition to the geographic expansion of the state. As such, there were no attempts to overthrow them, as was the case with the Nabahina State. Accordingly, *Shura* cannot be viewed as independent from justice.

The respondents also spoke about the current ruling family in order to explain why it is seen as legitimate. As the founder of the current ruling family was an Imam selected by *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, his successors still can gain legitimacy from the legitimacy of their

grandfather and from their adherence to *Shura* and to the policies of the religious intellectuals. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> Ahmed Bin Said (the founder) reached the Imamate through the *Shura* process and his progeny adhered to the religion and to the religious intellectuals who were taken as advisors, judges, teachers for their children, and they were consulted in the religious teachings. Even when some followers of the Imamate tried to go forcefully against the Sultans, for different reasons, the Sultans did not renounce them and they remained in adherence to them and to the sect because the sect exemplifies a security and a socially significant aspect of Omani history.

Also, using the principle of prioritising those having ruling experience, RR4 (24 February 2009) argued that as long as the qualifications of civility and leadership are exhibited in the person from the ruling family, even if there is an equivalent to him in the society as a whole, his roots with the ruling family should give him the priority in order to avoid dispute and to avoid conflict within the society. He supported his argument by saying that Prophet Moses, peace be upon him, was not mistaken to ask his lord to involve his brother Haroun as a prophet with him, to share in the responsibility entrusted to him, with the efficient people at his time – the good Jewish believers, but the kinship overbalanced that selection.

The above quotes argue that the Imamate and the Sultanate can live side by side as long as both systems fulfil the general requirements of ruling, such as *Shura*, the honouring of justice and the furthering of prosperity. They reflect also the flexibility found in the *Shari'a* law and in the *Ibadi* notion regarding the legitimacy of the ruler in Islam, a fact that connects Islam to the day-to-day issues and arguably narrows the distance between Islam and democracy.

As for the homage of the Sultans, respondents said that there is nothing prohibiting the members of the ruling family from internally selecting one of their own to be the new ruler. Here is a signal of the article in the Basic Statute of the State which mandates the selection

of the new sultan to the ruling family council. For example, RR7 (17 April 2009) said:

> In the Sultans' system in Oman, allegiance is pledged internally by the ruling families, and there is no harm in that. It not necessary that allegiance has to be pledged by the jurist, this is in order to avoid strife and loss of lives and waste of money and the proliferation of terror and fear. The ruler must be obeyed as long as good conditions are ensured, and challenging him is not permissible in order to prevent sedition. consent and submission have the same effect of allegiance. Therefore, whoever takes the rule, be they Sultan or President or Imam, so long as they achieve the duties proscribed, they must be obeyed.

It can be argued that this represents *Ibadi* thought and it is in favour of democratically selected rulers, as the quote calls for obeying whoever takes the rule so long as he fulfils the Islamic requirements.

In summary, the political system in *Ibadism* has not got just one unique form. It can be a hereditary system as long as it achieves the desired goals of the good for religion and the citizenry. The selection of Imams by the religious elite in the Imamate system is an obligation, but it is not an obligation in the hereditary systems. The selection of rulers, however, is not seen as sufficient to legitimise them if their performance proves they are unsuitable. By contrast, successful performance of a ruler may substitute for a lack of legal selection, and he must be obeyed regardless of the method of his selection. The ruler becomes more exposed to political challenges if he is found to be unsatisfactory in the post regardless of how he reached the throne.

Stipulations for Deposition of the Ruler

Ibadi jurisprudence sets general principles which regulate the matter of challenging or deposing the ruler.[6] It appears that Imams are more vulnerable to deposition because they are expected to stick to the religious teachings. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> The Imam comes by a contract and if he does not apply the '*Fiqh*' or Islamic jurisprudence which is justice, mercy with

> people, humility with people and the application of laws, he can be deposed. If he applies the Islamic jurisprudence, people will be satisfied with him and if he does not apply it, unseating him would become necessary.

The objection of the jurists alone towards certain Imams, whom they may consider illegitimate, is seen as insufficient for deposing them. People's resentment – as will be discussed below – is more important in delegitimising the Imam. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> Sometimes Faqeehs objected to a certain Imam, and they could not unseat him. Some jurists objected to the Imam Mohammad Ibn Ismael Al-Hadhery in Nizwa and he was not unseated. In the epoch of the Imam Saif Ibn Sultan, Aisha bint Rashed Al-Riyamiya, who was one of the great Islamic jurists in her age, objected to Qaid Al-Ardh [nickname of Imam Sultan Ibn Saif] and considered his Imamate illegitimate, but he was not unseated and was considered one of the most successful Imams militarily in his fight against the Portuguese.

As for systems other than the Imamate, the jurisprudence is less strict because the nature of the ruling dynamic is not religious but civil. The ruler in hereditary systems becomes vulnerable when he obviously breaches the religious teachings or misuses his authority. In the *Ibadi* ideal the Imamate does not disappear; it serves to monitor the situation from a distance, and it intervenes at times which are necessary in order to protect religion, state and people. For example, RR10 (13 April 2009) claims that the dogmatic aspect of *Ibadism* necessitates the presence of a Muslim ruler for Muslims at all the times according to the system of Imamate. He said that there is no era without an Imam. So the *Ibadis* divided the Imamates into different categories, which are the apparent Imamate, the hidden Imamate, the purchased Imamate and the defence Imamate, according to the strength and weakness of the relevant Muslims.

However, there are some stipulations that should be taken into account before challenging or deposing the ruler. This is in order to

avoid any sort of unrest in the state. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> The question of deposing the ruler involves certain controls. It is subject to the public interests which decide what can rectify the status of a particular ruler. It goes through some steps, beginning with advice, then supervision, then an assessment with regard to accountability and a demand for reform. Sometimes it ends with the necessity of deposition where possible. Deposition as I understand from some readings is determined by two aspects: popular discontent with the performance of a particular ruler, and accordance with the principle of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*, including the advice of scientists, experts and scholars. They may multiply or may diminish, but it is rare to have only one segment, say only scholars criticizing the performance of a certain ruler without popular resentment regarding the poor conditions of living and social, moral, religious and even scientific aspects of society.

After following all the steps mentioned by RR5 above, the decision of deposition only takes place if the victory's essential bases are available; otherwise the process will be a failure and become a mess. This was asserted by RR3 (25 March 2009) when he argued that in the custom of the Imamate, it is forbidden to rise against the unjust rulers unless their blasphemy is very obvious. If this is the case, then it is stipulated that 'victory-agents' or conspirators have to be, to a great extent, part of the process, and those going against him must have a great belief and will towards victory; otherwise the revolution will be converted into mess, which is not acceptable in *Shari'a* legislation.

From this discussion, it seems that the citizenry's resentment is more influential in the deposition of a ruler than the jurists' objections. In all cases, the regulations which organise the process of deposing the ruler should be followed, starting with the advice stage. Military coups are forbidden according to Islamic law. For example, RR10 (13 April 2009) said:

> *Coups d'état* are not present in Islamic law; even the dismissal of the ruler can never take place unless his apostasy is very clear, even

> if his disbelief is clear, disobedience should be preceded by some processes such as consultation and other things. There is a saying that 'it's better to be ruled by a fair ruler who does not apply the Islamic law than ruled by a Muslim ruler who applies the Islamic law in the presence of sedition'. The religious intention here is to keep stability and spread justice and ensure people's freedom.

Some respondents spoke about the process of the foundation of the current ruling family, which took over from the Ya'ariba when they misused their authority and left the country subject to foreign intervention. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said that the second half of the State of Ya'ariba witnessed many flaws because the practice of rule was wrong and the performance became weak. They got rid of the *Shura*, people started to feel resentful, and weakness was established. Therefore, some parts of Oman were seized, and disorder sparked until Imam Ahmed Bin Said saved the situation. Thus, even the current monarchic system originated as an Imamate rule which had rescued the country during an epoch of weakness, and this is what the Imamate normally does.

The interviewees stressed that the Imamate throughout time had not been involved in challenging a ruler unless he has been proved to be unqualified for the post. Whenever the country witnessed political unrest, the *Shura*, represented by the jurists, became involved in rescuing the situation. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said:

> The vision of the religious intellectuals throughout history has remained wide and comprehensive and the *Shura* that has represented them has remained the saver of the country during periods of weakness. The weakest periods which the country has witnessed have been due to the weakness of the religious intellectuals or disputes among the ruling families that have either led to seeking help from foreign forces or to the invasion of the country by other countries. The weakness that occurred towards the end of the Nabahina State, for example, led to Portuguese intervention in some parts of the country, and the weakness which occurred towards the end of the Ya'ariba State led to a tribal dispute that in turn led to the Persian invasion.

This means that the followers of the traditional *Shura* cannot be seen as a threat to the current political regime in Oman, since throughout history their interventions have not been directed towards the ruling regimes themselves but to rescuing the state during periods of weakness. This is particularly the case when a foreign force has become involved in internal issues of the state due to weakness in the political regime. Also, the matter of deposing a ruler is not arbitrary but subject to certain rules. The decision to depose the ruler is not enough to be taken by the religious intellectuals; it should be backed by clear public resentment. In all cases, it should not be taken through a military coup but through certain steps that start by advice to the ruler, then supervision of his performance, ending up with announcing his disqualification for the post. The last step should not be taken unless there are guarantees for the success of the removal, such as sufficient people and munitions to challenge the ruler militarily. Without these sorts of guarantees, religious scholars prefer to stay under the same ruler to avoid any presence of sedition in the society. This argument is in favour of the stability of any democratic system that may appear in any Islamic state if not challenged by the vertical social divisions. Unfortunately, the twentieth century witnessed many coups although arguably this took place in Arab states where Muslim people had deviated from their wise Islamic principles and adopted external ideologies.

The Traditional and Contemporary *Shura*

The previous sections have shown that any Islamic political system can be tolerated by *Ibadism* as long as it practises the *Shura* in one way or another. This section specifically explores religious respondents' views of the contemporary *Shura* and how they evaluate it religiously in comparison to the traditional *Shura*. As for the *Shura* itself, the respondents believe that any type of *Shura* is welcomed by *Ibadism*. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> If we talk about the *Shura* in the contemporary time, I say that the *Shura* is welcomed according to the *Shari'a* legislation, and that the development that we see is related to the

> in-loco-parentis [the Sultan] principle, which sees the country's goals as being modernisation proportionate with the level of maturity in the Omani mentality.

The contemporary *Shura* is welcomed by the respondents because it does not neglect the historical aspect of the *Shura* and the religious legislations. RR5 (5 January 2009), for example, argues that the contemporary *Shura* in Oman is not duplicated from east or west. It is the product of three sources: (1) the Quran and the *Sunnah*, (2) from the historical experience and the historical product of this experience, and (3) from the requirements of the age. This means that contemporary *Shura* has the same legitimacy as the traditional one.

Many respondents believed that the modernisation process in the country has changed the old notion of *Shura* from depending on the elite alone to exercise wider political participation. For example, RR8 (20 April 2009) said:

> The complexity of science and the scientific disciplines which compel us to keep in parallel line with modernisation through the appointment of the right person in the right place, and to consult the people who are in good professions, and not do as we did in the past where the man of the tribe and religious jurists are consulted over everything. This is the simple difference between the previous and the current schools.

What can be derived from the above is that the impact of globalisation in terms of tribal legitimacy increasingly determines political power in Oman. In particular, the emerging professional classes in the Sultanate now form a more influential force in urban areas – one that was in the previous school represented by the traditional tribal structures.

Respondents also reported that the contemporary *Shura* has combined both tradition and modernity through the establishment of the two-council system, wherein the State Council substitutes the traditional Council of Elite, and the *Shura* Council takes a modern form of participation by having publicly elected members. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) argues that the government, through the contemporary

Shura, blended historical precedent with modern innovation, looking at what is available in the world, and implementing both the traditional and the modern *Shura* in the two-council system.

Some respondents state that although public participation in the *Shura* is a new practice to *Ibadism*, it has legitimate support from the legal scholars. For example, RR7 (17 April 2009) said:

> There is an Islamic principle which can be used to legitimise the elections, which states: the nation does not meet on a deviation. Therefore, the collective opinion is usually given preference, and this can be viewed as equivalent to the views of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* in the traditional *Shura*. The current expansion makes for more efficiency and accuracy as the opinion of a hundred is better than the opinion of ten.

Respondents also believed that there is no harm in expanding the Council of Elite (*Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd*). This is a sign of the current situation of the State Council. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) argues that the concept of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* can be expanded to embrace civil society associations as civil rule does not require members of the associations to be purely religious. It can also contain physicians, lawyers, sportsmen – if there is a person who has influence on the society – and also women if there are female associations with social influence. Most important to RR1 is that the member of the council has an influence over a good part of society.

In addition to welcoming the contemporary *Shura*, religious respondents did not hesitate to criticise the traditional *Shura* because it concentrated on religious and tribal leaders and did not benefit from all the qualified elite. This indicates that the traditional model itself was not a perfect model that could be used as a parameter to assess the contemporary *Shura*. This may serve to strengthen the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura* and reduces the likelihood of it being challenged by the traditional *Shura*. For example, RR10 (13 April 2009) said:

> *Shura* was based on scholars but Oman is big and scholars are everywhere, so not all scholars were consulted and those who

> were consulted and who took part in the council of the elite were the scholars who were around the Imam. Nowadays, after development of the means of transportation and communication, it has become natural for *Shura* to develop into an accurate political system that benefits from the experiences of others and achieves the interests of the nation and the citizenry.

The respondents seem to be content with the contemporary *Shura* because, as in the traditional *Shura*, the concept of the *Umma* and the preference of collectivism over individualism are rooted in the process. For example, RR4 said, 'There is no conflict between the traditional and contemporary *Shura* in terms of the aims and objectives it espouses. It is the objection to individualism by the collective desire to reach a superior goal'. Similarly, RR8 (20 April 2009) said, 'The Omanis are exercising their political right in the *Shura* Council, and they have inherited this tradition from their ancestors, while still maintaining respect for the practice of the old and the young'.

This indicates that the religious elite may play a role in hindering the process of social transformation in Oman from reaching advanced standards with a full separation of powers, such as those seen in the Western democracies. They welcome any sort of modernisation in the political process so long as it does not go against the superior goals of the concept of the *Umma* and so long as it preserves Islamic values, ethics, traditions and norms.

In summary, respondents do not see any contradiction between the traditional and the contemporary *Shura*, which arguably leaves no question about the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura* at least among religious leaders. The religious respondents have shown a clear flexibility in their vision of the contemporary *Shura*, and theirs are not merely personal views – most of the views are explained and sometimes supported by evidence from the *Shari'a* law. They believe that the age needs modernisation in *Shura* as professional classes have now emerged and the concept of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* itself does not mind the expansion of the Council of Elite. This expansion, according to their views can also include women, which demonstrates a revolution against the radical views of some Islamists against women. They also accept

the presence of a two-council system aimed at substituting the old Council of Elite with the State Council and increasing the number of *Shura* Council members as a substitute for the quality of the members of the old elite council, because the larger the number of members, the more accurate their decision is perceived to be. But at the same time they stress the necessity of preserving the concept of *Umma*, which means that the degree of advancement in the *Shura* should preserve the values, ethics, traditions and norms of society and not reach a level of full separation of powers.

The Powers of the Contemporary Shura

As for the powers given to the contemporary *Shura*, the respondents seem to be supporting the government's steps in the gradual opening up of the political horizon. They believe that this gradualism reflects a shrewd approach to government. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said:

> The contemporary *Shura* is wise because of its gradualism in its modernising approach. It is not imitating the others and it is not hurrying in the implementation of modernity. Some might have preceded us in education levels but they have not been so canny in implementing democracy.

The religious respondents believe that some of the democratic experiences in the Arab world have been devastating because they were implemented without sufficiently careful attention being given to the nature of the society. For example, RR10 (13 April 2009) argued that some pluralistic experiences in some Arab countries have hindered the march of progress because they hurried to put all authorities in the hands of the parliament. He added that he is with keeping many authorities in the hands of political leadership to determine what is good for the nation and the citizenry. This does not negate him from being for the development and activity of the *Shura* but condones it being done in a calculated way. Also RR8 (20 April 2009) said:

> We hear about the parliament's chairs being thrown under the pretext of democracy, and of parliaments dissolved a government

> resigning and interests breaking down, and we do not want this to happen in Oman because this is a disruption of development and gives priority to personal or factional interests.

This shows that religious people are not only confined to religious studies but are open-minded and know what is going on around them. This knowledge led them to conclude that the gradual steps taken by the government in opening up the political horizon are best for Oman, as some other, quicker moves towards democratisation in some Arab states that have the same social divisions witnessed some devastating results. Accordingly, these respondents urge the citizenry, particularly the younger generation, not to hurry towards opening up the political horizon in order to avoid the mistakes seen in other Arab states such as Iraq and Lebanon. They predict that more powers will be given over in the future but urge people to maintain the Omani identity for the meantime. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) argued that we do not have to hurry this opening up, precisely to avoid mistakes. He added that the Sultanate now is obliged to adapt its policies to fit the international standards. These things make the country fulfil what the young generation wants but according to Omani – and not alien – standards.

When the religious respondents spoke of maintaining the Omani identity, they most likely meant to reserve the concept of *Umma* and to prioritise collectivism over individualism. They believe that the separation of powers counters these principles, and consequently, it stops society from benefiting from all its potential. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) said:

> If you say that, for example, there is a complete separation between the executive and the judiciary powers, you are here helping to create clear institutions in society as much as you deprive the community of specific benefits. Therefore, the issue of the separation of powers must be examined. As a specialist in *Shari'a* studies, I would say that the full separation of powers – a point that needs to be studied – may lead to the omission of some of the benefits of society, such as the system of the promotion of

> virtue and the prevention of vice, for example, which accords with legal conditions and with controls and which addresses many of the general phenomena in society. The argument applies to the *Shura* Council in the event of making it a legislative authority separated from the rest of the authorities. It will make the other bodies lose too much of their powers, whether individually or collectively, whether it was a certain ministry or the Council of Ministers, or whatever. The Islamic community needs to be a holistic community for the service of each individual. Community is the goal, not the individual. There should be an optimal use of all elements of society.

The Influence of Tribal Fanaticism

As the government's elite in Chapter Four did, the religious respondents spoke of the tribal nature of Omani society. They believed that during the first Imamate states the role of the religious elite was powerful, but its role dwindled over time due to the strengthening role of tribalism. This had not been seen as a problem as long as tribal fanaticism did not monopolise the whole political decision-making process. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> With time, the authority of the *Faqeeh* began to dwindle and the authority of the tribe became stronger. There were examples in which the Imam was appointed by the leaders of tribes, only without the opinion of the *Faqeeh* like the Imamate of Mohammed Bin Nasser Al-Ghafri at the end of the epoch of the Ya'ariba reign.

Unfortunately, this tribal decision to appoint Al-Ghafri led to the emergence of a long tribal conflict between the Hinawi and Ghafri blocs, discussed in Chapter Three. This is because the pure tribal political decision is regarded as illegitimate in the Omani tradition. However, tribalism can influence political decision making nonetheless. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) said, 'Tribal leaders had a role in *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* in the past and in the security and stability of Oman'.

The religious respondents, agreeing with the government elite's opinions presented in Chapter Four, believed that tribal fanaticism in the current era has been weakened due to the welfare provision of the government (a reference to the social contract) and advancement in education. However, with the existence of this weakness, the spiritual influence of tribal fanaticism on people is still felt. It appears most obviously during the *Shura* Council's election. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> The tribe is not the same as before. In the past, the leader of the tribe was the only one who could affect the village. Nowadays there are many factors which have an effect such as education, the liberty that has begun to appear, and the high standard of living that has made them independent from the leader of the tribe. However, mentally, we still cannot get rid of the tribe as an ideal however much we can get rid of it as a social entity. Voters think that the leader of the tribe can benefit them, their families and the whole village where they live. These aspects encouraged the populace to elect the respective tribal candidate.

Also, RR8 supported this argument when he said that the Sultan, having in mind the structure of tribal society of Oman, did not start the *Shura* process by elections but by appointing members of the council. The Sultan did not want our democratisation process to be dialectical but wanted it to be organised, civilised and effective.

Once again, the reliance on educated classes to improve the democratic culture appeared in the religious respondents' views. They believe that the graduates in particular are able to reduce the influence of tribal fanaticism in elections, which would facilitate the process of encouraging more qualified citizens to run for office. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said:

> There is a stronger impact [of tribal fanaticism] in certain districts more than others but it is not hindering much; in time the number of educated people will increase, the faith in *Shura* will be greater, and educated people will be selected, not the candidate of the tribe.

Boycotting the Elections: The Graduates Response

Respondents gave almost the same reasons as those mentioned in the previous chapter for the boycotting by educated classes of the *Shura* Council's elections. Some of them addressed the role of tribal fanaticism and the council's limited effectiveness. For example, RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> The tribe is still powerful and it makes the educated people less important, that's why the educated person cannot reach the Council easily. The tendency of educated people to refrain from elections has other reasons behind it, such as lack of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the Council, participation not being compulsory, and the ambiguity regarding the benefit the Council brings to people. The educated people are not satisfied with the benefits of the *Shura* Council; they still think that its effectiveness is limited and that the members inside the Council do not have enough power to practice.

Some respondents spoke of the unwillingness of graduates to sacrifice their career for temporary council membership, for the non-effective media coverage of the council's performance and for the ambiguity surrounding parliamentary immunity. For example, RR9 (4 March 2009) said:

> A citizen with a successful career may not be willing to sacrifice his job for a temporary membership that may not exceed four years; some consider it as a risk. This is in addition to the weakness in the financial stimulus. Among other factors, concern was expressed regarding shortcomings in the information that the Council can access and the inertia of the citizen such that he remains isolated from the performance of the Council. Finally, the lack of clarity in the scope of parliamentary immunity and how the future of the member might turn out to be after the expiry of the period makes people hesitant to run for a seat.

Some respondents said that the contemporary *Shura* is not perfect but graduates should not boycott it. They should be involved and convince

the political leadership to improve the level of the experiment. For example, RR8 (20 April 2009) argued that they should try to encourage change in the way Omani people favour: through persuasion, rather than drumbeating, in reference to some pluralistic experiments in the region. He believed that although there are negative aspects of the practice so far, including the non-legislative powers for the *Shura* Council, these powers and others will certainly come. He added that these things demanded to be dealt with using wisdom and good policy decisions. Nevertheless, he added that these children must be embraced and enlightened until their vision becomes mature.

RR8 spoke here about some of the social problems, which represent the social divisions – discussed in Chapter Two – present in most Middle Eastern societies that need to be taken into account when opening up the political horizon. Some of the interviewees believe that the powers given to the *Shura* Council are sufficient at this stage and that they will increase with time when better-educated members reach the council. They urge the young generation not to be influenced by the media. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said:

> Educated people should not boycott elections, what is said about the limited authorities of the Council is not accurate and reflects a short-sighted vision; more authority is available and when more educated members reach the Council and they send up their visualisations to His Majesty the Sultan for more authority they will be given it. It is not acceptable to give authority to one who never effectively uses it. The demands that we hear these days from some in the citizenry are regarded as exhibiting too much touchiness due to the influence of foreign factors. The areas open for the civil society organisations are sufficient, and proportionate to the current situation.

Challenge of the 'Rentier State Model'

Respondents spoke indirectly about the implicit social contract between the government and its citizens. They believe that according

to this contract, the people working in the public sector criticise the government less than those working in the private sector. For example, RR1 (14 April 2009) said:

> Sometimes the country employs citizens in jobs not to meet real requirements but in order to redistribute the wealth to those citizens. Some unnecessary ministries have been established; the government could have proceeded without them. In this regard, you find that the employee in the public sector feels that he has more claims to the government than he would have if he was employed by the private sector. As for criticism, the employee in the public sector has less criticism to offer the government when compared to those in the private sector and the latter criticises more if he gets less wages than those paid by the public sector.

The respondents accordingly believed that any big economic problem would affect the social contract, and this would be reflected in the political situation in the country. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said, 'The economic weaknesses lead to setbacks in the development that affect the citizens and this would certainly affect the political process in Oman'. Also RR4 (24 February 2009) said, 'The economic problems may lead to the emergence of a more effective private sector which might form some effective pressure, especially in the presence of trade unions which can apply pressure on the government'.

In an attempt to reduce the effect of economic problems on political stability, some respondents spoke about the connection to the global economy. They argued that nowadays states in general do not reach a point of economic failure, particularly if they cooperate with the international community, as they can seek loans or aid from other countries or international financial bodies. For example, RR1 (14 January 2009) said:

> The economic situation in the modern era is different from the ancient one; the economy is circulating now and is not stagnant. Also the economy is not local any more but is international and

> nations serve each other, so any country normally does not reach a point of bankruptcy. Rather, it seeks loans and aid from other countries, so if there is an impact it will be limited and it will be dealt with. The impact would be more if the country was in a status of animosity with other countries particularly with the great powers, which could lead to an economic boycott or an economic embargo.

This means that while the social contract might be affected by large economic problems, the legitimacy of the political regime may not be affected as both government and people can adapt to the new situation. The respondents said that, although Oman is an oil-producing state and oil is regarded as the major source of income, the Omani people and the government have managed to balance their living standards without too much luxury when compared with some neighbouring states, which will help them to cope with any economic shock. For example, RR8 (20 April 2009) said:

> As Omanis, the depletion of oil will not drive us mad, we are balanced and we are not living in comfort, and we have not abandoned our beautiful customs and traditions. The Omanis will adapt their lives depending on the circumstances; they will change their houses and cars and so on.

In summary, the religious respondents echoed the views of government respondents in Chapter Four regarding the contemporary powers given to the *Shura* Council, the influence of tribal fanaticism on elections, the negative effect of graduates' boycott on the development of the political process in Oman and the economic challenges that face the rentier state model. They seemed optimistic about the future of the *Shura* process in Oman and urged graduates not to leave a wider space for tribal fanaticism, to direct the political process and not to hurry further opening up of the political horizon as vertical social divisions may ruin the whole process – as is happening in Iraq and Lebanon. They also feel that economic crises may affect the implicit social contract but not the stability of the country.

Democracy and Globalisation and the *Ibadi's* View

The Shura and Democracy

No single respondent from this category thought democracy contradicts Islam. They think that democracy does not negatively impact the *Shura* as a principle, and it agrees with the *Shura* in terms of its practice. This is because both approaches are the direct result of human thoughts and experiences. For example, RR3 (25 March 2009) said:

> There is no contradiction between the *Shura* and democracy. It is not as some people think; that *Shura* comes from religion and democracy from the people. *Shura* is an Islamic political system that came from the Muslims' diligence and here one should differentiate between *Shura* as a principle and *Shura* as a practice. The intervention of religion in *Shura* is to immunise it from falling into being something forbidden by Islam.

I take RR3 to have meant, in the last sentence of this quote, that it is the need to protect it from adopting values that contradict Islamic values, such as full separation of powers, which weakens the very essence of the concept of *Umma*. Respondents felt that *Shura* and democracy agree in terms of the principle of the devolution of power as the rule should not be hereditary; however, the *Shura* does not agree as far as changing the ruler before he dies, becomes physically incapable or proves unsuitable for the post. For example, RR4 (24 March 2009) said:

> What can be learned from the first four Caliphs who succeeded the Prophet is different than today's democratic calls. For the recent call, leaders should be re-elected or changed every few years and this fulfils what is known as the law of devolution of power in the State. While the system of the Caliphs, may Allah be pleased with them, talks about the continuity of the rule of the Caliph, as long as he is alive, conscious and capable. So a successor cannot be elected until the previous one has died.

Therefore, the respondents believe that according to this tradition, a presidential kind of democracy such as those in the USA or France could not be implemented in Islamic societies. However, as Oman's experiment is close to a parliamentary democratisation process at the moment, nothing can prohibit the implementation of a governmental democratisation process through which the prime minister comes to be elected alongside the Sultan's position. This stability in the position of a ruler in Islam so long as he is found suitable and capable may suit Middle Eastern societies better than presidential democracies because the presence of the social divisions may find open democratic environment a fertile soil to strengthen their positions above all others, including the national interests.

It can be argued that this fact put limits to the ambitions of the new generations in Oman to have a comprehensive democratic system in future, and at the same time it strengthens the legitimacy of the ruling system and the contemporary *Shura* process. This argument has proved its validity until now, particularly when one looks at the democratisation processes in the surrounding region; for example, the experiment in Iraq.

The Shura and Globalisation

As for the relationship between Islam and globalisation, none of the interviewees thought of anything that might be used to counter globalisation. They do not look at it from a doctrinal but rather a social angle. The only concern felt was that they did not want globalisation to affect the value system in Oman. For example, RR8 said, 'keeping pace with globalisation is not a defect and is not an error unless it is affecting the fixed values of Omani society'. They do not see any harm in taking particular political steps which could be read as being an accompaniment to globalisation but, at the same time, would not contradict religion. For example, RR7 (17 April 2009) said: 'Omanis are compelled to go along with globalisation, which does not now affect our faith, ethics, traditions and customs'. Also RR8 (20 April 2009) said:

> When society does not choose women to parliament, but they are given by the State seats in the Council of Ministers and seats

> in the State Council, this is not an error as it is a wise policy, and there is nothing that prevents the majority of the members involved in the two chambers from being women.

Once again, this is an enlightened view of women that turns the table on the radical Islamic jurists and supports the Omani government views on empowering women, mentioned in Chapter Three. For the relationship between the *Shura* and globalisation, the majority of respondents believed that there is no link between the two as the political process in Oman began in the 1970s while the strong trend of globalisation was only really felt in the 1990s. For example, RR2 (1 April 2009) argued that although the *Shura* in its recent form had been established in 1991, which is about the time of expansion of globalisation, there was a clear and announced vision about the political process in Oman since the 1970s. He added that before the *Shura* Council there was the State Consultative Council, and even before that the Council for Agriculture, Fish and Industry had a counselling role. Preceding even that, the Sultan came up with his outstanding method of *Shura* that comes through the annual open parliament seen in the annual tour, and before the tours were the royal speeches, which had concentrated on the political participation since the beginning. He asserts therefore that globalisation in its contemporary form had no role in the establishment of the political process in the Sultanate. Also RR6 (10 January 2009) said:

> External effects are always there. They may accelerate the process of turning from appointment to elections. Nevertheless we have institutions that grow in all fields, in education, in economy and in other fields. We have continuous growth in Oman. Oman had consultative councils since the seventies and they have grown naturally. Globalisation cannot be limited to a certain time because globalisation had probably started before the age of the internet and satellite channels. However, I can say that openness to space channels and the internet has happened more recently. It had probably started in the nineties with space channels then it was followed by the internet in the middle of that same decade.

The respondents believe that globalisation socially affects a few people but not the whole society. For example, RR5 (5 January 2009) argued that there was a great impact of globalisation due to the openness of communication and methods of acquiring knowledge, but community and government have shown some awareness of how to protect the generations from the ills of globalisation. There was no rush in the nation in favour of globalisation, unlike other countries which had plunged determinedly into it in certain economic aspects, adopting an open policy open tourism; consequently money laundering and unreal companies without consciences appeared.

This means that the social effect is marginal, and the government is aware of it. The view that government itself economically is not affected by globalisation much and that it did not rush the political opening process for the sake of the economy, as had happened in some neighbouring states, reflects, the government respondents' views in Chapter Four. They believe that the contemporary political process in Oman has emerged since the 1970s and was not a product of globalisation, which has only tangibly spread during the 1990s. This belief strengthens the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura*, which the respondents believe stems from the Omani tradition. They do not deny, though, the influence of globalisation on some governmental policies and on the society itself, but they do not see any harm in that so long as the Islamic values of the society are preserved.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura* and investigated whether the followers of the traditional *Shura* pose a real challenge to reform of the political system in Oman.

What has emerged from the religious respondents' views is that the followers of the traditional *Shura* cannot be seen as a threat to the current political regime in Oman because, throughout history, their interventions have not been directed towards the ruling regimes themselves but designed to rescue the state during periods of weakness. This is particularly so when a foreign force has become involved in the internal issues of the state due to weakness within the political

regime. Also, the matter of deposing a ruler is not arbitrary but subject to certain rules. It is not enough to be decided by the religious intellectuals but it should be backed by clear public resentments. In all cases, it should not be taken through a military coup but through certain steps that start by advice to the ruler, then supervision of his performance, ending up with the announcement of his disqualification for the post. The last step should not be taken unless there are guarantees for the success, such as sufficient people and munitions to challenge the ruler militarily. Having not secured these sorts of guarantees, scholars prefer to stay under the same ruler to avoid any presence of sedition within the society. This argument is in favour of the stability of any democratic system that may appear in any Islamic state and has not been challenged by the vertical social divisions.

It can be argued overall that there is no doubt over the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura*, as *Shura* in Islam and *Ibadism* has no unique form and the respondents believe that the current form of the *Shura* is more suitable for this period. *Ibadi* history also witnessed non-hereditary and semi-hereditary political systems, and both of them are seen by the respondents as legitimate so long as they adhere to the *Shura* and fulfil the aspirations of the society. Therefore, there is no ground for the followers of the traditional *Shura* to challenge the current political system. But there is a good chance for *Shura* to evolve in the future to satisfy some ambitions of the new generation.

CHAPTER 6

THE 'BOTTOM-UP' MODEL: AMBITIONS AND CHALLENGES

Introduction

Arguably, the contemporary *Shura* is positioned in the centre between those who toe the traditional line, those who want to conserve the image of the traditional *Shura*, and the younger generation, representing a bottom-up process, who are willing to be freed of the historical handcuffs and have a greater political space. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to find out to what extent the views of the younger generation are close to, or distant from, the government's views regarding the political process in Oman. In short, this chapter explores the attitudes of this generation towards Omani history and what values it has and also reviews the extent to which 25 to 50 year olds are satisfied with the political initiatives taken by the government, as well as the barriers they believe are hindering the political process.

The underlying argument here is that if these respondents are aware of Oman's history, traditions and contemporary issues, they will be capable of adopting the comprehensive political view that is a requirement in order to consolidate a solid political process from the bottom up. If not, however, they may not be counted upon for initiating a genuine process. So this chapter is going to explore aspects of their political view in relation to their awareness of Oman's history, traditions

and contemporary issues because this understanding will help to formulate their ideas and come up with a political agenda that still can embrace tradition and convince both the people and the government to open further the political horizon.

The Younger Generation's Views of the Traditional *Shura*

I found it difficult to assess whether young people are aware of the historical and anthropological characteristics of their homeland and whether they represent a clear political agenda that takes into account the unique features of Omani society. This is because some of the respondents gave unexpected answers when interviewed. For example, when YGR10 (15 April 2009) was asked what he knows about the *Shura* and its history in Oman; he replied as follows: 'I had not had access to the *Shura* in the past because I was born during the Renaissance era, and furthermore, I did not understand the purpose of having the *Shura* Council until lately. Therefore, I am not aware of the past'.

This response is unexpected as it comes from an individual associated with the elite of Omani society who chairs one of the most active civil society associations and who has direct ties to the political system and indeed, is regarded as part of the *Shura* process. The response of YGR10 might be taken as an example of what GR6 said in Chapter Four: that the young generation use phrases they hear in the media, but when asked about their views on Oman, they get confused. GR6 attributed this to the influence of satellite channels that talk about certain cultures that are not necessarily suitable for Oman. If the response by YGR10 reflects the views of some of the educated younger generation, change brought about by a bottom-up political process seems unlikely to succeed as it needs charismatic social leaders who are able to redirect peoples' points of reference in a conservative community surrounded by a strong government with an effective apparatus of media control.

However, not all respondents in this category provided answers similar to those given by YGR10. Interviewees such as YGR2, YGR3, YGR4 and YGR5 are aware of the *Shura's* history and have clear views about the present and future. The common factor that links these four respondents is their age and experience; YGR10 is younger and may

adopt similar views in future. This observation, by itself, suggests that a bottom-up process is possible because, with time, the younger generation will get older and more mature, will form the majority of the population and be more likely to support the political process from the bottom up. For example, this is what YGR2 (08 March 2009) said when he was asked about the *Shura* in the past:

> The *Shura* means 'consultation' in its widest range. It is rooted in the Holy Quran, which came in a spoken form about the community of believers. Therefore, it came to tell us about an existing situation and is very important to the structure of communities. *Shura* has to be applied and practiced, as it has the same obligations as the other religious ordinances.

This answer is similar to those given by the religious respondents in Chapter Five. When a person is knowledgeable, he gains peoples trust, and this makes him eligible to contribute to the contemporary political process and criticise its shortcomings. Similarly, YGR8 (09 January 2009) demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the origin of the *Shura* when he spoke about the emergence of *Ibadism*. He believes that the *Ibadi* sect was not created as a result of religious indulgence but as a result of *al-bay'a* (pledge of allegiance), which was grounded on *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* and which rejected any sort of hereditary rule. YGR8 (09 January 2009) also said, 'Over history, Oman adopted the *Shura* and succeeded. It is the most stable democracy in over 12 centuries'. YGR1 (19 April 2009) said, 'In the past there were councils that consisted of people with an in-depth knowledge, during which time it was known as the councils of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* throughout Islamic history in Oman'.

This demonstrates that some of the younger generation are as capable of understanding the history and context of *Shura* as their religious and tribal counterparts. Gaining trust and support from a wider society certainly enhances the ability of the younger generation to have a stronger influence on political change throughout the Sultanate.

Moreover, in an example that suggests some of the younger generation is on the right track with regards to gaining the trust of society,

YGR3 (21 February 2009) explained the similarities and differences between the *Shura* and democracy, with a clear description of the features of the contemporary *Shura* in Oman. He said:

> We should not compare democracy that stands as the only reference to the traditional systems such as *Shura* that calls for some sort of parallelism between ruler and ruled. We should understand the system that we have: What values does it sponsor and what parameters does it have as a controller for rights and accountability and so on? The three authorities [i.e. the executive, judicial and legislative] are available in Oman, but the only difference is that in Western countries they all exist on the same level and one does not prevail over the other. With us they all converge at the ruling level. This is because each society has its own peculiarities according to its traditions, and most countries started to take these aspects into account. Also, the issue of legislation in our societies is subject to three authorities, the religion, the ruler and the parliamentary institutions.

YGR3 can be understood to be implying that the *Shura* can never evolve into a modern secular democratic system. It will always have limitations as the three authorities can never be separated in the same way as in the West. There are certain values that will always be present and limit a separation, such as the influence of religion and tradition. Religion, for example, will not legitimise any legislation that might contradict Islam. On the one hand, this puts limitations on the ambitions of the younger generation to have a full democratic political system in the future although *Shura* can reach advanced levels that deepen the political participation and at the same time preserve the characteristics of the society. On the other hand, it may arguably support the position of the bottom-up democratisation process as it attracts more supporters to its campaign.

To summarise, some respondents have a good understanding of the traditional *Shura*, which they believe can never be the same as democracy, although it can enable the process of wider political participation. By contrast, other respondents demonstrated a lack of awareness of

the traditional *Shura*, which in turn leads to confusion over the role of contemporary *Shura*. Nevertheless, with time the younger generation may gain sufficient knowledge that will support a bottom-up political process by gaining more supporters from the community, particularly as the majority of the Omani population is young. The following section will highlight these issues in a deeper focus.

The Younger Generation's Views of the Contemporary *Shura*

It was important to ask the interviewees about their vision of the contemporary *Shura* because I hoped from their answers to draw out a fuller picture of their beliefs of the political process in general. When asked about their views on the contemporary political process, some thought that the performance of the appointed members of the State Consultative Council, which was established before the *Shura* Council in the 1980s, performed better than the *Shura* Council's elected members during the 1990s onward. For example, YGR8 (09 January 2009) said:

> When you look at the performance of the Consultative Council, you find it was more practical than the *Shura* Council in 1990. Is there a problem with the people selected? Of course! We are talking about members who were being appointed, not elected. There was a process of selecting good people who would appreciate the efforts of government, on the one hand, and transfer the people`s points of view, on the other. Were they more mature, aware and stable in that they occupy official positions and play a domestic role that qualified them to discuss the subjects?

This is not necessarily a criticism of the elected political process. It demonstrates instead that the younger generation has a rational and patient approach to political change. This, in fact, is close to what the government respondents and the religious respondents have said in the last two chapters: that the members of the *Shura* Council are not necessarily the best qualified people in society. It seems, therefore, that the younger generation agrees with the earlier respondents that Omani society needs more time to reach political maturity. The following

paragraphs explore the various issues surrounding the contemporary democratisation process in Oman in order to see if the views of the younger generation overlap or clash with the views of other segments of society, as explored in the last two chapters.

Old and Contemporary Shura

The younger generation understands that Oman has selected the *Shura* to be the political process because of its historical presence in the country and that the contemporary *Shura* is an extension of the traditional *Shura*. This is important because it reduces the expected sort of bargaining between the three democratisation processes in the country and shows that the younger generation is not necessarily willing to replace *Shura* with Western democracy. Instead, they probably want a greater role in the political decision-making. For example, YGR1 (19 April 2009) said, 'The contemporary *Shura* is an extension of the traditional *Shura* but has been developed in line with the development of the modern state'. The interviewees feel that the impact of the old *Shura* on the current *Shura* is marginal because modernisation cannot be avoided. For example, YGR10 (15 April 2009) said, 'There is an influence of the old *Shura* on the contemporary *Shura*, although it is minor, but the beauty of the new *Shura* is its jurisdictional authority – we have economic, political, and social, while the former was deciding in all fields'. Also YGR6 (8 March 2009) said:

> The impact of the past on the present is slight because times have changed. We now have a state of institutions. The world is heading towards democracy with all its pros and cons. The citizen in the past was easily satisfied and accepted less of everything and remained silent, but now the new generation is exposed to constructive and destructive ideas through the Internet and satellite channels. One does not accept the status-quo, regardless, any more. One feels that it is one's right to speak and that the state should listen.

YGR6 spoke explicitly here about what this study predicted at the beginning: that the younger generation will not accept what their

fathers had accepted, and they are likely to challenge the current political situation. The younger-generation respondents believe that *Shura* was chosen because of its tradition but that its influence on the contemporary *Shura* is only marginal. Therefore, they do not see the traditional process as hindering the modernity of the contemporary process and don't seem to mind *Shura* as defining the political process as it fulfils the need for real political participation.

Influence of Globalisation

In order to find out how young people look at the political process in Oman, it is important to concentrate on the issue of globalisation and its influence on the political landscape in Oman. If these people believe that it is an indigenous process, their support of it might be more supportive, and accordingly their bargaining is likely to be softer. While, if they believe that the political process is a result of foreign dictate, then their support might be weaker, and their ambitions to convert it into something closer to Western democracy might be greater, particularly because a majority of graduates in Oman have studied abroad in Western countries.

I noticed that the young respondents paid considerable attention to the issue of globalisation: some rejected the connection between globalisation and the contemporary political process in Oman, while others argued that it has had a noticeable effect on the political process in Oman. Few of the interviewees believed globalisation was welcome. Except in matters that contradict the social dimensions, it is worth considering whether globalisation can be fragmented, as they wish, or whether it is immutable as a whole package. Some of the respondents, such as YGR7 (3 April 2009), recognised that defining globalisation is very difficult. YGR7 viewed it as a continuous process that has been present for a long time but has in the last 15 years grown because of the great developments in communication. However, YGR3 (21 February 2009) said:

> Globalisation means an approach and context that unify the way humans live, the systems they follow and the devices they use in the different territories on Earth. The only exceptions are the

> cultures that have pure humanitarian characteristics and divergent perspectives. That's why we have some reservations, because we do not want to succumb or adapt or remove our inherited culture in order to adopt another culture.

This definition of globalisation, with its accompanying concern, is a good basis for discussing the other issues related to the influence of globalisation on the political process in Oman. Some respondents, such as YGR9 (25 December 2008), believe that Oman cannot be separated from the world as globalisation has become a fait accompli, part of a wider political reality, and is something that Oman cannot and should not avoid. However, most of the respondents do not feel the current political process in Oman to be the result of globalisation but the result of an indigenous desire to deepen the political participation in the country. For example, YGR1 (19 April 2009) said, 'The Sultanate led by His Majesty the Sultan has had a political vision before the expansion of globalisation and set up advisory councils since the eighties'. Globalisation may have started much earlier than the eighties, but the Sultan could have read the ongoing global situation and started the political process before the expansion of globalisation in the 1990s. Also YGR4 (12 April 2009) said:

> In the first interview of His Majesty with Newsweek Magazine, he spoke about the establishment of a modern democratic system in the Sultanate. Therefore, the idea was in existence even though the birth may have been late, but its gradualism was natural and there was no burning of the stages. I fear that the social illnesses such as tribalism and the patriarchal society are detrimental to any sort of political openness. His Majesty is aware of the illnesses and does not want transparency in order to avoid social and political upheaval. We hope that the government initiatives in opening the political horizon will help dissolve the social illnesses and create a new national identity.

This argument was supported by other respondents, such as YGR7 (3 April 2009), who claims no strong or tangible effect of globalisation

on the political situation of the Sultanate can be identified. He argues that even the initiatives for promoting democracy offered by the likes of the Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative cannot be considered as one of the Western trials to bring democracy to the Middle Eastern societies. He added that the real aim of the initiative was to strengthen civil society in the Middle Eastern countries although its earlier aims were to support democratisation processes in the region. However, the aims changed after the arrival of some Islamic movements who came to power via democratisation processes, such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Nevertheless, some respondents believe that globalisation has had a great influence, at least on the recent stages of the political process in Oman. They refer to the political steps that were taken by the government from the 1990s onwards, but not the 1970s, when the process had only just began. For example, YGR5 (1 March 2009) said, 'There is no doubt that we have been affected by globalisation because the concept of globalisation is comprehensive, but globalisation does not deprive nations of their distinctive features'. Also YGR7 (3 April 2009) said:

> The information and technological revolution has had a great impact on the political process in Oman, because the unlimited openness created by new technologies has created a disorganised generation. There's a principal that says: 'The mass of information creates chaos of knowledge'.

The satellite channels and internet did not enter Oman until the mid-1990s, while the political process began far earlier, so the effect mentioned by YGR7 in the quote above does not mean that the political process in Oman stems from globalisation. The phrases: 'disorganised generation' and 'chaos of knowledge' is arguably another implicit conviction that refers to some of the younger generation's confusion. This confusion is a result of the knowledge they get from the external media that does not accord with Omani political reality. However, some of the younger generation, due to their ingrained understanding of Omani society both past and present, do not look affected or confused by the media.

As for the acceptance of globalisation by the society, the respondents believe that it is welcomed so long as it does not affect the characteristics of the society. The characteristics they are referring to are mainly religious, traditional, and customary. Therefore, they are on the line of the traditional and governmental respondents; there is no harm in the accompaniment of globalisation, but the law must protect the values of the society. For example, YGR5 (1 March 2009) said:

> Globalisation's affect on the social aspect of the nation is very dangerous. The danger is not related only to the social values but also to the religious beliefs. We cannot separate the two matters at all. We cannot apply the type of globalisation that destroys everything that we have. We should adhere to a minimum level of values and we must say to the world that 'we are civilization builders and that the people of this area are the builders of this civilization', whether in Oman, Egypt or Pakistan, etc. Western people save thousands from their annual incomes to visit this area to see its great monuments. How can we establish a nation that has no principles, values, and customs and has no social, political and economical system?

Furthermore, some respondents see that with the presence of globalisation, societies can still manage their choices and modify the political process according to their needs and social conditions. For example, YGR2 (8 March 2009) said, 'We only take and implement things that benefit our political environment and our society and that do not affect our culture, morals, traditions and mores'.

This can be taken to indicate that the younger generation respondents are against accepting globalisation as it is and want to preserve the concept of *Umma* with all this encompasses. They also believe that globalisation's influence is undeniable but its influence on the political process is secondary because the political will has been evident from the Omani leadership since the 1970s. This arguably blends the top-down and bottom-up political processes as they both seek to preserve the values of society.

Gradualism of the Contemporary Shura

Interviews revealed that the younger generation respondents seem to be in agreement with the government's gradual opening of the political horizon. They show some understanding of why the government is evolving the political powers step by step in order for the conservative nature of Omani society to be taken into account and avoid political unrest. For example, YGR5 (1 March 2009) said:

> When we compare the *Shura* experiment in Oman and its logical graduation with other experiments, we discover that it's the most suitable way – we have much evidence. When Bahrain, for example, tried to rush into modern democracy, it found many obstacles and faced many internal problems as a result of its haste in applying democracy without deliberated study and graduation in applying it.

Another example came from YGR9 (25 December 2008), who said, 'The development of *Shura* follows a progressive line in a slow way, and this is good to avoid any shocks for society resulting from confrontation between the conservative, traditional and tribal lines'. This stance means that the younger generation respondents are arguably in favour of political stability due to the mutual understanding between the government and different sectors of the society.

Similarly, YGR1 (19 April 2009) has concentrated on the issue of women in the political process. She argues that gradualism is necessary and rational with regard to the involvement of women in political participation because the Omani society remains tribal and conservative and may not otherwise accept the idea, particularly in rural areas. She said:

> The contemporary *Shura* has evolved gradually and women entered the Council in Muscat in the second round in 1994 and won two seats. The idea of the nomination of women outside Muscat did not circulate in the first instance because the Omani society is conservative and tribal.

What is noticeable in Oman is that the role of tribal fanaticism in urban areas is less compared with its influence in rural areas. Urbanisation, in addition to globalisation and education, therefore enhances the political process in the Sultanate. YGR1 (19 April 2009) argues that the failure of any women to win seats in the last election was due to the women candidates' lack of preparation in comparison with the more efficient competitors among men. She refutes the locally spreading argument that claims 'women are the enemy of women in elections'; it is just that women vote for the most qualified candidate, regardless of gender. At the same time, however, she does not deny the vulnerability of women, as well as men, when dealing with the loyalties to tribe and kinship during voting.

The opinions of the younger-generation respondents reveal that their views coincide with those views of the respondents from the other two segments who claim that the Omani society is not ready yet to properly practise a greater political experiment. They need some more time to accommodate the issue of political openness, which they encourage to be done in a gradual manner.

Tribal Fanaticism

Most of the interviewees believe that tribalism in a tribal society is a given reality and that people should accept it and that it has a positive role even in the modern age. However, they recognise that problems occur when tribes unite on an issue that runs counter to modernity or the national interest and form what can be called a 'tribal fanaticism'. For example, YGR3 (21 February 2009) said:

> Tribal lineage is important socially and genetically as many diseases in our time have a relationship to genetic lineages. Tribalism is only a problem when the tribe coerces a person to do things that he should not, as that is in opposition to the person's rights.

As in the previous two chapters, the respondents feel that the negative impact of tribal fanaticism on the *Shura* Council's elections is great

and that this affects the political process because it goes against the desire of the qualified candidates. For example, YGR10 (15 April 2009) said:

> Unfortunately, the impact of tribalism is substantial and it is the reason for the slow pace of political process. The government cannot change the reality of tribal society, as the motto raised by tribal supporters: (fight for your tribe whether it is unjust or not), and calling for the selection of a tribal candidate, regardless of his efficiency.

Also YGR7 (3 April 2009) said, 'The power of tribe exists and "the man of tribe" is a candidate regardless of his qualifications at the expense of the educated candidate'. This argument is supported by YGR1, who believes that the preference of tribal representatives comes at the expense of qualified candidates. But, as some respondents said in Chapters Four and Five, he believes that, with time, the role of tribal fanaticism in elections will diminish due to the increasing number of graduates and the increasing level of urbanization. Other respondents, such as YGR5, spoke about the current ongoing tribal agreements in some regions to circulate the membership between their representatives in turn.

YGR2 (8 March 2009), however, argues that the tribal interference in the *Shura* elections reflects the cohesion among the Omani people, and this is because tribal fanaticism, according to his argument, has disappeared:

> I think there is a big role for tribalism in the elections and this is due to the cohesion and centrality of tribal values in Oman. I do not think what happens in elections is tribal fanaticism. Tribal fanaticism [according to its old understandings] disappeared a long time ago. I think what is happening does not exceed the meanings of cohesion and support among the society members.

Once again, this argument from the younger generation respondents is unexpected, at least theoretically; in the beginning of this chapter

it was expected that younger generation would prefer modernity to tradition – as modernity and democratisation should ideally increase the individual's freedom and not the collective interest. Kinship should not be encouraged to play a role in the political process regardless of how people look at it. In other words, this argument reflects a degree of confusion among the younger generation and a lack of consistency in their political views. To sum up: the view that the younger generation respondents have of the tribal society needs to be taken into account when opening the political horizon, as the degree of bargaining with the top-down model might be less than one might expect.

Graduates' Reluctance

I expected that the younger-generation respondents would clarify the reasons behind graduates' reluctance to participate in the *Shura* process more than the interviewees in the previous chapters. But I found that most of them repeated the same reasons mentioned by respondents in the last two chapters, such as the negative tribal interference, the limited powers of the council, the unwillingness to sacrifice ones job for a short-period membership etc. To an extent this could be accepted as this may reflect what is going on at the moment; however, it may slow down the improvement of the political process in Oman, which is dependent on the graduates' participation. Most respondents from the three segments have expectations regarding the graduates' participation and see them as the hope for improvement. For example, YGR6 (8 March 2009) said:

> The reason for the reluctance of intellectuals on the candidacy is the lack of desire to compromise for the post, and also the influence of the tribalism: it is not in favour of the educated candidate but the tribal candidate. Also the lack of political awareness among many of the educated people; they are not aware of their rights and duties, making them reluctant to participate. Finally, the limited powers of the *Shura* Council does not encourage the educated people to interact with the forward march of the *Shura.*

YGR8 (9 January 2009) has supported this argument by comparing the great achievements the educated person can make through his/her career with the minor achievements that can be made through the council's membership. He also spoke about the filters that any particular bill passes through, between the council and the Sultan, which weakens the role of the council and does not encourage graduates to run for membership.

The following quotations represent the views of some respondents regarding the shortcomings of the contemporary *Shura*. YGR9 (25 December 2008) said, 'The young people who know what's happening in other countries think that we need to make greater contributions in the political arena and to be faster in making political changes'. YGR5 (1 March 2009) said, 'In my opinion, young people abstain from voting for many reasons; they do not feel that the *Shura* council plays a great role in the process of running or forming policies'. YGR10 (15 April 2009) said, 'Despite the few achievements of the *Shura* Council, it is considered, however, among intellectuals still to be below the level desired'. Also elsewhere YGR10 said, 'The cultured did not see the fruit of the *Shura* Council and there has become this grim picture; that the Council is ineffective and will not lead to a change in political reality'. All these quotes revolve around the issue of giving more powers to the *Shura* Council, and they see it as being crucial that graduates are attracted to participating in the political process.

Some respondents say that graduates boycotting elections is not only found in Oman but in all countries around the world that hold elections. For example, YGR3 (21 February 2009) said, 'the phenomenon of graduates boycotting elections is international and not limited to Oman. Voting is a national right, therefore citizenry are not obliged to participate and one cannot be held accountable if one refuses this right'.

But one may argue here that the situation in Oman is different due to the tribal nature of the society which favours a tribal candidate rather than what the voter deems to be the most qualified candidate. In addition, the number of graduates is not large when compared with the larger swathe of the population who are educated to a lesser degree. In other countries, particularly in the West, kinship does not play a

big role in voting behaviour, and the majority of people are comparatively well educated. YGR7 (3 April 2009) argues (see below) that the person who does not vote has no right to criticise the political process. Therefore, if the graduates do not assess and criticise the political process how can it develop?

Rarely did the younger-generation respondents touch upon their own role in the shortcoming of the *Shura* process, probably because they did not want to weaken their position in demanding more political space. YGR6 (8 March 2009) admitted that his boycott of the election may affect the political process as he and his peers are counted on to improve the process through their support of the qualified candidates: 'As a voter, I am one of the graduates who neglected the elections and admit that this may have had a negative impact on the progress of the *Shura* process'. Only a few respondents have spoken about the quality of the members of the *Shura* Council. They see that the problem of the council is not limited to the insufficient powers given to the council but the insufficient qualified members that can make use of the given powers. For example, YGR1 (19 April 2009) said:

> In fact the powers given to the State Council, for example, are not greater than those of the *Shura* Council, but the quality of members of the State Council and their competence, makes them better at taking advantage of the powers and making the state respond to their perspective and recommendations.

If this is the case, then the graduates arguably are condemned for their reluctance to participate because, by doing so, they leave greater space for unqualified members to reach the council. This threatens the *Shura* process with stagnation and will slow down its march towards reaching more advanced stages. It might be argued that graduates are not convinced by the whole *Shura* process or they may see it as a cosmetic exercise, but the responses that came from the interviewees did not suggest this. Once again, if the respondents do not blame the government for not giving more powers to the *Shura* Council because of the quality of the council's members, then they show some understanding of the top-down model.

The Future of the Shura

Like the respondents in Chapters Four and Five, the younger generation of respondents showed a degree of optimism that the *Shura* will evolve into the future. That these respondents say it, however, is more significant than when previous respondents said it. The younger-generation respondents, due to their better education and awareness of other successful social experiments in democracy as witnessed through media and the internet, were expected to show a greater appetite for more political transparency and criticise, if not confront, the contemporary *Shura*. For example, YGR7 (3 April 2009) said, 'Recently, the State Consultative Council was transformed to the *Shura* Council. However, it has not reached the final stage and the experiment will develop with time'. Also YGR4 (12 April 2009) said:

> The *Shura*, in the future will develop as society reaches a level of political ripeness and social mobility. This will be reflected positively on the *Shura*. Creating mechanisms for symbiosis with citizens is in the favour of the activation of the political process and serves towards stability. This is because sustainable development needs mobilisation of all energies in order to maintain the status quo.

This quotation indicates that the sustainability of the political process depends on its development through giving more powers to the *Shura* Council and creating a partnership with the civil society.

The belief in a gradual, continuous policy of opening up the political horizon led some respondents to attempt to predict the coming political scenarios. For example, YGR1 (19 April 2009) said, 'In the future I think that the *Shura* will develop more: perhaps there will be legislative powers to the *Shura* Council alone or in conjunction with the State Council'. Also YGR5 (1 March 2009) said:

> I think that in the coming days we will witness some progress that leads to internal voting in choosing the Chairman of the *Shura* Council. We do not want to imitate the experiment of some Arab countries that witnessed quick political changes such

> as Kuwait, Jordan and even Israel, where you find the same faces leaving one government and joining the other. The same ministers are rotating in the same circles, but they change their positions in each government. Kuwait is an exceptional case because it is a totally negative case. The Umma Council, instead of being a civilised showpiece of Kuwait, has become a burden, because no minister stays in his position for more than six months. We have never heard of anything similar to this most experimental form of democracy.

This can be interpreted to mean that younger-generation respondents are calling for, in any future political movement, a genuine, parliamentary form of democracy through electing the chairman of the council and improving its statutory powers whilst avoiding other types of democratic systems, such as those in some Middle Eastern states, that continuously bring the same faces to the forefront, which hinders the process of greater liberalism.

This optimism of the younger-generation respondents who believe that *Shura* will evolve in the future coincides with the other two segments' views, mentioned in the last two chapters. Once again the top-down model seems to be not far from the younger generation's ambitions.

The Younger Generation's Political Views and Demands

The interviewees have demonstrated why younger generations have some political demands. Some of them, such as YGR7 (3 April 2009), said that they want to be like their peers in other countries, practising their rights and exercising their liberties free from the binds of their ancestors. They want to have a political system closer to Western democracies. Others spoke about the economic and demographic changes in the Omani society that oblige the government to widen the political horizon. For example, YGR6 (8 March 2009) said:

> We currently have a population explosion. The rate of population growth reached 3.8 per cent, while the economic growth

> is slower: less than 3 per cent. This will lead to internal pressure for change. This divergent rate of population growth and economic growth in the Sultanate may result in increasing unemployment and crime levels and this could result in severe political instability.

This belief is, to some extent, very close to the hypothesis mentioned in Chapter One, which argues that oil rentier states, particularly the less wealthy, now face increasing pressure to provide a standard of living previously taken for granted, a standard that increasingly the rentier state can no longer meet. Thus a significant challenge to the legitimacy of rentier states is expected as challenges to the existing social contract implicit within the rentier state model come to the fore.

Other respondents felt that an increase in broader cultural awareness will automatically lead to political demands through which citizenry express a desire for a modern political system based on the separation and independency of authorities. For example, YGR8 (9 January 2009) said, 'As for the increase in cultural awareness, it is natural that it will be linked to political demands'. Also YGR3 (21 February 2009) said, 'When you build some energies, you should expect that those energies need to breathe out'. YGR1 (19 April 2009) said, 'They believe that they are ready to make the right decision. This is a healthy phenomenon because demanding means willingness to take responsibilities'. Of course, the pressure that comes from graduates for more accountability and transparency is not limited to the less wealthy rentier states but probably to most of them, and voices started to emerge even from Saudi Arabia. YGR8, YGR3 and YGR1 refer here to the increasing number of graduates and their readiness to have a say in the political processes. Another example came from YGR8 (9 January 2009) who said:

> As for the increase in the cultural awareness, it is natural that it will be linked to political demands. If one receives a good education, lives in a safe and stable environment and in a prosperous era, one covets an executive authority expressing ones prospects and character and satisfying ones ambitions. One covets a

> political system that expresses this young character, born in this blessed era. The character expects to have a functional council; a real technocrat government that rewards well-doers and punishes failures; an independent, sovereign, judicial system, practising its authority consciously without intervention.

The above quote summarises the political demands of the new generation, which anchors around the three judicial, executive and legislative authorities. They are not saying that those authorities are unavailable or not distinct but that they want members of the Council of Ministers to be from the technocrat elite more than from the tribal leadership, and they want the *Shura* Council to be more effective.

Some respondents, such as YGR9 (25 December 2008), speak about the top-down government initiatives. He argues that this positivity from the government has left no chance for a real political opposition to coalesce. But he also argues that this positivity from the government needs appreciation not confrontation. Indeed, YGR9 refers here to the implicit social contract and political initiatives that come as gifts from the government, but the question that must be answered here is, 'Will the government be able to continue with the rentier state model in the post-oil era?'

Some other interviewees see that the government's political initiatives need to be improved in order to extend their validity and durability. For example, YGR8 (9 January 2009) said:

> I envisage refreshing this aspect, particularly, say, 40 years after the Renaissance. It is our right, as citizens, to insist the *Shura* Council has full powers to call the executive authority to account. Powers given will bring active members. So, it would be better to give broader powers and sufficient opportunity to the Council to practise its powers and see who will participate. Aware and educated categories will come; I have no doubt about that.

YGR8 is betting here that greater powers will bring more qualified members to the *Shura* Council. This argument is partially supported

by YGR4 (12 April 2009), who argues that the powers given to the *Shura* Council are still limited if compared with the powers given to the Council of Ministers, which still enjoys wide executive and legislative authority. However, he sees that the experience the Council of Ministers' members enjoy is greater than that of some members of the *Shura* Council. Therefore, he supports transfer of more power but without haste. This argument is also supported by YGR6 (8 March 2009) when he says:

> To be fair, I agree sometimes with the government in applying the gradual policy, because from my observations, I see that people have not yet reached a sufficient degree of awareness to properly practise democracy. The tribal considerations still exist and some graduates, even, are still stuck to the principles of tribal fanaticism.

It also seems that graduates are blamed not only for placing tribal fanaticism above all else, but also for their ineffective participation in the political process. For example, YGR7 (3 April 2009) said, 'If the educated person does not vote for the Council, he has no right to criticise the Council, because, basically he is not a part of the process'.

What also is quite noticeable is that some of the younger-generation respondents feel that the political rights available in Oman are sufficient but that people might not be aware of them. For example, YGR5 (1 March 2009) said:

> We have everything in Oman; I can criticise, appeal, be equal to a minister or a deputy minister if he takes any abusive measures against me, and this is a part of political development. Political development is available but people might not know about it. I think that we have many positive political practices. There are no raids and we enjoy complete freedom. We have many liberties, much mercy and compassion that are not found in many countries.

YGR5 speaks here about justice more than political openness. People might look to giving more power to the *Shura* Council and allowing

the creation of real civil society associations that are important in any modernising community. For example, YGR8 (9 January 2009) said: 'Hegel, in looking at urban human society, says that society is the formula invented by man to fill the space between the family and the state. Civil society institutions have an advantage in that they represent a bridge connecting the limited-effect family and the state with its wide vision and work. They must be formed to satisfy certain needs and necessities not by an act from the state. People should build what they want, to practise the democratic role among themselves in syndicate, such as journalists and labourers and others. What happened in Oman as per civil society institutions is the same as per the *Shura* institution: the permission for establishing it came from the Sultan, in the Royal decree no. 14/2000'.

So YGR8 is criticising the establishment of the civil society associations by the government. This is questionable because the state had only issued the law regulating the establishment of those associations, while their establishment is left to the citizenry. Before the issuing of the law, establishing civil society associations was almost forbidden. Therefore, the law created the permissive environment for civil society associations to emerge but did not actually establish them. However, some respondents, such as YGR2 (8 March 2009), see that those associations should not copy the Western civil society organisations because they were formed in different circumstances. According to him, the creation of the latter is characterised by conditions of hunger, oppression and deprivation, while the former are being created in conditions of justice and luxury.

In summation, some respondents felt that economic and demographic changes taking place in Oman affect the legitimacy of the rentier state model and leave no choice for the government except to surrender more political space. They feel that the three authorities should be clearly distinguishable, that the executive and legislative authorities should be enhanced through having more technocrat members in the Council of Ministers and that the powers of the council should be strengthened. At the same time they feel that independent civil society associations should be formed freely, away from government interference.

By contrast, other respondents feel that people in Oman have everything, including political participation, and that they are in a better situation than some other countries. They encourage the government's policy of gradualism because they do not want Oman to witness political unrest due to the tribal nature of the society. Therefore, as YGR4 (12 April 2009) said, this generation is confused and needs to debate among itself what it wants in order to present its political demands in an organised manner. He said the cultural club started to have a weekly gathering for the younger generation's leaders to discuss these issues. It is clear that the bargaining between the bottom-up and the top-down models is accurately reflected in this section and the government must listen to the demands of this growing segment of the community.

Civil Society Associations

These respondents spoke at length about the civil society associations; on the one hand, this may reflect their attention to the significance of those associations, and on the other hand, it might reflect the difficulties those associations are facing, particularly because they represent a fairly new experiment in Oman. The respondents criticised the graduates' unwillingness to participate in voluntary work, specifically in these associations. They also criticised the government's intervention in the associations' affairs. For example, YGR10 (15 April 2009) said:

> Graduates do not seem willing to sacrifice themselves or their time for the volunteer work, even in the civil society institutions. I was the President of the Story Writers Family, and am currently the Chairman of the Writers Association, and the number of those who were actually working does not exceed the number of fingers on one hand. Unfortunately, I think that the cultured people do not have the maturity; they are not aware of their role in society. Everyone of the intellectuals sees the world through his vision and ignores all else.

As for the governmental intervention in the associations' affairs, the respondents spoke about the difficulties and barriers that face

the establishment of those associations and their administrative and financial dependency. For example, YGR6 (8 March 2009) said, 'When we wanted to establish an association for the writers, we have struggled because the approval from the responsible ministry took four years to be issued'. Also some respondents, such as YGR8 (9 January 2009), saw that the law hinders the establishment and development of those associations:

> The present law has been changed 12 times. It still does not cope with what the country has become. There is a group of aware youths, wishing to do many things, but the law hinders them with procedures. The problem is at the executive level. There are many problems hindering the development of the civil body. If these issues persist, the sector will not be able to provide anything, and what it might provide, would be deformed.

However, other interviewees, such as YGR1 and YGR7, see that there is no harm in having this governmental control at this early stage of establishment of these associations until they become mature. They see that democratic experiments in other countries took several decades to reach a stage of maturity. By contrast, some respondents saw that the law has guaranteed the independence of the associations and that the other regulations have been set up to make sure that those associations are on the right track and do not contradict the general features of society. For example, YGR2 (8 March 2009) said:

> The Labour Union was established through the Royal Decree 74/2006, and there is a full article in the decree that talks about the independence of the Union. All civil society associations have freedom and independence in their practising of their rights and powers, providing they do not contradict regulations and mores in the Sultanate. The matter of receiving financial support does not affect independence, so long as it is not unconditional. The Union is trying to build a mutual partnership with the government and people's presumption that this cooperation will lead to government control over the Union is not correct.

Some respondents commented about the financial support that these associations receive at this stage from the government, saying it is necessary and does not affect their independence. They need that kind of support because they do not have fixed sources of income and their members show marginal commitment to pay for the expenses of the associations. For example, YGR6 (8 March 2009) said:

> We debated the impact of government support on the credibility and independence of our association, and we concluded that the budget received by the *Shura* Council from the government does not affect its independence and impartiality and that the relationship between us and the government is not necessarily a relationship of disharmony.

This argument is supported by YGR10 when he says that we do not find any harm in the government's support as the government does not require anything that may impair the independence of the associations.

Influence of Employment in the Private Sector

As for the influence of the citizenry working in the private sector on the political process, most respondents felt that their impact, through criticising the government's performance and applying political pressure, was minimal. Their source of income is independent of the government, and this gives them greater liberty to criticise the public policies. As YGR9 (25 December 2008) says, 'The less the citizen needs support from the government, the more he is independent from the government'. Also YGR8 said, 'People' heading for the private sector helps them to become independent. So, they will not hesitate in questioning any official'.

However, most respondents agree that governments in the Gulf States, including Oman, are welfare governments, in which government support exceeds the role of just offering employment to their citizens. Hence, even the private sector employees get governmental support through other means that fulfil the principles of the implicit

social contract. Some respondents said that the independence of the employees in the private sector is only partial because the private sector itself is dependent on the government projects. For example, YGR1 (19 April 2009) said, 'The private sector in the Sultanate exists only through government projects and therefore is wholly dependent on the government'.

Even though the private sector is not fully independent, some respondents feel that its employees have more freedom to criticise the government's performance than their counterparts in the public sector. For example, YGR10 (15 April 2009) said:

> Workers in the private sector are free and unrestricted and their means of earning a living are independent. Thus they have a greater capacity to criticise the performance of the Government, while employees in the public sector would be more cautious so as not to hurt their employment prospects.

However, other respondents say that graduates working in the private sector are satisfied because they get a good income and are unwilling to change the current situation. For example, YGR4 (12 April 2009) said:

> The well-educated Omani employees in the private sector are in luxury, as their income is greater than their counterparts in the public sector. Therefore, they will not seek a political change. The other lower level workers lack tools to implement change even if they want to.

YGR7 (3 April 2009) said that if the Omani educated people were to start up their own private businesses, they would be more independent and could apply more pressure on the government for greater political accessibility. He said, 'Graduates do not have the desire to establish private and independent work. If they did, they could exercise pressure on the government and would have a greater role in the political awareness'.

In summation, the citizenry working in the private sector are not likely to exert great pressure on the government to undertake the aforementioned political steps. This is because the private sector itself is dependent on the government projects, and educated employees in the private sector are content in luxury and not willing to change the current political situation. They also indirectly benefit from the implicit social contract drawn between people and the government. Meanwhile, the non-graduates working in the private sector lack the tools to apply political pressure. This provokes the argument that there is not much bargaining between citizenry working in the private sector, contradicting my earlier view that they would be initiating a bottom-up political process to counter the government's initiatives from the top down.

Post-Oil Era

The respondents' views of the post-oil era had differentiations. Some of them, such as YGR9 (25 December 2008), predicted that the current situation of stability will change to some sort of confrontation between people and the government, which would lead to some sort of political mobilisation and political unrest. Others, such as YGR5 (1 March 2009), thought that Oman's wise policies with the international community will qualify the country to receive international political and economic support. He said:

> Many countries do not have oil and nor do they have fixed resources or supplies; they have no strong sectors supporting their economy. However they are stable and have no political threats. For example, Jordan basically depends on subsidies for a particular political ethos, because it has no resources. However, if it pursues a reckless policy, it will not get those subsidies. There are Arab countries that have big resources and they were expected to be modern and rich countries, such as Iraq, Algeria and Libya. However, they are not advanced countries because politically they are not stable. There is a big difference between Jordan and Syria because Syria has more resources than Jordan.

> It has land, water and greater historical and archaeological sites than Jordan. However, Jordan is more stable than Syria because of its wise policy. Therefore, we should not be afraid of the post-oil period in Oman because we have many alternative resources that we can depend on. One of them is the tourist sector, which needs a great deal of development. We have many monuments in our country. We have some resources in our country that we have not started to benefit from. We have a fantastic climatic diversity.

According to the above quote, YGR5 argues that political stability is dependent on economic prosperity, as is the case in rentier states, and with its deterioration, political unrest automatically occurs. In other words, some other factors play a role in political stability, such as wise policies of the states, bearing in mind that in the post-oil era the rentier states may use other economic alternatives to substitute for the oil depletion with support from the international community. Some other interviewees saw that economic alternatives will substitute most of the oil revenues by that time. In fact, all of these views are comprehendible although one might find it difficult to understand when one of the younger-generation respondents wishes to be ruled by a dictator in order to boost the economy during the post-oil era. For example, YGR6 (8 March 2009) said:

> Perhaps we will need a strong political will at that time, we may need what some call 'good dictatorship'; it means that an authoritarian dictator leads us to impose obligatory education and gives good incentives. He must be tough in the end so the people will be productive and industrialist, as in the case in Korea for example.

These views show to some extent that this generation is confused, supporting the views of respondents cited in the previous two chapters about this generation. At one time they call for more political openness and a democratic system; yet at another time they wish to be ruled by a 'good dictator'. It might be argued that respondents see a

greater chance for greater political reform in the post-oil era although some of them believe that Oman will not be significantly affected by the depletion of oil because of other economic alternatives and the economic and political support that Oman may get from the international community. If this is the case, then the top-down process will not lose much of its momentum at that time.

Conclusion

This chapter found variation in the respondents' responses towards the issues of the traditional *Shura*, the contemporary *Shura*, and the views that they have to improve this indigenous process. It was difficult to work out whether they are aware of the historical and anthropological characteristics of their homeland and whether they have got a clear political agenda for their country that takes into account these features of their society. This is because some of them gave some quite unexpected answers to some of the questions posed in the interview, such as their lack of knowledge about the *Shura* throughout history because they were born only in the 1980s, while at the same time they occupy the top position of an association responsible for culture in the country. Nevertheless, some of them showed clear views regarding the traditional and contemporary political processes in Oman and gave some recommendations on how to improve the political process in future.

Regarding the contemporary *Shura* in Oman, they felt that Oman has decided to choose the *Shura* because of its historical presence in the country although they saw that the traditional *Shura* has a marginal impact on the current *Shura* process. The respondents saw also that globalisation has had an influence on the political process but that its influence is not great because sufficient political will has been present within the Omani leadership since the 1970s. The cultural effect of globalisation is available and welcomed by society so long as it does not touch societies fixed values. They saw that globalisation does not forcefully impose certain values on societies as societies can still manage their choices. Their belief is that the political process is indigenous and not duplicated from elsewhere and so is not a result of globalisation or foreign dictation. This makes them feel responsible and duty-bound to

stick to it and not call for its replacement by democratic systems, such as those found in Western countries. At the same time, it reduces their challenge to the top-down model as their criticism does not target the legitimacy of the whole process, only its shortcomings.

These types of views show to what extent this generation is not yet ready to initiate a bottom-up political process that could challenge the current situation adopted by the government. For the time being, this generation still needs the government's initiatives and support, and it still needs more time to be able to stand on its own feet. However, it is worth mentioning that the legitimacy of the top-down model is not targeted by the younger generation because they are in agreement with the government's view of selecting the *Shura* to be the political process in Oman. Their current ambition does not exceed the need to improve the executive and legislative authorities in the country although this ambition may grow and evolve with time.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The Democratisation Problem in Oman and the Arab World

Although Oman has its own unique participatory form of politics which has continued since the eighth century, this book demonstrates that the challenge of the democratisation process in Oman coincides, to some extent, with the problems surrounding democratisation in the wider Arab world. For the most part, the Arab world can be characterised as consisting of authoritarian regimes, conflicting ideologies, military coups and weak civil societies. The discovery of oil, which occurred during the twentieth century in the Arab region, resulted in a strengthening of the position of the ruling regimes, an increase in intervention on the part of global superpowers and a lowering of the chances for democratisation. It also led to the emergence of what has become known as the rentier state model, in which the ruling regimes extended their monopoly of power by initiating an implicit social contract with its citizenry. This contract secured a modern infrastructure and free services to the people but at the expense of their rights to political participation.

Since the 1990s, most Arab regimes have adopted some sort of participatory system, an occurrence which is attributed mainly to the change in the global political system in the aftermath of the collapse of communism, the emerging dominance of the capitalist-democratic system, the increase in the promotion of democracy across the Middle East and the wide scope and spread of globalisation. However, I have

argued in this book that Oman has remained somewhat different, as its political process had been established in the 1970s and it had been decided that it continue with its indigenous traditional *Shura* system but with a gradual modernisation process commensurate with the social transformation taking place in the country.

Reasons for Adopting the *Shura* from the Top Down

The Arab world is well known for its vertical social divisions, mainly formed on the basis of ethnicity, sectarianism and tribalism (see Chapter Two). People in the region are, for the most part, divided socially according to these vertical divisions, which have priority in terms of determining people's loyalties; most Arab states contain some or all of these divisions and subdivisions, which can be seen more clearly during civil wars and political conflicts. Democracy may offer a way to pacify these divisions, but in Iraq, the process has in fact exacerbated sectarianism, as it has in Lebanon, where confessionalism dominates the state order.

Since the early 1970s, the Omani government wanted a participatory political system. I noted that this was apparent in the Sultan's speeches and that it began with the Annual Royal Tour and the initiation of councils, such as the Council of Agriculture, Fish and Industry, which had appointed members and practised some sort of accountable discussion with government officials. However, bearing in mind the vertical social divisions and the historical legacy of *Shura*, which is regarded as a key cornerstone in the identity of the nation and in the authority and legitimacy of the ruling system in Oman, the Sultanate decided to continue with the *Shura* and to avoid any other participatory system, such as Western democracy.

The interviews I conducted with key officials from the Omani government who have relations with and to the political process showed that the Omani government, during the early 1970s, might well have had a long-sighted vision and might have expected that sooner or later some factors such as education, urbanisation, demographic changes and globalisation could emerge as pressuring forces which could necessitate the existence of a pluralistic political system. Time elapsed

has proven that these factors have indeed created a new democratic culture in the later stages of Omani modern history and increased moves towards democratisation. These factors have shaped the political arena in Oman, which was originally initiated by the government from the top down. This is because the population has dramatically increased, the number of graduates is growing and political pressure from the new generation is increasing. It is supported not only by the improving levels of education but also by the growing rate of the urbanisation process and the different facets of globalisation. As a result, a bottom-up democratisation model is slowly emerging as we speak, challenging the contemporary top-down model and pushing for more political reforms.

In accordance with the policy of opening the political horizon as a 'gift' from the top down and as a result of the pressure-laden factors mentioned above, I have shown that the government has decided to take steps forward, again, in terms of modernising the *Shura* process. This took place when the government decided to establish *Majlis Al-Shura* with elected members, including women, issuing the necessary legislation needed to guarantee real and fair political participation and later on adopting a two-council system. The book examined the attitude of the religious intellectuals regarding the modernisation of the *Shura* and looked at their views regarding some other aspects of the contemporary epoch, such as democracy and democratisation. It also examined the views of some of the new generation in the hope of reflecting the extent to which the young generation is satisfied (or dissatisfied) with the steps taken by the government to open up the political horizon and modernise the *Shura* process. The following two sections discuss the main findings regarding these two segments.

Religious Intellectuals Legitimise the Contemporary *Shura*

The book examines the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura* from the religious intellectuals' point of view in order to find out if the followers of the traditional *Shura* pose a real challenge to the political system in Oman. In my analysis, they are not likely to challenge modernisation in the contemporary *Shura* because the *Shura* itself existed in the region

prior to the emergence of Islam. What's more, its description in the Quran and its practice by the Prophet and his companions make it a divine pillar in political Islam. Additionally, the practice of the *Shura*, particularly during the time of the first four Caliphs, shows that Islam does not come with a fixed political system but leaves choices on this matter to Muslims.

Furthermore, the results of the exploration of these practices has highlighted that the ruling system in *Ibadism* is not confined to the Imamate non-hereditary system and that it can incorporate the other monarchic systems. Of course, the Imamate system has given priority in *Ibadism*, in which *Shura* is an obligation for the Imam. However, regarding other semi-hereditary systems, *Ibadi* jurists consider other vital issues, such as the stability of the society, the level of justice and the nation's interests, as well as taking into account global changes. This means that the practice of the *Shura* can be flexible, a flexibility which is often welcomed by religious intellectuals so long as it does not violate Islamic values or the traditions and mores of Omani society. Therefore, arguably, it can be said that, on the one hand, there is no doubt surrounding the legitimacy of the current ruling system in Oman in that it has fulfilled all of the issues mentioned by the jurists above, including *Shura*. On the other hand, this system might not be considered authoritarian, at least not in the same way mentioned in Chapter Two, on authoritarian regimes in the wider Arab world, as it does not tyrannise by its own opinions but consults with deep-sighted people in accordance to the *Ibadi* notion. This fact is often used in order to belittle any challenge to the contemporary political process as the clerical requirements are seen to be met.

What has also emerged from the findings of this book is that the followers of the traditional *Shura* should not be seen as a threat to the political regime because throughout history their interventions have not, for the most part, been directed towards the ruling regimes themselves but designed to rescue the state during periods of weakness. This is particularly so when a foreign force has become involved in the internal affairs of the state due to weakness in the political regime. Also, the matter of the deposition of a ruler is not arbitrary but is subject to certain rules and protocols. It is not enough for it to be decided upon

by the religious intellectuals; it should be backed by clear and patent public resentment. In all cases the theory is that it should not be done through a military coup but through certain steps, starting with advice to the ruler and then supervision of his performance and ending with an announcement of his lack of qualification for the post. The last step should not be taken unless there are guarantees for the success of the deposition, such as sufficient people and munitions to challenge the ruler militarily. Without securing these sorts of guarantees scholars prefer to stay under the same ruler in order to avoid the presence of sedition in society. This implies that any modernisation in the *Shura* will not bring any challenge from the religious *Ulama* because, if they feel that that the Islamic values have been violated, they will peacefully demonstrate their resentment towards the government.

This book has also put forward the argument that the followers of the traditional *Shura* have a flexible attitude towards the contemporary *Shura*. Most of their views in this regard were explained and sometimes supported by evidence from the *Shari'a*. They believe that this historical age necessitates modernisation in the *Shura* as the professional classes have now emerged and the concept of *Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd* itself does not restrict the expansion of the Council of Elite. This expansion, according to their views, should even include women, reflecting a significant reaction against the radical views which some Islamists hold. They also believe that the existence of the two-council system is aimed at substituting the old Council of Elite with the State Council, and they asserted that the increasing number of the *Shura* Council's members substitute the quality members of the old elite council. They believe that the more members there are, the more accurate the decisions made will be. But at the same time they stressed the necessity of preserving the concept of *Umma*, and they emphasised that the degree of advancement in the *Shura* should not revoke the preservation of the values, ethics, traditions and norms of the society, and it should not reach the level of a full separation of powers.

Religious intellectuals interviewed did not believe that democracy and globalisation contradict the Islamic doctrine as long as they do not affect faith, or the traditions and values of the Islamic people. They asserted that the *Shura* as a practice is a result of human beings'

diligence and emphasised that it is not divine. Similarly, democracy and globalisation are also the result of human activities, and many of their principles can be incorporated into Islamic societies in a way that serves to retain the identity of the society and does not lead to chaos. They were probably referring here to the vertical social divisions, which may emerge as a hindering force if a democratic system was to be applied.

The respondents also believe that the contemporary political process in Oman has emerged since the 1970s and is not a product of globalisation, which only has tangibly spread during the 1990s. This belief strengthens the legitimacy of the contemporary *Shura*, which the respondents believe stems from the Omani tradition. They do not deny though, the influence of globalisation on some governmental policies and on society itself, but they do not see any harm in that so long as the Islamic values of the society are preserved. This belief strengthens their satisfaction about the contemporary political process and reduces their tendency to challenge it.

Satisfaction of the New Generation

It has been noted above that some degree of challenge could be expected to come from the new generation because their number is increasing and the government's ability to maintain the same level of the implicit social contract is decreasing. Empirical chapters demonstrated this but also showed that some of the respondents were not aware of the historical and anthropological characteristics of their homeland and have not got a clear political agenda for their country which takes into account these features of their society. Nevertheless, some of them showed clear vision regarding the traditional and contemporary political processes in Oman, and they gave some recommendations as to how to improve the political process in the future. Some respondents showed a full understanding of the traditional *Shura* to an extent which led them to judge that *Shura* can never be like democracy, although it can achieve good levels of political participation.

Regarding the contemporary *Shura* in Oman, Chapters Four, Five and Six showed that the respondents felt that Oman has decided to

choose the *Shura* because of its historical presence in the country, but the traditional *Shura* has a marginal impact on the current *Shura* process. They believed that the political process is indigenous and not duplicated from elsewhere, and thus not as a result of globalisation and/or foreign influence. This, it can be argued, makes Omanis feel responsible for it and duty-bound to stick to it and not to call for its replacement by a democratic system such as those found in Western countries.

Younger-generation respondents were also found to believe that globalisation has had an influence on the political process but that its influence is limited because a democratic political will has been present amongst the Omani leadership since the 1970s. They felt that the cultural impact of globalisation is very much present and is welcomed by society so long as it does not undermine society's fixed values and that globalisation does not forcefully impose certain values on societies as societies can still manage their own affairs and cultural milieu. This vision coincides with that of the religious respondents, and it reflects the fact that different segments of society believe that the political process of *Shura* is indigenous, which encourages people to adhere to it and support it.

Nevertheless, the interviews held with these younger-generation respondents brought out the sentiment that they are not totally satisfied with the level of modernisation in the contemporary *Shura* process; they said that there is a need for political change in Oman. They believe that the increasing demographic rate is greater than the increasing economic rate, which will reduce the government's ability to maintain the same level of quality in the social contract and which may affect the legitimacy of the rentier state model. They also spoke of the political demands that they look for; among them, a genuine parliamentary type of democratisation processes through the election of the chairman of the council and through an improvement of its statutory powers whilst still avoiding other types of democratisation processes such as those found in other Middle Eastern states. Such systems were perceived to recycle the same faces in the front lines and hinder the development processes more than they facilitate them. They also want to see more technocratic representatives in the Council of Ministers. At the same time they encourage the government's policy of gradualism

because they do not want Oman to witness political unrest due to the tribal nature of Omani society.

In general, the book has put forward the proposition that since the political activists from the younger generation are a minority, some of them lack experience. They are still not powerful enough to initiate a bottom-up political process that could challenge the current gradual approach adopted by the government and still need time to be able to stand on their own feet. It is worth mentioning that the legitimacy of the top-down model is not penalised by the younger generation because they are in disagreement with the government in terms of selecting the *Shura* as the appropriate political process in Oman. Their current ambition does not exceed a desire to improve the legislative authorities in the country although this ambition may grow and evolve with time.

The Shortcomings of the Contemporary *Shura*

Problems Related to the Government

Chapters Four, Five and Six revealed that there are some shortcomings in the contemporary *Shura* process attributed to the government, such as the absence of legislative powers in the *Shura* Council. These may be a causal factor in terms of the trend amongst the educated classes to exhibit a reluctance to participate in the process. The government is accused also of undemocratic leanings for appointing the chair of the council and not giving the council a greater status such that people would be more enthusiastic about participating in elections.

The results of many interviews have showed that the respondents express desire for the role of the council to be explicitly mentioned in some of the royal decrees – which are related to the issuance of certain legislations; and they wish for there to be live broadcastings of the meetings of the council; with free publications of the council's discussions in a newspaper.

The respondents were also found to wish to urge the government to secure guarantees to the members of the council after the end of their term. These include the need to clarify the legislation related to

parliamentary immunity so as to ensure the non-prosecution of the members after the end of their term and the end of the parliamentary immunity. They also mentioned the need to consider the creation of a special retirement system for the members which would ensure a fixed income following the end of a given period of membership. However, some senior government officials said that the issue of establishing a pension system for the members after the termination of membership is difficult because of the high turnover rate of the council's members, which reaches 65 per cent per term. Regarding the issue of parliamentary immunity, the government officials argued that the immunity law covers the members during their periods of membership and ends at the end of the term, and there has not thus far been any judicial pursuit of any former council member for his professional performance during his membership.

The respondents also urge the government to follow the efficiency criterion by strengthening the infrastructures of the political process, which needs to witness transparency in terms of information, freedom of opinion, the encouragement of civil society institutions and the finding of civil frameworks other than the tribe. They do not consider the tribe to be a negative facet of society, but they feel that occupational frameworks may serve the political process better. The government, in the new millennium, has issued legislation that has opened the door to an initiation of the occupational framework and also permitted establishment of many civil society associations, unions and syndicates. They are still, however, in need of government support.

By contrast, some respondents, including the younger-generation respondents, felt that people in Oman have everything, including political participation, and that they are in a better situation than the people of many other countries. They encouraged the government's policy of gradualism because they do not want Oman to witness political unrest due to the tribal nature of the society.

Problems Related to the Society

The government appears to be monitoring the cultural development of the community and does not want to grant a wider participatory

political space as long as some social practices, such as tribal fanaticism, the reluctance of educated classes to participate and the process of vote-buying are still significant factors in the political environment.

Within Chapter Three to Six, it was found that Omani society is a tribal society, in which the tribe forms the foundation of the social fabric. It occupies ontological priority. The tribe is considered to be a symbol of the pride and honour and of the dignified origin of any citizen. It plays a significant social role in the upbringing of generations and in the protection of its people. It helps them to achieve their needs indeed it provides a normative framework that defines at least non-biological needs, and it stands beside them during times of adversity and misfortunes. However, respondents did not deny tribal fanaticism's negative effect on the political process; rather, they argued that this effect will lessen with time in accordance with the increase in the number of graduates. However, they confess that graduates show some reluctance to participate in the political process, a fact which leaves greater space for tribal fanaticism and lesser for educated classes to guide the political process. This fact will slow down development in the *Shura* process.

Tribes may hinder the contemporary political process through two main channels of action; the first is that the tribe will fight – as it always does – the centralisation of power in the homeland. This by itself may favour the political process as it encourages decentralisation. The reality is different, however. Tribes fight against a centralisation of power because they want to dominate their own territories and to be in competition and confrontation with other tribes. The second channel of action is their tendency to form tribal allies (*Shaff*) in order to strengthen their political power against other tribal enemies. They form tribal militias, which trigger tribal fanaticism at the expense of the stability of the homeland. This problem has provoked tribal wars throughout Oman's history, and the repercussions of these wars have remained present for many centuries. This tribal fanaticism is the one factor that affects the contemporary political process presently, while the first channel of action is not tangibly felt. This is most probably because the enforcement of the state of law and the strength of the state monopoly has played a part in diminishing its influence.

Some respondents believed that the strength of the tribe is less now because the state, through the implicit social contract, plays a welfare role which used to be undertaken by the tribe. They also believed that the tribe is playing a positive role in the *Shura* Council's elections by encouraging tribal followers to participate and hence raising the turnout.

The book has highlighted that there are certain reasons behind the reluctance of graduates to participate in the political process; these include their unwillingness to sacrifice their jobs for the council's membership and the fact that they are not sure as to the post-membership future of the council members financially and judicially. The lack of functionality of some of the former members of the *Shura* Council and the absence of a clear agenda of appropriate candidates for membership of the council are also factors. However, some respondents believed that the graduates' boycott could be a result of their carelessness due to a lack of awareness of the significance of social activities in general, particularly because the same habit has been noticed in terms of their participation in civil society associations. This reflects their unwillingness to participate in culture voluntarily.

Vote buying is another problem which this book has examined, and it was mentioned by some respondents who felt that it is hindering the credibility of the political process. The government officials did not deny that they had heard stories about the problem but argued that, unless they have a clear case in front of them, they regard them as rumours and will not base their views and acts on such rumours. They asserted that the law is strict regarding this issue and that any candidates found guilty will be liable for legal accountability.

The Future of the *Shura* in the Post-Oil Era

Findings from the interviews within this book point towards a degree of optimism regarding the evolution of the *Shura* although it is not easy to specify the limits that can be reached by this process nor to delineate a finite timescale or schedule for such a process. The interviewees from the three segments of society seemed to be optimistic about the existing policy of gradualism and are taking a pragmatic

approach to the implementation of the *Shura* as the key feature of Omani politics. It also emerged that some respondents did not wish to give legislative powers to the *Shura* Council, fearing that they may be abused by the relevant interest groups. In contrast, some interviewees argued that the current *Shura* is not satiating their hopes, and they stressed that it must be strengthened in the coming period through the provision of legislative powers to the *Shura* Council. There were calls in places to follow a gradualist approach in the future in order to avoid any shock in the community, and some respondents believed that the opening up of the political horizon must be proportionate to the community's level of enlightenment, particularly because the demographics of the population show that the majority of Omani society is still young.

This sort of optimism, seen in all the three categories of respondents, is also applicable to the political and economic stability of the country in the post-oil era. They said that economic factors may challenge the current political situation during oil related economic crises or in the post-oil era, and some of them predicted that the current state of stability will change and that there may be confrontation between people and the government. This could lead to some sort of political mobilisation and political unrest. But the respondents, in general, are optimistic regarding the Sultanate's ability to survive during such times. They spoke with confidence and self-assuredness about the prosperous economic future of the state. Some interviewees spoke of the persistence of oil in Oman for several decades to come, and they believed that economic alternatives will substitute most of the oil revenues by that time. In general, interviewees did not hide their concern regarding the potentially damaging effects of economic crises on the political situation. However, they put their trust in the government to overcome such situations and postulated that the impact on the political scene would be limited in its extent.

Furthermore, the respondents believe that the economic situation in the modern era is different from that of the ancient one and, the economy, according to their views, is stirring now and is not stagnant. Also, the economy is not local any more but is international, so a country does not normally reach a point of bankruptcy. This means

that the social contract might be affected by economic problems, but the legitimacy of the political regime will not necessarily be affected as the government and the people can adapt themselves to the new situation.

As for the citizenry working in the private sector, the respondents, including the new generation of respondents, believed that they are not likely to exert any great pressure on the government to undertake any political measures. This is because the private sector itself is dependent on the governmental projects and educated employees in the private sector are comfortable in luxury and not willing to change and/or challenge the current political situation. They are indirectly benefiting from the implicit social contract between the people and the government, while the lesser-educated citizenry working in the private sector lack the tools with which to apply political pressure.

The respondents also believe that a presidential kind of democracy such as that in the USA or France could not be implemented in Islamic societies. The stability in the position of ruler in Islam, so long as he is found suitable and capable, may suit the Middle Eastern societies more than that of any kind of presidential democracy because of the presence of the vertical social divisions in society. Democracy may be considered a good chance to compete honourably or otherwise attain a leadership position? confusing in order to strengthen the position of one element of society above others, but not necessarily for the national interests in particular. This fact puts limits on the ambitions of the new generations in Oman for having a comprehensive democratic system in the future and, at the same time, strengthens the legitimacy of the ruling system and the contemporary *Shura* process.

Conclusions

As a result of the research contained within this book, one can conclude that the contemporary *Shura* process in Oman can be taken as a promising, successful example of the popular political participatory processes in the Middle East in general and in oil-producing states in particular. This success needed an overall socio-political transformation in the Sultanate that underwent several calculated steps,

commensurate with the levels of education, cultural awareness and urbanisation. The process has also taken into account some of the traditional fixed values of the society such as those related to the *Ibadi* legitimacy, the tribal legitimacy and the Sultanic legitimacy.

While submitting some of the Sultanic authorities to the citizenry, through adopting a political process from the top down and allowing the civil society to build up, the government simultaneously has taken some steps to dilute the influence of the tribal and religious institutions, but in a way that keeps them recognised within the political process. Among these steps is the absorption of tribal leaders into the government cabinet, and at the same time the government urged people to prioritise the national interest above all other loyalties. This is seen as a step towards building a nation state. It also acknowledged the religious establishment through the selection of the *Shura* as the political process in Oman, which is regarded as an Islamic pillar, but at the same time, it modernised the *Shura* in a way that was commensurate with the requirements of the modern age. The Sultanate also has encouraged citizenry to learn and acquire higher levels of education and applied the distributive policy of the social contract in a balanced way that made its educated people more productive when compared with their counterparts in some of the neighbouring rentier states. This fact kept most of the important occupations in both the public and private sectors in the hands of the Omani people, not expatriates, as is the case of the UAE, for example.

Gradualism in the political process was clear and took into account all factors mentioned in the previous paragraph. The political process began with the Annual Royal Tour that is still taking place and was developed through the establishment of the appointed councils and then the elected council and ended up with the establishment of the two-council system crowned by a sensed participation of women and the emergence of the civil society forces through the establishment of dozens of civil society associations in less than five years.

More importantly, the political process in Oman seems to be well organised and trusted, as not one of the respondents accused the government of any malpractices in the political process. Additionally, all social spectrums are participating in the process

without the emergence of destructive sectarianism or ethnicity during elections, as is the case in some Middle Eastern states.

The respondents have also shown some optimism towards continued political stability, even in the post-oil era, because they felt that Oman is preparing herself for that day politically, through adopting a genuine political process and finding economic alternatives to oil. I urge other rentier states in the region to take similar steps in applying some balance between the political and economic issues in order to avoid any political shock in the post-oil era, taking into account that their populations are increasing, educational and cultural awareness levels are improving and their ability as rentier states to continue with hitherto accepted standards of living provided by the social contract, is declining.

By concluding that the *Shura* process, which stems from tradition and deep-rooted history, suits Oman more than any other pluralistic system, this book shows how different segments of society to a great extent believe in this system and in its potential to evolve. People, in general, trust the government's ability to overcome political and economic problems even in the post-oil era. Therefore, taking into account the experience gained through practising the political process for several decades and the tolerable level of separation of powers, I argue that this development is likely to shift the political situation in Oman from a monarchic system to something close to constitutional monarchy, doing so without hazardous turbulences or political earthquakes.

NOTES

Chapter 1 Introduction

1. See 'Oman's Oil Yield Long in Decline', Shell Data Show cited in: http://www.peaceredding.org/Oman's%20Oil%20Yield%20Long%20in%20Decline,%20Shell%20Data%20Show.htm. See also: http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/08/business/08OIL.html?pagewanted=1. Accessed 7 April 2010.
2. See Skeet, I. *Oman Before 1970: The End of an Era*. (Kent: Whitstable Litho Limited, 1974).
3. Chatty, D. 'Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View From the Edge', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 41, Number 1, 2009, p. 43.
4. See Halliday, F. *Arabia Without Sultans*. (Manchester: Philip Park Press, 1974).
5. Chatty, D. 2009, p.44.
6. Kishtainy, K. *Oman and the Experiment in Democracy*. (London: Elliot & Sampson: 2007), pp. 56–57.
7. Oman Country Monitor. June 2003. In: http://0-web.ebscohost.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/ehost/results?vid=2&hid=111&sid=5335fcdb-375-c-4dab-a7be-11294b36347e%40sessionmgr114&bquery=(JN+%22Oman+Country+Monitor%22+and+DT+20030601)&bdata=JmRiP-WJ1aCZ0eXBlPTEmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl. Accessed 19 July 2010.
8. Al-Maharmi, Z. K. *Al-Ibadiya: Tareekh Wa-Manhaj Wa-Mabadi'a*. (Bahla: *Al-Ghubaira'a* Library, 2005), pp. 3–8.
9. See Al-Suhail, N. E. J. *Al-Ibadiyah Fil-Khaleej Al-Arabi Fil-Qarnain Al-Thalith Wal-Rabi'e Al-Hijri*. (Muscat: *Al-Istiqamah* Bookshop, 1998).
10. Rabi, U. *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman Under Said bin Taymur 1932–1970*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), p. 44.

11. Muammar, A. Y. *Ibadhism: A Moderate Sect of Islam*. (Muscat: International Printing Press, 1990), pp. 16–19.
12. Zahlan, R. S. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*. (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1998), p. 126. See also Rabi (2007), pp. 26–27.
13. Zahlan (1998), p. 126.
14. Ruete, R. S. *Sultanate Oman Khilal Hokm Al-Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1791–1856)*. (Basra: Arabian Gulf Studies Publications, 1983), p. 226.
15. For a full background of the current ruling family, see: Ruzayq, H. M. *Al-Fateh Al-Mubeen Fi Sirat Al-Sadah Al-Busaidiyeen*. (Cairo: Amoon Printings, 1984).
16. See Owtram, F. A. *Modern History of Oman*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004).
17. Davidson, C. M. 'From traditional to formal education in the lower Arabian Gulf, 1820–1971', *History of Education*, Volume 37, Number 5, September 2008, pp. 633–643. See also Rabi (2007), p. 13.
18. Rabi (2007), p. 43.
19. For the sources of income for both the Imamate and the Sultanate, see Rabi (2007), p. 17.
20. Zahlan (1998), p. 132.

Chapter 2 The Context of Democratisation in the Arab world

1. See Peterson, J. E. *Oman's Insurgencies.* (London: Saqi Books, 2007).
2. Beetham, D., and K. Boyle. *Introducing Democracy: 80 Questions and Answers.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 2.
3. Held, D. *Models of Democracy*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 3–8.
4. Al-Sulami M. F. *The West and Islam: Western Liberal Democracy against versus the System of Shura*. (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 4.
5. Beetham, D., and K. Boyle. *Introducing Democracy: 80 Questions and Answers.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 1.
6. See Martin Kramer. Islam vs. Democracy. In: http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/IslamvsDemocracy.htm. Accessed 12 April 2010.
7. Al-Jabri, M. A. *Democracy and Human Rights*. (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies Press, 1994), pp. 173–179.
8. Beetham, D., and K. Boyle (1995), p. 114.
9. Kramer, G. 'Islamist Notions of Democracy', *The Middle East Report*, Number 147, 1993, p. 7.
10. See: King-Irani, L. 'Kinship, Class, and Ethnicity', in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004), pp. 299–334.

11. Anderson, L. 'The Prospects for Democracy in the Arab World', *Middle Eastern Lectures*, Issue 1, 1995, p. 69.
12. Lewis, B. 'The Other Middle Eastern Problem', *Middle Eastern Lectures*, Number 1, 1995, p. 51.
13. For more details, see www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers10/paper903.html. Accessed 8 April 2010.
14. See, Iraqi Constitution Vote Split on Ethnic and Sect Lines, cited in http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/23/international/middleeast/23iraq.html. Accessed 8 April 2010.
15. Beetham and Boyle (1995), p. xiv.
16. See Abdullah, T. F. *Aliyyat Al-Taghyeer Al-Deemocraty Fi Al-Watan Al-Arabi*. (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1997).
17. See, for example, Migdal, J. *Strong Societies*, *Weak States.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 139–141.
18. See Owen, R. *State*, *Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 13. See also, Davidson, C. M. 'From traditional to formal education in the lower Arabian Gulf, 1820–1971', *History of Education*, Volume 37, Number 5, September 2008, pp. 633–643.
19. See Esposito, J. L., Muqtedar Khan, M. A., Schwedler, J. 'Religion and Politics in the Middle East', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004), pp. 363–386.
20. Kramer, M. *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideal in the Middle East.* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1996), p. 189.
21. Khouri, R. G. *Iraq Repeats the Arab Legacy of Tribe, Religion and State*. Found in: http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/mep/04232003op.htm. Accessed 13 April 2010.
22. Lockman, Z. *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism.* (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2004), p. 134.
23 Huntington, S. 'Political Development and Political Decay', *The Military and Modernization*, ed. Henry Bienen (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, Inc, 1971), p. 162. See also, Billet, B. L. *Modernization Theory and Economic Development: Discontent in the Developing World*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1993).
24. Lockman, Z. (2004), p. 136.
25 Lockman, Z. (2004), p. 137.
26. Halliday, F. 'The Great Powers and the Middle East', *The Middle East Report*, Volume 151, (1988), p. 3.
27. Owen, R. (2004), p. 7.
28. See Al-Hirmasi, M. A. 'Al-Qawmiyah Wal-Dimocratiyah fil Watan Al-Arabi', In: *Azmat Al-Dimocratiyah Fil Watan Al-Arabi*, ed. Center for Arab Unity Studies (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2002).

29. Lewis, B. (1995), pp. 46–50.
30. Rubin, B. 'The Geopolitics of Middle East Conflict and Crisis', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 2, Number 3, 1988. Found in http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue3/jv2n3a7.html. Accessed 13 April 2010.
31. Tetreault, M. A. 'International Relations', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004), pp. 131–168.
32. For more information on the implications of imposing democracy by external force, see Danchev, A., and Macmillan, J. *Iraq War and Democratic Politics*. (London: Routledge, 2004).
33. Pevehouse, J. C. (2002), pp. 518–539.
34. Calvert, P. 'Authoritarianism', *Ideals That Shape Politics*, ed. Michael Foley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 62–68.
35. Zaki, M. 'Civil Society and Democratisation in the Arab World', *Ibn Khaldon Centre for Development Studies*. Annual Report 2007. Cited in: http://www.eicds.org/english/publications/reports/Annual-Report-EN07.pdf. Accessed 12 April 2010.
36. For the single party rule in the Arab World, see Al-Filali, M. 'Al-Dimocratiyah Wa Tagrobat Al-Hizb Al-Wahid fil-Watan Al-Arabi', *Azmat Al-Dimocratiyah Fil Watan Al-Arabi*, ed. Center for Arab Unity Studies (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies Press, 2002).
37. For the control over telecommunications, see also Eickelman, D. F. 'Communication and Control in the Middle East: Publication and Its Discontents', *New Media in the Muslim World*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and John W. Anderson (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).
38. See Steven Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. In: http://www.brookings.edu/events/2007/1129_arab_world.aspx. Accessed 12 April 2010.
39. For more information about democracy and authoritarianism, see Saikal, A., *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 111–129.
40. Ajami, F. *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 3.
41. Rubin, B. 'The Triumph of the Old Middle East', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 6, Number 2, 2002. Cited in: http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2002/issue2/jv6n2a6.html. Accessed 13 April 2010.
42. Anderson, L. (1995), p. 63.
43. See Owen, R. (2004), p. 9.
44. See Augustus, R. N. *Civil Society in the Middle East*. (The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1996).

45. Karl, T. L. *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*. (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1997), p. 14. Another definition of the state given by Alfred Stephan is 'the state is a continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive system that attempts not only to manage the state apparatus but to structure relations between civil and public power and to structure many crucial relations within civil and political society'. See Shafer, M. *Winners and Losers: How Sectors Shape the Developmental Prospects of States*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 5.
46. See the website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rentier_state. Accessed 12 April 2010.
47. Zahlan, R. S. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*. (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1998), p. 29.
48. See the Europa Regional Surveys of the World: The Middle East and North Africa 2006 (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 876.
49. See Zahlan (1998).
50. See Tetreault, M. A. 'The Political Economy of Middle Eastern Oil', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner & Jillian Schwedler (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004), pp. 249–272.
51. See Zahlan (1998), pp. 24–25.
52. Zahlan (1998), p. 2.
53. Davidson, C. M. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2008), pp. 151–153 and 178–182.
54. Ayubi, N. *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 1995), pp. 224–240.
55. Some scholars argue that Oman does not fit the rentier pattern experienced by its near neighbours. See, for example, Allen, A., and Rigsbee, L. *Oman Under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970–1996*. (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), p. 216.
56. Karl, T. L. (1997), p. 7.
57. See the United Nations' Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2005–2006, p.39.
58. Moghadam, V. M. 'Population Growth, Urbanization, and the Challenges of Unemployment', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004), pp. 273–296.
59. See the Europa Regional Surveys of the World: The Middle East and North Africa 2006, p. 873.
60. Owen R. (2004), p. 39.
61. See the Statistical Year Book (Muscat: Information and Publication Centre in the Ministry of National Economy, 2007), p. 95.

62. See the United Nations' Survey, 2006, p. 18.
63. Karl, T. L. (1997), p. 5. The Dutch disease is associated with the dependency of the state on one main source of income.
64. Tamimi A. S. *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 98–102.
65. See John Esposito and John Voll, http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2001–11/islam.html. Accessed 12 April 2010.
66. See Farooq, M. O. *Islam and Democracy: Perceptions and Misperceptions*. In http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/writings/islamic/democracy.htm. Accessed 12 April 2010.
67. Tamimi, A. S. (2001), pp. 89–90.
68. See John Esposito and John Voll, http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2001–11/islam.html. Accessed 12 April 2010. .
69. Tamimi, A. S. (2001), pp. 46–50.
70. See the Survey Report: Views of a Changing World 2003: War With Iraq Further Divides the Global Publics. In: http://people-press.org/report/185/views-of-a-changing-world-2003. Accessed 19 July 2010.
71. Kramer, G. 'Islamist Notions of Democracy', *The Middle East Report*, Number 147, 1993, p. 3.
72. Kramer, G. (1992), p. 3.
73. Kramer, G. (1992).
74. See Farooq, M. O. *Islam and Democracy: Perceptions and Misperceptions*. In http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/writings/islamic/democracy.htm. Accessed 12 April 2010.
75. Mu'awiya is the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty and the one who initiated the hereditary rule in Islam. He fought with Imam Ali, the fourth successor after the Prophets death.
76. Al-Sulami, M. F. *The West and Islam: Western Liberal Democracy versus the System of Shura*. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
77. See: Salam, N. 2002. *Civil Society in the Arab World: The Historical and Political Dimensions*. In: http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/publications/salam.pdf. Accessed 12 April 2010.
78. See: Tariq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: Historical Traces, Contemporary Vestiges', *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Winter, 1997. Cited in: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2501/is_n1_v19/ai_19956657/pg_6?tag=artBody;col1. Accessed 12 April 2010.
79. Yom, S. L. 'Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 9, Number 4, 2005, p. 4.
80. Yom, S. L. (2005), pp. 4–8.
81. See: Kharajah, S. 2007. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: The Missing Concept', *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 9, Number 2, (2005),

in: http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ijnl/vol9iss2/special_2.htm. Accessed 12 April 2010.

82. See Kharajah, S. (2007).
83. See: Al-Najjar, B. S. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: A Reality That Needs Reforming', *Contemporary Arab Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2008). Cited in: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t780786794. Accessed 12 April 2010.
84. See: Kharajah, S. (2007).
85. Mohammadi, A. *International Communication and Globalisation*. (London: Sage, 1997), p. 3.
86. Fox, J. W., Sabbah, N. M., Al-Mutawa, M. *Globalisation and the Gulf*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 27.
87. Sadik, T. 'The Economic Implications of Globalisation for the GCC Countries', *Globalisation and the Middle East: Islam, Economy, Society and Politics*, ed. Toby Dodge and Richard Higgott (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2002), p. 83.
88. Abdulla, A. 'The Impact of Globalisation on Arab Gulf States', *Globalisation and the Gulf*, ed. John W. Fox, Nada Murtadha Sabbah and Mohammed Al-Mutawa (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), pp.180–188.
89. See also Ahmed, A. *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalisation*. (Washington: Booking Institution Press, 2007).

Chapter 3 The Omani Context

1. Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Arab Origin. In: http://sirah.al-islam.com/Display.asp?f=rwd1014. Accessed 19 July 2010.
2. Carter, J. R. L. *Tribes in Oman.* (London: Peninsular Publishing, 1982), pp. 11–16.
3. For more details, see figure 4 in Wilkinson J. C. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 74.
4. Al-Hajri. M. B. *Oman: The Shura in the Political History of the Imamate Rule*. (Muscat: Al-nahdha Press, 2002), p. 84. Also see Ruete, R. S. *Sultanate Oman Khilal Hokm Al-Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1791–1856)*. (Basra: Arabian Gulf Studies Publications, 1983), p. 221.
5. Rabi, U. *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), p. 24.
6. Wilkinson, J. C. (1987), p. 9.
7. The plain mapped has been taken from the following website: http://www.almdares.net/vz/showthread.php?t=19371. Accessed 8 April 2010. But the rest of the work on it has been done by me.
8. Wilkinson, J. C. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 166–168.

9. Al-Salmi, A. H. *Tuhfat Al-A'ayan Bi Sirat Ahl Oman*. (Muscat: Al-Nahdha Press, 1997), pp. 194–267.
10. Aashur, S. A. *Tareekh Ahl Oman* (Muscat: Al-Sharqiyah Printer, 2005), pp. 157–177.
11. Rabi, U. *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), p. 25.
12. Wilkinson, J. C. (1987), pp. 93–95. See also Rabi U. (2007), pp. 9–16.
13. See map 6 in Wilkinson, J. C. (1987), p. 391.
14. Rabi, U. (2007), p. 9.
15. Valeri, M. *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2009), pp. 241–250. Also see Peterson, J. E. 'Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman', *Middle East Journal*, Volume 58, Number 1, 2004.
16. Wilkinson, J. C. (1987), p. 4.
17. See *Oman Economic Studies: The Cultural and Demographic Risks in Oman*, 2000.
18. See the United Nations' Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2005–2006, p. 39.
19. See also Valeri, M. (2009), pp. 183–224.
20. *Oman Economic Studies*: *The Cultural and Demographic Risks in Oman*, 2000.
21. United Nations' Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2005–2006, p. 39.
22. See *Oman Country Review: Social Overview* (2008), pp. 99–120.
23. See the Statistical Year Book (Muscat: Information and Publication Centre in the Ministry of National Economy, 2007), p. 158.
24. Statistical Year Book (Muscat: Information and Publication Centre in the Ministry of National Economy, 2007), pp. 290–291.
25. Valeri, M. (2009), pp. 213–222.
26. See *Oman Economic Studies*: *The Economics of the Latent Demand* (2000), pp. 22–25.
27. Plamondon, B. *Oman Country Monitor* (January 2008), pp. 1–9.
28. See also *Oman Country Review*: *The Economic Overview* (2008), pp. 59–84.
29. For the political development and the challenge of modernisation, see: Bill, J. A., and Springborg, R. *Politics in the Middle East*. (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994).
30. Valeri, M. 'Liberalisation from Above: Political Reforms and Sultanism in Oman', *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, ed. Khalaf, A. and Giacomo, Luciani (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006), pp. 189–190.
31. See Hamoudi, H. H. *Oman: Prosperity Today, The State and Development*. (London: De-Luxe Printers Limited, 2006).

32. Ghubash, H. *Oman the Islamic Democracy: Imamate Culture and the Modern Political History*. (Beirut: Dar al-Jadeed Company, 1997).
33. Ghubash, H. (1996), pp. 21–22.
34. Ghubash, H. *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), pp. 31–32.
35. Katz, M. N. (2007), p. 6.
36. Cecil, C. O. 'Oman's Progress Towards Participatory Government', *Middle East Policy*, Volume XIII, Number 1, 2006, p. 60.
37. Valeri, M. (2009), pp.119–140.
38. Jones, J. *Negotiating Change: The New Politics of the Middle East*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), p. 159.
39. Eickelman, D. F. 'Oman's Next Generation: Challenges or Prospects', *Crosscurrents in the Gulf: Arab Regional and Global Interests*, ed. H. R. Sindelar III and J. E. Peterson (London: Routledge, 1988).
40. Jones, J. (2007), p. 159.
41. Cecil, C. O. (2006), p. 65.
42. Katz, M. N. 'Assessing the Political Stability of Oman', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 8, Number 3, 2004.
43. Jones, J. (2007), p. 163.
44. Katz, M. N. (2004), pp. 4–5.
45. Jones, J. (2007), pp. 170–179.
46. Rabi, U. *'Majlis al-Shura* and *Majlis al-Dawla*: Weaving Old Practices and New Realities in the Process of State Formation in Oman', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 38, Number 4, 2002.
47. Jones, J. (2007), p. 162.
48. Jones, J. (2007), p. 166.
49. Balkini A., Denoeux, G., and Springborg, R. *Legislative Politics in the Arab World: The Resurgence of Democratic Institutions*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999), pp. 79–109.
50. Information Committee of the State Council. *Sultanate of Oman: The Basic Statute of the State*. (Muscat: The State Council Press, 2008).
51. Information Committee in the State Council. *The State Council: Its Bureau, Committees and Administrative Apparatus During the Fourth Session (2007–2011)*. (Muscat: the State Council Press, 2008).
52. Information Committee in the State Council. *The State Council: Its Bureau, Committees and Administrative Apparatus During the Fourth Session (2007–2011)*. (Muscat: the State Council Press, 2008), pp. 19–24.
53. *Al-Shura* Council. *The Shura Path in the Sultanate of Oman in Quarter a Century (1981–2006)*. (Al-Anan printing, Rusayl Industrial Area, 2006), pp. 11–215.

54. *Al-Shura* Council. *The Shura Path in the Sultanate of Oman in Quarter a Century (1981–2006)* (Muscat: *Al-Anan* printing, 2006), pp. 60–71.
55. *Al-Shura* Council. *The Shura Path in the Sultanate of Oman in Quarter a Century (1981–2006)* (Muscat: *Al-Anan* printing, 2006), p. 69.
56. For more information about the Royal Tours, see Chatty, D. 'Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View From the Edge', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Number 41, 2009, pp. 50–53.
57. *Al-Shura* Council. *The Shura Path in the Sultanate of Oman in Quarter a Century (1981–2006)* (Muscat: *Al-Anan* printing, 2006), pp. 28–29.
58. Some scholars, such as Dawn Chatty (2009), argue that the Sultan is becoming distant from his people as ordinary people cannot see him easily as they used to do during the 1980s and 1990s. Although this argument is partly true, it is over simplified. This situation in Oman has dramatically changed: the population has increased, so the number of people that want to meet up with the Sultan has increased; the Sultanic system is gradually giving up some of its authorities, so it is not a one man show situation anymore, and people have their representatives in the *Shura* Council that can even help them in securing a safe access of their petitions to the government; Oman is an institution-state now and enforcing a state of law, so people's rights are preserved and there is no need to take grievances to the Sultan himself. Additionally, the concept of the Royal Tours has developed from a very primitive stage to organized high-quality symposiums.

Chapter 4 The 'Top-Down' Model: Challenges to Its Success

1. The Ministry of Information. *The Royal Speeches of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said: 1970–2005*. (Muscat: Modern Colour Printers, 2005), p. 12.
2. See Al-Jabri, K. *Oman's Joining the WTO and Signing the FTA with the US*. PhD Thesis, University of Durham, 2009.
3. Rabi, U. (2006), pp. 9–16.
4. The Minister of Interior said in an interview published in an Omani newspaper on 19 April 2010 that the Ministry will apply the articles mentioned in chapter 7 of the Electoral Principle on any case found guilty, but at the same time it does not rely on rumours for taking actions against vote buyers. For more details, see: http://main.omandaily.om/node/14551. Accessed 20 April 2010.
5. See the, Omani Women Symposium, *Oman Daily Observer,* issued on 17 October 2009.

Chapter 5 The Traditional Model: Theology of *Ibadism* and Modernity

1. Al-Hashmi, S. S. *Tagrobat Al-Shura fi Sultanate Oman: Baina Al-Shura Al-Islamiyah Wad-Dimocratiyah Al-Mua'asirah*. (Muscat: The Dawlah Council, 1999), pp. 12–13.
2. Al-Hashmi, S. S. (1999), pp. 15–17.
3. Al-Hashmi, S. S. (1999), p. 18.
4. Al-Ja'abiri, F. *Al-Bu'ad Al-Hadhari lil-Aqidah Al-Ibadiyah*. (Muscat: *Al-Istiqamah* Bookshop, 2004), pp.33–66. See also Saee, M. N., *Al-Qanoon fi Aqa'ed Al-Firaq wal-Mathahib Al-Islamiyah*. (Cairo: Dar Al-Salam Publishers, 2007), p. 370.
5. RR1 said: Sultan Qaboos, for example, may have not had homage through *Ahl Al Hal Wa Al Aqd*, but he received a homage from the Omani nation when they contented him and submitted to his rule and the masses went out to praise him. Also RR6 said: Sultan Qaboos is characterised by a clear and distinct feature as the whole Sultanate accepts his governance, even the Islamic jurists.
6. Saee, M. N. (2007), pp. 369–370.

APPENDIX 1: THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDENTS (GR)

Code	Date of Interview	Post	Remarks
GR1	24 February 2009	Chairman of the State Council	
GR2	18 March 2009	Minister of Social Development	Her ministry is responsible for association-forming permissions
GR3	23 March 2009	Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior	His ministry is responsible for regulating the elections
GR4	28 February 2009	Undersecretary of the Ministry of Manpower	His ministry is responsible for syndicate-forming permissions
GR5	15 March 2009	Undersecretary of the Ministry of Petroleum and Gas	Ex-Director General of finance in the Ministry of Finance

Code	Date of Interview	Post	Remarks
GR6	6 February 2009	Deputy Secretary General of *Al-Shura* Council	
GR7	31 March 2009	Head of the Economic Committee in the *Al-Shura* Council	Ex-Deputy Chief of the Omani Central Bank
GR8	4 April 2009	State Council member	Head of the Omani delegation in the Arab women parliamentary meetings
GR9	23 March 2009	Dep. of Associations and Clubs Director in the Ministry of Social Development	Her department is responsible for association-forming permissions
GR10	8 March 2009	Dep. of Syndicalism Organisations Director in the Ministry of Manpower	His department is responsible for syndicates-forming permissions

APPENDIX 2: THE RELIGIOUS RESPONDENTS (RR)

Code	Date of Interview	Post	Remarks
RR1	14 January 2009	Secretary General of the *Iftaá* Office	
RR2	1 April 2009	Religious businessman	Ex-Deputy Chairman of the State Council. Ex-Deputy Chairman of *Al-Shura* Council. Ex-member of the State Consultative Council. Ex-member of the Agric., Fish. & Indus. Council. Ex-member of the GCC Advisory Association.
RR3	25 March 2009	Advisor of HH, the Minister of Heritage and Culture	Ex-Imamate member and a relative of the last Imam

Code	Date of Interview	Post	Remarks
RR4	24 February 2009	A senior staff in the Office of HM, Advisor for the Religious and Historical Affairs	
RR5	5 January 2009	A reader in the *Iftaá* Office	PhD in the *Ibadi Fiqh* from Oxford University
RR6	10 January 2009	Employee in the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs	Regarded as a renewal in the *Ibadi Fiqh*
RR7	17 April 2009	Ex-religious judge	Regarded as religious intellectual and comes from a tribe that ruled Oman in the past.
RR8	20 April 2009	State Council member	Was a representative of Imamate in Yemen, then became an ambassador for the Omani gov.
RR9	4 March 2009	A senior official in the Sultan Qaboos Institute of the Islamic Culture	Comes from a family that ruled Oman in the past.
RR10	13 April 2009	A senior official in the office of the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs	PhD in Islamic *Fiqh* from Germany

APPENDIX 3: THE YOUNG GENERATION RESPONDENTS (YGR)

Code	Date of Interview	Post	Remarks
YGR1	19 April 2009	Chairman of the Omani Women Association in Muscat	A member of the State Council and one of the first two women members in the *Shura* Council
YGR2	8 March 2009	Chairman of the Omani Labour Union	
YGR3	21 February 2009	A founder of the Arab Dialogue Council in Washington, DC	Ex-ambassador for the Omani government and regarded as a political intellectual
YGR4	12 April 2009	Chairman of the Cultural Club	Ex-informational attaché in Washington

Code	Date of Interview	Post	Remarks
YGR5	1 March 2009	Chairman of the Journalist Association	The director of the Omani television
YGR6	8 March 2009	Head of an internet blog (*Sablat* Oman)	
YGR7	3 April 2009	Ex-representative for Middle East Partnership Initiative	Ex-employee of the American Embassy in Muscat
YGR8	9 January 2009	A reader in the State Council	A member of the Omani Writers Association and regarded as a political intellectual
YGR9	25 December 2008	Chairman of the Omani Film Association	
YGR10	15 April 2009	Chairman of the Omani Writers Association	Famous for writing stories.

APPENDIX 4: COMMITTEES' WORK IN *MAJLIS AL-DAWLAH* (STATE COUNCIL)

No.	Title of the Study	Committee	Date
1	National Population Policy	Social Committee	October 1998
2	Civil Transactions Draft Law	Legal Committee	May 1999
3	Challenges Facing Omanisation in the Private Sector	Economic Committee	October 1999
4	The Establishment of Private Universities	Social Committees	May 2000
5	Future of Tourism. Its Role in Boosting the National Economy	Economic Committee	October 2000
6	Evidence in Civil and Commercial Material Draft Law	Legal Committee	January 2001
7	Civil and Commercial Procedure Draft Law	Legal Committee	May 2001
8	Protecting the Environment and Pollution Prevention Draft Law	Legal Committee	May 2001

No.	Title of the Study	Committee	Date
9	Tourism Regulation Draft Law	Legal Committee	January 2001
10	Draft Labour Law	Legal Committee	October 2001
11	Draft Telecommunications Regulation Law	Legal Committee	October 2001
12	Scholarships and Educational Grants Regulation Draft Law	Social Committee	October 2001
13	Draft Fisheries Law	Legal & Economic	March 2002
14	Economic Diversification and Its Enhancement	Economic Committee	May 2002
15	Social Security and Principles of Establishing Social Support Fund	Social Committee	October 2002
16	Emerging Negative Social Phenomena and Their Effect on the Omani Society	Social Committee	January 2003
17	Challenges Facing Water Resources in the Sultanate	Economic Committee	October 2003
18	Social Support and Social Security and Their Role in the Improvement of the Social Conditions in the Sultanate	Social Committee	April 2004
19	Road Accidents in the Sultanate and Strategies of Preventing Them	Social Committee	April 2005
20	The Housing Sector	Legal Committee	April 2005
21	Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled Draft Law	Social Committee	January 2005
22	The Current Status of the Omani Labour Market and New Job Opportunities	Economic Committee	December 2005
23	National Demographic Policy	Social Committee	February 2006

No.	Title of the Study	Committee	Date
24	Preservation of Public Wealth	Legal Committee	April 2006
25	An Evaluation Report on the Performance of the Tourism Sector	Follow-up Committee	January 2006
26	Study on the Juvenile Law	Legal Committee	November 2006
27	Study on the Development of Human Resources in the Public Sector	Human Resources Develop. Committee	November 2006
28	A Study on Development of an Appropriate Mechanism to Support Families Benefiting from the Social Security System and Low-Income Families in Getting Wider Opportunities for Higher Education	Social Committee	November 2006
29	Study on Fisheries in Oman and Developing Methods of Investment in This Sector	Economic Committee	December 2006
30	Study on the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises	Economic Committee	May 2007
31	Study on Environmental Pollution in Oman and Mechanisms of Prevention	Social Committee	June 2007
32	Report on the Evaluation of the Industrial Sector within the Framework of the Sixth Five-Year Plan	Follow-up Committee	January 2007
33	Draft Law on Company Income Tax	Legal & Economic	February 2008
34	Draft Law on Food Safety	Social Committee	February 2008
35	The Project of the Organisation of the Work of Taxis within Muscat Governance	Economic Committee	February 2008

APPENDIX 5: DRAFT LAWS REVISED AND SUGGESTED BY THE *AL-SHURA* COUNCIL

1) Draft Labour Law
2) Solicitor Law
3) Civil and Commercial Procedure Draft Law
4) Tourism Regulation Law
5) Evidence in Civil and Commercial Material Draft Law
6) Protecting the Environment and Pollution Prevention Draft Law
7) Telecommunication Regulation Law
8) Scholarships and Educational Grants Regulation
9) Fisheries Draft Law
10) Protecting the National Economy from Any Malpractices in the International Trade Sector Law
11) Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled Draft Law

The Council has also revised through self-initiatives the following laws:

1) Improve the Inspection Law for the Art Works
2) Improve the Trade Agencies Law
3) Improve and Enforce the National Treasury Protection and Avoiding Interests' Conflict Law

4) Improve the Printing and Publication Law
5) Improving the Pension Fund Law for the Omani Government Employees
6) Improving the Welfare Law
7) Initiating Regulations That Guarantee the Independence of the Judiciary

APPENDIX 6: ISSUES DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE *AL-SHURA* COUNCIL AND SEVERAL GOVERNMENT MINISTERS

1) Discussing the matter of drilling exploration wells near the source of the traditional water stream (*Falaj*) with the Minister of Water Resources
2) Discussing the problem of electricity cut out in some districts with Minister of Electricity and Water
3) Discussing the problem of Muscat Securities Market with the Minister of Trade and Industries
4) Discussing the problem of the wrongful fishing with Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
5) Discussing increasing the annual acceptance and improving the level of the scientific research with the head of Sultan Qaboos University
6) Discussing the oil and gas reserves in the Sultanate and national employment in the oil companies with the Minister of Oil and Gas
7) Discussing the increase in the inflation rate, especially in building materials and some food commodities, with the Minister of Trade and Industries.

APPENDIX 7: REPORTS SENT BY THE *AL-SHURA* COUNCIL TO THE GOVERNMENT REGARDING VARIOUS ISSUES

1) Developing the agricultural and zoological sectors
2) Privatisation of the some government sectors
3) Efficiency of the banking sector
4) System of equivalent trade dealings (Offset)
5) Industrial role in the economic development
6) Employment of the national human resources
7) Muscat Securities Market Crises
8) Role of the large companies in stimulating the economy and developing the local societies
9) Studying the facilitated loans
10) Studying the trade monopolism
11) Road accidents and their effects and how to reduce them
12) Improving the national health services
13) Social welfare for the handicapped
14) Juvenile crimes
15) Renewing the ways for giving the alms tax

16) The educational and cultural measures in the nurture of the Omani children
17) The career's situation of those working in the educational sector
18) Culture development in Oman
19) The role of the private universities and colleges
20) Civil defence services and crises management techniques
21) Sponsoring a symposium for simplifying the administrative procedures (Routine)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Government Publications and International Reports

Country Profile: Oman, the Yemens. The Economist Intelligence Unit. (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1988–1989).

Europa Regional Surveys of the World: The Middle East and North Africa 2006. (London: Routledge, 2005).

Al-Hashmi, S. S. *Tagrobat Al-Shura fi Sultanate Oman: Baina Al-Shura Al-Islamiyah Wad-Dimocratiyah Al-Mua'asirah {Al-Shura Experiment in the Sultanate of Oman: Between Islamic Shura and Modern Democracy}*. (Muscat: Dawlah Council,1999).

Information Committee of the State Council. Sultanate of Oman: The Basic Statue of the State. (Muscat: The State Council Press, 2008).

Information Committee in the State Council. The State Council: Its Bureau, Committees and Administrative Apparatus During the Fourth Session (2007–2011). (Muscat: the State Council Press, 2008).

Al-Shura Council. *The Shura Path in the Sultanate of Oman in Quarter a Century (1981–2006)*. (Muscat: Al-Anan printing, 2006).

Statistical Year Book. (Muscat: Information and Publication Centre in the Ministry of National Economy, 2007).

Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2005–2006. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (New York: United Nations, 2006).

Survey Report: Views of a Changing World 2003: War With Iraq Further Divides the Global Publics. In: http://people-press.org/report/185/views-of-a-changing-world-2003.

United Nations' Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2005–2006.

Books

The Quran

Aashur, S. A. *Tareekh Ahl Oman {History of the People of Oman}*. (Muscat: Al-Sharqiyah Printer, 2005).

Abdullah, T. F. *Aliyyat Al-Taghyeer Al-Deemocraty Fi Al-Watan Al-Arabi {Mechanisms for Democratic Change in the Arab World}*. (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies Press, 1997).

Ahmed, A. *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalisation*. (Washington: Booking Institution Press, 2007).

Ajami, F. *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Allen, A. and Lynn Rigsbee. *Oman Under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970–1996*. (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000).

Anderson, Lisa. 'The Prospects for Democracy in the Arab World', *Middle Eastern Lectures*, Issue 1, 1995.

Augustus, R. N. *Civil Society in the Middle East*. (The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1996).

Ayubi, N. *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 1995).

Balkini, A., Denoeux, G., Springborg, R. *Legislative Politics in the Arab World: The Resurgence of Democratic Institutions*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999),

Beblawi, H. 'The State in the Arab World', *The Arab State*, ed. G. Luciani. (London: Mackays of Chatham, 1990).

Beetham, D., and K. Boyle. *Introducing Democracy: 80 Questions and Answers.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

Bill, J. A., and Springborg, R. *Politics in the Middle East*. (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994).

Billet, B. L. *Modernization Theory and Economic Development: Discontent in the Developing World*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1993).

Budge, I. *The New Challenge of Direct Democracy*. (Cornwall: Hartnolls Ltd, 1996).

Burnham, P., et al. *Research Methods in Politics*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

Carapico, S. *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Carter, J. R. L. *Tribes in Oman*. (London: Peninsula Publishing, 1982).

Cunningham, F. *Theories of Democracy: A Critical Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

Danchev, A., and Macmillan, J. *Iraq War and Democratic Politics*. (London: Routledge, 2004).

Davidson, C. M. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2008).

Esposito, J. L. *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Foley, M. *Ideas That Shape Politics*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

Fox, J. W., Sabbah, N. M., and Al-Mutawa, M. *Globalisation and the Gulf*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

Ghubash, H. *Oman the Islamic Democracy: Imamate Culture and the Modern Political History*. (Beirut: Dar al-Jadeed Company, 1997).

Ghubash, H. *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

Al-Hajri, M. B. *Oman: The Shura in the Political History of the Imamate Rule*. (Muscat: Al-nahdha Press, 2002).

Halliday, F. *Arabia Without Sultans*. (Manchester: The Philip Park Press, 1974).

Hamoudi, H. H. *Oman: Prosperity Today: The State and Development*. (London: De-Luxe Printers Limited, 2006).

Held, D. *Models of Democracy*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

Al-Ja'abiri, F. *Al-Bu'ad Al-Hadhari lil-Aqidah Al-Ibadiyah {Cultural Far-Cited Vision of the Ibadi Faith}*. (Muscat: Al-Istiqamah Bookshop, 2004).

Al-Jabri, K. *Oman's Joining the WTO and Signing the FTA with the US*. PhD Thesis, University of Durham, 2009.

Al-Jabri, M. A. *Democracy and Human Rights*. (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies Press, 1994).

Jones, J. *Negotiating Change: The New Politics of the Middle East*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007).

Karl, T. L. *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*. (London: University of California Press, 1997).

Kishtainy, K. *Oman and the Experiment in Democracy*. (London: Elliot & Sampson: 2007).

Al-Khalili, M. *Oman's Foreign Policy*. (Westport: Praeger Publisher Inc., 2009).

Kramer, M. *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideal in the Middle East*. (London: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

Kvale, S. *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. (London: Sage, 1996).

Lockman, Z. *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2004).

Al-Maharmi, Z. K. *Al-Ibadiya: Tareekh Wa-Manhaj Wa-Mabadi'a {Ibadism: History, Methodology and Principles}*. (Bahla: Al-Ghubaira'a Library, 2005), pp. 3–8.

Migdal, J. *Strong Societies, Weak States*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Mohammadi, A. *International Communication and Globalisation*. (London: Sage, 1997).

Muammar, A. Y. *Ibadhism: A Moderate Sect of Islam*. (Muscat: International Printing Press, 1990).

Owen, R. *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. (London: Routledge, 2004).

Owtram, F. *A Modern History of Oman*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004).

Peterson, J. E. *Oman's Insurgencies* (London: Saqi Books, 2007).
Pratt, N. *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2007).
Rabi, U. *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman Under Said bin Taymur 1932–1970*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007).
Ruete, R. S. *Sultanate Oman Khilal Hokm Al-Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1791–1856) {Sultanate of Oman During the Rein of Sayyid Said Bin Sultan 1791–1856}*. (Basra: Arabian Gulf Studies Publications, 1983).
Ruzayq, H. M. *Al-Fateh Al-Mubeen Fi Sirat Al-Sadah Al-Busaidiyeen {The Outlined Victory in the Biography of Al-Busaidi Lords}*. (Cairo: Amoon Printings, 1984).
Saee, M. N. *Al-Qanoon fi Aqa'ed Al-Firaq wal-Mathahib Al-Islamiyah {The Law in the Faiths of the Islamic Groups and Sects}*. (Cairo: Dar Al-Salam Publishers, 2007).
Saikal, A. *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).
Al-Salmi, A. H. *Tuhfat Al-A'ayan Bi Sirat Ahl Oman {Notables' Masterpiece in the Biography of the People of Oman}*. (Muscat: Al-Nahdha Press, 1997).
Shafer, M. *Winners and Losers: How Sectors Shape the Developmental Prospects of States*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).
Skeet, I. *Oman Before 1970: The End of an Era*. (Kent: Whitstable Litho Limited, 1974).
Al-Suhail, N. E. J. *Al-Ibadiyah Fil-Khaleej Al-Arabi Fil-Qarnain Al-Thalith Wal-Rabi'e Al-Hijri {Ibadism in the Arabian Gulf in the Third and Fourth Centuries AH}*. (Muscat: *Al-Istiqamah* Bookshop, 1998).
Al-Sulami, M. F. *The West and Islam: Western Liberal Democracy versus the System of Shura*. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
Tamimi, A. S. *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
Valeri, M. *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2009).
Weir, S. A. *Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007).
Wilkinson, J. C. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987).
Zahlan, R. S. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*. (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1998).

Journal and Book Articles

Abdulla, A. 'The Impact of Globalisation on Arab Gulf States', *Globalisation and the Gulf*, ed. John W. Fox, Nada Murtadha Sabbah and Mohammed Al-Mutawa. (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

Abootalebi, A. R. 'Civil Society, Democracy, and the Middle East', *Middle Review of the International Affairs*, Volume 2, Number 3, 1998.

Anderson, L. 'The Prospects for Democracy in the Arab World', *The Middle Eastern Lectures*, Issue 1, 1995.

Calvert, P. 'Authoritarianism', *Ideals That Shape Politics*, ed. Michael Foley. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

Cecil, C. O. 'Oman's Progress Towards Participatory Government', *Middle East Policy*, Volume XIII, Number 1, 2006.

Chatty, D. 'Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View From the Edge', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Number 41, 2009.

Davidson, C. M. 'From Traditional to Formal Education in the Lower Arabian Gulf, 1820–1971', *History of Education*, Volume 37, Number 5, September 2008, pp. 633–643.

Eickelman, D. F. 'Communication and Control in the Middle East: Publication and Its Discontents', *New Media in the Muslim World*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and John W. Anderson. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

Eickelman, D. F. 'Oman's Next Generation: Challenges or Prospects', *Crosscurrents in the Gulf: Arab Regional and Global Interests*, ed. H. R. Sindelar III and J. E. Peterson. (London: Routledge, 1988).

Esposito, J. L., Muqtedar Khan, M. A., and Schwedler, J. 'Religion and Politics in the Middle East', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004).

Al-Filali, M. 'Al-Dimocratiyah Wa Tagrobat Al-Hizb Al-Wahid fil-Watan Al-Arabi' [Democracy and the One Political Party Experiment in the Arab World], *Azmat Al-Dimocratiyah Fil Watan Al-Arabi {Crises of Democracy in the Arab World}*, ed. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies Press, 2002).

Halliday, F. 'The Great Powers and the Middle East', *The Middle East Report*. Volume 151, 1988.

Hijab, M. F. 'Crisis of Western Democracy and Its Challenges in the Third World', *Democratic Issue in the Arab World*, ed. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies Press, 2000).

Al-Hirmasi, M. A. 'Al-Qawmiyah Wal-Dimocratiyah fil Watan Al-Arabi' [Nationalism and Democracy in the Arab World], *Azmat Al-Dimocratiyah Fil Watan Al-Arabi {Crises of Democracy in the Arab World}*, ed. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies Press, 2002).

Huntington, S. 'Political Development and Political Decay', *The Military and Modernization*, ed. Henry Bienen. (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, Inc, 1971).

Al-Jabri, M. A. 'The Problem of Democracy and Civil Society in the Arab World', *Issue of Democracy in the Arab World*, ed. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies Press, 2000).

Katz, M. N. 'Assessing the Political Stability of Oman', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 8, Number 3, 2004.

Kapiszewski, A. 'Elections and Parliamentary Activity in the GCC States: Broadening Political Participation in the Gulf Monarchies', *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, ed. Khalaf, A. and Giacomo Luciani. (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006).

Kharajah, S. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: The Missing Concept', *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 9, Number 2, 2007.

King-Irani, L. 'Kinship, Class, and Ethnicity', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004).

Kramer, G. 'Islamist Notions of Democracy', *The Middle East Report*, Number 147, 1993.

Lewis, B. 'The Other Middle Eastern Problem', *Middle Eastern Lectures*, Number 1, 1995.

Moghadam, V. M. 'Population Growth, Urbanization, and the Challenges of Unemployment', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2004).

Norton, A. R. 'The New Media, Civic Pluralism, and the Slowly Retreating State', *New Media in the Muslim World*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and John W. Anderson. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

Peterson, J. E. 'Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman', *Middle East Journal*, Volume 58, Number 1, 2004.

Pevehouse, J. C. 'Democracy from Outside-in?: International Organisations and Democratisation', *Middle East Report*, Volume 56, Number 3, 2002.

Plamondon, B. *Oman Country Monitor*, January 2008.

Rabi, U. 'Majlis al-Shura and Majlis al-Dawla: Weaving Old Practices and New Realities in the Process of State Formation in Oman', *Middle Eastern Studies,* Volume 38, Number 4, 2002.

Rubin, B. 'Pushback or Progress: Arab Regimes Respond to Democracy's Challenge', *Policy Focus*, Volume 75, 2007, p. 4.

Rubin, B. 'The Triumph of the Old Middle East', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 6, Number 2.

Sadik, T. 'The Economic Implications of Globalisation for the GCC Countries', *Globalisation and the Middle East: Islam, Economy, Society and Politics*, ed. Toby Dodge and Richard Higgott. (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2002).

Sager, A. 'Political Reform Measures from a Domestic GCC Perspective', *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, ed. Khalaf, A., and Giacomo Luciani. (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006).

Tetreault, M. A. 'The Political Economy of Middle Eastern Oil', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2004).

Tetreault, M. A. 'International Relations', *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2004).

Valeri, M. 'Liberalisation from Above: Political Reforms and Sultanism in Oman', *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, ed Khalaf, A., and Giacomo Luciani. (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006).

Weitzman, E. A. 'Software and Qualitative Research', *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (2nd ed.), ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. (London: Sage, 2003).

Yom, S. L. 'Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 9, Number 4, 2005.

Electronic Resources

Abdul Hakim, K. *Islam and Democracy*. In: http://muslim-canada.org/ch19hakim.html

Al-Najjar, B. S. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: A Reality That Needs Reforming', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*. (London: Routledge, 2008). Cited in: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t780786794.

A Roundtable Discussion. *The State of Democracy in Middle East States*. 2005. In: http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue3/jv9no3a9.html.

Esposito, J., and Voll, J. *Islam and Democracy*. 2001. In: http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2001–11/islam.html.

Farooq, M. O. *Islam and Democracy: Perceptions and Misperceptions*. In: http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/writings/islamic/democracy.htm.

Gerth, J., Labaton, and Stephen. Oman's Oil Yield Long in Decline, Shell Data Show. *The New York Times*. 8 April 2004. In: http://www.peaceredding.org/Oman's%20Oil%20Yield%20Long%20in%20Decline,%20Shell%20Data%20Show.htm.

Heydemann, S. Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World. In: http://www.brookings.edu/events/2007/1129_arab_world.aspx.

Ismael, T. Y., and Ismael, J. S. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: Historical Traces, Contemporary Vestiges', *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Winter 1997. Cited in: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2501/is_n1_v19/ai_19956657/pg_6?tag=artBody;col1.

Khouri, R. G. 'Iraq Repeats the Arab Legacy of Tribe, Religion and State'. Found in: http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/mep/04232003op.htm.

Kramer, M. 'Islam vs. Democracy'. In: Farooq, M. O. Islam and Democracy: Perceptions and Misperceptions. In: http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/writings/islamic/democracy.htm.

Kramer, M. *Islam vs. Democracy*. In: http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/IslamvsDemocracy.htm.

Oman Country Review: The Economic Overview (2008). In: http://0-web.ebscohost.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=111&sid=d72c7622-cb6f-4240–8514-ae199037b65b%40sessionmgr110&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=buh&AN=27898878.

Oman Economic Studies: The Cultural and Demographic Risks in Oman (2000). In: http://0-web.ebscohost.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=111&sid=5ab187cc-2086–4bb4-b0c5-df9cee21584f%40sessionmgr110&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=buh&AN=5843440.

Oman Economic Studies: The Economics of the Latent Demand (2000). In: http://0-web.ebscohost.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=111&sid=5ab187cc-2086–4bb4-b0c5-df9cee21584f%40sessionmgr110&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=buh&AN=5843433.

Otterman, Sharon. 2003. The MIDDLE EAST: Islam and Democracy. In: http://www.cfr.org/publication/7708/.

Rubin, B. 'The Geopolitics of Middle East Conflict and Crisis', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 2, Number 3, 1988. Found in: http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue3/jv2n3a7.html.

Salam, N. 2002. 'Civil Society in the Arab World: The Historical and Political Dimensions' In: http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/publications/salam.pdf.

Saudi's Ministry for Islamic Affairs. *Asl Al-Arab {The Arab Origin}*. In: http://sirah.al-islam.com/Display.asp?f=rwd1014.

Taheri, A. 'Islam and Democracy: The Impossible Union'. In: http://www.benadorassociates.com/article/4585.

The Net of Omani Schools. *Map of Oman*. In: http://www.almdares.net/vz/showthread.php?t=19371.

The Omani Minister of Interior. Early Readiness for the *Shura* Council's Elections. *The Omandaily Newspaper*. July 19, 2010. In: http://main.omandaily.om/node/14551.

Wikipedia. *Rentier State*. In: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rentier_state.

Zaki, M. 'Civil Society and Democratisation in the Arab World'. Ibn Khaldon Centre for Development Studies. Annual Report 2007. Cited in: http://www.eicds.org/english/publications/reports/Annual-Report-EN07.pdf.

INDEX

Adnani, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 61, 86, 160
Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd, 35, 54, 86, 109, 110, 125, 126, 140, 143, 148, 155–6, 157, 160, 161, 165, 169, 170, 173, 186, 218
Allegiance (*see also Al-Bay'a*), 1, 35, 51, 52, 63, 119, 122, 155, 156, 163, 186
Ameer, 53
Annual Royal Tour, 62, 66, 84, 85, 87, 94–5, 137, 215, 227
Asabiyyat, 54
Authoritarianism, 3, 18, 24, 29–31, 42, 45, 94, 155, 211, 214, 217
Azd, 46

Baitawiah, 147
Bani Sama, 46, 49, 50
Basic Statute of the State, the, 10, 56, 68, 70, 72–3, 76, 87, 92, 162–3
Al-Bay'a (*see also* Allegiance), 1, 63, 156, 186
Bedu, 8
Blasphemy, 144, 165
Bottom-up process, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 43, 71, 87, 130, 131, 184–213, 216, 221

Caliph, 39–40, 47, 48, 51, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 150, 152, 155, 158, 179, 217
Centralisation of power, 3, 51, 54, 60, 61, 86, 233
Citizenship, 41, 42
Civil society, 1, 3–4, 13, 19, 26, 27, 33, 40–4, 73, 102, 122, 192, 200, 205, 214, 227,
Civil society organisations, 13, 15, 19, 29, 40, 41, 42, 43, 103, 112, 113, 122, 132, 139, 169, 176, 185, 205, 206–8, 222, 224, 227
Colonialism, 22, 25, 27, 28
Compatibility, 35, 37, 40

Dealings, 38
Democratisation process, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18–9, 22, 27, 28, 31, 41, 42–3, 64, 65, 70, 71, 86, 118, 139, 146, 174, 180, 187, 189, 192, 214, 220
Deposition, 50, 51, 163, 165, 217, 218
Diversification, 10, 35, 58, 59, 87
Dynastic rule, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 46, 47, 48, 69, 153

Elections, 19, 23, 29, 54, 57, 64, 69–70, 78, 82–4, 89, 107, 108, 110, 114, 117, 118–22, 137, 169, 175–6, 178, 181, 195–6, 198, 199, 220, 221, 224, 228
2003 Parliamentary elections, 57
2007 Parliamentary elections, 12, 68, 78, 112
Employment (*see also* Unemployment), 2, 9, 10, 31, 32, 33, 34, 60, 85, 131, 208, 209
Equality, 19, 20, 23, 31, 38, 39, 63, 69, 72–3, 89, 100, 102, 127, 130, 160
Ethnicity, 21, 22, 71, 215, 228
External Intervention, 18, 26, 28

Faith, 21, 35, 38, 92, 127, 144, 174, 180, 218
Fanaticism (*see* Tribal fanaticism)
Fiqh, 38, 158, 163
Fiqh al-Aqifah (*see* Faith)
Fiqh al-Hodoud (*see* Sanctions)
Fiqh al-Ibadat (*see* Worship)
Fiqh al-Muaamalat (*see* Dealings)
Freedom, 20, 29, 31, 42, 56, 70, 72, 80, 102, 112, 118, 127, 166, 197, 204, 207, 209, 222

Geopolitics, 27
Ghadaf, 49, 50
Globalisation, 14, 34, 43, 61, 82, 87, 90, 97–105, 140, 168, 179–82, 190–5, 212, 214, 215, 216, 218, 219, 220
Gradualism, 67, 82, 95, 116, 136, 139, 171, 191, 194, 206, 220–1, 222, 224, 227
Graduates, 2, 10, 31, 61, 82, 87, 90, 96, 107, 115, 120, 121, 122, 174–5, 178, 190, 196, 197–9, 202, 204, 206, 209, 216, 223, 224

Hereditary rule, 6, 14, 39, 42, 49, 64, 93, 149, 150, 152, 153, 155, 157
Non-hereditary rule, 49, 154, 155–9, 160, 183, 217
Semi-hereditary rule, 159–63, 183, 217
Hodoud (*see* Sanctions)
Human Rights, 5, 20, 42, 68, 89, 127

Ibadat (*see* Worship)
Ibadism, 5, 6, 10, 17, 18, 64, 65, 124, 125, 126, 127, 142, 147–55, 156–7, 160, 163, 164, 167, 169, 183, 186, 217
Identity, 2, 3, 7, 10, 24, 44, 60–1, 65, 70, 86, 90, 91–2, 140, 172, 191, 215, 219
Iftaaá, 12
Ijma', 6, 35, 38–9, 63, 146, 150
Ijtihad, 6, 35, 38–9, 65, 145, 148–9, 150
Imam, 5, 6, 7, 8, 35, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 63, 64, 92, 107–8, 126, 127, 148, 149, 150, 152, 153, 154–5, 156, 157, 158, 161, 163–4, 170, 173, 217
Imamate, 2, 5, 6–7, 8, 14, 35, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 55, 63–4, 65, 107, 124–7, 147, 150, 152–3, 155–9, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 173, 217
Individualism, 104, 170, 172
Inflation, 31, 58–9

Jahiliyah, 143–4
Julanda, 46, 47, 48, 50
Judges, 73, 83–4, 93, 162
Justice, 39, 45, 72, 73, 89, 102, 124, 137, 130, 151, 152, 154, 155, 156, 169, 160–1, 162, 163–4, 166, 204, 205, 217

Khalifah, 39–40
Kofr (*see* Blasphemy)

Leadership, 35, 46, 50, 52, 55, 63, 65, 85, 89, 136, 162, 171, 176, 193, 226
Legitimacy, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 35, 39, 44, 65, 89, 91, 92, 125, 127, 140, 142, 148, 150, 153, 155, 156, 157, 158, 160, 161–2, 168, 169, 170, 178, 180, 182, 183, 202, 205, 213, 125, 216, 219, 220, 221, 226, 227

Madanee, 41
Majlis Ahl Al Hal Wal Aqd, 54, 86,
Majlis Al-Dawlah, 72, 75, 76–8, 246–8,
Majlis Al-Istishary lid-Dawlah, 78, 95,
Majlis Al-Shura, 67, 68, 69, 72, 78–81, 216, 249–53
*Majlis Om*an, 72, 75–6,
Majlis Al-Zira'a Wal-Asmak Was-Sina'a, 95
Ma'rab, 46
Media, 4, 10, 26, 29, 43, 44, 45, 62, 68, 82, 101–3, 111, 132, 175, 176, 185, 192, 200
Modernisation, 22, 25, 26, 41, 60, 90, 93, 110, 168, 170, 189, 215, 216, 218, 220
Mulukiyaah (*see* Hereditary rule)

Nabahina, 48, 51, 161, 166
Nationalism, 27, 90
New generation (*see also* Younger generation), 69, 103, 105, 116, 123, 127–32, 139, 141, 180, 183, 189, 203, 216, 219–221, 226
Nizari, 48, 49, 50, 51, 117
Nizwa, 49, 50, 52, 56, 107, 164

Oil,
  Production of, 1–2, 5, 10, 57–8, 59, 133
  Reserves of, 2, 3, 5, 18, 69, 87, 133
  Revenues (*see also* Rentier state), 2, 8, 31, 33, 57, 59–60, 62, 69, 86, 88, 132, 133, 211, 225

Pluralism, 3, 29, 37, 42, 107, 149
Political participation (*see also* Women, political participation of), 42, 61, 62, 66, 69, 71, 81, 84, 87, 88, 94, 95, 110, 127, 139, 140, 168, 181, 187, 190, 191, 194, 206, 214, 216, 219, 222
Private sector, 2, 9, 57, 115, 128, 130–1, 134–5, 177, 208–10, 226, 227
Public sector, 1, 2, 5, 10, 33, 34–5, 60, 94, 128, 130–1, 177, 209

Qaboos, Sultan, 2, 3, 8–9, 10, 62, 64, 66, 78, 88, 138, 153
Qahtani, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 61, 86, 160
Quraish, 64, 144, 147, 149
Quran, 20–1, 35, 37, 39, 40, 98, 126, 143, 144, 145, 149, 154, 168, 186, 217
Qurashia, 147

Rasheed, 53
Reforms, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 18, 27, 28, 29–30, 31, 41, 43, 65, 67, 87, 98, 129, 140, 161, 165, 182, 212, 216
Rentier state, 1–2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 28, 29, 31–5, 42, 62, 69, 129, 130, 176–8, 202, 203, 205, 211, 227, 228
Rustaq, 7, 47, 50, 107

Sablah, 66
Sanctions, 38
Sayyid, 7, 52
Sectarianism, 21, 22, 71, 114, 118, 138, 139, 215, 228
Shaff (*see* Tribal allies)
Shanuah, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54

Shari'a, 20, 35, 56, 91, 152, 154, 158, 160, 162, 165, 167, 170, 172, 218
Sheikh, 32, 53, 66, 107
Shi'a Islam, 17, 22, 56, 64, 147, 149
Shura,
  Contemporary, 14, 65, 90, 91, 93, 97, 98, 100, 105–10, 110, 117, 118, 123–35, 136, 138, 140, 141, 142, 146, 158, 159, 167–71, 175, 180, 182, 183, 184, 186, 188–9, 194, 198, 200, 212, 216–9, 220, 221–4, 226
  Traditional, 14, 64, 69, 71, 105–10, 123, 124–7, 141, 142, 146, 158, 167–71, 182, 183, 184, 185–8, 189, 212, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220
Social contract, 2, 9, 16, 30, 33–4, 42, 69, 119, 129, 131, 134, 135, 174, 177, 178, 202, 220, 227, 228
  Implicit, 1, 5, 14, 60, 119, 129, 130, 131, 132, 135, 141, 176, 178, 203, 208–9, 210, 214, 219, 224, 226
Social divisions, 21, 22, 139, 146, 167, 172, 176, 178, 180, 183, 215, 219, 226
Social fabric, 21, 64, 71, 86, 116, 119, 223
Social mobilisation, 15, 41, 128, 131
Social transformation, 13, 26, 55, 60, 61, 86, 87, 95, 104, 119, 170, 215
Socialism, 24, 27, 89
Sultan, 7, 8, 52, 56, 64, 67, 75, 76, 79, 80, 81, 84, 85, 86, 92, 152–4, 155, 158, 162–3, 168, 176, 180, 198, 205
Sunnah, 35, 39, 168
Sunni Islam, 5, 6, 17, 22, 24, 56, 64, 65, 147–8

Tamima (*see also* Tribal leaders), 53, 60
Tawheed, 38
Top-down process, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 71, 87, 88–141, 197, 199, 201, 203, 206, 212, 213, 216, 221
Traditional political processes, 4, 5, 11, 12, 20, 29, 39, 62–72, 90, 142–83, 190, 212, 219
Tribalism, 13, 21, 22, 43, 51, 53, 54, 55, 60, 64, 70, 71, 86, 114, 115, 116, 117, 119, 173, 191, 195, 196, 197, 215
  Tribal allies, 53, 86, 116, 223
  Tribal fanaticism, 60, 61, 64, 88, 96, 107, 108, 109, 110, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125, 137, 138, 139, 173, 174, 175, 178, 195–7, 204, 223,
  Tribal leaders (*see also Sheikhs*; and *Tamina*), 52, 54, 55, 60, 76, 82, 84, 119, 148, 169, 173, 227

Ulama, 49, 52, 62, 218
Umma, 35, 42, 104–5, 170, 171, 172, 179, 193, 218
Unemployment (*see also* Employment), 31, 34, 45, 202
Urbanisation, 14, 60, 61, 82, 87, 90, 97, 140, 195, 215, 216, 227

Wahabism, 6, 22
Wali, 82, 83–4, 151
Women,
  Education of, 57
  Political participation of, 61, 78, 82, 101, 110, 137–8, 180–1, 194, 195, 216, 218, 227
  Rights of, 56, 57, 68, 85–6, 132, 137–8, 170, 181
  and Suffrage, 57, 82
Worship, 10, 38, 56

Yahmad (*see* Qahtani)
Yamani, 48, 50
Younger generation (*see also* New generation), 4, 5, 9, 11, 14, 34, 62, 87, 122, 172, 184, 185–206, 211, 213, 220, 221, 222

Zakat, 63