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A Divided Sea: A Study of Bahrain's Identity Conflict and Identity Formation

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International Relations
LANDSAM

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Declaration

I, Bashar Marhoon, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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Abstract

Bahraini society has suffered a prevailing conflict of identity spanning several generations. Generally, the division is described as based on sectarian lines – a minority Sunni and majority Shia. The two main groups lead segregated lives and distrust that has impeded cooperation. Periodically, violent fits of civil conflict have emerged, the latest and most significant of which was inspired by the Arab Spring. The protests were brutally suppressed by the government, divided society more than ever before. In order to understand the identity conflict that has endured in Bahrain, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Bahraini citizens to gain a clearer image of the Bahraini collective identity formation, and the structures that play a role. The data presented the constructed image of the Bahraini self, and the significant others in the eyes of Bahrainis over the age of 65. Bahraini-*Bahrani* relations were difficult to discuss, as the topic was considered taboo. However, relations were depicted as once peaceful, with positive identification between the two groups existing. Changes in the economic structures, such as the tribal-governance system, and the introduction of oil, were not factors in the change in identification. The British other was constructed as a major actor in causing Bahraini disunity. Different identification towards the British by the government and society fractured trust between the two. The huge increase of the *Hindi* other was another possible reason for the distrust between Bahraini society. Finally, differing opinion on whether Bahrain was part of the *khaleeji* other is a reason for disunity among the Bahraini self.

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1. Introduction

In 2011, inspired by other Arabs, Bahrainis took to the streets, occupying the national Pearl Roundabout landmark and demanding extensive political reforms that would reshape society in unprecedented ways (BBC, 2013). The brief media attention created the narrative of a new conflict in Bahrain and failed to explore and understand the underlying causes that may have led to this recent, but not ‘new’ development. For many Bahrainis, this was just another milestone in the generation-spanning conflict in the country.

While trying to understand Bahrain’s ‘conflict’, the focus may shift on the role of regional or international agents Saudi Arabia, Iran, or the United States. Any possible local underlying structures of identity that have historically played a role in the continuation of the issues, such as the economy, or the influence of colonial powers, are largely been ignored. To understand the conflict in a society, it is important to study both the agents and the underlying structures that may allow, or encourage, the agent to act. All cases are different, and historical and geographical context is paramount to all open systems (Patomäki, 2002). The paper will focus on historical elements that make the Bahraini civil conflict possible and use primary data to understand how the perceptions of identity develop over time

1.1. Why Study Bahrain?

The societal conflict in Bahrain is difficult to describe. The identity conflict within Bahrain, which includes the Shia majority, Sunni minority, and the Bahraini government, has spanned decades. Furthermore, the conflict has rarely produced a considerable number of casualties in a short period or devolved into widespread violence. Instead, it has constituted consistent friction and struggles, with periodic outbursts of civil conflict. With a focus on power, security, and geopolitics, International Relations as a subject of study has traditionally neglected the smaller cases in the globe (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2004). Thus, the conflict within tiny island has found itself on the sidelines, with other issues monopolizing West Asian political discourse. Furthermore, the literature on Bahrain focuses on the role of external actors to explore the issues in Bahrain.

The Bahraini niche offers an interesting case for the study of ethnic/identity conflict, state-building, and power relations in International Relations. This thesis aspires to play a role in filling the knowledge-gap that exists in West Asian studies. While small states are certainly

susceptible to external influence (Ott, 2000), the conflict in Bahrain has surely been driven by actors within Bahrain, not outside of it. Thus, it is important to consider how Bahraini knowledge is produced from external influence as well. Maintaining a primary focus on the actors within the island, and the role external structures, this paper studies Bahrain; its conflict and history first, with the regional and international powers as a supplement to the research.

Furthermore, Bahrain offers a strong case to understand how undemocratic regimes function and conflict takes place in small states. Ethnic conflict scholars such as Ignatieff (1993) suggest that ethnic conflict is intensified when state governments begin to collapse. Bahrain, however, provides a case where the conflict grew *during* state formation and continues to this day.

1.2. Research Objectives

This research objective aims to explain some of the possible causes for the identity conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain. To do this, it endeavours to construct a picture of Bahraini identity, conflict, and the significant Bahraini others that may play a role in fueling the conflict. Furthermore, the research attempts to situate identity within ontologically mind-independent structures besides language, which has dominated identity discourse in IR (Jackson, 2011; Hansen, 2006).

Furthermore, this research will explore how group identity develops with the persistence of the conflict (or, the assumption that the conflict is persisting), and how this develops over time. Finally, this research aims to fill the knowledge gap on the Kingdom of Bahrain in International Relations.

1.2.1. Research Question

To tackle these objectives, the paper aims to answer the main research question and a set of sub-research questions to supplement and expand upon the research question. Those are:

Research Question

- Why do some Bahrainis see a division in national identity?

Sub-Research Questions

- Who are some prominent others for the Bahraini self?

- What roles have structures played in assisting the formation of Bahraini identity?

1.3. Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into different sections consisting of various sub-sections. The first section, details some of the history of the landmass of Bahrain, and the people within it. It discusses the economic and political context surrounding the society before the entry of the Al-Khalifa ruling power to the open system. The second section details the methodology of the thesis and discusses the various choices made to tackle this project. It also discusses the primary and secondary data; the criteria for the data collection, the limitations, and difficulties of the data collected to study the open system of Bahrain.

Then, the thesis discusses the theoretical perspective of the paper. Identity formation and identity conflict play a big role in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It looks at literature on identity in IR, including the concept of the other, which is an out-group that the self, the in-group, situates itself with. Also, the role of identification in creating an inferred perception on the other is paramount to understand how the various perceptions of identification in Bahrain played a role in creating animosity and distrust. The role of linking and differentiating in creating constructed identities for the self and other is also explored.

After that, the thesis explores some of the others that the data presented. The role of the internal 'Bahra(i)ni'¹ other, as well as the influence of the constructed exterior British other pose as examples of others in the Bahrain open system. Smaller others, such as Omani and Indian others, play an important role to varying degrees as well. Furthermore, the role of economic and colonial structures, as well as mind-independent structures such as geography, are discussed and explored. The final section concludes the thesis with insights on potential channels for further research.

2. A Short Introduction to Bahrain: The 1500s-1900s

To gain a holistic picture of an issue or case, it is imperative to consider the historical context that it exists in. The case is similar in Bahrain. Crucial to understanding the alleged conflict in Bahrain is the historical context that Bahrain experienced prior to the genesis of the

¹ 'Bahra(i)ni denotes to the two main groups in Bahrain. This will be expanded upon in the section "The One We Shouldn't Talk About: The Bahra(i)ni Other"

conflict. Thus, this section will serve as a contextual introduction to Bahrain. It will provide part of the basic foundational knowledge that may be useful to fully grasp the context behind the structural mechanisms that perpetuate the conflict. Bahrain's historical role economically and politically will be illuminated, as it is crucial to understand the situation of the landmass of Bahrain to understand the human conflict within it. The history of political powers will also be discussed.

“The Land of a Million Palm Trees” – An Introduction to Bahrain’s Geography and Economy

The Bahrain islands are an archipelago in the Persian Gulf, in close proximity to the Arabian Peninsula. The country is 760 square kilometres (CIA, 2018), making it one of the smallest countries in the world, and the smallest in West Asia. Regionally, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran surround it to the West, South/East, and North respectively. The country has a long history, spanning several civilizations, dating as far back as 3000 BC, with what is known as the Dilmun civilization. The island that is today called Bahrain was once the capital of the ancient civilization (UNESCO, n.d.). In Arabic, its name means ‘two seas’, a reference to the freshwater within it and the salt water that surrounds it (Al-Nabi, 2012). Bahrain was geographically advantageous for maritime routes because it is the largest island in a geographically strategic region in the globe. Standing between the most substantial focal points of the ancient world – the Far East, the Indus Valley, Fertile Crescent, the Red Sea and the Coast of East Africa (Niederhorn, 2016), trade goods from the Persian Gulf made its way into Europe through Antioch (Khuri, 1980). This made Bahrain an important port city, a metropolitan hub where different cultures met (UNESCO, 2012).

While the Gulf Arab states are known for oil, it was only discovered in the 1930s in Bahrain, and taken advantage of for national development in the 1950s. Before then, it was pearling that brought prosperity to the society. Palm cultivation, fishing, and pearl production formed the majority of Bahrain's economic system, from which trade was facilitated and used to sustain the locals. Income was generated from mainly trading pearls, while fish and dates were used for nutrition, tax revenue, and minor trading (Khuri, 1980; Landen, 1993). Bahrain's trade was robust, but its exports were limited to those mentioned. Maritime products from Bahrain were exported by merchants to various reaches of the Gulf and beyond, such as India, Turkey,

Basra, Kuwait, Europe, and others. The merchants who took part in the trading of pearls grew to become a small but powerful class in Bahrain, as with the other coastal cities of the Gulf. These merchants were politically influential, as those in control of the islands depended on their support and their economy. Those merchants exercised their powers economically, by physically relocating to other parts of the Gulf if the ruler was uncooperative or difficult (Khuri, 1980).

The economic advantages that the merchants brought, however, came with a consistent political price as Bahrain saw itself on the receiving end of constant occupation from practically all global powers throughout history. The Babylonians, Sumerians, Hellenistic Greeks, Persians (on several occasions), Portuguese, Ottomans, Omanis, minor Arab tribes, and the British all controlled and claimed ‘legitimate’ control of the archipelago at some point, taking advantage of its location to trade with the empire’s base, or with other colonies. (UNESCO, n.d.; Mansfield & Winckler, 2008; Khuri, 1980; Fuccaro, 2009). The struggle for Bahrain between regional players was extensive, as several actors claimed control over the island at several times. Indeed, Onley (2009) claims that the British Government of Bombay was reluctant to respond to the Al-Khalifa’s pleas for protection in the 1800s because of the numerous claims of ownership over the island by so many regional powers². Thus, discussing some of the powers that were involved in Bahrain allows us to study some of its history. The following sections will be divided into two main sections: one focusing on the regional powers that controlled it before the Al-Khalifa tribe, and one that focuses on the introduction of the Al-Khalifa into Bahrain’s open system.

2.1. The 1500 – 1750s

The Portuguese offer a solid start to look at Bahrain’s history. They controlled the islands for a substantial period, from around the mid-1500s to the 1600s, however, little documentation exists (Larsen, 1983). The Portuguese sailed to the Persian Gulf in the late 1400s and sought to control Bahrain in order to take advantage of its pearl bed, succeeding in 1521. Portugal’s colonialism was economically focused, with little concern placed on the society or well-being of its colony (Khuri, 1980). While the Portuguese competed with other European powers to monopolise control over the region, it was a regional power in Safavid Iran that reclaimed control over Bahrain from the Portuguese in 1602 (Larsen, 1983; Fuccaro, 2009). Bahrain was transformed under Safavid Rule in countless ways. Fuccaro (2009) claims that Iran’s control

² According to Bombay government reports, the Al-Khalifa motioned for British protection a total of 21 times.

over Bahrain marked its conversion to Shi'ism, however, some Shia themselves claim otherwise (Interview 7, 2018).

Under the Persian Empire, Bahrain gained access to Iranian markets in the Southern coastal towns, making Bahrain boom (Fuccaro, 2009), and possibly painting the Persian Empire in a more positive one than the Portuguese, whose control was marred by brutality and regional instability. Bahrain did not only thrive economically but spiritually through the Persian Empire. Under Safavid rule, Shi'ism in the islands was encouraged and Bahraini *ulama* were trained in Iran on religious matters. Bahrain became a small but active and powerful centre for Shi'i jurisprudence under Safavid control. The Persian Empire was not impervious to the effects of time, as its power and influence waned in the early-1700s. The transition from Shi'i to Sunni rule led to a Bahraini refugee crisis in the town of Bushehr (Fuccaro, 2009). Clashes between the Persian and the re-emergent Omani Empire instigated this *ulama* diaspora, however political tensions did not cease after, as battles between the Omani and the 'Utub took place.

2.2. The 1750s – 1900s

The 'Utub are a federation of tribes which travelled throughout the Arabian Peninsula. In the 18th century, the Al-Khalifa (AK) tribe, splintered off and travelled from Kuwait to Zubarah in the west coast of Qatar, in hopes of taking part in the blossoming Eastern trade (Khuri, 1980). The proximity of Zubarah and Bahrain brought Persian and AK forces together, who clashed while the Persian Empire was in decline (Lorimer 1915; Khuri, 1980). Eventually, AK's attacks on Bahrain pushed away Persian forces, and transformed the island from a Persian dependency to an Arab principality, under the control of the AK.

The introduction of a new power did not put an end to the political instability, as regional powers were unwilling to accept Bahrain's recent controller. According to Lorimer (1915), the Arab Sheikhs of Bushehr, Al-Qawasim, and Persian forces conspired to reclaim control from the AK, and the Omanis attempted to seize the island in the 1780s. Bahrain's trade economy flourished during this time, despite regional and internal upheaval (Khuri, 1980). This could be merited to the AKs deep knowledge of trade and economy, stemming from their experience in Kuwait and Zubarah. Under them, pearl trade became almost entirely controlled by Bahrainis, making them the undisputed regional economic hub by the 1800s. The 19th century saw the British increase their activities and control in the region, signing a general treaty with the region

in 1820, and an official Convention with the ruler of Bahrain in 1861 (Al-Baharna, 1968). The latter cemented the AK as established rulers of the island. The British's involvement with Bahrain will be detailed and analysed in later sections.

Bahrain had seen a long history of international and regional powers fighting to control it, which led to long periods of political instability. Further, it caused considerable loss of life, and infrastructure (Fuccaro, 2009). This section fulfilled two roles: to provide historical context of Bahrain, as well as illuminate the economic and geopolitical dynamics historically. It is important to highlight that the structures within Bahrain's open system and the individual's interactions within it are directly inferred by Bahrain's historical context. The following section will focus on the methodological decisions made for this research project.

3. Methodology

For identity formation and identity conflict, the researcher must consider the data that is needed and available. Patomäki (2002) identifies distinguishable data depending on the how the issue is situated in time. For a study of a historical world, the use of texts could be employed, because the relevant people are already dead. For a present world, participatory observation and interviews could be used. This may be applicable to general issues that are studied. However, regarding ongoing conflict and identity, this research proposes that a combination of the two provides a more powerful method of analysis for the case of Bahrain than only historical texts. One reason for this is because the conflict is still ongoing. One way of validating that the identity formation and othering perceived is taking place is through corroboration with primary data, such as interviews. It is for this reason that this research project employs both primary and secondary data; interviews, as well as secondary texts. The primary data provides the main channel for understanding the open system of Bahrain, while the secondary data will supplement, support, and play a role in building Bahrain's others, and identity formation. This section will discuss some of the methodological decisions for this project, including the research design, the data collection method, and others.

3.1. Research Strategy and Design

One goal of this research project was to identify and understand some possible causes of the conflict in Bahrain. Arguably, the two most common clusters of research strategy in social research are quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Inferring from the nature of

the research question, qualitative research was deemed best. Qualitative research strategy focuses on words, rather than the measurement of quantity as its main mode of analysis (Bryman, 2012). The causes of conflict in Bahrain could not be studied only through numerical variables, because of the complex and subjective aspect of identity and the perception of conflict.

Bryman (2012) sequences the first step of qualitative research as creating a general research question. This research project did not follow this sequence, however. The intention to study Bahrain's conflict was clear from the start. Thus, the general research question regarding the Bahraini conflict was developed after the site was identified, followed by the theoretical framework and methodology. Despite this, this research project falls within the category of case study design. Stake (1995) asserts that a case study research is concerned with the complexity and contextual nature of one specific case. A case study was preferred over others, such as a comparison study because of the desire to focus on the understudied case of Bahrain. A comparative case would've included other open systems which would have distracted the research from Bahrain. As a goal of this project is to fill the knowledge-gap on the kingdom, a single case study was preferred.

3.2. Motivations for Primary Data

Primary data was motivated as it was needed to corroborate with for a complex picture of the conflict, and the desire to bring forward the voices of the Bahrainis and highlight Bahraini society for research. In International Relations study, Bahrain has usually taken the backseat to other Arab Gulf states that have attracted more attention through their material power, natural resource wealth, or the existence of war in it. This meant that qualitative primary data such as personal interviews or surveys are quite rare in Bahrain³. Aside from hoping to contribute to filling the knowledge gap regarding Bahrain, the study of identity conflict and formation is impossible without the inclusion of its central components; the self and other. Furthermore, the research wished to avoid what Patomäki (2002) refers to as "armchair philosophizing" (p.14), and truly encounter, collect, and study empirical evidence.

The collection of data from Bahrainis would also allow the data to focus on the agency involved in the presuppositions of the conflict. This, along with some of the structural causes of

³ However, it is important to note that some academics such as Justin Gengler, Nelida Fuccaro and Laurence Louër have collected excellent data of Bahraini Shias which has immensely aided this research.

the conflict from secondary data would, in turn, allow for a multi-layered explanation of the conflict. The combination of data regarding structures and agents would allow us to truly explore how each is involved in conflict creation. Thus, we would be able to identify the possible causes of the long-lasting conflict in Bahrain. In this way, both sets of data will enrich and supplement each other.

3.3. Data Collection and Sampling Method of Primary Data

To fully explain and understand any conflict, and to understand how collective identities are constructed and form Bahraini identity, actors must be involved (Patomäki, 2002). The main actor groups considered for this project is the population of Bahrain. Old members of the Bahraini community were identified as the primary participant group to target for primary data collection. Furthermore, men and women were interviewed with the main criterion of the sample being age, with a minimum tentative age of 65. This criterion was established because the nature of the conflict in Bahrain was historical, not only in its starting point of the initial crossing of paths of the two main groups involved, but also in the perceptions of each group before the conflict took root in Bahrain in the first place. Knowledge is situated geo-historically (Patomäki, 2002), and for the primary data from contemporary sources to be used in a fitting manner, the sources should be as close to the historical timeframe in question as possible. There is no ‘start’ for identity formation. However, Bahrainis who were alive during the formative years of forming an independent Bahrain, between the 1950s and 1970s, were prioritized. For this reason, age was the main criterion. Aside from age, the sample group was divided to somewhat reflect Bahraini population: Shia Bahrainis formed the majority of the sample, followed by Sunni, and as many residents of expatriate origin as possible.

In qualitative research, it is usually beneficial for the researcher to select units from the target population which directly refer to the research question at hand (Bryman, 2012). This would ensure that the data is focused on the topic, and help the research achieve maximum efficiency during fieldwork. A combination of samplings methods was used, such as purposive sampling, one of the central sampling methods of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Because of its non-probability nature, purposive sampling would allow for the data to remain focused on the research question (Bryman, 2012). Specifically, snowball sampling was employed to a large degree. Snowball sampling entails using an initial small sample that is collected through

purposive sampling to suggest new participants to be interviewed for data collection. This sampling method is usually used when purposive sampling is virtually impossible. In this case, it is far from impossible. Being a local, the researcher had greater access to the project's target population than others. However, snowball sampling was employed to curtail safety risks of conducting research in an undemocratic state. The Arab Gulf states, including Bahrain, have developed a reputation for monitoring channels of communication to control activism or other unwanted activities (Economist, 2014). This makes scheduling and organizing interviews beforehand a real danger to all members involved. Thus, it was decided that the research would partially depend on the network of the initial participants to find similar participants that fit the research's criteria. This would limit oversea communications before entering the country, and limit the communications within Bahrain, to reduce the possibility of government reaction to a minimum. Of course, however, this sampling method brought with it some limitations and difficulties which will be discussed in the following sections.

3.4. Data-Collection Methods

3.4.1. Private, Semi-structured Interviews

The primary method of collecting data from the sample was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The true strength of semi-structured interviews is that it allows the researcher to assess what is important to the participant, based on what they focus on during the discussion. Thus, by allowing the participant to 'take the lead', we would be given a glimpse into their interests and priorities regarding the topic. Further, it would allow the researcher to gauge the emotional reaction to the topic (Bryman, 2012), which is beneficial when studying the nature of identity conflict within society. Another important feature of the interviews was privacy. Because of the politically sensitive nature of the research topic, the research ensured that interviews not only took place where the participants were the most comfortable, but also where it was the most private. Ideally, the interviews took place in their home, where the participant would feel most comfortable. Interviews were aimed to be individually-based, involving only the participant and interviewer. Unfortunately, it was best to include a 'middle-man' sometimes, who was generally the acquaintance who arranged the interview. The inclusion of a middle-man took place in five of the 12 interviews conducted. While it was encouraged to have private interviews, whether the 'middle-man' joined the interviews was left to the behest of the

participant. The middle-men proved to be both beneficial and problematic in some cases. This will be discussed at the end of this section. Finally, it should be noted that as the interviews were conducted in local Bahraini Arabic, the terminology may vary from interview to interview, and may not be identical to the interview guide. Notes were taken in a combination of English and Arabic, so the interviews were translated during the discussions.

3.4.2. Recording, transcription, and translation

For the sake of safety and to ensure participant comfort, the interviews were not recorded. This was a decision made in the field, after discovering the difficulty of acquiring participants who were willing to be recorded. Furthermore, it became clear that the presence of a recorder could stifle discussions. It also would have added an element of officiality that was bypassed because the interviewer was local, and thus seen as part of the Bahraini in-group. Unfortunately, this caused one of this research's largest ethical grievances – that participants were unable to review, correct, and provide feedback on any notes. While this was done to protect the participants and the researcher, it is an ethical oversight which must be stated and considered when conducting research in regimes with high monitoring and aggressive reactions to political criticism.

The interviews were translated during the interview phase. This was done to simplify the processes of translation and transcription by combining them. Furthermore, it was important to take notes that were as close to reality as possible and avoid the interviewer's memory from adding elements to the participants' discussions, because of the lack of recordings. Quotes were noted in Arabic and then translated later. All the interviews except for one were conducted in Arabic

After collection, the data was organized based on the out-groups or 'others' that were discussed and analyzed to understand how the out-group was constructed and discussed in the interviews. General patterns of others emerged, and their descriptions allowed for an assessment of identification, in a spectrum between being an extension of the self (positive), or merely a tool for goal achievement (negative).

3.5. Limitations of Primary Data

As with all research, the collected data, and data collection methods came with some limitations. One way for a researcher to test the validity of his work is through respondent validation. By relating back findings to a group within the target population, the researcher can receive feedback to ensure that his/her work is close to the social reality of the group (Bryman, 2012). Respondent validation received in this way is difficult because of the monitored communications channels that have been mentioned before, posing another limitation to the analysis of the primary data. A lack of respondent validation plays a role in the ethical issues with this research project, something that will be discussed in its own dedicated section.

A final clear limitation of the primary data relates to the issue of time. Looking at the causes of identity conflict encourages one to look at the start of the interaction, or at least, the start of the interactions between the actors involved. The importance of situating the data in space and time is crucial to create a full complex that can seek to explain some of the possible causes of the issue that is studied (Patomäki, 2012). In this research's case, the period of the late 1700s and 1800s pose very important timeframes. Thus, truly situating the data collected in time is difficult. To collect new primary data from this period is impossible. This is a limitation of this research's primary data considering the historical timeframe of social interaction.

3.6. Data Collection and Sampling Method of Secondary Data

Secondary data entails data and knowledge that is collected by researchers other than the ones involved in the current research. As state earlier, the study of past worlds entails the use of texts for analysis and explaining possible structural mechanisms for the case (Patomäki, 2002). Thus, this paper uses secondary sources as a main source of knowledge for analysis, to ensure that it employs high-quality data that is as situated in time as possible. The temporal proximity of the secondary data over any primary data that a current researcher could collect pushes the research closer towards achieving confirmable research. The secondary data for this project could be broadly dividing into two sub-groups; data related to theoretical perspective of identity and data related to the case of Bahrain, and structural systems that may have influenced identity. This section will focus on the data related to Bahrain specifically.

Bahrain is one of the most understudied GCC states in IR. Being regional powers, either materially, economically, or ideationally, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates

(UAE) are well represented in IR academia. Bahrain has received less attention because of its small stature within the GCC. However, secondary data exists, some of which were sampled for this research. Fuad Khuri is an anthropologist, and his seminal work *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* is one of the most vital scholarly endeavours regarding society and state on the island. Nelida Fuccaro's *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama Since 1800* provides great personal accounts of Bahraini perceptions after the introduction of tribal Arab structures in the open system, making it another valuable resource. Other work such as Lawson's (1989) *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy*, or *Bahrain 1920-1971: A Reading in British Documents* by Al-Shehabi are important sources as well. Contemporary literature was not used extensively but was possibly referenced for context on how such causal structures for the conflict may continue and evolve throughout time. A special note must be made to Charles Belgrave's diaries and other writing. The Political Agent's diaries offer a rare, albeit limited view of the government's activities daily. His close relations to individuals in the government and involvement in Bahraini state-building provide rare insight which is useful in building an understanding on a historical issue.

3.7. Reflexivity

Reflexivity has an important place in social science, as it based the foundations to separate between the social and natural sciences (Jackson, 2011). The ability for self-reflection and self-awareness is crucial to create a wholesome research project that can consider all aspects involved, including the researchers themselves. This project is no different, as reflexivity was important to situate the researcher during the project. Bryman (2012) identifies methodological self-consciousness as one form of reflexivity; that is, being aware and considering one's own relations with that he/she researches. It also includes considering the consequences of one's methodology onto the outcome of the research itself. There exists a relation between the researcher and the material, despite academic detachment. All analysis and knowledge come with a plethora of preconceived ideas from the researcher. Some academics argue that it would impossible to create a method that would guarantee objectivity, even more so in the social sciences (Patomäki, 2002).

Of course, reflexivity is important in any research regarding social science, because context and perspective are key to any historical event, issue, or conflict. Pursuing reflexivity

throughout this research is particularly important for its success, and to ensure its validity/confirmability because I, myself, am a Bahraini native. Because of my existence in the open system of Bahrain for extended periods, interacting with the conflict that is the subject of research, it is safe to assume that I have developed deeply embedded presuppositions, values, and biases regarding it. Patomäki (2002) claims that detachment between the researcher and the object of study through time does not rid the research of the complex relationship between subject and object. This relationship, however, is even more complex in this case, because of its personal nature. Awareness of this is the first step towards limiting and controlling the researcher's presuppositions towards the possible causes of conflict in Bahrain.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Considering some of the hurdles that conducting fieldwork in a politically volatile environment poses, some ethical considerations should be discussed. This research project was tackled with a deep care for ethics, because of the true danger that the participants faced if they were to face any consequences because of the actions of the researcher. Whether collecting primary data was a risk that was worth taking was considered and debated at length. The complex aspect of identity suggested that merely secondary data will not suffice for analysis. Thus, fieldwork was deemed necessary, but with the utmost care for safety to be taken.

One of the first measures taken was limiting the number of interviews conducted. Simply put, more interviews put the researcher and more participants at risk, because of the increased likelihood of any misinformation spreading. If the authorities would uncover the research and deem it a 'danger to national stability', limiting the number of those 'affected' was making the best of an unfortunate situation. Furthermore, to maximise security measures, none of the interviews were recorded. This would reduce the tangible evidence that existed on the participants. No names were noted, and notes were made as vague as possible, by using 'Sh' to denote the word 'Shia', or 'G' to denote to the 'government'. This pseudo-code was used to avoid the notes being understood in the event of a spontaneous encounter with security forces in the field. Furthermore, the researcher strived to avoid learning the name of the participants in some cases. In this circumstance, ironically, ignorance was bliss.

3.9. Conducting Field Work in Bahrain: Difficulties, Lessons, and Retrospection

This research project offers an example for better understanding some of the difficulties that come with conducting research in Bahrain, and the Arab Gulf in general. One of the reasons for the lack of field work in Bahrain is the difficulty to access the country, as research is discouraged and suppressed by the government. As this was possible to bypass, by nature of the researcher being a local, it was a primary opportunity to collect data on a subject rarely discussed in depth in Bahrain. However, political discussions with strangers or even close members of one's group have become extremely controversial in the island. The events of the Arab Spring's failed attempts at political change in the island, and the ensuing violence and othering were particularly traumatic to Bahraini society. Indeed, its ripples continue to be felt to this day, more than five years after the protests took place in Bahrain.

Initially, the participants considered the research too political or controversial to discuss openly. There was a fear of security in discussing such societal issues openly. Several potential participants declined to be interviewed upon approaching them. As expected, the interview place and time were left completely flexible to avoid any scheduling issues and ensure participant comfort. However, interviews were declined with no real basis. It is most likely that the participants felt discomfort with the idea of discussing topics of other groups, or political and economic issues considering the political environment in Bahrain since the Arab Spring. Furthermore, it is possible that such topics were deemed as extremely taboo and inappropriate to discuss. Pandya (2012) briefly discusses the aspect of private and public life that is prevalent in Bahraini society, that is relevant here. Openly discussing one's thoughts on the Persian or Indian communities in Bahrain may be seen as inappropriate to discuss in the public life. While Bahrainis may hold these discussions in private, with their family and friends, an official face of neutrality is expected to be held in the public life. The taboo nature of the social and political discussions the research demanded was the largest challenge during the data collection phase, even after interviews were successfully scheduled.

Discussing collective othering *within* Bahrainis was more challenging. Participants who agreed to be interviewed became uncomfortable when other groups were mentioned or unwilling to discuss groups within Bahrain. Some conversations were interrupted by the participants, who

wished the conversation to remain 'jolly' or 'civil'. Further, some details were mentioned but then asked to be deleted from the record. Some were conducted with a friend or acquaintance present, normally the one who introduced the participant to the research. It was not uncommon for the friend to interrupt the conversation, despite not being the one interviewed. This was done with the explanation that 'we did not need to have such discussions or talk about these issues.' This made discussing the Bahraini others in a direct manner virtually impossible. Sometimes, the most concrete comments on the Bahraini other were made as passing comments. It was important to navigate which method to take when discussing Bahraini problems, to get as much information as possible.

It is because of the difficulty of straightforward discussion of Bahraini others, that other collective identities could be discussed, as it could take place indirectly, or directly if deemed 'not taboo'. External others such as the British, for example, were simpler to discuss directly because of its historical nature and the general agreement that Bahrain is no longer under its direct colonial control. Thus, the British other's involvement in Bahrain was 'something of the past'. Knowledge of the private/public dynamic in Bahraini (and Gulf) culture is paramount to establish rapport and avoid destroying it by 'asking the wrong question'. Further, how to discuss taboo societal topics indirectly and infer from comments made about them in passing is crucial to conduct effective data collection. It was very common for Bahrainis to talk around the topic, but not of it.

The taboo nature of the data, the public/private nature of Arab Gulf culture, and the security fears in discussing political issues made acquiring a large sample difficult and possibly discouraged it. Thus, this research's sample suffers in size, with a total of 12 interviews. Furthermore, the age of the sample population raised the question of mental health, bringing other ethical questions. For example, the twelfth interview was used sparingly because it was difficult for the researcher to assess the participant's mental health as they were closing on 85+ years of age.

The benefit of snowball sampling cannot be understated in Bahrain, however. By having a friend 'vouch for the interviewer' as someone they know and trust, the participant was more likely to accept the interviewer and take part in open discussion. If the research was done through purposive method, then the hurdle to creating rapport would be much larger because of

the public/private dynamic, leaving the discussions of lesser quality. But snowball sampling did present some issues. Because it leaves a large part of the sampling on the participants, the pace of the data collecting was at their mercy. During the three-week trip to Bahrain, the first week involved only scheduling and marketing the research to potential respondents. While this was necessary, it made it difficult to conduct interviews with a 'control' group that involved younger generations than the sample. The initial goal was to conduct similar interviews, to assess how identity formation and othering evolved over two-three generations. Initially, it was expected that the British other would decline in importance to the American other, and the Indian other would present a much more negative identification than older generations. Unfortunately, no 'control' interviews were conducted.

4. Collective Identities, Identity Formation in IR, and Beyond

To understand Bahraini identity formation and conflict, it is imperative to build upon existing work on identity formation in the field. This section will look at various aspects of identity formation. The following section is a discussion of concepts related to identity in International Relations (IR), such as the Self, the Other, and how identity is formed. It provides the theoretical framework through which the case can be studied. Neumann (1999) posits that studying and incorporating identity into IR study can help transcend some of the ontological debates of the field. This thesis aims to avoid losing itself in these discussions but it is necessary to address them in some cases.

The first section will discuss some of the historical and philosophical discussion related to identity; then move on to uses of interest and identification in inter- and intra-state relations. Then, the process of creating the Self through the juxtaposition with the Other, known as linking and differentiation will be discussed. After, some of the literature related to Arab identity will be discussed. Some issues that pertain to the literature will be discussed, namely, the homogenization of Arabs as one group, a result of the prevalence of Pan-Arabism as a political ideology. Finally, some difficulties with identity formation study in IR in relation to the dominance of poststructural scholars in this field of IR, and how other channels may help combat it, will be discussed.

4.1. Making Sense of Identity, Identification, and Interest

Identity in IR has been dominated by the notion that it is constructed through the creation of others (Lebow, 2008). The field has used this perspective even in the traditional perspectives, albeit implicitly. They perceive international relations entailing atomistic and rational actors in a system interacting with other similar players, making the ‘us’ and ‘other’ dynamic natural to the field (Lebow, 2008). IR has normally involved a group, usually, a state, perceiving another as a threat, ally, or somewhere in between. The beginnings of studying identity were outside of the field of IR, which adopted identity study from sociology (Neumann, 1999). In IR, the study of identity stems from the tenets of Constructivism, where the state is integral to studying global interaction (Wendt, 1994). One dimension of identity is corporate identities, which are the “intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute actor individuality” (Wendt, 1994). This differs based on the identity in question. For an individual, it is the body and its experiences thus far; while for the organization, it is the individuals, resources, institutions, and others. For a state, corporate identity stems from four goals, that span several schemes. The state craves physical and ontological security, the improvement of standards of living for the individuals of the state, and importantly, recognition as an actor in the open system by others, without the need for violence to merely survive (Wendt, 1994). A term that is necessary to clarify here is ontological security. It refers to a “sense of continuity and order in events” (Giddens, 1991 p.243). While security in IR traditionally refers to survival from material destruction, ontological security refers to security as being, and the ability to address basic existential questions. Threats and disconnects from the self, which can be caused by narrative and behaviour contradicting, can result in ontological insecurity (Steele, 2008). Wendt separated but mentioned both physical and ontological security because a society needs more than avoiding destruction to continue to exist. It also needs to reconcile its self and its actions consistently.

Regarding state interests, Wendt (1994) continues that they are met in various forms, depending on how the state defines itself relative to the other. While considering an international perspective, the same logic applies to corporate identities *within* the state. In fact, the corporate identities within the state and all its social structures and institutions predicate the ultimate corporate identity of the state (Wendt, 1994). Every group wishes for the goals described above. However, the path to these can be perceived as blocked by the other. In Bahrain, the collective identities clash in achieving their interests, leading to a weak state identity, as the state expends

resources on the conflict within its society. Perception of the other, or identification, can also exist within a spectrum. If identification between the two identities is positive, then the other is seen as an extension of the self, as opposed to an independent actor (Wendt, 1994). An example of positive identification are states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, whose relations reached new heights after announcing new economic and military ties that surpass those of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) (Al Jazeera, 2017). This suggests that Saudi and Emirati governments have identified with each other more positively than with the rest of the GCC members. Several reasons predicate this, of course. First, recent developments within the Gulf region, such as the Saudi-UAE blockade on Qatar, play a role. Further, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and Saudi and UAE's shared animosity towards the Muslim Brotherhood are likely reasons for the two countries to see shared interests, leading to positive identification. Thus, Saudi Arabia and UAE see each other as an extension of themselves. Within states, positive identification leads to a sense of community, nation, and other cooperative sentiments. On the other end of the spectrum, negative identification leads to the other being seen simply as a stepping stone to achieve the self's interests (Wendt, 1994). Negative identification can be a unifier as well. Anderson (2006) presents negative identification that can take place between coloniser and colony, because of increased control within the colonies. Thus, an other's actions led to the creation of national sentiments, unifying nations into modern states. This dynamic exists within Bahrain on various levels. Internationally, the British Empire was identified with negatively by society, which sprouted national mobilization. Alternatively, negative identification among Bahraini groups has led to social conflict. The second example could lead to using the other *within* society as the stepping stone for meeting interests. This is problematic because states should look to their own societies for survival. If a government depends on other states to survive, and simply uses society to achieve its interests (Wendt, 1994), then the government in question could develop to become autocratic. This shows identification's role in forming democratic, internally peaceful societies, and the possible authoritarian outcomes of the state's interest differing from wider society's. Identity, then, is a key factor in intra- and inter-state political action (Lebow, 2008), with interests and identification playing a role in forming that identity.

4.2. You Complete Me – Linking, Differentiating, and Othering

It is useful to consider identity formation as an ever-continuous process, as opposed to one with a clear ‘start’ and ‘end’. This sheds light on the fact that identity is in perpetual transformation, depending on the present context, and cannot remain permanent (Neumann, 1999). Crucial to studying identity, be it collective or individual, is the concept of the self and the other. The self and the other, as illustrated above, are complex concepts that can represent a single citizen of a country, a nation, such as Kurdistan, or a modern sovereign state, such as Russia (Wendt, 1994; Neumann, 1999). Stuart Hall (1995) details three concepts of identity according to European literature. The first concept is the Enlightenment subject, which was sovereign, rational, with a ‘core’ that remains relatively unchanged. The second is that which has been discussed above – dependent on significant others to form, and not independent. The third concept is the post-modern subject. This concept of identity is ever-changing and shifting in relation to the cultural systems it interacts with. This section will focus on the second and the third concepts, and the importance of the other.

The self, which is the core of the subject’s identity, can only be developed through the existence of a group to reflect upon, known as the other. These two concepts are not independent of each other, and it is impossible to consider one without considering the other (Hall, 1997). A study of the self without the other leaves the research lacking (Bakhtin, 1990). The construction of the other is a political concern and does not have to be constructed as evil, repulsive, or even a danger to the collective self. It simply must be an other (Neumann, 1999). This perspective on reality stems from Hegel’s assertion that one cannot ‘know thyself’ merely through introspection because one does not exist in a vacuum from other selves (Neumann, 1999). According to Hegel (1807, p.112), “each is for the other the middle term through which each mediates itself” and this highlights the importance of the other.

The self/other dynamic plays a role in cementing the identity of the self. This is done by reflecting upon the other, to create an individual’s, or a collective’s identity. Thus, the collective self, or the in-group, is formed not only by highlighting similarities among the individual members of the group but by differentiating themselves from the out-group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). One, in this view, cannot know ‘black’ without knowing ‘white’ (Hall, 1997), cannot know ‘barbarian’, without knowing ‘civilized’ (Hansen, 2006). This process, of looking at an

other and differentiating it from the self, is a prominent process of identity formation in IR. Hansen (2006) labels the process linking and differentiating, and involves linking descriptions to an other, and then differentiating these descriptions onto to the self, to shape the self's identity. For example, the identity of the concept of a 'woman' is positively linked to descriptions such as emotional, simple, reliant and others. Consequently, that is differentiated to the 'other' of the woman, man. Thus, a man is described as rational, complex, and independent (Hansen, 2006). Hansen (2006) illuminates how the process takes place in society through foreign policy discourse. Firstly, she clarifies that while the self is constructed through differentiation against an other, the construction does not have to overtly mention the difference between the two. So, if one group were to construct an other as 'bad', it would not need to explicitly mention that it is the opposite – 'good' – every time. Furthermore, it is unnecessary to refer to the description eventually, as the narrative will embed onto the receiver. With this logic, the descriptions of 'bad' do not have to be repeated every time when discussing the group. Eventually, the group will only need to be mentioned, and the description will be understood. Historically, this is illustrated in the European discourse around the Yugoslav Wars. Initially, the 'Balkan' identity was constructed in European media as violent and irrational, among others. Eventually, the detailing of the descriptions was unneeded, as the constructed identity became commonly understood (Hansen, 2006). This does not imply that the identity formation is 'complete', as the European construction of Balkan identity changed with the end of the war and the introduction of some Balkan states into the European Union and European 'identity'. This is known as discursive disappearance and is illustrated by the disappearance of the importance of one description for identity formation (Hansen, 2006). Thus, identity is changing with new developments that are integrated into the self's presuppositions (de Buitrago, 2012).

Because of the structure of direct and/or indirect comparisons between two groups, it is inevitable that an element of hierarchical power emerges in othering (de Buitrago, 2012). Most of the examples given in this section involved an other which was represented negatively, however it is not necessary for enmity, distrust, or moral inferiority to be the linking of the other. This is seen in examples where positive identification is possible, as mentioned. Further, it is possible for the other to be linked to admiration, because of political, social, or moral reason. Neutral othering, however, is the rarest form, (de Buitrago, 2012). The self, however, does not wish to construct itself as the weaker of the two, such as enslaved, while the other is free because

of the obvious dangers to the self's existence with such an identity (Neumann, 1999). So, what becomes of identities where a negative imbalance of power against the self exists?

The dangers of constructing the self as the weaker one between itself and the other or construct conditions that would allow a sense of inferiority to the self cannot be understated. *Ressentiment*, as Nietzsche calls it, emerges from suppressed feelings of hatred or jealousy. Ressentiment develops when the self perceives itself as fundamentally equal to the other but are in actuality unequal (Greenfield, 1990). Greenfield claims that resentment is a major factor in the creation of the Russian national identity, in relation to its perception as equal to Europe, but, in practice, not being treated as one. Regionally, this is clear in Qatar-GCC relations, which escalated to Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain completely fracturing diplomatic relations with Qatar. As is the case in IR, power is an essential central theme even in identity formation, because of the ability to maintain or impose the identity and create hierarchies which protect and promulgate its existing discourse (Lebow, 2008).

It is important to consider the unexpected effects of constant othering between groups. The constant linking of one group to another may lead to the other being seen as the self, but this is avoided through the differentiation, as the other is always just slightly different (Hansen, 2006). Even where positive identification exists, corporate identity strives for differentiation to maintain the self as individual (Wendt, 1994). The need to avoid merging the other and the self into one can also impede inter-state cooperation. For example, some GCC states and Iran have constructed their selves and the other as complete opposites in various ways. Religiously, for example, each claims to be the epicentres of a sect of Islam and its true protectors. The construction of both states as opposite ends of a spectrum hindered cooperation between the states. Economic cooperation is rare and if conducted behind closed doors, negligible. Interestingly, however, it is possible for the Self-Other constructions to give way to cooperation eventually. Saudi Arabia's collaboration with Israel seems to have recently increased considering the emergence of a third other, Iran, suggesting a breaking down of previous negative constructions to give way to newfound cooperation. This example suggests that a new actor must be introduced into the open system, for the identification to change. In this case, the shared animosity towards Iran allows Saudi Arabia and Israel to re-construct each other.

4.3. What Lies Beyond Othering and its Binaries?

Identity is not only formed through differentiating. Wendt (1994), and Hogg and Abrams (1988) assert that identity is also formed through the similarities between other members of the group. Identity theory was also expanded to include several collectives forming their identities simultaneously (Lebow, 2008). Identity formation and othering do not always create schisms, as this section may portray, but can also unify. This can happen when two collective identities may find positive identification amongst themselves, because of the development of a third other (Wendt, 1994). For instance, suppose that group A negatively identifies with group B, and then group C is introduced to the open system. Group C may become a unifying other for group A and B but does not undo the identifications between A and B, only alters them. This is especially common in the Bahraini collective identity that was observed during data collection, as the British other unified the collective identities within Bahrain to allow some of the most prominent modern political mobilizations. The emergence of a new other does not ‘undo’ the pre-existing othering with the initial outgroup. However, it will alter the construction of the first other.

A binary open system is an easier system (Lévinas, 1989). The reason for this is the simplicity of situating and navigating the self when there is one other, compared to several different others, which would demand several identifications that can all affect each other. Binary open systems are rare as contemporary open systems no longer host only two groups. There are several collective identities, all simultaneously constructing its identity and the identity of every other that exists in the system. The self then needs to situate itself as to which other is an ally and which isn't (Lévinas, 1989). The introduction of another other presents the complexity of identity and identity formation. Hansen (2006 p.33) highlights one aspect of the complexity by arguing that there is “series of related yet slightly different juxtapositions” that take place to constitute the self and the other.” This was alluded to with the example of how the identities of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ were constructed. The male self and the female other are not perpetually constructed with a singular difference that dictates the otherings, but several related, yet different identity markers. So, it is not imperative to construct an other that is radical to the self since the other can exist within “a web of identities, rather than a simple self-other duality.” (Hansen, 2006 p.36).

It would be possibly insufficient to construct an other from merely one difference. Several elements of differentiation are required for the othering to imprint onto society. This is simply because identities are dynamically plural and transcend several societal and natural structures that exist. An individual actor in a collective identity could be

“an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sanskritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a nonreligious lifestyle, with a Hindu background, a non-Brahmin, a nonbeliever in an afterlife.” (Sen, 2006 p.19)

Sen asserts that assuming an actor is limited to one identity, or that only one identity exists for the other is a dangerous practice that could lead to conflict. This is highlighted in Rwanda, where Rwandan identity was encapsulated to *either* a Hutu, or a Tutsi, as opposed to the multitude of identities within an actor, or the collective. This could be done intentionally, by groups looking to divide collective identities. Local dissent movements could be carved based on sectarian lines, by constructing parts of the movement as one religion, and so opposite to another, thus destroying it from within (Sen, 2006).

Another aspect important to consider is the spectrum that identification exists in (Wendt, 1994). Identities can exist that do not adhere to the extremes of the descriptions and constructions that are developed for identity. The existence of the new other can lead to the development of a spectrum of identification as the introduction of a new other will cause the self to “identify with or behave as an other so that there then becomes a spectrum of relatedness between self and other, between which lies the other-self.” (Shalk, 2010 p.4). The simple example provided by Shalk to illustrate this idea is if a black person walks into the room that has two people, one black and one white, the black self is more likely to feel closer to the black other than the white other, suggesting a spectrum. Of course, other details are crucial (Shalk, 2010). Furthermore, it is possible the very middle of the spectrum to be the basis of the construction of the self. Hansen (2006) described the Nordic identity as constructed to surpass the structures of the Cold War and work towards their own goals of neutrality. Regionally, Kuwait offers as an example of constructed collective identity that exists vaguely between the extremes. Kuwait has held a neutral disposition to many GCC issues, such as the war in Yemen. It has taken the lead in

reconciliation in the GCC-Qatar fracture and maintained military neutrality during the GCC's military mobilization in Bahrain in 2011. Kuwait situates itself as having a mediator identity, which protects itself from the decisive decisions made by its other GCC allies (Boghardt, 2017). Thus, it becomes clear that the self is constantly navigating itself through several others, all whose identities are constructed as well. The distinctions may not be extremes and could lay somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, depending on the constant developments of time.

The use of history to construct identity and narrative is crucial (Neumann, 1999; Lebow; 2008; Greenfeld, 1992), and necessary to study identity (Hansen, 2006). Linking past self/other links and differences to those of the present, society can draw parallels between present others, to those that historically mattered (de Buitrago, 2012). This facilitates linking and differentiating and allows for constructed identities to be easier absorbed and adopted by the actor. Links and differences could be asserted on the other based on historical events and groups, as the self is not limited to contemporary descriptions only. Greenfeld (1992) asserts that to understand the idea of a nation, one must look at the semantic transformations throughout history. History is crucial for the self to construct the identity of the other, and perceive its interests (Neumann, 1999; Wendt, 1994). For understanding collective identities, the history of perceived marginalization in its different ways is crucial for the study of the self/other (Shalk, 2010). State interactions, collective identities, and the transformation of interest over time are historically contingent (Campbell, 1992; Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1994). Identity formation is an ever-continuous process, and this means that identity at any one instance in time is the product of the decades or centuries of previous formations.

4.4. Arab, Shami, Khaleeji, and Baharna – A Look into Arab Identity and Arab Others

West Asia has been dominated by literature revolving around the role of foreign interventions, violent conflict, and as one of the final global hotspots for monarchies. While literature on Arab identity is slim in the field of IR, some literature does exist. One prominent critical junctures in the creation of collective Arab identity is the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to create modern Arab states. The creation of a modern Arab national identity required a Turkey/Ottoman other, with one of the key factors of differentiation between the two groups being language (Suleiman, 2003). Once Turkification became an encouraged policy, Arab

leaders began claiming the desire to form an Arab kingdom that unified the geographical area where the residents spoke predominantly Arabic (Suleiman, 2003). Turkification, then, was a factor which led to Arab political identity in modern times. This belief was what sparked the downfall of Turkish in the Arabic-speaking countries, as eventually, most states staged major revolutions against Ottoman control⁴.

The concept of sovereign states did not resonate with the apparently unified Arab identity, as Pan-Arabism (or Arabism) arose as one of the most prominent political ideology of the Arab world. Simply, Pan-Arabism perceived the existence of one single Arab nation that was inhibited by the existence of several ‘sovereign’ Arab emerging states. The states, and their rulers, whether monarchs or not, were obstacles to the creation of an Arab ‘super’ state that would span the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, bordering Turkey, and Iran (Ajami, 1978). In the Arab Gulf, the Nasserist brand of Pan-Arabism was brought by Egyptian expats who were welcomed into the countries through oil wealth. Crucially as well, Pan-Arabism was a reaction to the European other in the region that manifested through colonial structures. Established areas such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, and Qatar became sovereign states mostly through the Sykes/Picot agreement and the influence of the British and French, and the Balfour Declaration that promised Palestine to the Jews of Europe were seen as huge betrayals (Ajami, 1978). Thus, Arabs perceived the movements as a counter to colonial history and context. So, we can see the development of Arab identity through a Turkish other initially, then a European other. The Israeli victory in the wars with the Arab states and its military superiority, played a large role in breaking down this unified identity, as Pan-Arabism’s secular ideals were blamed for the defeat. However, internal developments played a role before that as well. Economic disparity within the region began to divide the ‘Arab experience’. Gulf Arab nationals saw unprecedented prosperity in the 60s and 70s, while other regions saw economic hardships, and others, such as Palestinians and Lebanese, political crises (Ajami, 1978). Furthermore, the facade of Arab unity and collective imagination was unveiled by the Gulf War, where Iraq invaded Kuwait (Labib, 2008).

But academic study of Arab identity continued to be influenced by Pan-Arabism. Despite cleavages within Arab nations and the eventual distancing of one from another, Arab identity

⁴ While Pan-Arabism was not the main spark to form the Arab Gulf states, Pan-Arabism played a large role in forming Gulf Arab political identity in the era of British dominance.

was viewed as mostly homogeneous. When looking at the so-called identity crisis of the Middle East, factors such as colonially created states and, and the negative influences of replacing national sentiments with religious (Kumaraswamy, 2006) are used. Unfortunately, these are blanket statements made on close to 20 countries, with a population of more than 200 million. Kumaraswamy's analysis of Arabs' identity crises hides a nuanced explanation. Despite acknowledging that "none of the countries of the Middle East is homogeneous" (Kumaraswamy, 2006 p.63), they are studied as a homogenous identity crisis nonetheless. While Jordan and Saudi Arabia's rulers claim legitimacy through religion, do the rulers of Kuwait, Libya, or Oman? Are colonial influences a factor for the Saudi 'identity crisis', considering it bears no colonial history with the British?

We can deduce that discussing Arab identity only plays a small role in identifying Bahraini identity. To get a clearer picture of some aspects of Bahraini identity, it may help to narrow down 'Arab' to 'Gulf Arab' identity. The Arab Gulf region presents itself as a niche within a niche, being even more poorly served than West Asia at large (Dresch, 2005). The Gulf (Arabic – Khaleej) refers to the Arab oil monarchies, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman (Dresch, 2005). These countries have historically been grouped together. The Secretariat General of the GCC describes the GCC union as an "institutional embodiment" of a reality. Cultural, religious, and geographical ties link the countries which have homogeneous values and characteristics, making the GCC a logical step. "Therefore, while, on one hand, the GCC is a continuation, evolution, and institutionalisation of old prevailing realities, it is, on the other, a practical answer to the challenges of security and economic development in the area. It is also a fulfilment of the aspirations of its citizens towards some sort of Arab regional unity" (GCC-SG, 2018). Though implied, similar ideas to Pan-Arabism exists within the GCC discourse. No explicit claim is made, but similar rhetoric of historical ties that transcend modern borders are.

Within the GCC, three broad 'sources of affiliation' exist in constructing Bahraini identity. They are detailed as Arabism, Gulf Arabism, and Islam (Jalal, 2007). Pan-Arabism plays a role in constructing Bahrain as an 'Arab' country, that understands itself as part of an Arab nation, as mentioned above. Gulf Arabism infers that Bahrain is khaleeji⁵ (Jalal, 2007

⁵ Khaleeji translates to "from the Gulf". It is a common term to denote Arabs from the Arab Gulf

p.79) country. This, then, situates Bahrain as unique amongst the Arab nations, as one of the handful that is *khaleeji* geographically and culturally. Interestingly, these two identities could contradict each other. Can a nation reconcile its *khaleeji* uniqueness while asserting its Arab unity with the other nations across the MENA region? Unfortunately, Jalal (2007) does not detail what entails a *khaleeji* identity to that we can compare to the existing literature on Pan-Arabism. While these three ideas infer Bahrain's basic identity in the Arab world, two more traits infer the island's unique identity even among the Gulf countries; that it is a nation of rich history that has existed for centuries and millennia and that it is a sea-faring nation since it is an island, constantly affected by neighboring areas (Jalal, 2007).

In Bahrain, a cultural focus on public image and private life was prevalent for Pandya (2012). Because of Bahrain's size, and tiny local population, public life is very personal, as knowledge of one's family ties and relations are widespread. Another reoccurring theme in Bahraini identity is that of a 'Bahrani' and a 'Bahraini', discussed by the few academics who study Bahrain as an independent open system from the rest of the Gulf. Normally, 'Bahrani' is a term given to the Shia citizens of Bahrain, while the more common term - 'Bahraini' is given to the Sunni citizens. This, however, is not the case, according to Louër (2008a). A Bahrani is not limited to the religious affiliation but is a term used by the group who consider themselves the original inhabitant of the island of Bahrain. They presided in Bahrain before the Sunni Arabs from the mainland immigrated centuries ago. Louër (2008a) specifies that description as the most prominent identity marker of the *Baharna*⁶, not the religious affiliation. There could be Bahrani communists, for example, who because of their communist ideology, reject the Shia identity. However, claims of nativity to the island and the coastal cities of Eastern Arabia are the core of their identity. This nativity extends to the Shia of the Eastern Provinces of Saudi Arabia, who were part of the Bahrani people, before being separated by modern borders (Louër, 2008a). Gengler (2011) shares an anecdote from when he conducted surveys in Bahrain that illuminates the prevalence of the *Bahrani* identity in Bahrain. His surveys from Bahrani villages often had the term "Bahraini" scratched out and replaced with the perceived 'correct' label, *Bahrani*.

Also integral to *Bahrani* identity is the idea of oppression (Louër, 2008a). "For the Baharna, it's different than for the others: they are the oppressed ones. Really. It's a matter of

⁶ Baharna, is the transliteration of the Arabic plural name for Bahrani

fact. But it has nothing to do with the fact that they are Shias. It's because they are Baharna.” (Louër, 2008a p.11). The Baharna perceive a deep sense of oppression by the government (Potter, 2013), which has been in power since the beginnings of Bahrain's existence as a modern state. As suggested, the oppression is not fueled by sectarian divisions, as other Shia groups in Bahrain, such as Persians, do not face the same experience as the Baharna. One way this 'oppression' manifests is creating the term 'Bahraini', which is a modern creation by the 'foreign' Sunni Bedouins, to erase Bahrain's rich Shia history (Gengler, 2011).

4.5. Structures, Invisible Dragons, and the “Hurly-Burly of Scientific Debate”

The previous sections discussed the nature of collective identity in philosophy and IR, and some of the more prominent ways that collective identities are formed, such as linking and differentiating. A noticeable pattern in the literature discussed today is the supremacy of language. Hansen (2006) claims that to poststructuralists, language is ontologically important, as it is through language that 'things' – states or living beings – are given meaning. This methodological focus is persistent in most IR literature on identity. Neumann, Greenfeld, Hansen, Campbell, Shapiro and the many other academics whose work influences this research project focused predominantly on language.

It may seem unintuitive to consider Critical Realism (CR) as useful for studying the self and the other. Indeed, it seems that Critical Realists themselves admit the lack of focus on the self/other dynamic in CR, and the various limitations that exist in studying it (Mahoney, 2011). However, CR allows different channels than the dominant methods for us to study the self/other dynamic, as it shares some similarities in the core tenets of identity study that Poststructuralists focus on. Time, or history, are crucial elements in both, as stipulated above. Social problems are historically contingent, just as identity formation is. Thus, it is possible to use CR to understand how time reproduces the social structures in which identity, the self, and the other are situated (Mahoney, 2011). Indeed, language is important to understand something as subjective and personal as identities, even collective ones. However, collective identities, even if subjective, could manifest structurally in a state through action and practice. Identity is a crucial part of society. Studying identity solely through agency ignores the many ways in which identity transpires structurally. Whether the constructed collective identities of the African Americans

before the civil rights movements is entirely subjective or not, it manifested in structures such as socially acceptable public spaces. Furthermore, the reassertion of this collective identity was done through pre-existing and emerging social structures, such as the economic structure, geography, and others. Of course, these structures do not produce consistent patterns in the social world (Sayer, 1992). However, they exist, and they deserve to be studied to understand identity formation and identity. Language is the crucial tool to begin studying these structures, their influence, and foundations, as it is to produce any knowledge (Sayer, 1992). But it is itself a structure. In Greenfeld's (1992) discussion on French national identity, she touches upon the perceived supremacy of Parisian French, which was seen as superior to the various other dialects in the geographical region of contemporary France. Greenfeld's focuses on language as a structure to understand how language played a role in creating French nationalism. For Bahrain, the geographical location of each village played a role in determining an individual's general rhetoric on the British, the capital market which was the hub of Bahraini economy, and even other Bahrainis, as data collection illuminates. In this case, the geography of Bahrain is an objective structure which played a role in creating inter-Bahraini identity. Geography is part of social practice, and it affects it intrinsically. However, by focusing solely on language, the importance of geography could be ignored for a focus on descriptions. Language helps us understand Bahraini's perception of it, but the role of geography in identity formation in Bahrain is mind-independent. Levinas claims that an ontological approach is a violent one when studying the self and the other (Neumann, 1999). CR's realist ontology, however, is not truly as rigid as the natural sciences, because of its acknowledgement of difference with social reality. Furthermore, CR permits fallible knowledge, which provides the liberty for the subjectivity of identity to exist within the analysis.

Jackson (2011) refers to an ontological dilemma of an unobservable dragon, made by Carl Sagan, which seems appropriate for the study of identity. The dilemma brings forth the issue of how to study an invisible dragon with no physical qualities, but which is nevertheless suspected to destroy nearby livestock (Jackson, 2011). This dilemma is similar in identity studies, because of the observable but intangible nature of identity. Identity, whether individual or collective, plays a role in intra-state and inter-state conflict, foreign policy, inter-state rhetoric, national identity, or limitations to democracy. So, CR allows us to consider collective identity as an invisible dragon to study. It affects the material world we can observe, through conflict, state-

building, secessions, institutional inequality, and others. But we cannot perceive it, we cannot conduct any experiments to test it or its existence. Thus, Critical Realism provides not only a channel to perceive identity in IR differently than previously considered by poststructuralists, but also a different channel to study it. Not only through language, but through structures and mechanisms as well. Ontological and ideational structures besides language cannot be ignored when studying identity, and their importance to collective identity varies but is prevalent.

5. The Others in Bahrain, and their Role in Identity Formation

5.1. *The One We Shouldn't Talk About: The Bahra(i)ni Other*

The Bahra(i)ni other was a prominent other that was considered taboo to discuss openly and posed the largest challenge in the data collection. Despite this, the Bahra(i)ni other could be understood through some aspects of the data to form a larger image of the othering and a possible root of conflict. First, it is important to identify what the Bahraini other could entail. Bahrain's society is usually divided on sectarian terms (Lorimer, 1908; Fuccaro, 2009; Lawson, 1989). Unfortunately, this masks the diversity of Bahraini society within the generalized groups that are made (Lawson, 1989). The numbers of the Shia and Sunnis within Bahrain is a topic of heated political debate, but recent random samples show that of a sample of 1,000, the percentage of Shia:Sunni is 62%:38% (Pollock, 2017). This information could be misleading, as a diversity of schools within each Muslim sect diversify Bahrain even further (Lawson, 1989). The religious groups could be categorised based on national background as well. Bahraini Sunnis could be categorized based on their central Arabian roots known as or mainland Arabs, their Persian roots, known as *Huwala*, or roots from other Arab lands, such as Kuwait. The Shia are categorised as the *Baharna*, who identify as the indigenous group of the islands and whose true roots are obscure and the Persian Shia, known as *Ajam* (Lawson, 1989; Khuri, 1980; Fuccaro, 2009)⁷.

Lawson (1989) describes three categories of economic class in Bahraini society that ignore religious/national affiliation. At the top sit the Al-Khalifa tribe, who have been unequivocally the strongest and most influential tribe in Bahrain. A group of established merchant families form what he called that form the “commercial oligarchy” (p. 5) who

⁷ I feel obligated to mention that despite the confusing use of Bahraini for one group and others, all these groups are generally considered Bahraini nationals

monopolized the pearling industry and the families and tribes allied to the elite form the first category of economy class. The second categorisation forms the administrative spine of the country and tend to its daily affairs. Top administrators may be derived from the elite families, as well as other groups. The third categorisation form consists of the agricultural and urban labourers. These consist of the *Baharna* agricultural villages, other *Baharna* villages that took part in craftsmanship, fishing, and other occupations, and finally, urban labourers living in Manama and Muharraq. Lawson's categorizations based on national origin and class, including religious sect, shows that Bahraini society has been overlooked for a simpler 'Sunni – Shia' divide. The economic class is important, because of the structural differentiation that took place based on them and dictated Bahrain's development. This was asserted in one of the participant who was of Sunni Arab ancestry through her definition of the word *Bahrani*. She specified that the *Baharna* are villager farmers, and not necessarily Shia. From this, we can extrapolate that some Bahrainis too may use economic class and occupational background as a source of classification of collective identities along with religion.

Generally, the primary data showed a focus in othering between the *Baharna* and the mainland Arabs among Bahrainis⁸. For the purpose of simplicity, this group will be labelled as Bahrainis. The data presented a consistent pattern of the participants acknowledging a formerly positive identification between these two groups in Bahrain. A recurring theme in the interviews was the pleasant reminiscing of how 'there was no differentiation' between *Baharna* and Bahrainis before. One participant would recall travelling to different areas in Bahrain to meet social obligation. "Before, there was no distinction. We were all friends" (Interview 4, 2018). This was prevalent in an overwhelming majority of interviews. One participant recounted how in a wedding he spotted an old man who looked familiar. After greeting him and asking him where he might know him from, the old man replied that he would travel daily from the island of Muharraq for coffee, then to the main island to eat lunch in Manama. From there, he would head to the nearby village of Nuaim for the after-lunch coffee, and then to the island of Sitra to visit friends. These were his daily social rituals, to see a mixture of *Baharna*, *Sunna*⁹, and *Ajam*. The old man must have frequented the participant's village (Interview 2, 2018). This story was told

⁸ Of course, othering took place with the other groups, such as the *Ajam*, but this will be addressed in later sections.

⁹ *Sunna* is the plural of *Sunni*

when asked about relations within Bahrain in his youth. Several other participants affirmed and recounted the apparent ‘unity’ and ‘friendliness’ within Bahrain. Whether it was through example of their parents visiting and holding close friends who were *Baharna* or *Ajam*, or *Baharna* describing games they would play with the Bahrainis in their youth, or Bahrainis who employed *Baharna* in their farms, Bahrain was painted as an island where the various collective identities identified very positively with each other (Interview 1, 2018; Interview 4, 2018; Interview 3, 2018; Interview 8 & 9, 2018). This positive identification did not limit itself to business and social ties, but religious rituals as well. Both *Baharna* and Bahrainis recounted how the Sunni Bahrainis took part in the Shia’s Muharram mourning rituals. Across several villages and cities, participants who commemorated Muharram in Manama and secluded villages attested to the inclusion of *Sunna*, while Sunni participants recalled taking part and watching the Shia’s rituals. Some participants even recalled how the *Sunna* would take part in the rituals, and chant with the Shia. The Bahrainis and *Baharna* did not only enjoy positive identification on a local level, then, but they possibly enjoyed a self/other dynamic where they saw each other as extensions of themselves.

Initially, it was considered that such a persistent historical narrative of positive identification was a constructed myth to preserve Bahraini history as ‘morally righteous’. According to the participants, this identification existed just 50 years ago. Undoubtedly, clashes existed, and even widespread discrimination was present, but perhaps the participants’ exaggerations were not too extreme. Furthermore, this identification and positive co-existence seemed to be confirmed by the project’s one non-Bahraini participant. Positive identification and lack of othering certainly existed, according to the participant of Pakistani origin who replied “whether they were Sunni or Shia, I didn’t know, because people didn’t talk about it” when asked about the background of his childhood friends. This identification transcended economic and geographical structures as well, as people travelled long distances to meet social obligations (Interview 11, 2018). However, it is still important to address the possible romanticisations of Bahra(i)ni relations, which possibly include considerable personal revisions. Here, it is important to consider the role of ‘absolute truths’, inferred from an ontologically realist mindset and a relativist epistemology (Patomäki, 2002), in creating identity. Holes (2005) discussed the sectarian and ethnic segregation of Bahraini villages, describing Bahrainis as living a voluntary system of apartheid, while the various other academics discuss the tensions and conflicts that had

taken place historically. These suggest an absolute truth that differs from the participant's relativist knowledge of their history. Furthermore, some interviews hinted at deep divisions between the two groups, with one participant briefly mentioning an expression he heard in his youth: "[Better to] be advised by a Jew than by a *Bahrani*" (Interview 6, 2018). And while it is likely that the participants needed to 'clean up' Bahrain's history to a younger Bahraini interviewer, the revisionist view on Bahrain's history is still crucial to group identity formation, as it informs the role of agency in identity formation, and the use of the imagined reality of Bahrain in constructing external others. One may need to 'rewrite' ethnic divisions to construct others who played a role in breaking apart and divide Bahrain. Despite this, following sections attempt to understand causes for Bahra(i)ni othering as well.

Of course, the participants' recollection of fine relations and identifications being positive in Bahrain should provide a clue that they saw things differently now. None of the participants maintained a claim that relations are still positive between the Bahrainis and *Baharna*. All participants expressed a shift in identification, with both groups mostly identifying negatively with each other. One participant discussed how some people around him would express their inability to trust members of the other group (Interview 4, 2018). This change serves as one of the keys to understanding Bahrain's persistent identity conflict in contemporary times. Unfortunately, this change was difficult to discuss, as all participants failed to give clear responses to explain it. Some offered possible causes, such as British colonial influence. Others posited that technology and increased communication led to tensions (Interview 11, 2018), or the introduction of religious political figures who accentuated previously-unimportant sectarian differences (Interview 7, 2018; Interview 6, 2018). Even when pressed, they hesitated and preferred to not discuss it. If the topic was reintroduced in private, it was common for participants to reference events that happened that "I do not want to mention" (Interview 11, 2018).

Some constructions of Bahra(i)ni self and other did arise, however. *Bahrani* nativity was a feature often brought up by the *Baharna* participants, along with the justification that *Bahrani* was the grammatically correct pronunciation of the word pertaining to "two seas". This was often given as an answer as to why the word exists, instead of every citizen being known just as *Bahrani* (Interview 1, 2018; Interview 2, 2018; Interview 7, 2018). Gengler (2011) discussed the

labelling of the self as *Bahrani* to assert claims of nativity, but also as pushback to attempts to erase Shia history after the entry of the Sunni tribes. The sectarian aspect may have led it to become ‘unfitting’ as a subject of conversation, leading to a linguistic explanation of the word. One participant, however, did add that the word “Bahraini” was created by the British to divide Bahrain (Interview, 2). The distinction in labels was present among the British as well. Lorimer’s (1908) census of Bahrain presented a differentiation of “*Baharna*” for Shia, and “Arabs” for Sunnis, suggesting that these labels were established. Belgrave (1960) called the *Baharna* by their name and Sunni Bahrainis as Arabs in his diary. However, whether this differentiation stemmed from the British’s need to categorize Bahrainis is unclear.

The participants’ hesitation to discuss the Bahraini identities despite acknowledging their existence may relate to the public/private life dynamic of Bahraini (and Gulf Arab) identity discussed earlier. Despite being ‘verified’ by the participants that the interviewer was someone ‘they could trust’ by an acquaintance, discussing sectarian issues within Bahrain was still predominantly viewed as part of the private life, and so inappropriate to discuss, per Pandya (2012). The ethnic aspect suggested by the British use of the terms seems inconsistent with the participant's perception of the two groups. None of the participants suggested that the *Baharna* were not Arab, with Bahraini participants themselves mentioning their ‘Arabism’. Unfortunately, the taboo aspects of the Bahra(i)ni other present the largest gap in the data and possibly the largest piece of the Bahraini puzzle that is yet to be fully explored and understood. Further, it seems that recent political developments have a further complicated discussion of the *Bahrani*-Bahraini dynamic because of the security fears related to discussing it, exemplified by the interview requests that were rejected.

Initially, it was expected that the economic structures of Bahrain and their development would be a source of differentiation between the two collective identities. National ancestry and geography decided both religious sect and occupation. *Baharna* were more likely to specialise in agriculture (Khuri, 1980; Lawson, 1989). Pearl cultivation, which was very widespread in Bahrain, was a full-time, all-year job, as the palm trees required constant attention and care (Khuri, 1980). As it was introduced by the Al-Khalifa in the 1780s, the fiefdom-like governance system shifted the agriculture areas of Bahrain. The system resulted in the division of the land throughout Bahrain and bestowing it to members of the tribe and allies. These lands were

controlled as a quasi-sovereign entity, with the ‘ruling’ sheikh being the receiver of the land. He issued taxes and resolved issues, among other things. Thus, the agricultural *Baharna* saw a drastic change in their daily affairs, where land that they tended to and considered theirs became owned and handled by a newly entered group. The Al-Khalifa meticulously controlled these palm tree cultivations, through experts and agents who tended to the fields daily (Khuri, 1980). Irrigation and access to water were heavily controlled and altered with the entry of the tribal system into palm cultivation (Fuccaro, 2009; Khuri, 1980). On the other hand, the Sunni merchants saw little to no change in general economic structure, as pearl diving was mostly uninterrupted by the entry of the Al-Khalifa tribe. Aside from a potential maritime tax, which was common in the region (Onley, 2004; Sweet, 1964), pearl diving was not controlled as closely as the agricultural economy. A reason for this could be the mobility and soft power of the pearl merchants, who could simply migrate to other regional hubs such as Kuwait. The only prominent structural change that took place was that the ruler organized regular meetings with the pearl merchants, which were mandatory to attend (Khuri, 1980). Thus, the Bahrainis and Baharna experience vastly different changes in their economic structure, which dictated their daily lives.

However, Khuri argues that this disparity in treatment towards the *Baharna* and Bahrainis did not stem from discrimination between *Sunna* and Shia, but because of profit maximization. Palm cultivation’s year-long system, along with the fiefdom tribal system meant that higher profits would be gained from higher control and higher taxes when necessary. Furthermore, all the palm experts employed by the Al-Khalifa tribesmen were Shia, as they were the most knowledgeable of the crop (Khuri, 1980). *Bahrani* villages that took part in artisanship saw less involvement with the Al-Khalifa (Lawson, 1989), despite being carved based on tribal traditions (Fuccaro, 2009; Khuri, 1980). On the other hand, pearl cultivation’s profits emerged from Sunni and Indian merchants’ contacts and channels. The Al-Khalifa’s meddling would potentially disrupt profits, not bolster them. Khuri (1980) posits a reasoning for the division of labour based on groups – tribal systems. The existing tribal systems which predate state structures provided the foundational ability to organize and control resources. Non-tribal *Baharna* and urban Sunnis dominated the other occupations.

Regardless of how and why the divisions took place, it seems clear that one group experienced larger economic changes than the other, through tighter control and taxation. The difference in treatment that the *Baharna* encountered could have fostered *ressentiment* between the *Baharna* and the Bahrainis, as the *Baharna* perceived being treated as unequal, despite their understanding of reality. The data did not show any similar forms of *ressentiment* in older generations, suggesting that the disparity in treatment left no notable impact on society. It is possible to explain the reason for the lack of othering based on the economic changes that took place with the introduction of the Al-Khalifa as a third other by the complete change in economic structures brought by oil production. Earlier tribal structures which focused on agriculture and pearling ceased to exist as most Bahrainis moved to the oil industry to work in various low-mid level jobs there. As most of the participants lived during the prime of oil production, and oil wealth, their relation to the previous economic structure was limited. So, the discovery of oil and the move to a new economic structure could pose as an example of how identification shifted because of a complete change of structures.

The Bahra(i)ni other is difficult to study and discuss because of a strong sense of taboo attached to it, caused by a multitude of cultural and political reasons. From the sparse and indirect discussions about the Bahra(i)ni other, it seems clear that no substantial geographic or economic structure seemed to dictate identity formation and othering. Despite what has been labelled as intentional self-apartheid (Holes, 2005), Bahrainis' formation was not formed by geography, as all Bahrainis took part in long commutes to meet other groups despite living in segregated villages. Similarly, it seemed that regardless of all occupations that the participants took part in, they all interacted with various groups of Bahrainis, because of the nature of specialisation that each village took part in, where some were agricultural, some took part in craftsmanship or others. Various participants recounted meeting Bahrainis of other villages, sects, and groups because of the specialisation of each area (Interview 2, 2018; Interview 10, 2018; Interview 8 & 9, 2018; Interview 4, 2018; Interview 11, 2018). Participants who live closer to the less segregated Manama, or travelled there constantly, did not show a tendency for different identification with their other, suggesting that geography did not play a role in identity formation. Despite these deductions, the Bahra(i)ni other remains elusive in the study.

5.2. *The One That Strained Our Unity: The British Other*

Being the most significant island in the region, Bahrain saw its fair share of global political powers vying for its control. Until its independence in 1971, no foreign power had left a mark on Bahrain as much as the British. It seems that the British played a monumental role in identity formation and othering during the period leading up to independence, and an inadvertent role in deciding various spectrums of identifications towards them, individuals within Bahrain, and neighbouring countries as well. Bahrain's initial formal contact with the British Empire came in 1816 when the British Resident of Bushire visited the Al-Khalifa clan to draft a 'treaty of friendship' which never came into force (Al-Baharna, 1968). Four years after that, an official treaty was signed with various Gulf states, including Bahrain (Onley, 2004). This relationship continues to this day. Recently, plans to open a naval base, the first since 1971, assert the continued close ties the Bahraini and British government share (Al Jazeera, 2014). The British offer a crucial other to understand in Bahrain's open system. The British other in Bahrain is a prime example of how a third other can change identification between the self and the initial other, how identification changes over time (and generations), and how othering could play in national identity. Structurally, the British other plays a role in how foreign powers and colonial interaction form Bahraini identity.

It is important to note here, that the use of the term 'the British other' includes solely the British Imperial government. It's presence in Bahrain historically involved mostly agents with some relation to the government. The British that the participants interacted with historically, rarely fell into this category. In 1908, Bahrain had two British citizens living in it, one of which was the Political Agent¹⁰ (Lorimer, 1908). Generally, village-dwelling Bahrainis would not interact or see many British, as one participant described hearing a lot about their oppressive actions, but rarely seeing them passing by his village (Memoir 1, 2014). The mid-1900s saw an increase in British residents who were related to the oil industry or direct political agents of the British government (Belgrave, 1966). This is an important distinction, as for the sake of the interviews, the use of the British relates only to a political discourse.

Participants in data collection revealed a significant and persistent interest in the British other, with a history of 'British hatred' emerging in practically all interviews and even

¹⁰ The other Europeans were two German merchants.

dominating ones. Unsurprisingly, factors such as geographical location, religious sect, or economic status did not play a significant role in inferring identification to the British other. Almost all interviews involved negative identification towards the British. Out of the 12 interviews conducted, nine of them involved discussions of the British, of which eight had very little positive things to say. Most common of the discussions was the role of the British Empire as an obstacle to self-governance and ‘freedom’. One participant began his interview, after the traditional pleasantries of greetings and small talk with the declaration “the most malignant of politicians is the Brit. You do not know if he is your friend or not” (Interview 2, 2018). This blunt introduction set the tone of most discussions on the British. The British were perceived as deceptive and underhanded in their political dealings. For example, the British would allegedly instruct their Bahraini “mercenaries” to sign petitions so that they could enact their own political will under the guise of it being popular demand (Memoir 2, 2006 p.49). This, of course, was juxtaposed by the honourable and straightforward way local movements organized themselves and dealt with the British. Protests were always peaceful if Bahrainis organized them, while the British police manoeuvred to stop these protests with violence and other illegal means (Memoir 2, 2006; Al-Shehabi, 1996).

The description of the British as violent was an explicit description that was persistent throughout the participants who were politically active in the 1940s-50s. The only female participant that was interviewed discussed her experience organizing anti-British protests in her secondary school, and the violent reaction from the police, who would retaliate with tear gas on children. She depicted a more accurate representation of Bahraini youth during this time compared to other participants who painted a perpetually peaceful Bahraini self to juxtapose the violent British other. “We used to chant ‘shut up you bloody fucking..’ and something I don’t remember... We would spit at them when they [British police] passed by us.” The participant seemed regretful of such actions, but still excused them. “We were children, we didn’t know how disrespectful it was.” On the other hand, the British were unjustified for any action taking in Bahrain. They were still “sons of dogs” for their violent actions (Interview 4, 2018). The construction of the British other as violent did not extend to the Bahrainis in the law enforcement, however. According to one participant, the Bahraini policeman expressed their displeasure with the violence to activists in private. One story recalls how a Bahraini police officer refused the direct orders from a British policeman to open fire on peaceful protestors,

only to receive a severe reprimand, barring him from a government job, and forcing him to emigrate elsewhere in the Gulf (Memoir 2, 2006). Similarly, other depictions of police brutality emphasized the barbarism of ‘foreign mercenaries’ employed in the police force, but ignored local policemen¹¹ (Memoir 1, 2014). This narrative emphasizes the ‘violent’ Brit who encourages the murder of Bahrainis, and the ‘peaceful’ Bahraini who sacrifices the quality of his life to combat the violence.

This all took place under the understanding that the British were colonisers, displayed through their actions in the Arabic world as well. The 1950s saw a turbulent time for Egypt, with the Suez Crisis considered an attack on all Arabs by some participants. This deeply affected the Bahraini population, according to a participant, as he heard stories of Egyptian heroism combatting the “barbaric death” brought about by the trinity of Israel, France, and Britain (Memoir 1, 2014 p.21). This “coated [my heart] also with extreme hatred and resentment towards the Zionists and the colonisers, Britain and France” (Memoir 1, 2014 p.21). The violent Brit very well existed as a foil to the achievement of Arab and Bahraini goals and interest. The violence of the British other transcended that of physical. The British were ‘dividers’, who worked hard to create cleavages among the ‘united’ Bahraini population. “Divide and conquer” was a reoccurring aspect of British political strategy that was discussed as if it was common knowledge during the interviews (Interview 1, 2018; Interview 2, 2018; Interview 6, 2018; Interview 4, 2018). The British were described as the source of societal issues in Bahrain, directly or indirectly; intentionally or inadvertently. Bahrain was constructed as a unified population, until the British began playing their ‘colonial games’ between the Sunnis and the Shia. The British were constructed as a liar who would create rumours to divide Bahrain based on religious sect. For example, one participant described British officials telling the Sunnis and the Shia that the other sect would kill them if they went out to commemorate the month of Muharram (Interview 2, 2018; Memoir 2, 2006; Al-Shehabi, 1996).

The colonial structures which plagued Bahrain, by virtue of Britain’s existence and dominance in the Bahraini political arena, formed a large part of the self’s image of Britain and Bahrain, so it is worth discussing at length. Bahrain’s position within the legal framework of the

¹¹ Of course, it is possible that no Bahraini policemen took part in violence against fellow nationals, but this is extremely unlikely.

British Empire was a bit strange. Britain's involvement started in the 1850s, with the treaty focused on maritime peace (Al-Baharna, 1968). This was to secure trade routes for British ships, which had suffered consistent attacks from so-called Arab pirates (Onley, 2004; Al-Qasimi, 1986). Eventually, the treaties made with the Al-Khalifa allowed the British larger control over Bahrain's foreign affairs, leaving the internal affairs autonomous to the tribal rulers (Al-Baharna, 1968). This was common for the Empire. Besides 'colonies', areas controlled by the British could fall under the status of 'protected states'. Protected states ceded decisions with external factors to the British, and affirmed internal affairs to the natives, as in Bahrain. In practice, the British government, directly and indirectly, gained more power on internal affairs over time, affirming the colonial status of Bahrain to Bahrainis. For example, in 1923, the British forced the ruler at that time to abdicate and allow his son to rule and forced merchants and other notable families to migrate to other countries in exile (Khalaf, 1998). Initially, British relations with the Gulf was handled by the Political Residency in Bushire, Iran. In 1904, the assistant was changed to a British political agent, which began his involvement with the local authority. By the 1940s, the entire Political Residency was transferred to Bahrain (Khuri, 1980; Onley, 2009). These structural changes to Bahraini-British relations completely altered the island.

After the First World War, the British government revised its policy in Bahrain to take part in more direct control to achieve reforms. Two major aspects of the reform will be discussed, and their role in structurally shaping the channels of identification in the open system. Firstly, the British bureaucratic reforms included the reorganization of economic resources and public services. The reorganization of economic resources weakened the power of pearl merchants and restructured the previously 'feudal' distribution of land that had taken place. Traditionally, all land in Bahrain was seen as private property of the government (Khuri, 1980). The bureaucratic reforms in Bahrain also involved the creation of official specialized offices that formed the foundations of a modern state. These offices became dominated by the Al-Khalifa clan and allies, cementing them as not only the rulers of the country, but also as those 'running' the country (Khuri, 1980). While these reforms were hugely contested in Bahrain, they successfully took place, with one of the major dissenting clans, the Al-Dawasir, severely weakened in the process (Khuri, 1980; Al-Tajir, 1987). This established the ruling family in the government further and created the perception that the British's activities resulted in a more powerful ruling clan in the country. Simultaneously, the British's aggressive push for the reforms

weakened the power of the local government internally, as the political agent's power grew drastically (Geoffrey, 1941; Al-Tajir, 1987). To the government, however, the British ultimately became representative of channels for further legitimizing their rule in a global setting. As mentioned, the Bahraini government repeatedly requested protection from the British numerous times before British interest in the Gulf increased. The British were positively identified with by most of the government officials who were in the upper echelons of governance. They were considered powerful channels for achieving interests – a globally recognized state with the current government continuing in power. It is important to note that the reforms of the 1920s encouraged by the British were supported heavily by the general population (Khuri, 1980; Al-Tajir, 1987). However, the reforms serve as an example of the colonial structures that came to construct the colonial British other.

The government's positive identification with the British is seen before the events of the 1920s reforms as well. The General Treaty of 1820 was signed by the Trucial states and Bahrain after the Bahraini power requested to sign the treaty as well to avoid maritime tolls (Al-Qasimi, 1986; Onley, 2009). Perceptions regarding the treaty are mixed in relation to how the Emirati states signed, with Al-Qasimi claiming it to be a forced imposition by the British, while Onley (2009) claiming it to be a welcomed treaty by the Arab. It is possible that the Bahraini tribes saw signing a treaty with the British as a step towards legitimacy as leaders, and protection from the invasions of Wahabi Saudi Arabia and Bu Saidi Oman, who invaded Bahrain while under Al-Khalifa rule (Lorimer, 1915). British involvement with Bahrain was seen, by the powers that would eventually form the modern government, as beneficial for their existence. The British, then, were a tool for the government to secure perpetual survival, and identification with the British was positive because of this. The Bahraini government and the British enjoyed mostly splendid relations. The government official interviewed believed the economic benefits of British presence was significant and existed not only in Manama, but even in villages (Interview 10, 2018). For the rest of Bahraini society, however, the opposite is true. The British were constantly seen as uncooperative and failing to support the population's democratic demands. Interviewed by the BBC, one of the most prominent anti-British activists in the 1950s, Abdulaziz Al-Shamlan, stated that the British government should remain only if it will help and support the Bahraini people, instead of only supporting the rulers, when asked if he would like British influence to continue in Bahrain (BBC, 2012). The British influence over Bahraini politics

created the colonial structures that Bahrainis used to construct the British other. This is perfectly exemplified by one of the participants comment on the topic of British colonialism. He claimed that Bahrain wasn't a colony, but a protectorate. But all the decisions were made by the British. "Then what is this? Colonialism!" (Interview 2, 2018).

The second addition that created a structure of colonialism in a protected state was the appointment of Charles Belgrave as Adviser to the ruler of Bahrain in 1926. Belgrave rose quickly in political power, becoming the major magistrate, chief administrator in the country, and "in many respects a de facto ruler" (Belgrave, 1960 p.292)¹². Belgrave, apparently, knew nothing of West Asia before coming to Bahrain (Belgrave, 1966). The Sheikh he was employed to advise had recently ascended to the throne after his father was forced to abdicate by the British (Belgrave, 1960). Generally, 'adviser' to a ruler of a protected state is a position seldom employed by the British government to its foreign interests. However, Belgrave's unique position is steeped in ambiguity. He was disposed to work independently of the British government, but his initial job was paid by the British government (Belgrave, 1966). Unsurprisingly, he cooperated heavily with the political agent in Bahrain, maintaining constant communication with him in order to ensure that Britain's interests in Bahrain are met (Curtis, 2012; Belgrave, 1966). For example, in his quasi-autobiography of his time in Bahrain, Belgrave concluded the book discussing in depth what he believed the British should do in the Gulf. His discussions of local Bahraini channels of development were slim, however (Belgrave, 1966). Before his retirement, Belgrave was employed directly by the Sheikh as the head of his government (BBC, 2012), further exemplifying the interconnectedness of British power and Bahraini politics, and the government seeing the British as a means of meeting their interests of global legitimacy. Eventually, even British officials of the India Government displayed their concern regarding Belgrave and the ruler's positive relationship, while their popularity with the population declined sharply (Geoffrey, 1941). This seems to continue to this day, despite Belgrave's exit from Bahrain. When discussing foreigners in Bahrain, the government official that was interviewed beamed at recounting the first European he met, Charles Belgrave. He recounts being in awe, unable to compose himself, describing Belgrave's appearance as angelic (Interview 10, 2018). Belgrave undeniably represented and embodied the British presence in

¹² Belgrave does not give this description himself, but by the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, which wrote the Forward to the acquired edition of Belgrave's Diaries.

Bahrain for the government. His retirement came about for medical reasons, suggesting that the Bahraini government never seriously considered parting ways with him (Belgrave, 1966). However, he also represented Bahraini's construction of Britain's colonial identity. When discussing how the British were synonymous with 'dividing' a country, one participant recounted a story of how Belgrave would resolve issues. He would meet some Bahrainis from different villages, listen to their grievances, and then provide each individual with whatever would solve their personal issues. If someone needed a house, or money for their son to get married, Belgrave would provide it. These representatives would then return to their villages to calm the residents, claiming that change is coming. Since it rarely would come, the villagers would resent the representative, and turn on each other (Interview 2, 2018). This story perfectly personifies the constructed British identity – deceptive, destructive, and manipulative. Compared with the government official's narrative, we begin to see the clash in identification towards the British other, and the various elements within it.

The British government's increasingly hands-on approach with Bahrain's internal affairs provides the foundations of the identification problem that plagues Bahrain. Vastly differing historical interests between the government and citizens led to different identifications towards the British. The different identification led to each collective within Bahrain to identify negatively with each other. The government is constructed as having taken advantage of their position with the British at the expense of the society, as their primary interest dealt with cementing themselves in power. Indeed, the government's issues were considered as having a British root. One interview recounted how the government's unequal budget allocations were caused by the lessons learned from Belgrave and the British, who created the first budget in Bahrain's history (Interview 2, 2018).

The British Other provides an interesting case of how new others can affect ties between different groups in diverse ways. Firstly, the growth in prominence of the British other, personified through Belgrave, became the unifying factor between the *Bahrani* and Sunni tribal groups within Bahrain. The National Union Committee (NUC), formed in 1954, was a trans-sectarian group that included Shia religious leaders, Sunni and Shia merchants (BBC, 2012). It was the first non-sectarian political group in Bahrain and considered the first public group in the Gulf (Al-Mdaires, 2002). The eight members were split equally between the two Muslim sects,

and their organization was mostly in reaction to British actions. The Suez Crisis led to a major demonstration in 1956, the domination of Belgrave as a judge in Bahraini courts led to demands to curb his power entirely by removing him from any position (Memoir 2, 2006; BBC, 2012; Al-Mdaires, 2002). The NUC and its activities represent changing identification of the collective identities within Bahrain, in relation to the rise of the third other, the British Other.

It is important to acknowledge that the introduction of the British in the Bahraini open system was not the critical juncture for the construction of the British other. It was predominantly the increased actions in Bahrain and the Arab world that led to its importance. Being a cosmopolitan island, and a history of foreign interference spanning more than 500 years, the British other's mere existence should not have led to the negative identification that the participants presented. The positive identification towards the British as means to achieve their interests by the government and the negative identification by collectives within Bahrain towards the British as obstacles to achieving their success created conflict between the government and large segments of the Bahraini society. The British other, then, offers an example of the disturbance ontological insecurity causes, where the actions of Bahrain as a political entity through the government, clashed with the rhetoric of the Bahraini people. Bahraini society pushed for democratic reforms, renewed governance and justice systems, and better protection for workers. Simultaneously, the British were perceived as hindering Bahraini society in achieving their interests. Further, the Bahraini government saw the continuation of British influence in the internal affairs as positive for their interests. The British, through their mere existence in Bahrain, simultaneously unified Bahrain and divided them.

The British other shows how some structural causes of identity formation and othering do not play a role. Unlike some others, construction of the other was not entirely dependent on geography. Participants from the centres of Manama and Muharraq, as well as those from the village, identified negatively with the British. Some, as discussed above, were charged with politics. Participants further from the hubs where the British officials would frequent held more fantastical constructions of the British other. The most secluded villagers of the participants displayed less politically negative identification, but demonization instead, with the claim that the British maintained their white skins by drinking blood (Interview 8 & 9, 2018). Others described the village considering Western clothing as scary (Interview 1, 2018). It is important to

consider that some constructions of the British were positive by the participants and posit the possible structural reasons for this. For example, the government official's positive identification with the British may transcend 'government rhetoric' and fall under the economic benefits that the British brought to his village, which was located close to the oil refineries (Interview 10, 2018). Besides the government official, one participant was neutral when discussions of the British other emerged. In relation to Bahraini divide, he claimed that it is generally said that the British 'divided Bahrain', but did not show any signs of subscribing to the rhetoric.

The implications and longevity of the colonial, devious British other must be questioned as well. The reason for this is because colonial Britain no longer exists in Bahrain, in a similar form to before 1971. Possibly, the construction of the British other may have shifted to an American political other, as The United States' involvement in West Asia increased as British involvement decreased (Freiberger, 2007). The participants did not discuss a political American other during the interviews. However, some political poems from the Shia rituals of Muharram illuminate a focus on the US' role in destruction and corruption, with former President George W. Bush the primary target of criticism. In parallel with a visit to Bahrain, the poem describes how Bush is visiting a country where he is not welcome, and that America is the source of destruction and the death of Bahrain (Al-Derazi, 2012). From this, we can posit the possible existence of an American other that may exist for younger generations, and that the constructions may be similar in vein to the constructions of the British other. However, the American other is a venue that must be further researched to gain a clearer image. Despite the possible change in the prominence of the British other for the collective identities within Bahrain, the dynamic between the British and the government has stayed much the same. The two royal families share positive relations to this day, meeting a recent milestone labelled as "200 years of friendship" in 2016 in relation to their political interactions (Bahrain Watch, 2016). The recent deal for a permanent British naval base further exemplifies the continued positive identification and sharing of interests between the two governments.

The British other touches upon various aspects of identity formation, othering, and the role of structures in them. First, data collection and Bahraini sources displayed the construction of the British other as manipulative, destructive to Bahraini unity, violent, and the implicit (and explicit) differentiation to the Bahrainis, who were peaceful, honest, and loyal to their country.

Further, the opposing identification of the government and the Bahraini population to the British other plays a role in forming the foundations of identity conflict in Bahrain. Furthermore, the perceived colonial structure that Bahrain was seen as existing in infers much of the constructions of the British other that the Bahraini self took part in. Geographic reasons seemed to play a small part in inferring othering and identification. However, some nuances emerged, where participants from villages that were economically enriched by the British showed less negative identification, and more isolated villages exhibited folklore-like demonization of the British. Understanding how geographic structures play a role in deciding events that can infer othering and identity formation, even on smaller, more nuanced level, asserts the importance of considering minute differences in structures for identity formation. Economic class seemed to play a similarly polarizing role, as merchants both supported the British, Belgrave, and the government's actions, and took part in opposition movements against the British other's actions within Bahrain.

5.3. The One We No Longer Like: The Hindi Other(s)

Like several other cases, migration in Bahrain is driven by economic factors (Dito, 2007). Being situated where it is geographically, Bahrain saw migration from several areas regionally, and eventually internationally. Iranians and migrants of Iranian heritage constituted the largest groups of migrants who were Muslim and ethnically not Arab (Louër, 2008b). Indian (and Iranian) migration boomed in the early and mid-20th century, as the Bahrain Petroleum Company sought a workforce for the oil that was discovered in the island. While initially employing Iranians, the government and British officials pressured the company to focus instead on Indian migrants (Louër, 2008b). Indian workers were trained, educated, and connected to the British, unlike the Bahraini population at that time (Louër, 2008b; Gardner, 2010). The Indian migrants came in as accountants, security guards, workers, and many other professions (Gardner, 2010). Since then, Bahrain has seen an increased trend of migration to match the total population of the nationals. Estimates vary regarding the percentage of non-Bahraini percentages in Bahrain, from UN estimates of 48% of the total population (CIA, 2018), to 52% in 2015 (GLMM, 2015). In a country of approximately 1.4 million, that amounts to a sizeable 672,000. Surely, the existence of such a large immigrant community in Bahrain plays a large role in how Bahrainis construct their identity in relation to them.

The ‘immigrant other’, can a become prominent other, because of its constant existence within the Bahraini borders. However, it is crucial to understand a constructed ‘immigrant other’ in a way that is specific only to the geographical and historical context of Bahrain. Bahrain’s ‘immigrant other’ could represent a wide variety of groups within the population. Indians, Pakistanis, Ethiopians Sri Lankans, Filipinos, Egyptians, Syrians, British, Americans, French and Lebanese can all fall under this blanket term. However, it is Indians that have been the largest expatriate community in Bahrain (Embassy of India, 2014). Hindus consisted the largest non-Muslim community in the turn of the century, however large communities of Muslim Indians resided in the islands as well (Lorimer, 1908; Briscoe, 1930). Furthermore, the connection was not one-sided. Bahrainis depended on Indian products for survival, with traders maintaining close relations with India. The close ties to the Indian subcontinent were seen from the participants as well. One participant and older family members of other participants spoke Hindi to varying degrees of fluency. Initial expectations from the data did not include the *Hindi*¹³ other as such a prominent other in Bahrain. However, considering that the participants experienced Bahrain during the oil boom, the prominence of the *Hindi* other to them seems obvious. Thus, while it is possible to study the immigrant other as an other that plays a role in identity formation and identity conflict, it is useful to study the Indian or *Hindi* other. Focusing on the *Hindi* other also illuminated how economic and geographic structures plays a role in othering, along with how they change over time.

The data presented a nuanced picture of the *Hindi* other – one that was not expected. Whenever the topic of foreigners would come up, the interviews showed a recurring theme of discussing British people, and then only nonchalantly mentioning that there were *hnood*¹⁴. It was mentioned as an obvious statement that they knew the interviewer would also know, by virtue of being Bahraini. When asked to describe her memories of Manama as a child, one participant responded by mentioning how the markets had plenty of Bahraini farmers, some other Bahraini groups but few British. “The *hnood* were a lot, of course” (Interview 4, 2018), she finished, matter-of-factly, after a brief pause. It seemed that for her, the existence of the *hnood* was a constant. It could be understood that the *Hindi* was considered so insignificant that they ‘were forgotten’. However, this is unlikely because they are the largest group of non-Bahrainis. As a

¹³ Linguistically, the Arabic word for Indian is Hindi.

¹⁴ Hnood is the plural for hindi

Bahraini who lived between Manama and Muharraq in her childhood, she frequented the two areas where *hnood* were concentrated, and likely interacted with a lot. Furthermore, because of her high economic class, it is possible that expats worked for the family business owners. Similar sentiments are shown in another interview, who excitedly exclaimed to me when asked about the *hnood* after not remembering the first foreigner he saw as a child that “the *hnood* have been here for years, and years”, and were important to Bahrain’s development (Interview 11). Interview 1 also dismissively remembered the *hnood* after being asked about foreigners in his village and said they were “few” in his village, and more in Manama (Interview 1, 2018). So, a recurring theme of forgetting the *Hindi* of their childhood was present, despite the *Hindi* accounting for the most notable foreign group in Bahrain.

Interestingly most interviewees identified positively, or neutrally with the *hnood*. This may seem strange for anyone with knowledge of migrant working conditions in Bahrain, and the GCC at large. Bahraini officials have struggled or failed to implement reforms to improve migrant worker rights. (HRW, 2010). Experiences vary, of course, but, it is difficult to argue that a systemic structure of inequality exists, as foreign workers consistently suffer from passport confiscation, failure to receive wages in a timely manner, or ever, sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, among many other issues (HRW, 2010). How does the Bahraini self identify positively with the other that it also systematically, and sometimes brutally, oppresses? For now, it seems that *hnood* who spent generations in Bahrain were less likely to be thought of first when discussing foreigners in the islands. Other interviews from the data collection produce some negative identification with the *Hindi*, under interesting circumstances. The negative identification of the *Hindi* produces a more complex construction of the *Hindi* other.

The mentioned identifications and discussion of the *Hindi* are nuanced in another interview. When discussing his job as a teenager in the 50s, he explained some issues Bahrainis faced. “Bahrain is all *hnood*”, he claimed, along with “*hnood* were taking over the country. They used to make calculations more difficult for us [Bahrainis] at work”. This may seem like regular ‘us’ vs them ‘immigrants’ rhetoric. Unhappiness with immigrants, in this case, Indians, would not be strange if the immigrant as an other is considered. However, the same participant showed inconsistencies in his narrative. His previous statements are juxtaposed to his discussion of the kindness of *hnood*. “The *hnood* doctors would give me medicines for free or cheap when I used

to go to them. Not the Arab doctors, they made you pay it all. The *hnood* were honourable” (Interview 6, 2018). This recollection is from his youth when he used to go to get medicine for sick family members. These two narratives paint entirely different pictures of one’s perception of the *Hindi* other. This is inconsistent with the need for one’s rhetoric to match their actions. How can the self simultaneously identify to an other positively and negatively? The self should avoid this to ensure ontological security. The historical time of the Interview 6’s two narratives is crucial to understanding this contradiction on the construction of the *Hindi*. From his recollection, the two stories took place at different times in his life, one from his youth, while the other is from his experience entering the workforce as a teenager around 1955. The second story took place during the “early labour migration” (Louër, 2008b p. 34) in Bahrain. It is possible that the large workforce that was brought in by British India, constituted the ‘*hnood*’ that Interview 4 discusses in a negative light. However, the *Hindi* doctor could possibly be as one who worked in Bahrain before the oil wealth, before Bahrain was ‘overrun’ by immigrants. The interview suggests two groups within the *Hindi* other that have been constructed, one that ‘has been here’ from before the oil and enjoy positive identification by older Bahrainis, and another, which is negatively identified with – those that came with later migration periods from the oil booms. This is more directly stated in another interview when comparing Bahrain of the past to the present. “Bahrain had Bahrainis, *ajam*, and *hnood*. There weren’t as many as now, though. Now, there is a lot. [Cynically] Now, Bahrain loves the *hnood*” (Interview 3, 2018). Historically, according to him, Bahrain had the locals, and two groups of foreigners, Persians, and Indians. However, there is a further distinction to be made among the group of Indians. There are the *hnood* from before, and the *hnood* of now. The negative identification towards the *hnood* is present in another interview, who’s most emotional outburst came when asked why he claimed that Bahrain now is in a bad period. His response was a vehement “Do you see any *Baharna* in the market *now*? [emphasis added] It’s all *hnood*!” (Interview 12, 2018).

A possibility to further understand this discrepancy regarding identification towards the *Hindi* other, and to understand the constructed groups within the other is presented in another interview. When asked a similar question about foreigners that they remember, both participants recollected their limited interactions with the British, followed by the *Hindi*, of who there were plenty of. Later, when discussing some of the issues that immigrants brought to Bahrain, the pair discussed how the “Bengalis would calculate how much you make” and then use that against you

at work (Interview 8 & 9, 2018). The problems of Bahrain, according to them, started when the “Bengalis” came to Bahrain. The word ‘Bengali’ in colloquial Bahraini may refer to anyone from South Indian subcontinent. The Bengali and *Hindi* words were used in similar discussion, but with different connotations. *Hindi*, was used when discussing foreigners in Bahrain and was used to denote to a group that was almost forgotten, despite being the largest immigrant group in the islands. Bengalis, on the other hand, were the scheming group that made the workplace difficult. A similar distinction was made by Interview 6, who was sure to clarify that when he described the *hnood* as honourable, he was talking about *hnood*, and not Pakistanis. A clearer picture of the *Hindi* begins to be constructed through these narratives and descriptions. The *Hindi* has been ‘here’ for a long time, he (and it mostly males) worked the farms with the Baharna, he dealt in trade like the Sunnis, he comes from a country ‘we’ have ties with historically, India (Interview 11, 2018; Interview 6, 2018; Interview 4, 2018) These *hnood* are identified with positively. A *Hindi*, however, also came recently, made the workplace for Bahrainis more difficult, and came in huge numbers, changing Bahraini society. These suffer from very negative identification and are merely tools for meeting the self’s interests. *Hindi*, like *Bengali*, could also refer to all people from South Asia, as Interview 6 shows. However, there is still a distinction between those that have become close to an extension of the self by becoming successful businesses and Bahraini citizens and positively identified with and those who are merely tools to achieve national development. Much like Bush’s splitting of Iraqis as evil represented by Saddam, and oppressed represented by the citizens (Hansen, 2006), *Hindi* refers to a small group who are positively identified with as part of the country’s history (pre-oil wealth), and the majority, who are negatively identified with (post-oil wealth). This suggests an economic aspect to the construction of the other, where certain economic periods dictate in which ‘section’ the *Hindi* other falls under.

Gardner’s (2008) ethnographic study of elite Indian businessmen in Bahrain, represents a religious structural element to othering as well. An interview with an Indian merchant from Bahrain on the topic of citizenship portrayed a Bahraini self that is less likely to accept non-Muslim immigrants positively than Muslims:

For the Muslims, maybe citizenship is a possibility, but for the rest of us, it’s a different ballgame...If somebody sees me, he says, okay, an Indian. If I take a Bahraini passport, my

face says that I'm an Indian. The people will still not take me as a Bahraini. They will treat me as an Indian. (Gardner, 2008)

This example brings about an element of religion to the construction of the *Hindi* other. However, it can be argued that the economic structure supersedes the religious one for constructing the *Hindi* other group that is positively identified with. The Indian families that moved to Bahrain historically were a huge economic asset as they eventually formed huge local enterprises such as Kewalram, Dadabhai, or Devji. Some of these families mostly have Bahraini citizenship for several generations. They could be considered as having experienced Bahrain's history, legitimizing their existence in Bahrain, and elevating them to an elite-class¹⁵ of *Hindi*, that is positively identified, and while accepted as a Bahraini citizen, remains of the *hnood*. While many of them from Hindu families, they remain positively identified with, while not considered part of the Bahraini self. Their Bahraini citizenship is emblematic of how they are perceived as extensions of the self. The structure of religion could also be questioned by the rhetoric of Interview 6, who was sure to distinguish between Pakistanis and Indians when discussing *Hindi* honour. He and the Pakistani other are both Sunni Muslims, but this did not play a role in identifying with the Pakistani other differently. They were still different from the *Hindi*; less 'honourable'. Thus, both religion and economic production play a role in not only constructing the other, but also the dividing the individuals within the other.

A pattern from the interviews regarding the identification of the Indian other was the geographical location of the area the participants were from. From the interviews, participants who came from villages closer to the two main hubs of the country, Muharraq and Manama, were more likely to include positive identification towards the *Hindi* other. This was juxtaposed entirely by interviews from villages further away from the centres. This could help understand how an experience that is out of the actor's control (no one chose which village they grew up in) plays a possible direct role in identity formation. Internationally, the geographical location of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf played a role in constructing their perception of the Indian other differently than other areas in the Gulf. Bahrain's location close to the ocean, and being an island, meant that its interactions with the Indian subcontinent were more frequent than others in the region, especially as the economic hub of the region. Bahraini pearl divers would travel to the

¹⁵ My use of elite here differs from Gardner's. Elite in this context does not relate to economic wealth, but to level of identification by Bahrainis.

Indian sub-continent during the off-season to continue their craft (Zayani, 2004). However, the role of the *Hindi* other(s) is unclear in relation to the conflict in Bahrain. While issues certainly stem from the increasing number of immigrants in the tiny country, the link between the identity conflict in Bahrain and the role of immigration of South Asians is less prevalent. Gengler (2011) discusses how naturalisation is a source of political strife in Bahrain. This, however, did not emerge when discussing the *Hindi* other. One could assume that the increasing numbers of migrants are considered a failure by the government to protect Bahraini identity, and a failure to protect Bahraini employment. This could have been left out by the participants because of security fears. Unfortunately, this is speculative and does not stand with any evidence from this research project.

Studying the *Hindi* other and the structures that affect how the other is constructed provides us with the insight on the view of the positively identified Indian families that have lived in Bahrain for generations and the Indian and other South Asian communities that moved to Bahrain as part of the oil boom. The *Hindi* other shows how the other is divided into smaller groups. *Hindi* could refer to several groups, which are identified with vastly differently. It also is ultimately insufficient for studying the immigrant other, because it does not encompass Arab, African, European, or American immigrants.

5.4. *The One We Both Are, and Aren't: The Khaleeji Other*

The data collection presented an other in the Arab Gulf states that form the GCC with Bahrain. The Gulf states were a short topic of discussion in the interviews, but one that offered differing attitudes towards the *khaleeji* other. As mentioned before, the *Khaleej* involves the Arab Gulf states that are part of the GCC. They are considered culturally similar, with comparable historical paths. The *khaleeji* was a difficult other to discuss as a whole, because of the nature of its make-up; it consists several modern states within it. This presents a problem where a participant may hold a negative view of the *Khaleej*, and link negative descriptions to them, but hold a positive view of the modern state of Oman and Omanis. However, the participants did not divide the *khaleeji* other in their discussions. This resulted in a blurring of the construction of the *khaleeji* or the construction of a single state within the *khaleeji*. The *khaleeji* other presents an interesting case where participants exhibited vastly contrasting

tendencies to either reject and deny or affirm and accept the existence of the khaleeji other within Bahraini society.

The *khaleeji* other seemed to be a polarizing one in terms of the difference of attitudes towards it. For some, the mere existence of the *khaleeji* other seemed completely opposite to what they stand for. For example, it was common for the response to asking what the *Khaleej* is or to dismiss the *Khaleej* as a conceptual identity. The *Khaleej* was considered irrelevant, not in its existence or its importance, but in its ‘validity’. Some participants responded to the mention of the *khaleeji* that there is no *Khaleej*, only Arabs and that the *Khaleej* was constructed later because of politics. Khaleeji identity was rejected as one that was relevant to Bahraini identity. This seemed more common among some of the *Baharna* participants. When asked if Bahrainis are *khaleeji*, one participant vehemently responded that Bahrainis are not. “We are a country of culture. We are agriculturist. We are educated. We have a civilization” (Interview 2, 2018). This provides us with some insight on how the khaleeji other was perceived by a small group of Bahrainis. The *Khaleej* was constructed as a group that is uncivilized and uneducated. Bahrain’s civilizational history of Dilmun and geographic uniqueness from other Gulf regions served as a major differentiation for some *Baharna*. Another participant posed a religious explanation. He claimed that the *Baharna* were Christian before converting to Islam, unlike the Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula. According to him, this explains the ‘savage’ nature of the rest of the *Khaleej*, and the peaceful nature of *Baharna*, stemming from the Christian idiom of turning the other cheek (Interview 7, 2018). As mentioned, the history of the *Baharna* is extremely unclear, so it is difficult to assess whether claims of *Baharna* Christianity are accurate or fall under the realm of mythology. Generally, the distinction that took place with these two others was based on one of being either Bahraini or Bedouin. For some, the two identities were perceived as opposite. The *Khaleej*, then, was constructed as unable to live up and compare to the historical prestige of Bahrain, through its ancient civilization that spanned centuries. Bahrain’s civilizational history did not result in the othering of the *khaleeji* other in all cases, however. Other participants, who acknowledged the *khaleeji* other and its existence and role in Bahrain, recognized the important role *khaleejis* played in forming Bahrain, while still acknowledging Bahrain’s ancient civilizations as critical to Bahrain. Younger generations shared similar sentiments, affirming a unique Bahraini identity to other Gulf counterparts, which necessitates a local focus (Kinninmont & Sirri, 2014). Unfortunately, discussing details was always difficult. An obvious reason for this

is the aforementioned events of the Arab Spring, which possibly not only played a role in making the *khaleeji* other a taboo, but also shift attitudes towards it.

Further, it is important to consider the political beliefs that underlined this lack of identification or negative identification towards the *khaleeji* other. All the participants who were quick to distinguish the differences of Bahrain from the rest of the Gulf societies were staunch Pan-Arabists. This explains why the participants would acknowledge Bahrainis as Arabs, and not *khaleeji*, as that would result in further dividing the Arab identity, something that counters the very essence of Pan-Arabism. The passionate rejecters of the *khaleeji* identity for Bahrain idolized Gamal Abdel Nasser, the moral leader of the Arab world during the participants' youth, whose portrait hung high from the office of one of the participants. Support of Nasser was not limited to the politically left, or secular, only. Nasser was described as one of the best Muslims by a participant, suggesting that Pan-Arabism's surpassed the socialist/communist ties in the 50s (Interview 7, 2018).

Within the *khaleeji* other, The Omani other emerged as one group within the *Khaleej* that was constructed as different by a small group of participants. Several participants were quick to mention that Omanis worked with them in low-paying jobs. When comparing the difference between the village and Manama, Interview 10 claimed that Manama was truly multicultural, while his village had only Omanis who worked as builders. Similar sentiments were raised by another participant, who acknowledged Omanis as involved in Bahraini villages historically, as they were builders and farmers (Interview 1, 2018). The other interview which pointed out Omanis amongst the *khaleeji* other were participants who worked on farms as well. They exhibited the most explicit positive identification towards Omanis. "When the Omanis left, the good left with them" was a statement agreed upon in the informal group setting of the interview. "They were the kindest and most honourable of people! They left in the sixties and the Bengalis came instead of them." (Interview 8 & 9, 2018). This further exemplifies the negatively identified *Hindi* of the immigration boom. It is possible the Omani other may be identified with positively because to some, they represent an older image of Bahrain, one that doesn't exist anymore. One participant expressed his happiness when he visited Oman in 2008 "because it looked like Bahrain in the 80s" which he loved. In actuality, the Omani other is becoming less,

and less significant as different generations of Bahrainis produce different experiences where the Omani is placed as an average part of the *khaleeji*.

The *khaleeji* other serves as an example of differing identities within a society as a root of identity conflict. The conflicting opinions on what constitutes a *khaleeji*, and whether those traits are ones that pertain to Bahraini identity as well, illuminate how opposing descriptions and linking lead to eventual distrust, as the self is divided into parts of the other, allowing for conflict to take place.

5.5. The *Ajam* Other

Another minor emerging other from the participants were the *Ajam*. The *Ajam* were a group that was mentioned to various degrees. Historically, the Persian families moved to Bahrain in a migration boom between the 1860s and early 1900s. They quickly became a prominent group in Bahrain, as some took advantage of their connection in South Iran to conduct business between their new home, and their previous one (Fuccaro, 2009). Some of the *Ajam* that moved to Bahrain quickly established positive business relations with the Al-Khalifa ruling power, thus establishing themselves as among the wealthiest families in the island. Soon, Manama had an area in the Makharga neighbourhood known as the *Ajam* quarter (Fuccaro, 2005).

Some of the interviews mentioned of the Persian group in Bahrain suggested negative identification towards them, claiming that they “consider the *Ajam* different because they always used to differentiate themselves” going on to explain how they kept to themselves, continued to speak Farsi, and would not mix with the Baharna (Interview 1, 2018). This perception, possibly, infers Lawson’s (1989) labelling of the *Ajam* as constituting the most segregated group in Bahrain. Another example of negative identification towards the *Ajam* was identifying them as a separate group of foreigners when asked about who they remember in Bahrain (Interview 3, 2018; Interview 4, 2018). While most Persian families hold Bahraini citizenship, they are still othered by Baharna and Sunna. Unfortunately, attempts to interview members of the Persian community in Bahrain were unsuccessful, perhaps symbolic of their partly isolated nature. Furthermore, follow up questions about the *Ajam* were usually avoided, because of the possible taboo nature of discussing Iran, or sectarian divisions. Despite this, the *Ajam* other is a prominent and major group that plays a role in Bahraini identity formation, that should be studied further for a clearer picture.

5.6. How Do the Identities Relate To Each Other and Structures?

The self situates itself with its various others, which simultaneously affect it in different ways. It is important to consider how each other interacts directly, and indirectly to dictate identification or cause other changes to the open system. For example, the introduction of the Bahraini other to a larger extent, through the migrations that Eastern Arabian Bedouin tribes took part in, caused the *Baharna* to identify differently with them. The tribal governance structure altered the Bahraini open system in various ways, leading to irreversible effects on its actors. The British other led to the different identifications between the Bahrainis and the *Baharna* to change to become extremely positive. The collective identities within Bahrain, including ones discussed less such as the *Huwala* and *Ajam*, perceived each other as extensions of the self, but the British other's perceived colonial influence altered local relations. Thus, it is possible to posit that the British other's exit also played a role in the change of identifications within Bahrain to a negative one. However, the British other divided interests of the groups, as collective identities such as the government saw its interests become more achievable through the British, while others saw the British as hindrances to their interest. The British other's involvement in Bahrain shows the indirect and direct colonial effects that were left on Bahraini society and identity, despite Bahrain's legal status of protected state. The *Hindi* other(s) showed the complex process of categorising identities into smaller groups to avoid ontological insecurity brought about by contradictory rhetoric and action. The *Hindi* other(s) was altered entirely by the economy, as the Bahraini self constructed a *Hindi* that served Bahrain, and a *Hindi* that tried to take advantage of Bahrain. Each sub-group was identified with differently, with a critical juncture in the economic structures posing as a possible explanation. Interesting, religion does not seem to play a major role in identity formation in Bahrain. This seems unintuitive, as a Gallup (2010) poll shows that 94% of Bahrainis consider religion as integral to their lives. However, the most likely explanation for this is the taboo label of religion because of recent political issues. It is extremely unlikely that religion plays no role in identity formation, and a few fleeting comments from the participants of the data collection suggest it plays a larger role than they made it seem (Interview 7, 2018; Interview 6, 2018)

6. Conclusion

Davidson (2012) predicted the impending downfall of Gulf monarchies within a decade of the publication of his book. By now, one can safely assume that his calculations are wrong. Perhaps it is time for social scientists to evolve from the inevitably fallible prediction of regime change in the Arab Gulf, and delve deeper into the complex, contextual societal issues and dynamics of each country. The aim of this research project was to understand some element of the conflict in Bahrain through the formation of its various collective identities. One of the goals was to provide ontologically differing factors to identity formation through othering besides language, the prevalent ontology in the field. Through fieldwork, conducted in Bahrain from the 1st of February 2018 until the 24th of February 2018, various others were uncovered and explored. The Bahra(i)ni other posed as the prominent *internal* other, which referred to the Bahraini – *Bahrani* dichotomy. Participants recounted a united and peaceful Bahrain where all lived in peace until untold and taboo events took place. These constructions were most likely a personal revision of their experience. The Bahraini other posed as an example of the difficulties of fieldwork in Bahrain, stemming from strict public norms of conversation. While direct discussions on the Bahraini other were avoided, indirect discussions illuminated a division created from the perceived nativity of the *Baharna*, and the role of *external* others such as the British other. Furthermore, structural changes to the economy present an example of how identification could be extracted from economic structures.

The British other was constructed as manipulative, untrustworthy, and destructive, to Bahraini unity. The British were constructed as colonisers and foils to Bahraini self-governance. Bahraini self's construction as a colony, as opposed to a protected state, suggests a discrepancy in mind-independent reality and constructed reality. Furthermore, the British other presented how geography can play a role in identification. The British's construction of Bahrain presents a possible example of how non-colonies of former empires may still suffer from post-colonial identity issues. The British other's opposing identification from the government and Bahraini society shows how differing identification can cause societal conflict.

The *Hindi* other presented a complex construction, containing multiple sub-groups within it, and presented how economic and geographic structures inferred identification. Again, isolated villages identified more negatively with the *Hindi* other, while those closer to the markets of

Manama and Muharraq acknowledged the role of the *Hindi* in Bahrain's history. Further, the development of economic structures, shifting from pearl to oil, and the explosion of wealth shows how an other could change over time to include the sub-groups of 'old' Indians, who were identified positively with, and 'new' ones. While the researcher predicted the importance of the others that exist internally, the prevalence of the British and *Hindi* other in earlier identity formation was underestimated. This highlights Bahrain's colonial history as imperative to understanding Bahraini's, especially older ones, identity and the possible continuation of the British other as an American other.

Further, some structures were explored in understanding their role in forming identity in an open system. Economic structures played a massive role in dividing and nuancing the *Hindi* other, with even the Bahraini self articulating the economic shift as a reason for changing identification. Geographical structures predicated one's personal view on the British other, with participants from isolated villages showing larger demonisation than those closer to hubs, for example. Bahrain's size and location have predicated how it is studied in International Relations. This thesis aimed at maintaining a focus on Bahrain's open system to understand one element of Bahrain conflict – identity. While the external focus that Bahrain has seen in IR is certainly beneficial, it is clear that a solely geopolitical focus will not suffice if resolution and reconciliation are desired. Internal factors influence states, so exploring and analysing some internal workings of Bahraini identity will provide a channel towards understanding it beyond a simplified 'Sunni-Shia divide'. Future work should focus on developing an understanding of each Arab Gulf state's identity along with the unified *khaleeji* identity, to supplement the existing literature on the region's political economy, military cooperation, and security. The increase in field-work will hopefully allow larger transferability to supplement the small sample of this research project. As an ever-growing player in West Asian politics, especially so with recent global political developments, knowledge on the Arab Gulf states will be increasingly important to the study of regional relations.

7. References

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