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THE EMERGENCE OF POST-TRADITIONAL OMAN

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by

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Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper No. 5

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THE EMERGENCE OF POST-TRADITIONAL OMAN

Based on a lecture given by the 2004 Sir William Luce Fellow

Dr. J. E. Peterson

It seems advisable at the outset to locate the specific topic of this essay within a broader discourse. The exercise and experience of politics in Oman pertains directly to, first, the puzzle of why monarchies in the Middle East and especially those in the Gulf have been so resilient, and, second, the related question of whether the continued existence of these monarchies should be considered an instance of Middle East exceptionalism.[1] A plethora of theories have been advanced on the conundrum of why nearly all of the world's remaining quasi-absolute monarchies should exist in the Middle East, specifically the Arab, Islamic Middle East. Are the underlying factors for this cultural, historical, or accidental?

While the present essay does not attempt to provide an answer to these questions, various aspects of the debate are directly relevant here. Lisa Anderson, in an article coining the term 'the resilience of monarchy', rejects the explanation of Middle Eastern exceptionalism and cultural determinism and instead proposes that the appearance of monarchies in the region resulted from British imperial policy at a time of the formation of new states and their durability results from an affinity 'between monarchy as a regime type and the projects of nation building and state formation.'[2] In a later essay, Anderson suggests that not only were monarchies better equipped to handle prevailing conditions at the time of their establishment but also that they may be better suited at the present stage to dealing with the problems and challenges of interaction with the outside world and in marrying domestic needs and constituencies to international resources.[3]

But there are two long-term problems with monarchies. First, there seems to be little intrinsic motivation for a monarch to be concerned with the future development of his country, apart from securing the continuation of his dynasty and assuring his place in history.[4] But the modernising ethos or intention of Middle East monarchies, with Oman firmly in the midst of the fray, inevitably provokes the emergence of cultural change, changes in social groups, and political demands that monarchies seem ill-equipped to handle. This introduces what Samuel Huntington described as 'the king's dilemma': how to accommodate social and economic transformation and expanding political expectations without alienating core constituencies and creating hostile forces.[5] These problems seem particularly applicable to Oman, where the present ruler has no direct heir and has kept silent on the question of succession, yet where the pace of socioeconomic development continues to quicken and society grows more complex and heterogeneous.

At the same time, it should be remembered that while monarchies have considerable similarities and common interests, they are not identical, neither in the essential characteristics of individual countries nor in the particular methods and means of maintaining and retaining power. Oman, as a traditional monarchy or sultanate, represents one of only four types of monarchies in the Middle East.[6] While similar in many ways to its neighbours in the Gulf, Oman is also unique because of the geographical and social diversity of the country compared to the smaller Gulf states, because of its long existence as a quasi-national

entity, because its history and political experience have been shaped by the prevalent Ibadi sect, and because of the two-and-a-half-century legacy of the Al Bu Sa^cid dynasty.[7]

Before continuing any further, it undoubtedly would be useful to parse the title of this essay. Thus, 'The Emergence of Post-Traditional Oman' in reverse order:

Oman. I have chosen to concentrate on Oman for several reasons. Foremost, it is a country with which I have been happily involved for more than a quarter-century and with which I feel I have at least a reasonably good acquaintance. But, in addition, it seems to me that Oman serves as an excellent illustration or case study of the transitional phase between 'tradition' – and I use that word with understandable caution – and 'modernity' – which is also perhaps an equally fraughtful term. I will discuss these terms and their relativity in more detail in a moment.

Post-Traditional. 'Post-traditional' is what I have termed that presumably transitional stage in which Oman and its fellow states in the Arabian Peninsula presently find themselves. 'Post-traditional' may be said to lie on a scale where 'traditional' is at one end and 'modern' is at the other. This classification owes much to S.N. Eisenstadt but, as shall be shown shortly, I have modified it slightly to introduce another stage, that of 'neo-traditional'. Examination of the post-traditional phase lies at the heart of the present inquiry with Oman serving as the prism through which to examine its workings.

Emergence. In contriving the title for this essay, I found myself torn between the terms 'origins' and 'emergence'. The difference between the two concepts is significant but perhaps slight in the larger picture. In essence, my intention is to suggest that Oman – as well as its neighbours – has embarked upon the path towards modernisation only recently, although – and here emergence seems better suited to the purpose at hand – it has taken significant and noteworthy steps towards that goal.

Proceeding from that brief explanation, let me turn to a more careful discussion of the terminology involved.

THE TRADITIONAL-MODERN TYPOLOGY

Traditional Rulers in the Arabian Peninsula
My conception of 'traditional' here is very loosely defined, essentially meaning the situation before 'modernist' impulses began to have an impact on Oman and the Arabian Peninsula states. I do not intend to give a single, embracing definition to the term, as this would be counter-productive. One could argue that the Portuguese conquest of Muscat and other Omani coastal towns and their subsequent occupation during the 15th and 16th centuries contributed a strong impact on modernisation: after all, the succeeding al-Ya^caribah dynasty, victorious in ousting the Portuguese, utilized Portuguese military and technological principles and organisation in creating one of the largest naval fleets in the western Indian Ocean and used it to follow the Portuguese down the coast of Africa, ousting them in turn from their strongholds as far as the reaches of Mozambique.

I also would note the impossibility of defining 'traditional' as a static condition fixed in a particular time, and quote Southeast Asian scholar J. Tambieh on this point: 'Tradition ... is used most of the time in an uncritical "ahistorical" sense to denote some kind of collective heritage that has supposedly been transmitted relatively unchanged from the past. By conceiving of tradition in this way, two things tend to be forgotten: that the past was, perhaps, as open and dynamic to the actors of that time as our own age appears to us; and that the norms, rules, and orientations of the past were not necessarily as consistent, unified, and coherent as we tend to imagine'.[8]

Indeed, in a fundamental way, my application of the term 'traditional' to the Al Bu Sa^{c}id state through the early 20th century is something of a misnomer. Following Eisenstadt's conception, 'In traditional regimes, legitimation of the rulers has been couched in basically traditional religious terms. Moreover, the subject's basic political role is little distinguished from his other societal roles – such as membership in local kinship or "status" communities. His political role has often been embedded in such groups, and the citizen or subject does not exercise any actual, direct, or symbolic political rights through a system of voting or franchise'.[9] By this distinction, the 'traditional' state in Oman would be that of the Ibadi imamate and the Al Bu Sa^{c}id state – despite its initial dynast's election as *imam* – would be an innovation.

But, nevertheless, I believe it is useful to term the Al Bu Sa^{c}id state 'traditional' in order to contrast it with the succeeding brief phase of the neo-traditional state. Whilst Al Bu Sa^{c}id rulers surrendered pretension to rule as *imam*s relatively early, their subsequent rule depended on their claim to a 'traditional' legitimacy based on such factors as their general adherence to the requirements of a just and legitimate rule according to the tenets of Islam; their emergence from one of the recognized Omani tribes and thus full members of the fundamental Omani tribal political system; their competence, at least minimally, in providing order in the country; their role in maintaining and utilising relations with the outside world, especially Britain; and, perhaps most importantly, their eventual historical record as the principal rulers of Oman for several centuries.[10]

This should not obscure the subtle transformation of the terms of Al Bu Sa^{c}id authority – from *imam* (i.e., a religious cum temporal leader) to *sayyid* (a purely temporal ruler based on transitory power, akin to the term *hakim* used by aspiring tribal *shaykh*s elsewhere in the Gulf) to *sultan* (a term first applied to the Al Bu Sa^{c}id by the British, which in its basic Arabic sense means 'power' and was first applied to the Seljuk powers behind the ^{c}Abbasid throne and only later acquired widespread usage as a major temporal title, roughly equivalent to 'king'). This transformation of authority undoubtedly best explains why the Al Bu Sa^{c}id dynasts acquiesced in acceptance of their designation as *sultan*s, a term redolent with antipathy in Ibadi thought. It also explains why the Al Bu Sa^{c}id family adopted the honorific 'sayyid' to provide themselves with ascriptive rank in a context in which the Ibadi imamate proscribes titles for relatives of the *imam* and '*shaykh*' refers to tribal leadership.[11]

Notwithstanding these caveats, my working definition of 'traditional state' for the purposes of this paper is the Al Bu Sa^{c}id era until the abdication of Sultan Taymur b. Faysal in late 1931. I do this because Sultan Taymur and his immediate predecessors ruled in much the same manner as their forebears had with a minimalist government and they assumed or

demanded a 'traditional' legitimacy. This definition of 'traditional state' also applies to other Arabian rulers of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Neo-traditional Rulers

But the first half of the 20th century – in some cases extending into the second half of the same century – saw the emergence of a new type of ruler, seeking to create new means of control in order to preserve their conception of the 'traditional' order of things. These leaders and the states they constructed may be termed 'neo-traditional'. As I have written elsewhere, 'These individuals sought to preserve the existing traditional society, values and goals, by enhancing or enlarging the capability to control the state. In so doing, however, they altered the nature of the decentralized political system, transforming the basis of authority from traditional to neo-traditional'.[12]

Prime examples of neo-traditional leaders in the Arabian Peninsula would be the Imams of Yemen Yahya b. Muhammad Hamid al-Din (r. 1904-1948) and his son Ahmad (r. 1948-1962), Imam (later King) of Saudi Arabia ᶜAbd al-ᶜAziz b. ᶜAbd al-Rahman Al Saᶜud (r. 1902-1953), and Sultan of Oman Saᶜid b. Taymur Al Saᶜid (r. 1932-1970).

But neo-traditional rulers were fighting a losing battle. As I have put it elsewhere, 'the neo-traditional states were unable to cope with the wide scope and deep-seated nature of emerging challenges to their legitimacy. Most important, perhaps, were the growing pressures upon the state to allow socioeconomic change and even to promote it through systematic development efforts. [States] were unable to erect thorough barriers against the intrusions of the modern world'.[13] Because their conceptions fundamentally were flawed and their ability to execute their goals limited, their neo-traditional edifices were doomed to be swept away by newer conceptions of post-traditional constructions.[14]

Fundamentally, neo-traditional leaders faced 'a crumbling of legitimacy ... [from] the traditionalists, who opposed any change, and the modernists, who saw not nearly enough change. Facing widespread opposition, the neo-traditional rulers moved increasingly towards paternalism and eventually [stark] authoritarianism, thereby largely forfeiting claims to legitimacy'.[15]

Modern or Modernising States?

This brings us to the present status of the states of the Arabian Peninsula. All seven regimes proclaim themselves as 'modernising', particularly in terms of socioeconomic development, yet they are not modern.

> Modern societies, as contrasted with more traditional systems, continuously face the crucial problem of the ability of their central frameworks to 'expand.' The demand for or expectation of such 'expansion' can develop in several different ... directions: aspirations for the creation or maintenance of new, wider, political frameworks; for economic or administrative development or 'modernization' for greater societal responsiveness, especially

in the elaboration of new principles of distribution; for redefinition of the boundaries and symbols of the collectivity and for more direct access to the center.[16]

The oft-repeated claim of these regimes that they wish to provide for economic development without changing or transforming the 'traditions' of society and culture is another example of their situation somewhere between neo-traditional and post-traditional.

Ipso facto, these cannot be modern states because they are monarchies whose monarchs are recruited exclusively from dynastic families and who exercise unbridled authority. Rulers and ruling families are assisted in the process of ruling by a combination of traditional elites – *ᶜulama'*, other high-status allied families and shaykhly families, and established merchant families – and newly emerged elites – including senior government officials, *nouveaux riches* merchants (many of whom have based their ascendance on privileged access to or employment in the government), and the educated.[17]

Post-Traditional Rulers and States

If not traditional – and no longer neo-traditional – but not yet modern, then what are these states? They can best be described as 'post-traditional' states. That is to say, they are states that seek modernisation as a goal but continue to insist on – and are hampered by – many 'traditional' values and structures. As Eisenstadt points out:

> Any attempt to establish and maintain a new post-traditional order creates problems, conflicts, and tensions unparalleled in other situations of change. The transition to a modern, post-traditional order constitutes a focus around which severe conflicts and struggles tend to develop – borne most visibly by social movements, political elites and groups, and different social and political coalitions. Through such processes of struggle crystallize most of the contours of post-traditional orders – such as the ability of the post-traditional order and political regime to institutionalize new types of center-periphery relations as well as new patterns of institutionalization. Obviously, the establishment of such an order does not necessarily obliterate traditional forces in general or arrest the continuity of traditional cultural models in particular.[18]

Now that the stage has been set, it is time to turn attention specifically to Oman. I will begin by contrasting the radically different outlooks of Oman's last two rulers.

SAᶜID B. TAYMUR AS A NEO-TRADITIONAL RULER

Sultan Saᶜid b. Taymur was an archetype of the neo-traditional ruler. He continued the patriarchy of his ancestors, relying on a minimalist government and employing direct contact with and control over his subordinates. He was a true fiscal conservative, who believed fully in the maxim that you should not spend unless you absolutely must, and then you should not spend on an item unless you have all the funds required in hand already and unless you are certain it will not require future expenditures that you cannot meet. Saᶜid b. Taymur kept his country as closed off and inaccessible as possible, maintaining diplomatic relations only with Britain (and later India). He displayed strict personal adherence to traditional social values

and religious requirements, and sought to enforce this outlook and lifestyle on his subjects in the best paternalistic manner.

In part, these traits can be seen as the outlook of a 'traditionalist', not much different from his father Taymur b. Faysal and his grandfather Faysal b. Turki. But from the early or mid-1950s, Sa‘id b. Taymur began to appear more clearly as a neo-traditionalist. His need for more income led him to permit the entry of Petroleum Development (Oman) into the heart of the country. The requirement that the oil expedition be accompanied by an armed force, the Muscat and Oman Field Force, eventually resulted in the impromptu restoration of Sultanate authority over the interior (following the death in 1954 of Imam Muhammad b. ‘Abdullah al-Khalili). Al Bu Sa‘id control over the interior was restored, but in such a way that could not have been done by a traditional leader.

In order to prevent the recrudescence of the imamate, with Saudi and Egyptian help, the Sultan was forced to accept British military and financial assistance. Thus, the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) were born in 1958. This turned out to be a pivotal event in a number of ways. SAF clearly established the Sultan's authority throughout northern Oman. The only exceptions were the retreat of the imamate leaders to the top of al-Jabal al-Akhdar (from which they were driven in early 1959 by combined operations by the British Special Air Service SAS and SAF) and continuing small acts of mining roads and other sabotage.

All *shaykh*s and their tribes found themselves subject to the rule of the Sultan, as enforced by SAF, and SAF guaranteed the authority of the *wali*s (the Sultan's representatives). Beyond strictly military duties, SAF carried out civil development projects, such as the reconstruction of the villages and *aflaj* (water systems) atop the Sayq plateau after al-Jabal al-Akhdar war. Elsewhere, SAF engineers improved tracks and roads and built water supplies and SAF provided transportation and assistance for *wali*s. The creation of a 'tribal intelligence' capability within the armed forces served as a mechanism not only for keeping abreast of what was happening throughout the country, but it also became a conduit by which grievances and requests were transmitted to the government and assistance could be provided to tribes and localities.

Sultan Sa‘id b. Taymur maintained his aloofness and inaccessibility from his subjects, most notably by his permanent retreat to Salalah (in the south of the country) in 1958 and his failure to return to Muscat. Furthermore, he ruled as a strong-willed nationalist, consolidating political authority and control in his own hands. He did not, of course, represent himself as an Ibadi *imam*, even informally without the process of election, which would have rendered him dependent on the continued approval of the Ibadi (and thus Omani) community.[19]

He worked through a minimum of officials who were personally responsible only to him and did not represent independent power bases: Sayyid Ahmad b. Ibrahim, Sayyid Shihab b. Faysal, Pat Waterfield, Leslie Chauncy, and Shaykh Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Harithi. It is perhaps not coincidental that these officials were either family members or expatriates, neither of whom possessed the capability or sufficient reasons to challenge the Sultan. The one exception in this list was Ahmad al-Harithi, the *shaykh* of the important al-Hirth tribe of al-Sharqiyah region. But it should be remembered that his ascendancy as *shaykh* of al-Hirth

came only through his recognition as such by the Sultan and his continued status as such, in the face of at least potential tribal and family opposition, depended on serving the Sultan well.

In order to maintain the 'traditional' character of the state and society, Sultan Sa^cid was forced increasingly to maintain and expand his tight control of the government apparatus. This was achieved partly through his myriad restrictions on the lives and aspirations of his subjects, and partly through his acceptance of larger and more capable security forces to counter the growing rebellion in Dhufar and the rising dissident threats to northern Oman.

Although the Sultan's authority was ultimately unquestioned after the mid-1950s (because of the absence of alternative sources of authority and the enforcement capabilities of SAF), he – or more precisely, his governments and/or agents – did not directly intervene in local and tribal matters. These were generally left to *shaykh*s and notables as had been the case traditionally, with such matters attracting the attention of the Sultan and his 'central government' when affairs intersected with other tribes or national concerns.

Until the very late 1960s, Sultan Sa^cid's essential goal was to retain control over Oman by keeping affairs as unchanged as possible. Was his fundamental outlook altered by the receipt of oil revenues, first received in 1968? On the one hand, it can be argued that, yes, his outlook did change since he began to institute a number of modest development programs.[20] On the other hand, it can also be argued that, no, it did not alter his outlook, since these programs were not intended to change the character of the country but simply to provide basic improvements.[21] It is impossible to assess any long-term change in his attitude because he was never given the opportunity to develop any.

QABUS B. SA^cID AS A POST-TRADITIONAL RULER

Evidence of the 'modernising' intentions of Sultan Qabus is ample. To start with, there is his educational background in the United Kingdom, beginning with schooling in East Anglia and proceeding through Sandhurst and then a brief attachment to local government, again in East Anglia, and an equally brief tour with the British Army of the Rhine. In addition and early on, Qabus authoritatively stamped his personality on the new regime – emphatically making a clean break with the past of his father. One of his first declarations upon acceding as Sultan concerned his intention to develop the country: 'I promise you to dedicate myself to the speedy establishment of a modern government in no time. ... My people, I shall work as promptly as possible to ensure a better life in a better future. ... My people and brothers, yesterday we were completely in the dark, but with the aid of God, tomorrow a new dawn will arise for Muscat and Oman and its people'.[22] This was quickly followed by his creation of a government to carry out this central task.

But many characteristics mark him clearly as a post-traditional ruler. And beyond his personal beliefs and inclinations, it should be kept in mind that his objectives are very strongly constrained by the country's broader post-traditional status. Aspects of Sultan Qabus's personality in this context include his clear determination to retain all ultimate authority in his own hands. This conviction surfaced early in his reign during his struggle over conflicting goals with his uncle and Prime Minister Tariq b. Taymur: the Sultan saw

himself as a benevolent monarch, retaining all authority, while Sayyid Tariq pushed for implementation of his conception of a constitutional monarchy. Tariq lasted little more than a year in the office before he felt himself forced to resign and there has never been another prime minister (apart from the Sultan declaring himself as holder of the office).

Other evidence of post-traditionalism in the Sultan includes his adoption and extension of royal trappings. Indeed, the adjective *sultani* in Arabic is invariably and officially translated as 'royal' and at one point early in his reign there was consideration of a change in title from *sultan* to king.[23] In this context of royal appearance, it is also noteworthy that Sultan Qabus and his forebears dispensed with the key symbolic act of traditional legitimacy, the *bay^{c}ah* (or oath of allegiance). In the Ibadi imamate, an *imam* was not recognised as such until the notables and *^{c}ulama'* had given him their *bay^{c}ah*. Sultan Qabus is the ruler simply because he overthrew the previous ruler, his father, and thereupon seized the reins of power.[24]

In addition, the Sultan has encouraged a cult of personality. Nearly everything new in the country is named after him: Mina' Qabus, the country's principal port; Tariq Qabus, the capital's main thoroughfare; Madinat Qabus, the country's first modern housing project; the Sultan Qabus Sports Complex; the new Qabus mosques which dominate most major towns. In part, this may represent a dearth of prominent family members whose names in neighbouring countries are liberally sprinkled across projects in conjunction that of the ruler. But, still, there are other members of the ruling Al Sa^{c}id family whose names are never signposted and the only edifice to date with the previous Sultan's name is the Sa^{c}id b. Taymur Mosque in al-Khuwayr suburb of Muscat.

Indeed, the appearance of this striking Ottoman-style mosque is a bit of a surprise, given the present Sultan's apparent ambivalence in his feelings towards his father and the obvious intention of denigrating everything pre-1970 and celebrating only post-1970 accomplishments. It might be conjectured that a part of Sultan Qabus's ambivalence is the strong similarity in habits and characteristics shared by father and son. They share a shyness that most closely translates into an aloofness from family and general population alike. Both have kept the essential reins of power very much in their own hands and have been loath to delegate responsibility to others, including senior members of their own family. Similarly, both have refused to name or groom an heir. It is also significant that both have evinced a special attraction to Dhufar (the southern region of Oman), one through adoption and the other through birth, where both have tended to spend sizeable periods of their time and been largely inaccessible there.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST-TRADITIONAL STATE IN OMAN

We return again to the meaning of 'post-traditional'. Or, to put it another way, why is Oman post-traditional and not modern? The first piece of evidence is the patriarchical nature of the state, which in turn is built upon a foundation of the patriarchical nature of society. The ruler, like the *shaykh* of the tribe, like the father of a family, is the father of his country. He demands respect, obedience, and total loyalty. In exchange, he assumes responsibility for the protection and welfare of his constituents.

This traditional pattern of patriarchy has been reinforced in Oman, as well as to an even greater degree in the other Gulf states, by the accrual of oil revenues to the state and thus to the ruler as the guardian of the state. The consequence of oil has been, and continues to remain, the dependence of the economy, and especially the state, on oil revenues – if Oman is not completely a rentier state, it certainly is not a self-sustaining economy in the absence of oil. This leads not only to economic dependence on the state as the engine of growth as well as the maintainer of an orderly economy. It also produces social dependence on the state as employer (including both the civil service and the security services), provider of social welfare programs, arbiter of propriety and acceptability, and definer of cultural, social, and political values. Just as the members of a patriarchal family depend on the father to take care of them, so Omanis display an expectation that the state must initiate and supervise action in nearly all spheres and to guarantee the results.

The construction of the new Omani state also displayed, inevitably, a combination of neo-traditional and post-traditional characteristics, especially in the beginning but not limited to that period. First, there was quest for suitable government personnel. In time-honoured fashion, many of the early personnel were expatriate, primarily British. The few senior members of the old Sultan's government found it expedient to retire upon news of the coup. The selection process for the first Omani officials of the new government was based on several factors. One was practicality, embracing those who had at least a modicum of education or experience and who knew some English. But, equally, appointments were made on the basis of representation of important constituencies and personal ties.

For example, the four men named to the first cabinet announced on 15 August 1970 were: Dr. ʿAsim b. ʿAli al-Jamali, Minister of Health; Sayyid Badr b. Saud Al Bu Saʿidi, Minister of the Interior; Shaykh Saʿud b. ʿAli al-Khalili, Minister of Education; and Sayyid Muhammad b. Ahmad Al Bu Saʿidi, Minister of Justice. Of these four, two were members of the larger Al Bu Saʿid family from which the *sultan*s come. Their appointments were in addition, of course, to the prominent positions of two members of the *sultan*'s immediate family (the Al Saʿid), i.e. his uncle Tariq b. Taymur as Prime Minister and his cousin Thuwayni b. Shihab as the Sultan's Representative. Of the two remaining portfolios, Health went to a competent and respected medical doctor who at the same time was an old and close friend of Sayyid Tariq, the Prime Minister. The choice as Minister of Education may have been seen as surprising since the individual concerned possessed only a traditional education; more to the point, however, he was a nephew of the last indisputably legitimate Ibadi *imam* and a member of the shaykhly family of one of the largest and most important tribes of Oman.

By these and other contemporaneous as well as later appointments, it can be seen that the new regime worked carefully to modify, and not replace, traditional centre-periphery relations. This process took place even as the regime assiduously assumed new functions of government not seen in Oman hitherto (e.g., the various social service ministries and a national police). It should be remembered as well that the *wali*s, the representatives of the Sultan throughout the country, continued to be drawn largely from the Al Bu Saʿid family and other families that had long provided such officials.

Through the next few decades, the Qabus regime could be seen to display a number of enduring characteristics. One of these was the retention of many of the old methods of

interaction and governing. Even into the new millennium, ministerial appointments (and ousters as well) were announced without explanation, justification, or at times seeming rationality, even sometimes surprising those so anointed. Following such shuffles, Muscat and the country would be alive with rumours about why so-and-so had been appointed: was it because he hailed from the same tribe as the Minister of the Royal Office? Or was he a business partner of one or more of the Sultan's close advisers? Was his appointment because he was simply a suitable representative of a principal tribe or region? It did seem unlikely that al-Dhahirah region, historically on the periphery of Omani politics, should produce such a proportionately high number of appointees of ministerial rank, unless one notes the region's proximity to far wealthier and tempting Abu Dhabi and the close connection that some of the appointees' tribes maintained with Saudi Arabia during its claim to al-Buraymi oasis.

Once ensconced in a ministry, the incumbent minister tended to make it his fiefdom, secure in the knowledge that as long as he did not displease the Sultan, he could be assured of a reasonably lengthy tenure, which in a few cases encompassed several decades. Although under-secretaries are in theory the highest civil service ranks (whereas ministers are political appointments), it is striking how many under-secretaries (as well as office directors, directors-general and directors) seemed to hail from the same region or even the same tribe as their ministers. Even in later years when more and more educated and technically competent candidates for high office were appointed, a pattern of regional and tribal mixes continued to prevail.

At its foundations, the Omani regime continues to display a highly patrimonial nature, accentuated by the solitary and absolute figure of Sultan Qabus at its acme. This is not to say that the post-1970 regime has not registered major accomplishments or that it has become stagnant in its operation and direction. The government administration is often quite functional and effective. The foundations of a proper civil service have been laid. The regime has done much to create a socio-economic infrastructure that has notably improved its people's standards of living. The position of women has improved considerably and women serve as ministers, under-secretaries, ambassadors, and members of the Majlis al-Shura and the appointed Majlis Oman. Oil, and gas, income has been harnessed to public requirements with a relatively minimal wastage or diversion to private interests. In recent years, emphasis has been laid on encouraging an expansion of the private sector and of course Oman made the adjustments necessary for admission to the World Trade Organisation. In the political realm, Sultan Qabus introduced in 1996 a Basic Law that codified the outline and purpose of the state and its organs.

Rather, in spite of all progress that has been made, Oman remains bound by its post-traditional constraints. An extreme view of Oman's situation – as a microcosm of the situation prevailing throughout the Arab world – is Hisham Sharabi's conception of 'neopatriarchy', a hybrid society or culture representing a fusion of traditional patriarchy with a 'deformed modernisation' rooted in dependency relations with the West: 'Material modernization, the first (surface) manifestation of social change, only served to remodel and reorganize patriarchal structures and relations and to reinforce them by giving them "modern" forms and appearances.'[25]

Legally the Sultan rules by decree and politically he reigns by fiat. There is no court of appeal against his decisions and justice in Oman depends in large part on the Sultan's inherent sense of fairness and his diligence to duty. Cronyism, certainly at higher levels, persists and corruption is not only significant but punishment is haphazard. Tribal, regional, and communal identities persist on a level of intensity nearly equal to national identity. While the animosities of previous eras have declined, these subnational identities are often utilized to tweak the system and procure favours, jobs, and money. Representative institutions, such as the Majlis al-Shura (consultative council), remain extremely restricted, and freedoms of speech, the arts, and the media are severely circumscribed.

THE EMERGENCE OF OMAN AS A NATION-STATE

There has long existed a sense of the Omani nation but the emergence of Oman as a nation-state in the modern context has been hampered by the post-traditionalism of the regime and society. A return to the writings of Eisenstadt is perhaps instructive, particularly his examination of the development of democracies as modern states. In this context, Eisenstadt notes that,

> Like all modern regimes, constitutional democratic regimes developed within the framework of the formation in Europe of modern territorial states and developed with the crystallization of new types of collectivities, with the evolution of new state-society relations most fully manifest in the emergence of civil society, with the concomitant transformation of political processes and, finally with the rise of modern market, capitalist, political economies.

> The emergence of the first modern states in Europe entailed administrative centralization and relatively clearly defined territorial boundaries. The political community was conceived as autonomous, no longer subsumed under a broader "religious" canopy. This conception, which emerged in continental Europe and in England in close connection with the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the ensuing Wars of Religion, involved the transformation – even if haltingly and intermittently – of the basic conception of sovereignty that began as *dominium politicum and regale*. In many continental states, the state was now defined in secular terms, even if absolutist kings claimed some type of divine legitimation – the so-called divine right of kings. It was the sovereign – the king or the state ('L'Etat c'est moi') – who presented and promulgated, even if never wholly unchallenged, as the embodiment of what could be called the general will, the general good of society.[26]

He goes on to observe that,

> The development in Europe of modern states and collectivities and the transformation of the notion of sovereignty were closely related to changes in the power structure of society, namely, the emergence of multiple centers of economic and political power and the development of some nuclei of distinctive new types of civil society and of public arenas or spheres. The development of multiplicity of centers of power and of the nuclei of civil society was closely related to the development of a new type of political economy and of new modes of production, namely the market economy, first of commercial and later of industrial capitalism.[27]

Furthermore,

The transformation of the basic premises of the social and political order became interwoven with a parallel transformation and institutionalization of the conceptions of sovereignty, of citizenship, of representative institutions, and of accountability of rulers. The transformation of these premises entailed, first of all, a radical transformation of the basic concepts of sovereignty. The core of this transformation, which took place above all in the Great Revolutions, was the transfer of the locus of sovereignty to "the people" and the related development of the concept of popular sovereignty. At the same time, the concepts and practices of citizenship, representation, and accountability of rulers were transformed. Citizenship was changed from an acclamatory or ratifying act into a participatory act; representation was transformed from virtual to actual.[28]

Where, then, does the Sultanate of Oman exist, in political terms, in relation to Eisenstadt's conceptions of modern democracies? Sovereignty is unambiguously vested in the Sultan, who delegates authority – on his terms – to his ministers and other officials and permits comment – within the limits he sets – by the citizenry. In fundamental ways, the status of the Sultan equates to the divine legitimation of earlier European kings: notwithstanding the Basic Law's definition of Oman as an Islamic state with the *shari^cah* (Islamic law) as the source of legislation, the state is determinedly secular in its source of sovereignty and application of its authority.[29]

Considerable effort is made to express the Islamic legitimacy of the state and its leader. For example, the Sultan is seen to carefully observe Islamic rituals in public, the announcement of the first consultative council was made by his adviser on religious affairs, he is said to have given the *khutbah* (Friday sermon) on occasion, and Qabus mosques established by donations from his private purse dot the countryside. Nevertheless, the emphasis is not stressed overly vigorously – it consists of a superficial Islamic legitimacy, probably because the utility of religion as a unifying and legitimising force has the potential to be undermined by either or both of two factors. On the one hand, although there is no agitation for a return to the Ibadi imamate, the *sultan*s have usurped the role of the *imam* as the temporal head of the Omani community and have replaced the *imam*'s function as the spiritual leader of the community by the innovation of a state-appointed *mufti* (supreme religious authority). On the other hand, overly prominent reliance on or claim to Islamic credentials may well provoke emerging Islamist opposition, both internal and external.

There seems little dispute over the Sultanate of Oman's existence as some sort of a nation-state. The composition of the Omani nation is universally agreed, particularly since the integration of Dhufar into Oman from the 1970s onward. A sense of Omani identity has existed for centuries, perhaps millennia. Until recently, that identity encompassed the Oman Coast or Trucial Coast, now the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but the UAE has now acquired its own national identity. At most, some sectors of the majority community, essentially defined as Arab, tribal and Ibadi or Sunni, may contest the 'Omaniness' of certain minority groups, such as the Baluch and Lawatiyah, but this is not a serious issue.[30] Furthermore, the boundaries of the state have existed virtually unchanged over the course of at least a century, despite contestation by the imamate in northern Oman and by the Dhufari insurgents in southern Oman.

But in most other ways, Oman does not fit the criteria accepted of a modern nation-state, let alone, obviously, that of a democracy. Even as set out in the Basic Law, there is little

accountability of the ruler. Article Seven states that 'The Sultan, before exercising his authority, shall, in a joint session of the Oman Council and Defence Council, take the following oath – "I swear to God Almighty to respect the State's charter and the laws, and to safeguard the interests of the citizens and their rights, and to defend the sovereignty and the integrity of its territories"'. The Sultanate, as it exists today, would seem to fit most closely to Eisenstadt's description of absolutist authority as existed in pre-revolutionary France, 'which was promulgated by the central royal-bureaucratic center that attempted to present itself as the central locus of authority by virtue of its being the bearer of rational enlightenment.'[31] Or put another way, the figure of the Sultan may correspond to Weber's charismatic authority.

As loci of sovereignty, the other two sources of authority in pre-revolutionary France do not exist in any significant degree in Oman. Representative institutions are in an extremely nascent state and remain 'gifts' of the Sultan. The establishment of popular will as a foundation of sovereignty has yet to find acceptance by the state or even expression by much of the citizenry. Indeed, the closest that popular representation is entertained officially in the Sultanate is in Article Nine of the Basic Law, which states that 'citizens, according to this charter and its provisions and other legal enactments, have the right to participate in general affairs'. There is no evidence of any partnership or reciprocity, let alone acceptable channels of protest, between authority and citizenry, nor of any substantive challenge to existing authority.[32] The nascent middle class is an emerging force in economic terms but carries no corresponding political influence. Indeed, apart from some educated elements, agitation for a more substantial political role seems to be limited as most of the middle class, as is true elsewhere in the Gulf, remains preoccupied with materialism.

Just as importantly, it should be remembered that the state – and ultimately the person of the Sultan – is not only the source of all power, but oil remains the engine of the state and thus the economy.[33] Traditional economic sectors – such as fishing, farming, and herding – have declined and add marginal value, apart from providing significant employment. The principal economic contribution of the private sector has been in providing imported goods and local services, supplemented by some import-substitution industries. Oman's participation in the global economy is mostly constricted to the export of oil and gas and the import of finished goods and labour. Thus both Oman's politics and economy remain solidly post-traditional.

Similarly, Oman is constrained by a weakness in civil society. Few institutions exist and those that do, such as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Graduates' Society, are controlled and manipulated by the state.[34] Television and radio are government monopolies and the few newspapers and other print media in private hands are as careful of not offending the government as those that are government-owned. Few fora for public discussion and debate of national issues exist – the country is notable for the lack of editorial columns and the absence of letters to the editor in newspapers.[35]

Oman has always been remarkably free from pronounced social stratification. There have always been wealthy and poor, and some communities traditionally were regarded as inferior. The changes put in train in 1970 have done little to further differentiate society on the whole. They have, however, created two largely new and interrelated classes: senior government

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officials (or a bureaucratic elite) and a new capitalist merchant class. It can be argued that the continued strength or durability of the post-traditional state is due in large part to both old and new elites who derive considerable benefit from the status quo and, conversely, who have the most to fear from 'modernity' because it threatens their status and privilege. As a consequence, elites are hostile to any significant changes in the nature of the existing state and society.

It is undoubtedly superfluous to add that there is no corresponding proletariat or industrial working class, apart from expatriates from various Asian countries. While most Omanis have benefited in one or more ways from the country's one-third-century of prosperity, the benefit to the majority of people has been in the provision of a basic social welfare system, acquisition of minimal education, and securing employment, generally with the government. The great balance of personal wealth, however, has accrued to the new elites, along with existing merchant families, and there have been few, if any, conscious efforts to redistribute resources.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERNITY AND LEGITIMACY

A pertinent, indeed central, question that must be asked here is whether Oman needs to be transformed into a democracy, Western-style or otherwise, in order to be modern. The scale of traditional, neo-traditional, post-traditional (or modernising), and modern statuses explicated earlier in this essay implies a linear progression. But is this necessarily the case? Such a conception is fraught with being tarred by charges of ethnocentricity as were raised during the debate regarding modernisation theory advanced in the 1950s and 1960s.[36] One response to this shortcoming has been the introduction of the concept of multiple modernities to suggest that 'Western patterns of modernity are not the only authentic modernities, although they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others'.[37]

With this in mind, it is thus reasonable to assume that the emergence of a modern Oman, should that be the case, may well follow a unique path deriving from its still-potent traditional foundations and the tolerance and equanimity for which the country is noted. Still, the envisaging of such a future rests upon resolution of a number of salient points.

Prime among these is the question of what is the extent of – or the prospects for – continued loyalty or legitimacy. Loyalty in this context may have several objects. It may be represented in terms of personal loyalty to Sultan Qabus. In the early days of his rule, most Omanis when questioned about their feelings for their Sultan almost invariably replied that before him there was nothing and with him there was everything. For Dhufaris, the Sultan is one of them: he has been their champion in the uncertain integration into the larger Sultanate; for the *jabbali*s or people of the Dhufar mountains, he is also one of them and is responsible for bringing the long war of the 1960s and 1970s to a close.

But the exhilaration of the early days of the regime and the ending of the Dhufar War have long since passed and dependence on volatile oil prices to finance the country's growth and development has taken its toll. Some 80% of all Omanis were not yet born in 1970. No other

member of the ruling family has such close links with Dhufar. The Sultan's lavish spending on palaces and recently on the huge new congregational mosque on the outskirts of Muscat (in a country where the Ibadi tradition had little requirement for such mosques), his personal habits, and his continued aloofness may have brought his personal legitimacy into doubt.

Beyond the personage of the Sultan lies the question of loyalty to the Al Sa^cid monarchy. It is a small and weak family and there are few members who command loyalty. The Sultan's refusal to indicate an heir apparent and the studied indifference with which he receives his family members make any assessment of loyalty to the family difficult to assess. And at an even deeper level, there must be some question of loyalty to the Sultanate as presently constituted. While more than three decades of reinforcement have left a palpable sense of Omani national identity, there are potential fissions beneath the surface. The richer UAE continues to draw in Omanis like a magnet, to work in the civil government and security forces alike. Once settled in Abu Dhabi or Dubai – or Ra's al-Khaymah, where the Shihuh of the Musandam migrate – these Omanis are pressured to take up UAE citizenship. To the south, although Dhufar has been strongly integrated into the Sultanate, there will probably always remain at least the potential for a parting of the ways.

Another source for concern is the extent to which demands have been or are being articulated for reform of the system or its modification or its replacement. Demands for the latter have not been present since the Dhufar War (and associated activities in northern Oman) three decades ago. Fortunately, Oman has been largely free from being sucked into the maelstrom of Islamist currents sweeping the region. Similarly, calls for modification of the system have been muted, where even detectable, probably because of perceptions that the system seems alright as long as Qabus remains Sultan.

But there are voices calling for reform of the existing system and these voices seem to be growing. Educated Omanis, at least, are articulating in private demands for a greater say in decision-making, for some attention to be paid to their opinions and expertise. Oman is notable for the absence of any fora for debate and dialogue. The Majlis al-Shura is all-too-often seen as ineffectual and little more than a tool of the state; its effectiveness, when it appears, is only marginally so, in such matters as expressing minor grievances over municipal or social service deficiencies. There are also very real restrictions on the growth of civil society.

What then is a potential proper future role for what is in many respects a relatively strong state with an essentially unified society? Perhaps it may not be too far afield to look to the Turkish experience for enlightenment on Oman. At first glance, Turkey may seem like an odd choice for comparison. The country has been a strongly secular republic since the early 1920s, with a representative democracy that, in times of crisis, has been suspended by a politically interventionist military apparatus. Nevertheless, there are useful parallels. As Turkish scholar Metin Heper has noted,

> Political conduct is shaped, inter alia, by the presence or absence of a generalizing, integrating and legitimizing state, and, if such a state does exist, by the degree to which state values and norms are intrinsically concentrated or diffused. As noted, the existence of such a state in the Ottoman-Turkish polity constituted the qualitative difference between Turkey and most new

countries; as compared to European "state societies," Turkey's state values and norms have remained concentrated rather than diffused.[38]

My intention here is not to suggest that the Omani military will intervene in times of perceived crisis (although this cannot be discounted entirely as a result of a possible succession crisis following the death of Sultan Qabus). Rather, I wish to suggest that Oman also represents a strong state structure, at least on the surface, with an equally strong sense of national identity. While not an avowedly secularist regime, the state acts in a largely secular manner. Given Sultan Qabus' military background and interest, the Omani security forces can be seen as a loyal praetorian guard whose essential interests lie in unquestioned support of both monarch and regime. This, combined with the quiescent nature of Omani society, may confirm Charles Tilly's thesis that although such factors as population growth, industrialization, urbanization, and other large-scale structural changes may affect the probabilities of revolution, principally by changing the parameters of and contenders for power, 'There is no reliable and regular sense in which modernization breeds revolution.'[39] The key to peaceful transformation may lie in the particular nature of the impact of Oman's increasing urbanization, which, as elsewhere, may bring completely new types of demands and interests from the periphery to the urban centres.[40]

Alienation lies at the root of Arab malaise, contends Halim Barakat. He sees this as the direct result of prevailing Arab politics:

> Arab citizens have been rendered powerless because they have been excluded from the political process. Marginalized, and isolated from the human and material resources civil society should place at their disposal, the people of the area suffer from state tyranny over society. The most vital functions of society in "progressive" as well as "conservative" Arab states have been constantly undermined by authoritarian rule. Citizens of Arab countries have been denied the basic right to participate in the political process.[41]

It can be argued convincingly that passivity, as much if not more than alienation, defines public attitude in Oman today. Indeed, it is surprising, and something to be admired, how well Omanis have adjusted to the enormous changes of the past 34 years. It can be argued as well that the regime under Qabus b. Saᶜid has been, on balance, benevolent and concerned for the welfare of the Omani people. Nevertheless, the existing constraints and limitations as outlined above mean that the country cannot realize its full potential until it escapes its post-traditional predicament.

This essay began by noting two contemporary themes of thinking about the Middle East and its monarchies: their resilience and the argument for Middle Eastern exceptionalism. The preceding analysis should have made clear the reasons for the resilience of the current regime in Oman; whether those reasons constitute an exception to the arguments that the emergence of 'modernity' in Oman means the authentic 'constitutionalisation' of the monarchy, or even its demise, is a matter for future consideration.

ENDNOTES

1. For a recent collection of essays covering both more contemplative views of the resilience of the monarchies and case studies of the relevant states, see Joseph Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000). See also the discussion in Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democratic Prospects in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

2. Lisa Anderson, 'Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East,' *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (1991), p. 3.

3. 'Monarchy is not only well-suited to early stages of state-formation; it may also be far better adapted than we have suspected to the complex cosmopolitan world in which diverse communities interact through international finance and trade, labor migration, and global communications. Certainly in the absence of an egalitarian, populist world culture, monarchs can avail themselves of useful experience in balance varied international and domestic constituencies to draw resources from beyond their putative borders'. Lisa Anderson, 'Dynasts and Nationalists: Why Monarchies Survive', in Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies*, pp. 66-67.

4. Anderson, 'Absolutism', p. 15.

5. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

6. Fred Halliday points out that Oman and Morocco, are 'traditional sultanates turned into modern states by colonial support, whereas Jordan is a praetorian monarchy ..., Saudi Arabia is a product of tribal conquest, whereas the smaller Gulf states are towns that became states thanks to colonial initiative and oil. Halliday, 'Monarchies in the Middle East: A Concluding Appraisal', in Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies*, pp. 295-296.

7. There is not room to list all the relevant works on Omani politics, pre- and post-1970. A few of the more significant works include: John Townsend, *Oman: The Making of a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm; St. Martin's Press, 1977); J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978); Calvin H. Allen, Jr., *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Croom Helm, 1987); B.R. Pridham, ed., *Oman: Economic, Social and Strategic Developments* (London: Croom Helm, for the University of Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, 1987); Ian Skeet, *Oman: Politics and Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Calvin H. Allen and W. Lynn Rigsbee, II, *Oman Under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution,1970-1996* (Frank Cass, 2000); Joseph A. Kechichian, 'The Throne in the Sultanate of Oman', in Kostiner, *Middle East Monarchies*, pp. 187-211; Marc Lavergne and Brigitte Dumortier, eds., *L'Oman contemporain: État, territoire, identité* (Éditions Karthala, 2002); and J.E. Peterson, 'Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change and Development', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Summer 2004), pp. 125-137.

8. J. Tambieh, 'The Persistence and Transformation of Tradition in Southeast Asia, With Special Reference to Thailand', *Dædalus*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (1973), p. 55. See also the complaint of S.N. Eisenstadt in his introduction to this special issue of *Dædalus* on 'Post-Traditional Societies' that 'The indiscriminate use of the term "tradition" to explain "everything" in the development of these societies may entirely invalidate the usefulness of this concept, however, and only a more differentiated use of this concept may prove to be of value'. 'Post-Traditional Societies and the Continuity and Reconstruction of Tradition', p. 4. In addition, see Eisenstadt's contemporaneous synopsis and evaluation of the thinking revolving around this subject in his *Tradition, Change, and Modernity* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973).

9. Eisenstadt, 'Post-Traditional Societies,' p. 5.

10. This conclusion should not be interpreted as a glossing over of the periodic attempts to restore the Ibadi imamate, which explicitly required the overthrow of an Al Bu Sacid rule that was regarded as illegitimate precisely because it was not 'traditional'.

11. The Al Bu Sacid came to regard themselves as 'supratribal', unlike the case in the smaller states in the Gulf where the ruling families exercise leadership in essentially a confederation of tribes and thus not only can legitimately adopt the title of '*shaykh*' but continue to regard it as appropriate. The use of the term 'sayyid' for members of the ruling family in Oman is also made possible by the fact that Oman is one of the few Muslim lands where the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad enjoy no special status and thus are not normally called 'sayyid' or 'sharif'. Thus the Al Bu Sacid use of the term may enjoy a certain cachet from this more widespread usage elsewhere. It also creates a minor problem in formal address since 'sayyid' cannot be employed to simply mean 'mister' as is common in Arabic; this sometimes leads to formal invitations being issued to 'al-mister' so-and-so.

12. J.E. Peterson, 'Legitimacy and Political Change in Yemen and Oman', *Orbis*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter 1984), p. 985.

13. Peterson, 'Yemen and Oman', pp. 989-990.

14. Saudi Arabia is something of an anomaly. The Saudi state experienced an arrested phase during the reign of King Sacud (r. 1953-1964), who simply prolonged most of his inheritance of the structure, institutions, and direction of the neo-traditional state and displayed a weak and largely disinterested view of his domain. Thus his reign was an interregnum between the active neo-traditional leadership of King 'Abd al-'Aziz and the similar active but largely post-traditional reign of King Faysal (r. 1964-1975).

15. Peterson, 'Yemen and Oman', p. 985. Even the recrudescent Omani Imamate of the 1950s faced this loss of legitimacy as it embraced neo-traditional methods, particularly in seeking assistance from non-Ibadi Saudi Arabia and secularist Egypt.

16. Eisenstadt, 'Post-Traditional Societies', p. 4.

17. The last category is essentially a transitional phenomenon, applicable only in a society where previously education was rare and exceedingly difficult to achieve. Thus, the early generations of educated (progressing through secondary-school, university, and advanced-degree standards) were well situated to reap the benefits of career and income that burgeoned in rapidly evolving situations. Some of these early generations were enabled in their education by their high status in society as sons (and, more rarely, daughters) of ruling families, merchant families, etc., but many were simply the brightest youths that caught the attention of rulers, advisers, or oil companies. As oil-era societies slow in their pace of change and the pool of educated expands exponentially, the mere possession of 'educated' credentials is no longer sufficient to give their holders a significant advantage.

18. Eisenstadt, 'Post-Traditional Societies', pp. 20-21.

19. In this connection, it is interesting to speculate that Sacid's demurral when mentioned as a possible successor to Imam Muhammad al-Khalili in the early 1950s was less because of reticence on grounds of not being a proper candidate and more because of the implied restrictions on his field of actions that recognition as an *imam* might have entailed.

20. In his only public policy statement of his long reign, Sultan Sacid issued 'The Word of Sultan Sacid bin Taimur' in January 1968 explaining the history of Oman's finances and making the following declaration: 'God willing, 1968 will be the start of a new era for our country which will see the beginning of various plans which will be executed under the supervision of qualified technicians and experts. Firstly we shall begin building offices for various Government Departments; then houses for officials who will come from abroad; then step by step will come various projects such as hospitals, schools, roads, communications, and other necessary works including the development of fisheries, animals and agricultural resources etc. until modern projects spread over the whole of the Sultanate, to each area according to its needs.' Reproduced in Townsend, *Oman*, as Appendix 1, pp. 192-198.

21. '[W]e shall ensure every benefit and advantage for the populace and we shall pursue those developments which brings us that which is best and preferable and is consonant with

our people's heritage and ancient history. However much we progress and move forward we must keep before our eyes our true religion on which we place our reliance and traditions which are our heritage. There are prohibitions of our religion which are inviolable for ever and there are customs which can be altered without infringing the basic traditions of the country which are among the glories of our worthy ancestors, which are a source of pride and which protect our very existence.' *Ibid.*

22. Speech broadcast to the people of Oman on 27 July 1970; reproduced in Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1995), Appendix D, p. 277.

23. There is a parallel to *sultan* in the title of *malik* (king) as well. 'The term *malik* was ... used in the early Islamic centuries to denote rulers whose authority was primarily military and political – or, as we might say, "secular" – rather than religious and whose manner of ruling was arbitrary and personal rather than lawful and religious'. Bernard Lewis, 'Monarchy in the Middle East', in Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies*, p. 17. Later, the title 'king' acquired a more negative connotation, one which persisted until its revival as a favoured title in the 20th century. *Ibid.*, and Ami Ayalon, 'Post-Ottoman Arab Monarchies: Old Bottles, New Labels?', in Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies*, pp. 23-36.

24. It could be argued, although not particularly convincingly, that a sort of implicit *baycah* was given when Sultan Qabus arrived in Muscat for the first time in his life, two weeks after the *coup*. A ceremony was held in the only available sizeable public indoor space in the capital, a hangar at Bayt al-Falaj airport, during which the new Sultan was greeted by senior members of his family and by enthusiastic crowds of Omanis.

25. Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 4. See also the discussion in Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

26. S.N. Eisenstadt, *Paradoxes of Democracy: Fragility, Continuity, and Change* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 14-15.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

29. In this context, it is worth noting the earlier mention of the transformation of terms of authority from *imam* to *sultan*. As one scholar has explained it, 'in the pre-modern era there were two alternative concepts of Islamic society. One was the 'Caliphate' which integrated the state and the community, the realms of politics and religion, into an inseparable whole. The second was the 'Sultanate' of secular states which ruled over the quasi-independent religious associations that were the true bearers of Muslim religious life. In one image the state was the all-encompassing expression of an Islamic society; in the other, an Islamic society was divided into separate state and religious institutions'. I.M. Lapidus, 'Islam and Modernity,' in S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Patterns of Modernity, Vol. II: Beyond the West* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), p. 93.

30. I have discussed the situation of minority communities in 'Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Winter 2004), pp. 32-51.

31. Eisenstadt, *Paradoxes*, p. 25.

32. Indeed, it could be hypothesized that the use of the word *muwatin* to mean citizen exemplifies the state's conception of the status of its people. The word might be translated equally as 'national', as someone who belongs to the nation (*watan*) or resides in a territorial entity, rather than someone who has rights in a polity, and indeed the latter connotations have become attached to the word only in recent years. See A. Ayalon, 'Muwatin', *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (CD-ROM edition).

33. Oil and gas revenues constituted nearly 76% of total government revenue in 2002. Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of National Economy, *Statistical Yearbook 2003* (Muscat, August 2003), accessed online at <http://www.moneoman.gov.om/money/index.htm>.

34. In this context, Halim Barakat's remark that 'Arab society is increasingly becoming a "government society" rather than a civil society' is relevant. *The Arab World*, p. 174. As an observer in a Gulf state other than Oman pointed out to the author, often the smothering of civil society is quite unintentional. When an organization is established, it frequently gets taken over by the government, most often innocently because bureaucrats wish to extend government services, resources, and help.

35. In this connection, it is interesting to note the role played by al-Sablah, an online forum for discussion maintained by an Omani website. A number of Omanis claim that they check al-Sablah every day while others declare that they stay away for fear of leaving a trail for the government to find them.

36. The paradigms constructed by such theorists as Karl Deutsch, David Easton, Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, Daniel Lerner, Manfred Halpern, and W.W. Rostow, generally assumed that the process of modernisation would inevitably evolve economic and political institutions and structures that resulted in industrialization and democracy – i.e. states that would look and act like industrialized Western democracies. On the argument that modernity is a uniquely European phenomenon, see Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

37. S.N. Eisenstadt, "Some Observations on Multiple Modernities," in Dominic Sachsenmaier, and Jens Riedel, eds., with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 27. The editors point out in their introduction that "In significant respects, multiple modernities breaks with the classic approaches in Western sociology that, despite their divergent approaches, all tended to equate modernization with the homogenization of world cultures. The notion of multiple modernities developed against the background of recent events and developments, especially the process of globalization and the downfall of the Soviet regime, which have sharpened the problem of the nature of the modern, contemporary world." *Ibid.*, p. 2. See also Eisenstadt's discussion of various paths to modernity in his *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially pp. 197-198 and 203-207. Contrast this with his much earlier statement that "Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic, and political systems that have developed in western Europe and North American from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian, and African continents." S.N. Eisenstadt, *Modernization: Protest and Change* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 1.

38. Metin Heper, 'The "Strong State" and Democracy: The Turkish Case in Comparative and Historical Perspective,' in S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Democracy and Modernity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 148.

39. Charles Tilly, 'Does Modernization Breed Revolution?', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (April 1973), p. 447.

40. Heper, 'Strong State and Democracy', pp. 142-143, citing Frank Tachau, *Turkey: The Politics of Authority, Democracy and Development* (New York: Praeger, 1984). It should also be remembered that much of the theoretical literature posits that urbanization tends to create social mobility and instability and thus produces a negative effect on political cohesion.

41. *The Arab World*, p. 271.