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NON-INDIGENOUS CITIZENS AND “STATELESS” RESIDENTS IN THE GULF MONARCHIES. THE KUWAITI *BIDUN*

Since the discovery of oil, the political entities of the Persian Gulf have transformed themselves from desert sheikhdoms into modern states. The process was accompanied by rapid population growth. During the last 50 years, the population of the current Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman¹, grew from 4 million in 1950 to 33.4 million in 2004, thus recording one of the highest rates of population growth in the world². The primary cause of this increase has not been the growth of the indigenous population, large in itself, but the influx of foreign workers. The employment of large numbers of foreigners was a structural imperative for growth in the GCC countries, as oil-related development depended upon the importation of foreign technologies, and required knowledge and skills unfamiliar to the local Arab population. Towards the end of 2004, there were 12.5 million foreigners, 37 percent of the total population, in the GCC states. In Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait, foreigners constituted a majority. In the United Arab Emirates foreigners accounted for over 80 percent of population. Only Oman and Saudi Arabia managed to maintain a relatively low proportion of foreign population: about 20 and 27 percent, respectively.

This development has created security, economic, social and cultural threats to the local population. Therefore, to maintain the highly privileged position of the indigenous population and make integration of foreigners with local communities difficult, numerous restrictions were imposed: the sponsorship system, limits on the duration of every foreigner's stay, curbs on naturalization and on the citizenship rights of those who are naturalized, etc. However, these measures did not bring the

¹ The GCC is a regional organization of these states established in 1981.

² For the population data see A. Kapiszewski, *Nationals and Expatriates. Population and Labor Dilemmas of the GCC States* (Reading, Ithaca Press, 2001), pp. 33-47.

expected results. Rotation of the workforce has failed to meet expectations. The free market economy has been more powerful than the policies the authorities tried to implement. The majority of foreign workers have stayed beyond the term of their original contracts because employers usually prefer to keep workers with local experience rather than bring in new ones. As a result, the average stay of foreign workers in the GCC countries has continued to grow, and the number of almost permanent foreign workers has increased, albeit not formally.

The domination of foreign labour over the indigenous one has not been the only peculiarity of the GCC states population structure. The populations in these countries have been divided into citizens and temporary foreign workers and there have also been deep divisions within the citizens' groups themselves. Among the local passport holders, there have been naturalised foreigners and other "non-indigenous" citizens, including members of certain tribes, or certain ethnic or religious minority groups considered "impure" nationals by "real" nationals. In some countries the authorities established different degrees of citizenship resulting in not all citizens being equal.

The question of citizenship arose at the beginning of the oil era and acquired greater significance when the sheikhdoms of the Gulf obtained their independence. Citizenship was introduced as a concept that the local Arabs found a novelty, largely of Western origin and connected with the idea of the nation-state. It was "a blanket designation that overlooked tribal and geographic origins [...] a classificatory principle alien to their way of conceptualising social relations"³. Traditionally, the primary affiliation for most of the indigenous population was of a tribal nature. An "alien" was, by definition, anyone who did not belong to the tribe⁴. Thus, the core of the new nations in the Gulf consisted of tribes connected with the ruling families, as well as some powerful local merchant families. As loyalty to blood was considered far more important than residence in the particular territory and as the final word on citizenship remained in the hands of the ruler, inhabitants of a country could easily obtain the citizenship of another country, if they were linked to the proper tribe residing across the border. This eventually led to their possession of dual citizenship. Nevertheless, the later established laws formally regulating the issue usually incorporated both blood and territory in the definition of nationality and hence in the requirements to be satisfied for citizenship⁵. This

³ A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand. Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1997), p. 46.

⁴ The "alien" classification is often visible in names assigned by the natives to non-local residents. Al Yamani, Al Najdi, Al Hijazi or Al Hasawi are examples of well known Gulf families which originated in particular regions of the peninsula. See Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 46.

⁵ The first nationality law in this part of the world was established during the Ottoman period. In 1869, the Sultan separated the notions of religion and nationality and instead adopted the concept that the citizenship of the individual was determined by the citizenship of his or her parents or by the place of birth. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 established the citizenship of the people, who were earlier under the Ottomans' jurisdiction, based on the territorial principle. Despite the provisions of this treaty, many Arab states, Kuwait and the UAE in particular, decided to use both the principles – loyalty to blood and loyalty to the land – as a basis for citizenship. Bahrain was the only Gulf country where the place of birth was supposed to decide about the right to citizenship. Already in the 1930s, when the country was still very much under British influence, people born in Bahrain who wanted the country's citizenship had to register within a year of their 18th

approach did not change much over the years, and citizenship and tribalism cohabit uneasily under a regime that has been described as the “simultaneity of the unsimultaneous”⁶. Until today, the issue of roots for many GCC families is a sensitive one.

The question of citizenship was made more complicated by the context of the dual nature of the Arab statehood identity. Many Arabs subscribe to the principle that they constitute a single people, a single Arab nation (*umma arabiyyah*), united by a common language and religion. This concept has even found expression in the constitutions of Kuwait and the UAE. At the same time, Arabs identify themselves with particular sovereign states, a fact acknowledged in turn by the Arab League. Thus, in the Gulf a basic principle of a single Arab nation conflicted with the unequal treatment of the large migrant non-Gulf Arab workforce. Labour migration within the Arab world did not help to make the region a single territory without boundaries – the concept often proclaimed by pan-Arabists. On the contrary, and especially in the case of the GCC countries, labour migration has induced states to develop policies to control their borders. This approach has been clearly articulated in the Kuwaiti law which underlines that: “The most prominent aspect of the State’s sovereignty over its lands is the protection of its territories from any offender who daringly violates the said sovereignty by infiltration and residing in it without having secured a proper residence permit”⁷.

Despite sharing a negative attitude towards the integration of foreigners, several GCC states naturalised many foreigners, mostly Arabs, in the first years of their independence. They did so to enlarge the size of the country’s legal body of citizens or for political reasons. Moreover, some badu (bedouins) and foreign Muslims (of Arab, Persian or African origin; the last including former slaves), long-time residents of these countries, were also initially granted citizenship.

For example, the UAE gave citizenship to several thousand members of certain non-local tribes as well as to some foreign residents. Many Arabs of Omani, Bahraini and Qatari origin benefited from this opportunity, and so did some Arabs residing earlier in Iran and Baluchis from Pakistan. In particular, the Abu Dhabi emirate acted thus in order to enhance its political weight *vis-a-vis* the other emirates. It also granted citizenship to many Yemenis because of the special relationship between Sheikh

birthday with the authorities. P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality in the United Arab Emirates*, in: P. Dresch and J. Piscatori (eds), *Monarchies and nations. Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 141. For discussion on the issue of citizenship in the Arab world see: S. Stanton Russell, *Migration and political integration in the Arab world*, in: G. Luciani (ed.), *The Arab State*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), pp. 377-8; G. Dib, *Migration and naturalisation laws in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates*, ESCWA, *Population Bulletin*, Part I (15) 1978, pp. 33-62, Part II (16) 1979, pp. 3-18; N. A. Butenschon, U. Davis, M. Hassassia (eds.), *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East* (New York, Syracuse University Press, 2000). The Saudi Nationality Law of 1926, recognized as Saudi citizens “original” residents of the Kingdom holding Ottoman nationality in 1914, Ottoman nationals or non-Ottoman nationals domiciled in the Kingdom in 1914 and continued to do so until 1926 without obtaining a foreign nationality; www.uscis.gov.

⁶ B. Tibi, *The simultaneity of the unsimultaneous: old tribes and nation-states in the modern Middle East*, in: P. S. Khoury, J. Kosiner (eds), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), pp. 127-152.

⁷ Explanatory Memorandum accompanying Kuwait’s Law No. 55 of 1982; Russell, *Migration*, p. 384.

Zayed, the President of the country, and Yemen. Most of them were from the Hadhramaut region. Some were many well educated people from the Aden area driven out by the communist government⁸. In turn, Dubai, gave passports to some Iranians who had lived and traded there for generations (including the Bastakis).

In turn, Saudi Arabia in 1950s and 1960s, awarded citizenship to a number of Yemeni, Egyptian, and Palestinian workers as well as to dissident refugees from Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Palestine. Oman in a similar way naturalized many Indian traders, Pakistanis who worked in the army, and Yemenis with family links to the province of Dhofar as well as people from their former territories in Zanzibar and East-Central Africa⁹. A large number of people were also naturalized in Kuwait (see below).

After consolidating their independence, the Gulf monarchies restricted the possibility of obtaining citizenship. They declined to extend that right to a broader populace as it became a unique privilege, connected with social and material benefits¹⁰. Moreover, rulers now worried that extending citizenship rights to foreigners could lead to domination of the naturalized population over the local one. Therefore, Kuwait decided that citizenship could be granted only to people who have resided in the country since 1920; Bahrain declared the year 1921 for that purpose, the UAE – the year 1925 and Qatar – the year 1930.

This policy did not change in the following years. The residency requirements stipulated by the respective laws have been very extensive (although shorter for certain Arab nationalities), and naturalised citizens have remained subject to some restrictions of their rights, especially of a political nature¹¹. In the UAE, according to first Nationality Law of 1972, Omani, Qataris, and Bahraini residents for three years were eligible for citizenship in one of the emirates making up the Federation. Other Arabs had to prove ten years' residence, at least five of which had to fall after the date when the law was issued; other foreigners' request for naturalization required continuous residence since 1940, or for 30 years out of which 20 had to fall after the law came into effect¹². Later, some expatriate Arabs, who had worked for the UAE government for more than 20 years, were allowed to retire and stay in the

⁸ Like the bin Breks, who later became prominent "locals" in Dubai. See also: P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 142.

⁹ In 1964 Omanis in Zanzibar were told to go home. Many returned and eventually received the country's citizenship as of Omani ancestry. The ones with mixed Omani-African descent were naturalised. Since 1970s, the Omani nationality law considered children of Omani male nationals born abroad to be full Omani citizens. Nevertheless, Zanzibari returnees and their children have created a separate community, especially in Muscat; many of them speak Swahili rather than Arabic until now. For an excellent study of Zanzibari Omanis in Muscat see: M. Al-Rasheed, *Transnational connections and national identity*, in: P. Dresch and J. Piscatori, *Monarchies and nations*, pp. 96-113.

¹⁰ A. Nga Longva, *Citizenship in the Gulf States: Conceptualization and Practice*, paper presented at the Conference on Citizenship and the State in the Middle East, University of Oslo, November 1996; R. Maktabi, *The politics of citizenship in Kuwait – membership and participation in a rentier state*; paper presented at 13th Annual National Political Science Conference, Hurdalsjoen, Oslo, January 2005.

¹¹ J. al-Jasser, *Naturalization in the Gulf: Ladies come out on top*, „Mideast Mirror”, June 2, 1999. The information in the following section are based on the Jasser's article.

¹² P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 141. The Federal law of 1975 substituted reference to Omanis, Qataris and Bahrainis by more general: "members of the Arab tribes who migrated from countries neighbouring the State", *ibidem*, p. 144.

country, although not all of them have formally been naturalised. Until recently, Omanis and Yemenis serving 15 years in the UAE military force could also apply for citizenship.

Kuwait and Qatar require that Arab applicants for citizenship should have been resident for 15 years at least; 20 for non-Arabs. Oman, on the other hand, does not distinguish between Arabs and non-Arabs: all have to have been resident for 20 years, but this requirement is reduced to 10 years if the applicant has been married to an Omani since before 1986. Bahrain requires Arabs to be resident for 15 years, non-Arabs for 25, before granting its citizenship. Until recently, Saudi Arabia required a residency period of five years and proficiency in Arabic. Nevertheless, even fulfilling all the necessary requirements has not granted a foreigner an automatic right to citizenship. Interior ministries decide in such cases and often turn down applications without having to announce cause. On the other side, the GCC rulers have the absolute authority to grant citizenship to anyone even if they do not meet the basic requirements. This prerogative is usually invoked when the persons concerned have done the country a great service, if their skills are greatly desired, or for any other reason that the ruler deems appropriate. In such a way, the UAE and Qatar accepted (and naturalised) a number of Iranians after the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Naturalized citizens face varying restrictions: in Saudi Arabia, for example, they are excluded from the armed forces, the internal security forces, the diplomatic corps and other sensitive posts. In several Gulf countries they are not eligible to vote, run for parliament, or be appointed to a ministerial post before the passage of a certain period: 20 years in the case of Kuwait, and 10 in Qatar and Bahrain. In the UAE, naturalized citizens never obtain certain rights unless they were Omani, Qatari, and Bahraini natives; in that case they get them seven years after naturalization. Only Oman grants naturalized citizens all the rights of native Omanis. Moreover, the “non-indigenous” passport holders, not only the naturalised ones but also members of certain groups are often not treated by “real” nationals as equal to them, which often leads to their discrimination in various fields. This, for example, has been the fate of many Badu in Kuwait, Shi’ites of Iranian background in several GCC countries, and Yemenis in the province of Asir in Saudi Arabia.

All GCC countries formally require that people who would like to be naturalised renounce their previous citizenship. Conversely, GCC nationals – as well as their dependants if they do not specifically express their desire to retain the citizenship – usually lose their citizenship if they are granted the nationality of another country. Such approach is caused by the conviction that “dual (or multiple) nationality is anathema to the idea of loyalty to the state, and can result in confusion regarding jurisdiction in cases of disputes, as well as in matters relating to military service and employment in sensitive posts.”¹³ Nevertheless, as already mentioned, that rule sometimes does not apply to nationals within the GCC; there are members

¹³ *Ibidem.*

of certain tribes whose historical territory lies across the modern state borders, who hold dual citizenship (see below).

In total, about 50,000 people were naturalised in the UAE (until 1997), constituting about 8 per cent of the national population¹⁴. More recently, however, the practice has been severely curtailed and today it does not contribute significantly to the local population growth. In turn, Saudi Arabia naturalised between 1989 and 1992 only 15,058 people¹⁵, and Oman, between 1986 to 1996 only 1,861 people¹⁶. Most of them were Arab women married to nationals¹⁷. Also today, naturalisation in all GCC countries is limited mainly to foreign spouses of national men¹⁸. But even this right carries with it several restrictions. Foreign wives of citizens can usually obtain local passports only after a probation period lasting several years and at times the right of citizenship is extended only during the duration of a marriage (that is, women may have to return their passports if divorced)¹⁹. In Saudi Arabia the law forbids foreign women to get the Kingdom's citizenship if they married certain government officials, members of the Saudi armed and internal security forces or Saudis while studying abroad. Foreign women married to a Saudi national can apply for the citizenship only if marriage was sanctioned by the interior ministry²⁰. The Qatari law of 1989 altogether banned certain categories of state employees from marrying foreigners: ministers, members of the diplomatic service, officers of the armed forces, police and intelligence, and Qataris studying abroad. Others needed permission from the authorities. Male Qatari can request it if they have some "social reasons" for marriage, sufficient funds to support a family, not more than one wife already, and not more than one divorce history before. The wife cannot be younger from the man by more than 15 years. Female Qataris need permission to marry as well. All these measures apply only to non-GCC citizens; relatives, even without the Qatari citizenship, are also not to abide by this law²¹. Similar law exists in Oman since 1993 and is planned to be introduced in the UAE as well²².

Foreigners married to national women, if such a legal possibility exists at all, are normally not eligible for citizenship, and are required to have a job and a local sponsor to stay in the country. Children from such marriages are not automatically considered nationals since citizenship usually passes to offspring only from the

¹⁴ „Emirates News”, 13 Aug. 1997.

¹⁵ „Arab News”, January 3, 2004.

¹⁶ As calculated by the number of passports issued by the Naturalization Department, *Statistical Yearbook 1996* (Muscat, Ministry of Development).

¹⁷ J. al-Jasser, *Naturalization in the Gulf*.

¹⁸ Occasionally, also certain well-educated and well-connected long-term Arab immigrants are discretely given citizenship.

¹⁹ For example, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman require that five years pass between a person's naturalization and his wife's being granted citizenship. The UAE require that the spouse reside in a country for three years after her husband is naturalized in order to be granted citizenship, while Qatar requires for that purpose two years. al-Jasser, *Naturalization in the Gulf*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 149.

²² *Ibidem*.

paternal side²³. Therefore, very often wives and children of naturalised citizens remain naturalised citizens. In the UAE, paradoxically, the illegitimate child of an Emirati woman is better provided by the law – can have the country's citizenship – while her legitimate child by a foreign husband will probably never get it²⁴. In the UAE, a national woman married to a foreigner may lose her citizenship²⁵.

In Saudi Arabia, on May 23, 2005, the amendments to the Kingdom's naturalisation law went into effect. These amendments allowed residents who had legally lived in the country for 10 years to apply for Saudi nationality under certain conditions; earlier, formally only five years of permanent residence was required but the authorities rarely put that clause into practice²⁶. Moreover, the new law allows children of Saudi women married to foreigners to acquire citizenship when they reach 18 years of age. The non-Saudi husband of a Saudi woman may be granted citizenship once his children have obtained Saudi nationality. Despite provisions formally allowing the Kingdom's Muslim expatriates to apply for Saudi citizenship, which many of them would be happy to obtain, it is unlikely that authorities will be willing to provide many non-Saudis with the country citizenship.

In most of the GCC states, the law permits the state to revoke citizenship for political or criminal reasons. The UAE law declares that it may happen if a citizen "serves the interests of a hostile country, or voluntarily obtains the nationality of another country". The first provision was applied on several occasions to those involved in anti-government activities. Similarly, in 1994, Saudi Arabia, in probably the most famous case, revoked the citizenship of Osama bin Laden. In turn, since the early 1980s hundreds of Bahraini citizens, especially Shiites, have been forcibly exiled from Bahrain to Iran²⁷. Similar incidents happened in 1995. Some Bahraini nationals were also denied the right of return to the country, despite the fact, that under Bahrain's Constitution "no citizen shall be deported from Bahrain, nor shall he be denied re-entry."

In early 2005, the Qatari government revoked citizenship of 5,266 people from Al-Ghafran branch of Al-Murrah tribe. The government justified the decision on the ground that this branch of the tribe was of Saudi Arabian origin, and its members held Saudi citizenship, what defied a ban on dual citizenship²⁸.

²³ For example, in January 1998, the Cassation Court in Manama rejected the plea of three people applying for Bahraini citizenship, stating that the fact that they had Bahraini mothers did not qualify them for that right as their fathers were of Iranian origin. „Khaleej Times”, 10 January, 1998.

²⁴ P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 157.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

²⁶ M. Al Hakeem, *Saudi Arabia to approve new citizenship by-law soon*, „Gulf News”, April 4, 2005. The 1974 citizenship law stated that individuals born in Saudi Arabia of foreign parents or of Saudi mother and a father of foreign or unknown nationality, and individuals born outside of Saudi Arabia of a Saudi mother and a father of foreign or unknown nationality can apply for a Saudi citizenship if they have permanent residence in Saudi Arabia at age of maturity, have no criminal convictions, are knowledgeable in the Arabic language, and submit within one year of maturity the application for naturalization. When an individual files a claim to Saudi citizenship, representatives of the Saudi government travel to the individual's locality and take affidavits from community members who are familiar with the individual's and/or the individual's family's or father's origin; <http://uscis.gov>.

²⁷ "Fear, Flight and Forcible Exile. Refugees in the Middle East", Amnesty International Country Report 1998, web.amnesty.org.

²⁸ AFP, May 5, 2005.

However, some of those affected believed they were punished for their loyalty to the deposed emir, Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, or that the action against them was a belated response to a failed coup attempt in 1996 to unseat Qatar's current ruler, Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani²⁹. The move was apparently aimed also at keeping a "proper" balance in Qatari society, especially in view of the upcoming first ever parliamentary elections in the country, as well as reflected strained relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, all the GCC states reserve themselves a right to withdraw citizenship of a naturalised person within five years of granting it if the individual concerned was proven to have committed a crime.

In general, with the exceptions presented above, fear of compromising economic privileges and of diluting the identity of the local population has led the GCC countries to reject the option of absorbing foreign labour, even of long-term residents, as citizens. The concern remains that naturalised foreigners cannot be fully trusted, especially in crisis situations when the loyalty to the country of origin could come into question, and they are equally suspected of having a negative social and cultural impact on the local populations .

Recently, there were a few exceptions to this rule. In Bahrain, a new citizenship law was introduced in July 2002 to allow individuals from Arab countries to obtain Bahraini citizenship. The government apparently decided to change the social structure of the country by granting citizenship rights to a large number of foreigners, mainly Sunni Arabs from around the region. Some suggest that as many as 50,000 to 60,000 people became "politically naturalised"³⁰. The aim was probably to reduce the Shi'ite majority in the electorate as well as reduce the statistical dominance of the foreign workforce. The Bahrain Freedom Movement issued a declaration on the matter on September 3, 2002. It stated that the government was engaged in "relentless efforts in employing foreigners to create a workforce largely composed of non-Bahrainis to ensure total control of markets"³¹. What especially angered the Shiite Bahrainis was the naturalisation of large number of Jordanian, Syrian, Egyptian and Pakistani military and police officers, judges and some other civil servants, called by them "mercenaries". Apparently, some 8,000 Saudis were also awarded Bahraini citizenship in 2001-2002, without having to forego Saudi citizenship. There were people who claimed affiliation to the Dawasir tribe that was once in Bahrain but has long resided in eastern Saudi Arabia. The Bahraini Shiite opposition considered this move politically motivated, to allow Sunnis to vote in the October 2002 parliamentary elections³².

²⁹ „Arab News”, April 2, 2005.

³⁰ The International Crisis Group, The Middle East Report no. 40, "Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge", May 6, 2005.

³¹ „Voice of Bahrain”, September 2002. See also Marc Pellas, *Far from democracy in the Gulf*, „Le Monde Diplomatique”, March 25, 2005.

³² "Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge".

Kuwaiti *bidun*

In Kuwait, the situation of “non-indigenous” permanent residents has been particularly complex.

Kuwait has created different categories of citizens, unequal in rights. In 1948, the first two decrees on the matter defined as “originally Kuwaiti” members of the ruling family, those permanently residing in Kuwait since 1899, children of Kuwaiti men and children of Arab or Muslim fathers also born in Kuwait³³. Naturalization was possible for people who had lived in Kuwait for at least 10 years, were employed, and spoke Arabic; it could also be granted to other people “by special order for valuable services.” On the other hand, citizenship could be revoked as a penalty for diverse crimes, among them “propagating anti-Islamic ideas”.

A decade later the citizenship law was introduced (the Kuwaiti Nationality Act of December 14, 1959). This law defined Kuwaiti nationals as those persons who were residing in Kuwait in 1920, and had maintained residence there until 1959 (“Everyone who came to Kuwait pre 1920 is a natural Kuwaiti”)³⁴. Moreover, only those inhabiting the area before 1920 became Kuwaitis “by origin” (the so-called first class citizens), while those who arrived later became “naturalized” Kuwaitis (second-class citizens). Children of Kuwaiti fathers, born in Kuwait or outside its borders, became Kuwaitis as well; children of Kuwaiti mothers and non-Kuwaiti fathers were denied this right. Thus, the 1959 law widened the category of original Kuwaitis by establishing 1920 as the residency criterion, but at the same time narrowed the eligible population by excluding children of non-Kuwaiti men (i.e. children of “Arab and Muslim fathers born in Kuwait”). The *jus soli* principle was just replaced by one of *jus sanguis* nature. The date 1920 was chosen as it was the year of the battle of Jahra against the Ikhwan forces of Ibn Saud, the event which saw, as it is often claimed, the birth of an explicit Kuwaiti national awareness³⁵. Nevertheless, the law did not make clear what residing in Kuwait in 1920 means. At that time, Kuwait was already recognized as an independent country under a British protectorate, but the country’s borders were defined only later: in 1922 with Saudi Arabia, and in 1923 with Iraq. Moreover, the forces defending Jahra were composed not only of the long-settled inhabitants of the town, but also of nomadic tribesmen. On that basis, members of both groups were later granted Kuwaiti citizenship, establishing a pattern of offering this right not only to the permanent residents of certain locality but to migratory groups as well³⁶.

³³ J. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1990).

³⁴ A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 47.

³⁵ M. A. Tetreault, *Stories and Democracy. Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 45-46).

³⁶ Longva describes the different perception of citizenship by urban Kuwaitis vs. tribally oriented ones. While for the first, national identity is bound up with the connection between the citizen and the territorialized community (previously the town, today the nation-state), in the Bedouin tradition, with absence of attachment to a particular territory,

The Nationality Law of 1959 was amended several times. In particular, the amendment of 1960 allowed the naturalization of no more than 50 people a year: a restriction which seems to have been meant for non-Gulf cases only. Later, the amendment of 1966 allowed Arabs who had resided in Kuwait since 1945 and non-Arabs who had resided there since 1930 to apply for Kuwaiti citizenship. That possibility was later expanded to Arabs who had lived in Kuwait for at least 10 years continuously and to non-Arabs who had lived for 15 years. Finally, a 1981 amendment restricted the grant of Kuwaiti nationality only to Muslim applicants.

Using a clause permitting granting citizenship to everyone "who served the country and who deserves it", in the 1960s and 1970s, the government gave citizenship to thousands of *badu* living in Kuwait but whose tribes originated outside the country. The government encouraged these people to work and settle in Kuwait, fearing that otherwise the large number of workers from other countries would dominate the labour market. *badu* were characterised as completely loyal to the monarchy and, therefore, did not appear to be as radical as the politically active Palestinian, Lebanese or Syrian immigrants. In addition, *badu* were needed to counterbalance a growing anti-government opposition from the urban commercial establishment. As a consequence, by 1980 as many as 200,000 people had been naturalised in Kuwait. In the 1980s, this procedure continued, with 10,000 to 17,000 people naturalised each year³⁷. In 1994, the parliament passed a law stating that every male born to a Kuwaiti father, including naturalized ones is Kuwaiti by origin³⁸. Thus, tens of thousands of second-class citizens, children of naturalized Kuwaitis obtained citizenship. In effect, in the late 1990s, naturalized Kuwaitis constituted approximately a third of the national population.

Nevertheless, until mid-1990s, most of these people could not vote or run for public office; a naturalized person obtained voting rights 30 years after becoming a Kuwaiti citizen. The appointment of a naturalized citizen to a senior-level government position required special permission. Finally, the law of 1994 slightly changed the situation, reducing the period during which a naturalized person was denied the vote from 30 to 20 years. All these laws considerably expanded the size of the electorate; the first was noticeable in the 1996 elections.

Until now, Kuwait has not resolved the problem of many "stateless" persons, the so-called *bidun* (not to be confused with *badu*)³⁹, who may have lived in the country for several generations, but who have never obtained citizenship⁴⁰. The true *bidun* are either former nomads who previously had no formal citizenship and whose tribes usually originated from the territories of Iraq (sometimes also from Saudi

people's identity is connected with the ruler, whom they follow, and display allegiance and loyalty to. A. Nga Lon gva, *Citizenship in the Gulf States*.

³⁷ Ministry of Planning, *Annual Statistical Abstracts*. It is interesting to note that the law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims; however, citizens who were Christians before 1980 (and children born to families of such citizens since that date) were allowed to transmit their citizenship to their children.

³⁸ The amendment to the citizenship law reads: "Offspring of a naturalized Kuwaiti are treated as first-class citizens if their father was a Kuwaiti at the time of their birth", „Arab Times", February 7, 1994.

³⁹ In Arabic *bidun jinsiyya* means "without nationality" or "without citizenship".

⁴⁰ See, for example, *The bidun of Kuwait: 'Citizens without Citizenship'* (New York, Human Rights Watch/Middle East, 1995).

Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and Iran)⁴¹, or other undeclared former residents of these states. Many such people came to Kuwait to join the newly created army as most Kuwaiti men did not wish to serve in the military⁴². The Ministry of Defense listed them as stateless to avoid the embarrassment of having to admit to hiring foreign mercenaries, especially from the neighboring countries⁴³. In the later years, many badu with unclear nationality status continued to arrive in Kuwait, either legally or illegally, often exploiting to their advantage a gap in the residence rules that excluded Bedouin tribal members from obtaining visas to enter Kuwait⁴⁴. These people also joined the category of *bidun*. Later, the *bidun* group expanded further by the addition of those individuals who qualified for Kuwaiti citizenship in accordance with the requirements of the 1959 nationality law, but who failed to submit a request by the appointed deadline (1966). Their reasons were different: some perceived the nationality issue as unimportant at the time, others did not understand the legal aspect of citizenship, were too sick or too old to undertake necessary actions, had lost their parents prematurely, or refused to register believing that they qualified for first degree citizenship but that the government wanted to give them second category citizenship⁴⁵. Finally, the group has been enlarged by children of all such people. In effect, the population of *bidun* continued to grow continuously, and in the 1980s exceeded the 200,000 mark. Therefore, the *bidun* composed a large part of Kuwaiti population; according to the data available, in 1985 there were 207,310 *bidun* in the country, as compared to 437,978 Kuwaiti citizens⁴⁶.

For a long period, all these people, like the previously mentioned badu who later became naturalized, were allowed to work and reside in Kuwait, practically permanently, without, however, being formally granted the status of citizen and without clarifying their former nationality. Some have no home other than Kuwait and consider themselves genuine Kuwaitis but do not possess appropriate documents to prove their identity. Others have simply tried to use the existing opportunity to live in Kuwait, hoping that one day they will be able to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship.

For quite a time the *bidun* were widely accepted as part of Kuwaiti life. Their men constituted a large proportion of the country's military and police forces (in the

⁴¹ Most *bidun* of his type came from the Shammar and Anayzah tribes.

⁴² For many badu, service in the police and the military was a natural extension of the traditional role many they had played earlier as personal guards to sheikhs. They were perceived as loyal to the Emir and potentially less dangerous for state stability as they were usually disinterested in the ideological concerns of the time, as e.g. Arab Nationalism. On the other hand, service in the security forces was often the best career choice for them as without citizenship they could not legally own business in Kuwait. Jill Crystal, "Public order and authority. Policing Kuwait", in: P. Dresch and J. Piscatori, *Monarchies and Nations*, pp. 174-178.

⁴³ A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ A.-R. Assiri, *The Government and Politics of Kuwait: Principles and Practices* (Kuwait, 1996), p. 24; A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 72, note 7.

⁴⁵ When the citizenship law was issued in 1959, the special investigation committees were formed to decide about nationality and provided those considered Kuwaiti with nationality identification cards. Many residents of Kuwait clarified then their status and obtained citizenship. Some, however, for various reasons did not contact the committees and became *bidun*.

⁴⁶ R. Maktabi, *The politics of citizenship in Kuwait*.

1980s up to 80 per cent⁴⁷) and their status was close to that of the so-called 'certified' Kuwaitis. They received numerous privileges as nationals, except public housing and state-sponsored loans. Those employed in the military and other government jobs were often even granted Kuwaiti passports (although not the "normal" ones, but "special" temporary documents). Similar to the Kuwaitis in outlook, dialect and tradition, their different status was often known only to the authorities and sometimes not even to themselves (especially in the case of second or third generation of *bidun*); in official statistics they were counted alongside Kuwaitis. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti authorities have always been convinced that many *bidun* simply hide their true nationality (and/or discarded their passports) in order to gain entitlement to superior Kuwaiti economic, social and political rights. In other words, that they are economic immigrants who would like to be considered as citizens. Moreover, *bidun*, as a category, has been often perceived by "true" Kuwaitis as second class-citizens and often described in derogatory terms⁴⁸.

The legal situation of the *bidun* changed in 1985 when afraid of political movements growing in the country as well as of the lasting impact of Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution and the Iraq-Iran war, the Kuwaiti government cancelled their former status, turning the *bidun* into illegal residents. Kuwaitis became concerned that "their ambiguous status as an unacknowledged population provided a human pool into which Iraqi refugees, draft dodgers, and infiltrators as well as absconding workers and illegal aliens could easily blend after getting rid of their identity papers"⁴⁹. As the authorities began to apply the 1958 Residence Law strictly, most of the *bidun*, who thought they were qualified, applied for citizenship (over 62,000 not counting dependants). In most cases the citizenship was not granted, and the Minister of Interior Affairs told the National Assembly that he believed 90 per cent of applicants to be lying about their past national status⁵⁰.

In 1989 the Ministry of Planning corrected the population data, removing the *bidun* from the category of Kuwaitis. As a result, the percentage of "real" Kuwaitis – i.e. the ones enjoying the country's citizenship – fell from 40 to 28 per cent of the population. As a consequence of this approach, the *bidun* lost many privileges enjoyed only by nationals and began to face difficulties in the labour market. Moreover, they were forced to apply for residency permits as any other foreigners.

The dilemma of how to treat them was aggravated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As the Iraqi authorities ordered all non-Kuwaiti citizens living in Kuwait to join the Iraqi forces under penalty of death, some *bidun*, voluntarily or not, found themselves on the enemy side⁵¹. Consequently, as the war ended, thousands of *bidun* were arrested in Kuwait on collaboration charges or denied re-admission to the

⁴⁷ Apparently, the *bidun* formed 95 percent of Kuwait's infantry before 1990-91 war; *Middle East Report*, September-October 1991. In 1995, only 25 per cent of the 20,000 soldiers were *bidun*; *The Bedoons of Kuwait: citizens without citizenship* (New York, Human Rights Watch, 1995), p. 30.

⁴⁸ Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh has pointed out that *bidun* were often referred to as people "of unknown identity", "a term which means in fact 'bastard' [...] as *al-fugu*, the mushroom (without roots) or with other insulting terms"; "The Islamic conception of migration. Past, present and future", www.lpj.org.

⁴⁹ A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ *The Bedoons of Kuwait*, p. 13.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

country as government worried about their real allegiances (and was also determined to reduce the number of non-nationals in the country). Many *bidun* were also forced into exile (apparently, around 10,000 were deported). That was an experience that was especially tragic for those among the *bidun* who had supported the Iraqis and, considering themselves Kuwaiti patriots had joined the anti-Iraqi resistance movement. Those who remained in Kuwait, approximately 170,000, (as compared to around 225,000 before the invasion)⁵² became officially classified as “non-legal residents” (“citizens without citizenship”⁵³), which severely restricted the possibility of their employment, receiving welfare benefits, educating their children in free public schools and so forth⁵⁴. A majority of those working in the military or security services lost their jobs⁵⁵.

Maintaining stateless status for the *bidun* contravenes international standards, which assert that citizenship is a basic human right. Therefore, the Kuwaiti authorities incur severe criticism from human rights organisations in the West, especially since, in 1975, the country had ratified the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness⁵⁶.

Probably because of that criticism, but also due to the lack of sufficient number of “first class” Kuwaitis willing to join military and police forces, in the following years, Kuwaiti authorities, granted citizenship or permanent residency status to a number of *bidun*, those recognized as having sufficient links to Kuwait. Debatable cases were referred to courts for final decisions. In September 1998, the Kuwaiti government went even further and decided that genetic tests would be applied to all stateless residents to prove their Kuwaiti linkage⁵⁷. The spokesman for the government stated, that ‘adopting DNA testing is a nonnegotiable basis to assess the right of citizenship through a claim of kinship to a Kuwaiti mother, father, or other relative’⁵⁸. Occasionally, the Emir on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan granted citizenship to orphans whose fathers were *bidun* and whose mothers were Kuwaiti. At the same time, some *bidun* acquired passports from countries with which they did not have any affiliation or even purchased counterfeit documents. Such passports – even though Kuwaiti authorities might have been aware of their illegal procurement – allowed them also to obtain residency permits, to work or to marry, yet

⁵² This number was quoted by „Al Watan”, 23 November 1997. Assiri noted that in mid-1994 there were 116,694 of them, i.e. 7.2 per cent of the total population, about 53.7 per cent of the pre-invasion figure, *The Government and Politics of Kuwait*, p. 25.

⁵³ This category of people is sometimes referred to as “denizens”. “Denizen” denotes long-term residents who are neither citizens nor non-citizens. See T. Hammar, *Democracy and the nation State: Aliens, Denizens and Citizens in a World of International Migration* (London, Avebury, 1990).

⁵⁴ For example, in mid-1990s about 10,000 of them were unemployed, and around 50,000 children of school age suffered from the inability to attend government schools. A.-R. Assiri, *ibidem*.

⁵⁵ The number of *bidun* in the armed forces went down from 17,000 before the invasion to about 8,000 afterwards. A.-R. Assiri, *ibidem*.

⁵⁶ In particular, The Amnesty International, in its yearly reports, regularly criticized the Kuwaiti government for the treatment of *bidun*.

⁵⁷ In July 1999, the Emir issued the decree regulating this matter.

⁵⁸ „Khaleej Times”, September 7, 1998. According to the Minister of Health, following the government decision, some samples were sent for testing to London. „Gulf News”, September 21, 1998. Apparently, the project was shelved shortly after its inauguration.

not to obtain visas to travel abroad on these documents⁵⁹. Despite all these actions, thousands of *bidun* maintained the “non-legal” residents status.

In June 1999, just before parliamentary elections, the Kuwaiti government took another step to resolve the problem, deciding that the essential prerequisite to consider granting a *bidun* citizenship was for him to be registered in the 1965 census, the first census held in the country⁶⁰. At the same time, the government gave the *bidun* time until June 27, 2000 to legalize their status or face legal action. The issue was present in the election campaign, with several deputies criticizing the government for not providing all *bidun* with identity cards to allow them to acquire driving licenses, permission to marry, legal employment, and entitlement to free education and medical treatment. These deputies claimed that in addition, the government should consider granting citizenship to the *bidun*, because doing so would reduce the number of foreigners in Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti parliament finally approved that proposal in June 2000 (Law No. 22 for Progressive Naturalization of the *Bidun*). At the same time, the parliament allowed the government to grant citizenship to 2,000 adults and their families each year⁶¹. That number was lowered to 600 in 2002 only to go up to 5,500 again a year later.

In the meantime, around 102,000 *bidun* were officially registered with the government committee for illegal residents. Thirty-six thousand of those who registered during the 1965 population census became entitled to Kuwaiti citizenship⁶². Out of the remaining 66,000, twelve thousand were categorized as having foreign nationality or citizenship, others were considered stateless; both groups, however, faced deportations or other legal actions after the June 27, 2000 deadline. After the deadline, the government began sending files of *bidun* to the public prosecutor to start deportation procedures, despite protests from members of the parliament. At the same time, hundreds of the exiled *bidun* launched a five-day-long sit-in protest at the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border, demanding return to Kuwait⁶³. The Kuwaiti government accused Iraq of organising the protest ‘to whip up the crisis’ and asked the UN Security Council for assistance to avert ‘the grave danger’ that the situation posed. To calm down the situation, the Kuwaiti authorities agreed to grant citizenship to 1,000 stateless Arabs and their families⁶⁴.

As the prospect of a conflict with Iraq drew closer, Kuwaiti mistrust toward the *bidun* continued to gain ever greater credence. Concerns over Kuwait’s internal security were heightened in December 2002, when Saddam Hussein delivered an unprecedented address to the Kuwaiti people. Pretending to be a public apology for the 1990 invasion, Saddam’s statement was a thinly veiled call on Kuwaitis to rise up against the ruling family and American troops deployed in Kuwait. The address

⁵⁹ The U.S. Department of State, “Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2000 – Kuwait”; www.state.gov.

⁶⁰ AFP, June 28, 1999.

⁶¹ AFP, May 15, 2000.

⁶² AFP, June 27, 2000.

⁶³ AFP, October 7, 2000.

⁶⁴ BBC, October 8, 2000.

invoked the fear of domestic instability as a backlash to the US invasion of Iraq, and many Kuwaitis viewed the *bidun* as potential troublemakers. "They are all Iraqi fifth columnists," said Abdullah Bishara, a former Kuwaiti ambassador to the United Nations⁶⁵. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti parliament, in January 2003, further eased restrictions on *bidun* applications for nationality. It also allowed *bidun* serving in the army and police the same entitlements as foreign workers. Moreover, citizenship was approved for 400 *bidun* who fought against Iraq during the 1990 invasion, which gave the families of the *bidun* killed in action some hope that they too might acquire Kuwaiti citizenship.

It is difficult to say what the removal of Saddam Hussein brought to the situation of the Kuwaiti *bidun*. Many of them hoped that it would lead to an improvement in their status. On the other hand, some Kuwaitis expected that with Saddam gone and Iraqi border opened, all the *bidun* would go back to their supposed former home⁶⁶. This expectation, however, did not materialize. The *bidun*-related issues have remained present in the Kuwaiti politics. In June 2004, some members of parliament proposed granting *bidun* a number of basic rights, including free education and medical care (the government eventually did). In January 2005, some Kuwaiti parliamentarians accused the Minister of Justice Ahmad Baquer, of refusing to attest marriage certificates of *bidun*, thus violating their human rights⁶⁷. The assembly also called on the government finally to address the status of the *bidun*, stressing that there were still between 70,000 and 110,000 *bidun* with unresolved legal standing in the country.

Abdul-Reda Assiri justified this approach in the following way:

The majority of stateless persons who live in Kuwait and form a part of the social fabric and kinships have an organic relationship to the country. We have to benefit from this group before this section of the population disrupts social and political elements through widespread discontent. [Therefore, what should be done is to] grant naturalisation to relatives of Kuwaitis and offspring of Kuwaiti women married to stateless individuals, naturalise qualified experts, experts, especially technicians, physicians, and teachers born in Kuwait and still living in Kuwait, naturalise military and armed forces members and those who proved loyal and have served Kuwait⁶⁸.

Despite such calls, it will probably take several more years finally to regulate the status of most of the Kuwaiti *bidun*.

“Stateless” people in other GCC states

There are also some “stateless” people residing in other GCC states, although of a rather different background from the Kuwaiti *bidun* (and in fact often not even called *bidun* by the local populations).

⁶⁵ N. Blanford, *Stateless Kuwaitis struggle for acceptance amid deepening suspicion*, „Daily Star”, January 27, 2003.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ „Gulf News”, January 12, 2005.

⁶⁸ A.-R. Assiri, *The Government and Politics of Kuwait*, p. 27.

Some *bidun* live in Bahrain; they are mainly Shi'ites of Iranian origin. A group of them were deprived Bahraini citizenship in 1939 when Great Britain, which dominated the country at the time, promulgated the first law on citizenship. Others lost their citizenship when they did not present themselves to the authorities within a given time after the promulgation of the law of passports in 1963. Children of such people enlarged the *bidun* group, which by the end of the 1990s consisted of 9,000 – 15,000 people. The status of the Bahraini *bidun* was similar to that of the Kuwaiti. They did not have political rights and as such they could not, for example, participate in the 1973 elections or occupy public functions. Unlike Kuwaiti *bidun*, the *bidun* of Bahrain were barred from employment in the police and the military. According to the Citizenship Law of 1974 (and 1963 law as well), citizenship in Bahrain has been divided into different categories which are stated on the passport: by birth (*bil wilaadeh*), indicating persons born to a Bahraini father; by naturalisation (*bil tajjanus*), whether born in or outside Bahrain; by ancestry (*bil silalah*), i.e. those who can prove a Bahraini ancestry⁶⁹. The last category is reserved for descendants of people who have migrated to Bahrain in the past, or once were expelled from Bahrain, and can prove their case (such as members of al-Dawasir tribe (Sunni) in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia or members of the Qarooni and al-Asfoor clans (Shiite) in the al-Ahawaz province of Iran.

The *bidun* granted a passport (possible in special cases but valid only to one country and taken back at the border point upon return) is designated as an inhabitant of Bahrain. Such passports obviously have been viewed with suspicion by foreign countries. The situation of the *bidun* in Bahrain was basically solved in the early 2000s, when, with all the other political changes in the country at that time, most of them were finally granted citizenship⁷⁰.

According to some sources, in the UAE, there are around 100,000 *bidun*⁷¹, although the authorities declare that there are none in the country⁷². Some *bidun* in the Emirates are Sunni Arabs who originated from southern parts of Iran (Hormozgan), where many Arabs from the territories of today's UAE settled in a distant past, as well as from the area of the Musandam Peninsula. Many such Arabs decided to return to the UAE after the country's independence and rapid development thanks to the oil revenues. At the beginning, the returnees were granted UAE citizenship, but later the authorities stopped granting them that right, becoming suspicious that many of the late-comers were in fact the Arabised Iranians. Living in the country are also stateless non-Arabs, mainly from the Indian sub-continent, whose families settled down in the Gulf generations ago but whose status has never been clarified⁷³. Moreover, there are also some "stateless" badu or the descendants of

⁶⁹ A. Abu-Sahlieh, *The Islamic conception of migration*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ www.refugeesinternational.org.

⁷² In March 2005, the UAE Ministry of Interior declared that there were no *bidun* in the country.

⁷³ They are often known as "locals with letters"; the "letter" was from the Immigration Department saying that they had applied for citizenship and it was being considered. In the late 1980s and 90s they were still accepted as locals in the workforce.

badu who are unable to prove that they are of appropriate local origin⁷⁴. Finally, in the Emirates there have apparently been some Kuwaiti *bidun* who came there escaping the Iraqi occupation in 1990 and were not allowed to return by Kuwaiti authorities after the war.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a large, although unknown, number of “undocumented residents”, largely composed of pilgrims who did not leave the country after their pilgrimage to Mecca. Among them there is a large group of Africans and Asians and their Saudi born children, living in the Kingdom for decades but permanently unable to regulate their residency status. Similarly, members of certain tribes living in the border areas (in Assir and Najran) as well as members of Al-Enezi Badu tribes living in the north-eastern part of the Kingdom, have unclear citizenship status and often have only *laissez passer* for travel. There were reports in 2002, that Saudi government planned to provide citizenship to about 26,000 of such people⁷⁵. They are sometimes also called *bidun* and are generally perceived troublemakers by both the authorities and the Saudi population at large⁷⁶.

A few people with similar “stateless” status can also be found in Qatar, for example from the Shersheni tribe⁷⁷. That happens despite the fact that the nationality law of 1961 (with successive amendments) allows naturalisation of Arabs (after 10 years of continuous residence) and non-Arabs (after 15 years of residence). Nevertheless, even after naturalisation, native-born Qataris have priority in employment, particularly in the public sector.

Citizenship policies in the GCC states have so far been instrumental in preserving the rule of existing regimes as well as in establishing a superior-subordinate relationship between citizens of these states and other long-term residents. Groups perceived as non indigenous have been successfully controlled by the authorities through restrictive nationality and citizenship laws, residence and labor regulations, work permits, visas, and implicit threat of expulsion contained in the sponsorship system. Only sometimes, the GCC authorities had decided for a deviation from these rules and either naturalised certain groups for political reasons, or, on the contrary, forced them to leave the country. Such policies will be most likely used also in future. Only the problem of legally stateless residents will probably be solved in the coming years.

⁷⁴ The U.S. Department of State, “Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2000 – United Arab Emirates”; www.state.gov.

⁷⁵ „Arab News”, November 21, 2002.

⁷⁶ A. Abu-Sahlieh, *The Islamic conception of migration*.

⁷⁷ In an interesting development, members of the Shersheni tribe sued the producers of an Arabic sit-com for seriously damaging their social standing. The TV production portrayed Shershenis as nomads with no roots. In particular, according to the lawyer representing the tribe, a dialogue where a male character asks his sweetheart if she would marry a “Shersheni with no passport”, put the tribe in a bad light and led to many broken marriages; “Gulf News”, May 9, 2005.

Globalization processes, growing links between the GCC states and the international community or accession to such organizations as WTO and ILO should help to liberalize naturalisation policies. Of great importance here will be continued pressure from Western human rights organizations, emerging local civil society groups in the Gulf, and some Western governments. Nevertheless, even after obtaining citizenship, many of naturalised people will remain for a long period of time, formally or informally, not equal to "real" nationals. Tribal affiliations as well as security and concerns of the welfare state will continue to play a crucial role here.