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WHY DID THE CAMEL CROSS THE ROAD?: THE USE OF CAMEL RACING AND  
MILITARY PAGEANTRY IN UNIFYING OMAN THROUGH NATIONALISM

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By Elizabeth Jean Williams

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion  
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Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College  
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## ABSTRACT

In 1970, Sultan Qaboos bin Said seized power from his father Sultan Said bin Taimur in a bloodless coup with backing from the British. Prior to this, bin Taimur led with policies that left Oman open to foreign involvement and internal divisions between the interior and exterior of the country. After coming to power, Qaboos undertook several progressive policies to modernize and unite the country. This paper examines how two cultural symbols- camel racing and military pageantry- were used to develop ethnic nationalism into civic nationalism.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction and Literature Review

In 1970, Qaboos bin Said came to power in Oman following years of social fragmentation and national disjointedness in the country under his father Said bin Taimur. Under bin Taimur, the country saw an “aversion to social and economic reforms” and a reliance on foreign experts for how to run the country. Consequently, more than 50,000 Omanis had moved to other Gulf countries seeking opportunities and better living conditions.<sup>1</sup> The British resorted to setting up a Development Department in 1958 to work on alleviating worsening conditions in Oman and to protect bin Taimur from further criticisms.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the country faced a rebellion in the Dhofar region born out of anti-colonial sentiments and struggles between the Imamate and Sultanate. Historically the interior of Oman was occupied by various tribes who were primarily loyal to an Imamate while Muscat and the coast were more directly under the Sultan’s control. Until recently people living in the interior had little to no contact with the secular government on the coast.<sup>3</sup> When Qaboos ascended to the throne, he faced the challenge of uniting the interior and exterior of the country and establishing a national identity that defined what it meant to be Omani.

Developing this identity required careful strategy and deliberation. In this thesis, I try to answer the question “How did Sultan Qaboos employ nationalism strategies to

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Valeri, “Oman” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies* (London, Hurst and Company, 2011): 138.

<sup>2</sup> “The Struggle for Liberation in Oman.” *MERIP Reports*, no. 36 (April 1975): 11.

<sup>3</sup> Dawn Chatty, “Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View From the Edge.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 1 (February 2009): 42.

unite Oman in the first twenty years of his rule?”. I argue that Oman’s “nationhood” was defined with a two-pronged approach: Who are we in the world and who are we as a people? Military pageantry helped answer the former, and camel racing helped answer the latter. “Nationalism” for Oman in the 1970s and 1980s tied both concepts of “nation,” together under the leadership of Qaboos and the backdrop of anti-colonialism sentiments. In doing so, Qaboos stoked ethnic nationalism- based on shared historical experience and kinship- in order to foster civic nationalism, loyalty to political institutions that are viewed as “just”.<sup>4</sup>

Much has been written on the social reforms and cult of personality Qaboos’s early policies helped develop. In “‘Without Sultan Qaboos, We Would Be Yemen’: The Renaissance Narrative and the Political Settlement in Oman,” Sarah G. Phillips and Jennifer S. Hunt write about the institution of Qaboos’s cult-of-personality as well as the loyalty of Omani elites that he stoked. Uzi Rabi and Marc Valeri write about the establishment of the Majlis al Shura and the political reforms of the 1990s. Dawn Chatty has written extensively on the use of heritage policies in Oman to frame the past. More relevantly, Chatty also writes about the formalization of royal ceremony in “Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View From the Edge”.

This research will shine a light on lesser-acknowledged aspects of Oman’s early unification by discussing the use of two cultural symbols: military pageantry and camel racing. Prior to Qaboos, the sultan relied on British support for military ventures or paid foreign soldiers to make up his military guard. When Qaboos came to power, an emphasis was placed on the modernity and Omani-ness of the military. Military

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<sup>4</sup> Gretchen Schrock-Jacobson, “The Violent Consequences of the Nation: Nationalism and the Initiation of Interstate War.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 8 (2012): 833.

pageantry includes advertisements of military education and technology, formalization of military rituals and policies, and the integration of official logos. Additionally, in the early years of Qaboos's reign, camel racing was introduced (or became even more popular) to Muscat and other coastal parts of Oman, making it less of an interior activity and more a nation-wide activity. After the oil boom, modernization made more traditional economic activities obsolete; cars replaced camels. As a result, camels and camel-related activities evolved into a symbol of heritage for Gulf countries.<sup>5</sup> Taking a closer look at both of these cultural symbols provides an opportunity to learn more about their use in the early years of Qaboos's reign to unify the country.

#### *Relevant Literature on Ethno-Symbolic Policies and Nationalism in the Gulf*

In the study of nations and nationalism, scholars have often focused on where these “phenomena” originate. Many writings center on a very Western or European concept of the nation, drawing from the French and American Revolutions. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that a nation is an imagined political community. According to Anderson, a nation has three qualities: limitation, sovereignty, and community. A nation is limited because it does not include all members of the human race. It is sovereign because it is “free” from dynastic rule. Finally, it is a community because a nation is comprehended as a “deep, horizontal comradeship”.<sup>6</sup> Imagined communities began to form when the following conditions were met: the dying out of Latin, the decline of the belief in dynastic rule, and the development of a firmer

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<sup>5</sup> Khalaf Sulayman, “Camel Racing in the Gulf. Notes on the Evolution of a Traditional Cultural Sport” *Anthropos* 94, (1999): 86.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (Rev. and extended ed. London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

understanding of history.<sup>7</sup> Anderson also argues that nations coming out from under colonial rule were left to choose from models of nationalism created by the experiences of European groups.<sup>8</sup> The term “print-capitalism” was coined by Anderson to connect the use of the printed materials to the development of an imagined community. A newspaper with articles about unrelated individuals, for instance, provides evidence that an imagined link exists between them.<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason that printed materials provide such valuable evidence of connection between communities. The publication and distribution of camel racing results in Salalah from a race in Muscat evinces a link of recognition between the two locales.

This conversation shifts with Partha Chatterjee’s *Whose Imagined Communities*. Chatterjee writes about nationalism that develops in colonized countries as a response to being governed by a foreign entity. He describes the concept of a “nation” as something that arises culturally and among the people before it is taken to a political or international scale. Chatterjee argues that nationalism grants sovereignty to a colonial society. His writing focuses primarily on India but can be applied to other former colonies. When looking at Gulf countries that attained independence in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to consider the outside actors, particularly the British, that these countries had to forge identities in the wake of.

Anthony Smith takes an ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism, focusing on the use of cultural “symbols” and the shared past of a nation. This is the approach that this research uses to evaluate the development of nationalism in 1970s and 1980s Oman. In

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<sup>7</sup> Anderson, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Partha Chatterjee, “Whose Imagined Community?” in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, 33.



*Ethnosymbolism and the Study of Nationalism*, Smith highlights the main claims his approach to nationalism makes. This approach emphasizes the importance of a group's shared history, symbols of community, and the ethnic foundations of nations. Under the ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism, a large emphasis is placed on the collective history of a group. Smith argues that the origin of a nation cannot be pinpointed to specific historical events. Rather, the collective memory of the group and shared experience is more significant.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Oman, the elevation of the camel industry provides an example of the use of pre-existing cultural links to create a national identity.

If regimes look to the past for modern legitimacy as Smith hypothesizes, then the cultural policies of regimes in the Gulf provide an interesting case study. Karen Excell and Trinidad Roco provide a breakdown of the discourse surrounding heritage in the Gulf. Focusing on Qatar, they identify several themes across Gulf states' treatment of pre-oil culture. Among these is the reinstatement of traditional practices (like camel racing or falconry).<sup>11</sup> They also note how the Al Thani family's portrayal of the fairly recent Qatari past as "legendary" helps smooth over any contradictory tribal histories that could threaten their rule.<sup>12</sup> The heritage policies of Qatar are used to reinforce its present regime and distinguish it from neighboring states. In the case of Oman, pre-oil culture could be traded out for pre-bin Taimur culture. Even today, an emphasis on key parts of Omani culture is used to differentiate Qaboos's rule from the "dark days" of his father's rule.

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Smith, "Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of Nationalism" in *Nations and Nationalism* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005): 23.

<sup>11</sup> Karen Excell and Trinidad Rico, "There Is No Heritage In Qatar': Orientalism, Colonialism and Other Problematic Histories". *World Archaeology* 45, no. 4 (2013): 675.

<sup>12</sup> Excell and Rico, 680.

In addition to the promotion of pre-existing cultural symbols, the development of rituals and new traditions was essential to uniting the country around the Sultan. Chatty writes about the development of Omani royal rituals under Sultan Qaboos. After the rule of his father, Qaboos sought to unite Oman through modernization and his own persona. Under bin Taimur's rule, few people in the interior of the country were aware of the Sultan's existence or sovereignty, and the country lacked royal protocol. By mass producing images of himself in businesses and branding infrastructure developments with his name, he ensured people would associate him with modernization. The establishment of a National Day on November 18 each year gave reason for unity as the entire country would anticipate military demonstrations. To unite the interior of the country with the coastal cities, he also integrated camel racing into mainstream Omani culture and National Day celebrations. Qaboos's time studying at Sandhurst in England helped him develop a "lifelong love affair with military pageantry" which later influenced him when restructuring the SAF, creating new uniforms and medals, and designing a royal crest.<sup>13</sup>

### *Framework and Methods*

The following chapters will outline the historical context of this phenomena, the findings from my sources, and my analysis of what they tell us about how Qaboos used ethnic nationalism to foster civic nationalism. In order to understand the process of the formalization of the military, I use copies of *Jund Oman Al Adad*. This magazine was first published in January 1974 as a way of highlighting "cultural and military

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<sup>13</sup> Chatty 44.

information” that promoted the SAF’s “sacred mission”.<sup>14</sup> The magazine is published by and distributed through the Moral Guidance department in the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Sultan Armed Forces. These issues can be helpful in understanding what information the government wanted its military members to learn and what official ideals the military valued at the time.

I had to limit the amount of content I looked at due to time constraints, so my analysis focuses on the content of the covers of the magazines, the featured articles, and the editor notes at the beginning of the issues. Due to time constraints, twelve magazines were studied spanning from 1974 to 1989. The magazines are from a variety of months involving national holidays such as Renaissance Day (July 23) and National Day (November 18) and Ramadan (varies each year). Magazines from other months are included to get a sense of regular operations.

In order to understand how camel racing was used to unite Oman, I pulled from a wider variety of sources. Oman and the UAE filed a joint application for camel racing to be recognized as “intangible cultural heritage of humanity” in 2019. This request was granted in December of 2020, and the application provides valuable information about the cultural importance of camel racing in Oman. Additionally, I pull from a variety of online sources such as articles from Oman-based websites and other news sites. Finally, thanks to Dr. Rafia Al Talai from Oman, I was able to analyze a few oral histories from Omanis on the evolution and significance of camel racing. These oral histories provide a

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<sup>14</sup> “Morale Guidance: About Us.” Office of the Chief of Staff Sultan’s Armed Forces <https://members.mod.gov.om/en-US/cossaf/moralguidance/pages/about-us.aspx>

better idea of what emotions Omanis currently tie to camel racing and help demonstrate the impact that camel racing policies of the 1970s and 1980s actually had.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, I use Smith's ethno-symbolic approach in the last chapter to draw conclusions regarding how military pageantry and camel racing together provided an opportunity for Qaboos to tap into ethnic nationalism to civic nationalism.

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<sup>15</sup> Note: Oral histories do not need IRB approval like interviews do. See: [https://www.research.olemiss.edu/ACITI/What\\_is\\_Human\\_Subjects\\_Research\\_201106.pdf](https://www.research.olemiss.edu/ACITI/What_is_Human_Subjects_Research_201106.pdf)

## Chapter Two

### Historical Overview

#### *North-South, Interior-Exterior Divides*

When Sultan Qaboos ascended the throne in 1970, the country was in the midst of a conflict in the interior/south, in the Dhofar region. Any impact he made as a ruler was contingent upon resolving this conflict early in his rule, followed by resolving any cultural conflict between the interior and the exterior. As a result, any discussion of modern Oman must begin with the historical separation between the interior and the exterior of the country. However, frictions between the interior and exterior of the country emerged from the initial British recognition of the sultanic leadership in Muscat decades before. Centuries earlier, before becoming a sultanate, the whole of Oman was an imamate from 751 to 1792 led by a series of popularly-selected imams from the Ibadi sect of Islam. In 1797, Sultan bin Ahmed declared himself the independent ruler of Muscat, the capital that later conducted trade agreements with Britain and codified the relationship between the two countries. Britain chose to conduct business with the Sultanate in Muscat, formally recognizing it as the official Oman. It became British policy in the Gulf to only negotiate with rulers of “pure tribal lineage”, imposing British concepts on monarchy and succession onto the region.<sup>16</sup> In Oman, this policy reinforced the Muscat sultan’s legitimacy in the eyes of the British.

Domestically, however, Muscat and the rest of Oman came to be viewed as equally legitimate yet separate countries. The concentration of business conducted in Muscat led to a cultural and political divide between the northern Omani coast region (the

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<sup>16</sup> Miriam Cooke, *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf*. (University of California Press, 2014): 34.

“exterior”) and the further inland region and the south (the “interior”), consequently leaving tribes in the interior to feel excluded. The loss of Omani maritime superiority after the loss of its Zanzibar colony and the opening of the Suez Canal meant that the country increasingly relied on the British both for protection and income. It was mainly the coast that benefitted from any income that trade with the British and Indian government brought, contributing to internal divisions. Tribes in the interior led several rebellions against the Sultan in Muscat in 1875, 1895, 1913, and 1915. The 1915 rebellion resulted in a five-year conflict that ended with the Treaty of Seeb on September 25, 1920. This treaty ensured coexistence between the sultanate of Muscat and the rest of Oman and codified freedom of movement between the two. The distinction between the two entities, however, is clear. “Oman” refers to the imamate, while “Muscat” is used to refer to the coastal area under the Sultan’s influence.<sup>17</sup> This dividing line between the sultanate and imamate laid the foundations for later conflict.

However, the period from 1920 to 1954 was markedly peaceful and saw cooperation between Muscat and Oman. Muscat handled external affairs while the imamate handled domestic ones. The two coordinated successfully in 1952 when the imamate permitted the use of tribesmen from the interior to help defend the Buraimi Oasis from Saudi invasion. In return, the Sultan permitted the Imam to appoint official positions to tribal leaders in the interior such as judges, governors, and tax collectors.<sup>18</sup> The beginning of bin Taimur’s rule marked a turn in this amicable arrangement. Dependent on the support of the British and driven by their desire to explore oil

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<sup>17</sup> Treaty of Seeb (1920)

<sup>18</sup> Joseph A. Kechician, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy*. Santa Monica: RAND (1994): 34.

resources, bin Taimur began to look to the interior of Oman. Relations began to deteriorate when bin Taimur made concessions to oil fields in the area to Petroleum Development Oman without consulting the Imam in 1937.<sup>19</sup> In 1954, with the backing of the Al-Saud family in Saudi Arabia, Imam Ghalib bin Ali was elected ruler of the interior and began taking steps to formally declare the imamate the official “State of Oman”. Among these measures were the annulment of the Sultan’s 1937 oil concessions,<sup>20</sup> application to the Arab League and distribution of passports that were only valid in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup>

The subsequent Jebel Al-Akhdar Revolt from 1957 to 1959 resulted in the sultan obtaining control of central Oman and the exile of the imam, Ghalib bin Ali. Once again, Sultan Said bin Taimur would not have been able to exert this new power over the interior of the country without the military and intelligence support of the British. In the years following this revolt, bin Taimur moved to Salalah where he ruled distantly and reclusively, increasingly relying on British officials for assistance ruling the country while oppositional forces strengthened.<sup>22</sup>

After Qaboos came to power, the rule of bin Taimur would come to be known as the “dark period”<sup>23</sup> of Oman’s history due to monarchical mismanagement and the internal conflict the country faced. The Dhofar rebellion was launched in June of 1965 by the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) with the support of Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi

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<sup>19</sup> Kechician, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Kechician, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Kechician, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Kechician, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Marc Valeri, “Nation-Building and Communities in Oman Since 1970: The Swahili-Speaking Omani in Search of Identity”. *African Affairs* 106, no. 424 (2007): 480.

Arabia.<sup>24</sup> Its original aim was independence from the rule of the sultan, but the movement evolved into an anti-colonial, communist movement. The DLF became the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) and took up the new goal of eliminating British involvement and their monarchical clients “from Dhofar to Kuwait.”<sup>25</sup>

### *Solving Dhofar and Qaboos's Rise to Power*

The tribal rebellions from the interior provide a backdrop for the increase in British involvement in Oman's political-military matters. The British deployed troops to Muscat in 1913 for support against a revolt until they were replaced in 1921 by the Muscat Levy Corps.<sup>26</sup> The Muscat Levy Corps were originally a British-organized group of Seistani troops whose members were slowly replaced with locals while continuing to be led by British officers.<sup>27</sup> This unit became the foundation for the Sultan's Armed Forces which was instrumental in how Muscat dealt with the 1965 Dhofar rebellion and the 1970 coup.

The infamous 1970 coup speaks to the massive hand Britain played in Omani affairs. While bin Taimur relied heavily on the British for political advice, military support, and funding, they found themselves growing increasingly frustrated with the inaction of the sultan. Military support from the RAF was not going to be enough to quell the Dhofar Rebellion. Little could be done to legitimize the rule of bin Taimur who

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<sup>24</sup> Abdel Razzaq Takriti, “The 1970 Coup in Oman Reconsidered.” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3, no. 2, (2013): 157.

<sup>25</sup> Takriti, 157.

<sup>26</sup> James Onley, “Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971.” *Journal of Social Affairs* 22, no. 87 (Fall 2005): 10.

<sup>27</sup> Rossiter, 39.



had taken to a form of self-imposed exile in Salalah and who had done little to reinvest oil profits into the Omani economy despite his promises<sup>28</sup> in 1968.

The institution of a new sultan was not enough to solve the uprising in Dhofar. Just as Oman lacked necessary bureaucratic structures under bin Taimur, its military was also lacking. For intel during the Dhofar rebellion, bin Taimur relied heavily on British Desert Intelligence Officers (DIOs) and lightly on his own Sultan's Intelligence Officers (SIOs). These SIOs typically were Omanis that bin Taimur was in close contact with but their skills in the field were lacking or average and their frictional communication with the British DIOs made cooperation difficult.<sup>29</sup>

While serious restructuring was needed in the military, the public still had to be sold on a new sultan. Despite his father's obvious shortcomings in military strategy and his efforts to culturally unite with the interior of Oman, Qaboos did not cite these as reasons for the coup. Appealing to the country's need and desire for economic development he cited his father's "inability to use the newfound wealth of this country for the needs of its people"<sup>30</sup>. In his early public comments as sultan, Qaboos spoke of his goals for the country to find a role as a mediator in the region, claiming he anticipated "an era of active consultation" between Oman and its neighbors.<sup>31</sup>

Qaboos's associations with the Shah of Iran and King Hussein of Jordan bolstered his goal of establishing Oman as a strong country that was accepted by the other Arab states. Both sent troops to support the effort in Dhofar, alleviating the demands on the

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<sup>28</sup> "Sultan of Muscat and Oman Is Overthrown by Son" New York Times. July 27, 1970.

<sup>29</sup> Clive Jones, "Military Intelligence, Tribes, and Britain's War in Dhofar, 1970-1976." *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 563.

<sup>30</sup> "Sultan of Muscat and Oman Is Overthrown by Son" New York Times. July 27, 1970.

<sup>31</sup> "Sultan of Muscat and Oman Is Overthrown by Son"

British military. Where bin Taimur insisted all foreign affairs be handled by the British<sup>32</sup> Qaboos took an active role in advocating for Oman to its neighbors.

The Five Point Plan was an important feature of Qaboos's early days in power because it laid out very early on how he went about uniting the country. On the surface, the plan focused on the military goals of the SAF and the tactical military struggles the sultanate is dealing with in Dhofar. It was heavily influenced by the counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics the British were desperate to get bin Taimur to adopt. However, key parts of the Five Point Plan outline how Qaboos would go about using cultural symbols to unite Oman. The points were as follows

- “1. Offering a general amnesty to all those of his subjects who had opposed the Sultan.
2. Ending the archaic status of the Dhofar province and its incorporation in the state of Oman.
3. Opposing those insurgents who did not accept the general amnesty offer by conducting effective military operations, and
4. Improving the lives of the populace through a vigorous nation-wide development program.
5. A diplomatic initiative with two aims:
  - a. Having Oman recognized as an Arab state with a legal form of government

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<sup>32</sup> Takriti, 156.

b. Isolating the PDRY from the support it was receiving from other Arab states.”<sup>33</sup>

The second point, modernizing Dhofar, was an important part of other policies Qaboos undertook such as building schools, wells, roads, mosques, and hospitals. During the counterinsurgency period, 40 percent of government expenditures went towards Dhofar.<sup>34</sup> Other money from oil rents went toward strengthening the SAF, which had been severely underfunded and underdeveloped by bin Taimur. Other parts of the Five Point Plan were put into action such as the diplomatic initiative. In 1971, Oman joined the United Nations and garnered further support from Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.<sup>35</sup> The steps Qaboos took helped to both legitimize his rule in Oman and to legitimize Oman’s role on the world stage. By doing so, Qaboos provided a point of pride for Omani citizens. The funding of the military and the strengthening of Oman’s international standing produced a springboard for nationalism sentiments.

### *Modernization, Nationalization, and Solidification of Power*

After gaining power, Qaboos undertook many policies that aimed to both modernize and unite the country, thus putting an end to the divisions that had caused much violence in the first half of the twentieth century. While these measures were rooted in the COIN strategies introduced by the British, the efforts continued after the Dhofar rebellion was quelled and became a key part of Qaboos’s leadership style. The policies that Qaboos undertook in his first several years on the throne helped perpetuate a

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<sup>33</sup> Jim White, “Oman 1965-1976L From Certain Defeat to Decisive Victory” *Small Wars Journal*: 6.

<sup>34</sup> White, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher Paul 280.

“Renaissance narrative” that tied Qaboos himself to the economic and societal developments occurring under his rule<sup>36</sup> and created a paternalistic image of him.<sup>37</sup> By creating this narrative, Qaboos separated himself from Oman’s 20th century history pre-1970 by deeming it a “dark period”<sup>38</sup>. During this period, Oman lacked state infrastructure and had only a few paved roads and limited access to education.<sup>39</sup> After 1970, thousands of miles of roads were paved and Muscat, the capital, was connected to Salalah, where the royal compound was located.<sup>40</sup>

Funding for these projects was provided by increased oil rents. Following the global spike in oil prices in 1973 initiated by OPEC and a quadrupling in oil revenues, Qaboos had the funds to purchase the majority of Petroleum Development Oman in 1974.<sup>41</sup> Even as the peak in oil prices leveled out, this 60 percent<sup>42</sup> stake allowed Qaboos to continue to obtain more wealth from oil rents than before.

State employment was expanded with this new wealth. Where his father had British employees within government positions, Qaboos replaced them with Omanis and expanded their payroll. Positions in the army, police, and government administrations opened for more citizens to fill, creating a core of civil servants who were less likely to question a system they depended on for their livelihoods.<sup>43</sup> This reflects how policy alone did not secure Qaboos’s stability. He also relied heavily on the support of two

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<sup>36</sup> Sarah G. Phillips and Jennifer S. Hunt. “‘Without Sultan Qaboos, We Would Be Yemen.’: The Renaissance Narrative and the Political Settlement in Oman.” *Journal of International Development* 29 (2017): 646.

<sup>37</sup> Valeri, “Oman” 140.

<sup>38</sup> Valeri, 480.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, 559.

<sup>40</sup> Chatty, 44

<sup>41</sup> Phillips and Hunt, 649.

<sup>42</sup> PDO website

<sup>43</sup> Valeri, 480.

groups of people to support his rule: the merchant class and educated elites. Both of these groups came to owe a lot to Qaboos for their standing in society. To win over the merchant class, Qaboos used government contracts to secure the support of merchants and provide them with permanent links to the Sultan. He did this by providing them with fixed percentages of the country's oil revenue in 1970<sup>44</sup>, giving them a vested interest.

Qaboos won the support of the educated elite by calling them back from Zanzibar and making them a crucial part of his regime. During the revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, many Omanis fled to Mombasa, Dubai, Cairo, or Europe<sup>45</sup>. After Qaboos became sultan, he issued a 1970 call for these 'Zanzibaris' or 'back-from-Africa' Omanis to return to Oman and help rule<sup>46</sup>. Compared to 1964 when Oman only accepted 3,700 refugees in the wake of the revolution, the 10,000 that were welcomed back between 1970 and 1975 was significant.<sup>47</sup>

Also significant is that many of those returning were just descendants of Omanis who had left Oman to live and work in Zanzibar; they had never set foot in Oman themselves. Skills they had obtained abroad such as secondary education, their English skills, and their separation from the tribal politics of the country made them valuable assets and they quickly filled many bureaucratic positions.<sup>48</sup> Qaboos offered them a homeland and an opportunity to have positions of power, sealing their loyalty.

Underlining all of these political efforts was the need to mend the separation between the former imamate and the official sultanate. As Qaboos sought to legitimize

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<sup>44</sup> Phillips and Hunt, 649.

<sup>45</sup> Phillips and Hunt, 650.

<sup>46</sup> Valeri, "Oman". 136

<sup>47</sup> Valeri, 485.

<sup>48</sup> Valeri, 486.

and modernize the government through the establishment of legislative bodies, he made efforts to culturally include the interior of the country. The Majlis al-Shura, the legislative body with elected officials, borrows the term “shura”, meaning consultation, from the Ibadhi tradition.<sup>49</sup> Among these efforts was the integration of camel racing on the coast. The royal National Day camel races were attended by Qaboos and honored guests, but the qualifying trials leading up to them began capturing national attention. Especially for those living in the pastoral communities of the interior, the importance of the National Day races created a link to the sultanate.

Oman’s divided history and the lengths it took to quell the rebellion in Dhofar informed the early policy decisions Qaboos made. Even after coming to power, it took Qaboos another four years to resolve Dhofar. Afterward, the country still had to make significant leaps culturally to bridge decades of separation between the sultanate and the imamate. Even within Muscat, bin Taimur had not inspired confidence in the legitimacy of the sultan as a leader figure. It fell on Qaboos to use nationalist strategies such as military pageantry and camel racing to make his vision of a unified Oman a reality.

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<sup>49</sup> James Tarik Marriott. “The Sultan, the Imam and the Question of Oman.” July 2, 2020.

## Chapter Three

### Military Pageantry

Military pageantry can be viewed as a cultural symbol for Oman because of the significant role it plays in displays of patriotism today. National Day celebrations frequently involve military parades and demonstrations. Until his death in January 2020, Qaboos made it a point to see and be seen at these proceedings. They provided him visibility and lent his endorsement to SAF. The development of military pageantry was an essential part of Qaboos's formalization of the Omani state because it lent legitimacy to the leadership and direction of the country, as well as became a point of pride for the country.

Military pageantry also matched Qaboos's personal interests. Before his rise to power, young Qaboos was sent to Sandhurst in Britain to study. Many aspects of his time in the UK influenced later decisions he made regarding royal and military pageantry and had a lasting impact. For example, while in the UK he developed a fascination with the bagpipes<sup>50</sup>, which were featured in the 2016 National Day performance at the Royal Opera House in Muscat.<sup>51</sup>

After returning to Muscat, Qaboos was placed on house arrest for being "too western"<sup>52</sup> but the connections he built with the British military came in handy leading up to and after the 1970 coup. The British kept in contact with him from 1967 to 1970 by sending him messages in classical music cassettes.<sup>53</sup> In his first days of leadership, with

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<sup>50</sup> Chatty, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Royal Opera House Muscat, <https://www.rohmuscat.org.om/en/media-centre/video-gallery>.

<sup>52</sup> White, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Broder, "Sultanate Comes Out of the Dark Quickly". *Chicago Tribune* (November 6, 1985), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-11-06-8503160692-story.html>.

assistance from British military advisers, he instituted his five-point plan, which laid the foundation for the ways he would go about uniting the country both militarily and culturally.

With this background in mind, I focused on the appearance of certain key terms and concepts in the magazine selections that tie into various aspects of Qaboos's Five Point Plan. This plan outlined Qaboos's counterinsurgency strategy for the remainder of the Dhofar Rebellion. This policy was the first strategy put into action by the SAF and set the tone for the early years of the SAF under Qaboos. The rebellion ended in 1976, but several key parts of the Five Point Plan maintained relevance beyond the end of the insurgency. Among these are efforts to modernize the country (specifically Dhofar), Qaboos's nation-wide development program, and establishing international recognition of Oman as an Arab state with a legal form of government. I compiled the following list of topics to track references to these efforts in the magazines:

Colonialism/Colonies	الإستعمار/المستعمرات
Imperialism	الإمبريالية
Modern	حديث
Education	التعليم
Industry	الصناعة
Oil/Petroleum	النفط/البترول
Graduation	التخرج
Ceremony	المراسم/الأحتفال
Parade	إستعراض
Qaboos/Sultan Qaboos/*Endearing Term for	<i>varies</i>



Leader*	
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These specific terms are important to track for several reasons. *Colonialism*, *colonies*, and *imperialism* relate to the dialogue surrounding British influence in Oman. A goal of the Dhofar Liberation Front was to remove the Sultan as well as “British imperialist mercenaries” from the region<sup>54</sup>. An important part of Qaboos uniting Oman was eradicating the idea, especially in the interior, that Oman was just another small piece of the vast British empire. It was its own nation, and conversation around the topic of colonialism and imperialism can help identify the tone around how Oman was reconciling its own identity with the strong influence Britain had held over it with the previous Sultan.

Other terms are important for understanding how Qaboos’s various modernization policies coincided with the formalization of the military to foster nationalism. The use of the word *modern* turned up most frequently in my research. It was used to refer both to the military’s technological advancements as well as Oman as a “modern nation.” I thought it would be a good idea to look for *education*, *industry*, *oil/petroleum*, *graduation*, *ceremony*, and *parade* because these words reflect steps taken to create a modern nation. However, I found that these words did not appear very often in the magazines. Instead of focusing on specific steps towards modernization, the magazines touted the results of the efforts. A lot of focus was given to high ranking military officials- and in some cases, Qaboos- giving praise to the military without focusing on lower ranking individuals or practices. Even though I did not pick up these words while

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<sup>54</sup> Paul, 275.

skimming through the magazines, their absence shed light on the tone of the magazines: results-focused and congratulatory.

Finally, it was essential to note the way the magazines refer to the sultan. Other research has centered on the cult of personality that formed around Qaboos during this early period of his rule. Since Qaboos came to personify Omani nationhood, the way the magazines speak about him is important. It has been established through other research that Qaboos's identity became a significant part of Omani nationhood, but the way this element pervaded other cultural symbols like military pageantry speaks to the close relationship between cultural symbols and the nation itself. It is important to note, however, that the solidification of Oman as a nation, extended beyond the use of Qaboos's image. The integration of cultural symbols into the nation's pride ensured the country's nationalism could continue past the sultan's reign.

Review of these sources indicates that the formalization and modernization of the military was used as a signal for the unification and legitimization of the country under Qaboos. Above all, the magazines contain language that seeks to unite the nation and solidify its place in the world. They reference but do not linger on the inner fragmentations the nation faced in the 1970s and 1980s, but they allude heavily to the role Oman plays in the world. This ties into how the formalization of the military contributed to the question: "Who are we in the world?".

An essential part of the magazines is justifying the military and clarifying its role. The first issue of the magazine was published in 1974 when the Dhofar Rebellion was still continuing. It includes a letter from editor Faher bin Taimur, which outlines both the role of the magazine and the military as a whole. Tellingly, the role of the military is

described as “to carry on its shoulders the message of a historical hero in the face of a tenacious legacy and painful memories”.<sup>55</sup> This quote reveals both the way that Qaboos was portrayed as well as how the rule of his father was presented to the public. Qaboos’s status as a “historical hero” places his actions in a larger context than just the change of power from father to son in a small Gulf country. This language emphasizes the way he changed Oman’s trajectory. Additionally, the reference to “painful memories” validates any complaints Omanis (especially those in the interior) could hold against the prior regime while enforcing the fact that complaints against the old regime were not justified against the new regime. All of this suggests that the military’s early role was to symbolize and reinforce Qaboos and the switches in leadership and political styles.

In the context of Qaboos’s renaissance narrative, the use of such language makes sense. References to the prior regime had to be handled in a way that did not erase the story of the Omani people or the poor leadership of bin Taimur. Bin Taimur’s own guard



was made up of foreign soldiers and the military was bolstered by the British. For Omanis living in the interior, bin Taimur’s presence was already oppressive, and the institution of a military that did not hail from their country was even more alienating. The development of the military under Qaboos worked to send that message that the military is made up of Omanis for Omanis. The cover of the April 1979 issue (pictured) features a picture of high-

<sup>55</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad* (January 1974): 3

ranking military officials saluting with the caption “From You and For You”<sup>56</sup> emphasizing the Omani-ness of the military.

The magazines don’t just clarify the role of the military; they advertise it to promote it as a point of pride and nationalism for citizens. Images of training exercises, the naval fleet, and modernized weaponry are sprinkled throughout the issues. The modernization of the military was essential in quelling the Dhofar Rebellion as well as continuing to put Oman on the same level as its neighbors. It was also a key part of Qaboos’s strategy in using the military to unite the country. Having a modern military helped cement Oman’s position among other Gulf states. Military air shows later became a part of annual National Day celebrations. Cooperation between Oman and other countries was also seen as an important part of modernizing the military. An article providing an overview of the Ministry of Defense includes information on partnerships with several countries for educational military courses abroad. It sent 37 military members to Saudi Arabia, 36 to Jordan, 54 to the UK, and 27 to Pakistan to train.<sup>57</sup> Reliance on these kinds of partnerships helped Oman solidify a role on the world stage. Without the use of these sorts of military exchange programs, Oman could not have done such an effective job of defining how it fit into the world. Throughout its post-1970 history Oman has positioned itself as a negotiator because of good relationships Qaboos and the nation built up with other regional and global powers.

These kinds of partnerships and emphasis on military power continued into the 1980s as well. The cover of the March 1987 issue features two Sepecat Jaguars flying

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<sup>56</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad* (April 1979): 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*, (November 1976): 4.

over soldiers conducting a training exercise on the ground.<sup>58</sup> The jets represent a continuation of partnership with the British military. The Royal Air Force of Oman originally acquired 12 of these planes from the UK in 1977, followed by another acquisition in 1982.<sup>59</sup> Programs such as these helped Oman develop its own military strength while maintaining the backing of other Western powers. In the magazines, the focus is given to Oman-based training exercises not the countries that tools and weapons are acquired from. The March 1987 cover is linked to an article about the “fruits of the SAF’s tactical exercises”<sup>60</sup>, promoting pride in the Oman-driven side of the partnership.

In addition to technology acquired from other countries, the magazines demonstrate Qaboos’s push for industrial development. An article titled “Our Scientific Renaissance in the Era of the Blessed Renaissance” demonstrates that Oman continues to develop its own technology instead of just borrowing from other countries. All of these efforts tie into the larger goal of marketing the military as a beacon of modernity like the post-1970 Oman was supposed to be in comparison to the “dark days”.

An essential part of crafting a professional, modern military image was the development of iconography. Chatty writes about Qaboos’s efforts to craft a national symbol- the khanjar, a symbolic blade worn by Omani men during ceremonies. Developing a symbol for the nation played into the development of official royal protocol. Similarly, the development of iconography for the branding of the military demonstrates the formalization of the military. One issue includes the debut of the air

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<sup>58</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*, (May 1987): 1.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Foster, “Oman Retires Last Jaguar Strike Aircraft.” *Flight Global*. 12 August 2014.

<sup>60</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*, (March 1987).

force's logo: a khanjar and wings.<sup>61</sup> The use of the khanjar ties the air forces to the nation, underscoring once again the Omani-ness of the armed forces.

As expected, the magazines also demonstrate the importance of Qaboos as a personality and as a leader. He is referred to most commonly as the "highest leader" which can be seen throughout every issue of the magazine. Most issues include a section at the beginning called "From the Statements of our Highest Leader and his Guidance" which includes a quote from Qaboos relating to military activities or Omani national pride. The language that is used throughout the magazines reflects an Oman that is attempting to unite around its shared past, even if this means addressing insecurity around the level of education citizens received pre-Qaboos. In a May 1979 letter from the editor, a reference is made to the period before Qaboos's reign, specifically the country's lack of education. The writer concedes that they inherited this from their "grandfathers who possess commendable qualities because of their association with this fine land".<sup>62</sup> This quote calls on citizens' historical bonds as well as addresses what the country needs to work on in order to modernize the country. The article serves as a call to action and paints an inspiring picture of the future of Oman, emphasizing ownership and feelings of nationalism.

The magazines also reveal another layer of Omani-ness with the way they handle holidays. The inclusion of these events indicates a sense of nationhood by detailing the significance of events to Oman in particular. Among these are National Day and Renaissance Day. National Day is a day of patriotism that is celebrated on Qaboos's birthday every year, November 18. Renaissance Day is celebrated in July and

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<sup>61</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*, (November 1976): 35.

<sup>62</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*, (May 1979): 3.

commemorates the day that Qaboos came to power. The November 1976 issue featured a note from Qaboos to the military in honor of national day where he commended them on their efforts in unifying and modernizing Oman. The article references Oman's "spending on modern weapons" as a point of pride and reason for the military's gains. Regarding the resolved conflict in the south, he states that "truth triumphed over remnants of falsehood, and reconstruction projects resolved ruin and destruction."<sup>63</sup> These powerful words reflect not just the important role that industry and development played in unifying Oman, but the military's role in paving the way for these kinds of projects in Dhofar and elsewhere in Oman.

While magazines from the 1970s gloss over internal fractions, issues from the 1980s emphasize the coming-together of the nation post-Dhofar conflict. An example of this is the cooperation between Muscat and the interior that is shown in the magazine's coverage of a 5K held in 1985 in the southern region to celebrate Renaissance Day. The 5K was for military members and served as a symbol for oneness in the country. The July 1985 cover features Qaboos handing an award to a winner from the race. Once again, Qaboos, the nation, and the military converge. The accompanying article lists the first ten winners of the 2,013 participants and where they are from. This list is very telling of the state of the military in the mid-1980s. The winners listed are from a variety of locations across Oman. None are foreign mercenaries or British soldiers; they are Omani.

Also contributing to the conversation of who Omanis are in the world is the acknowledgement of the Arab-ness of Omanis as it relates to their place in the Gulf and

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<sup>63</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*. (November 1976): 3.

in Islam. The military magazines do not shy away from discussing religion. The July 1981 editor's note discusses reflection during the month of Ramadan. Discussion of this holiday, like the other national holidays, demonstrates a sense of nationhood and togetherness. The holiday provides an opportunity for the country to unite.

Additionally, many references are made to Oman's relationship with other Gulf countries, especially after the formation of the GCC in 1981, underscoring Oman's increasing role outside its own borders. Discussion about involvements with the GCC promote the idea that Oman is not alone and that it is actively working alongside its neighbors. As the magazines move into the late-1970s and early 1980s, they start to reveal how the military was used to establish not just Oman's domestic identity, but its place in the world. Uniting the country was no longer the sole concern of the nation. It now faced threats- real and perceived- from abroad. Following the Iranian revolution, the April 1979 issue includes an interview with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense that explains Oman's geographic security and steps the country needs to take to continue to maintain it.<sup>64</sup> This event created a new role for the military- serving as a means of reassurance for citizens against outside threat. Instead of just symbolizing Qaboos's rule, the military began to symbolize Oman's strength and ability to defend itself. The magazine's inclusion of this interview with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense demonstrates how the military's role became elevated during this time period.

The language that is used throughout the magazines reflects an Oman that is attempting to unite around its shared past, even if this means addressing insecurity around the level of education citizens received pre-Qaboos. Under bin Taimur's rule, resentment

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<sup>64</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*. (April 1979): 5.



for the sultan and migration out of Oman was common. The shift, almost overnight, to a new ruler and a new government was a significant shock. The rule of bin Taimur could not be ignored, but painting Omanis under bin Taimur in a way that victimized them would take away their agency. In a May 1979 letter from the editor, a reference is made to the period before Qaboos's reign, specifically the country's lack of education. The writer concedes that they inherited this from their "grandfathers who possess commendable qualities because of their association with this fine land".<sup>65</sup> This quote calls on citizens' historical bonds as well as addresses what the country needs to work on in order to modernize the country. It encapsulates the difference that Qaboos hoped to draw between his rule and his fathers: a look toward the future. The article serves as a call to action and paints an inspiring picture of the future of Oman, emphasizing ownership and feelings of nationalism.

Changes in the subject matter of the magazines shows how the role of the military evolved from 1974 to 1989, but the military's status as a cultural symbol is consistent throughout this range. The military was used as a way of making Omanis reflect on their shared past, present and future, as well as the position that Oman held in the world. This emphasis on "Who are we in the world?" required Omanis to think of themselves as a collective, a nation.

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<sup>65</sup> *Jund Oman Al Adad*. (May 1979): 3.

## Chapter Four

### Camel Racing

The institution of military pageantry was Qaboos's answer to uniting Oman in the face of rebellion and international uncertainty. Camel racing, on the other hand, was Qaboos's successful attempt at taking a pre-existing cultural symbol and using it to unite the country around a shared pastime. It helped in answering the question "who are we as a people?"

Camel racing's roots are in the tribal origins of Oman. Where camels were once bred for transportation, milk, wool, and meat, they are now primarily bred for racing purposes.<sup>66</sup> The introduction of television and radio broadcasts allowed camel racing events to reach larger audiences and allowed races to be elevated as national entertainment. Over time, the sport has evolved into both a formal sport and an informal symbolic activity. An essential part of determining the status of camel racing as a symbol is the application for UNESCO to recognize camel racing as "intangible cultural heritage of humanity."<sup>67</sup> Omani Ardah (horse and camel rider showmanship) was granted this title in 2018. The applications for both of these include valuable information about how camel racing culture is formalized within Oman.

Camel racing provided a good candidate for a national symbol to unite people around because of its ties to Oman pre-Qaboos and its connections to the interior of Oman. In addition to recognizing its role in the world, Oman also had to grapple with its unification and the split between coastal Muscat and the southern interior regions. The UNESCO application cites the importance of camel racing in Bedouin- or tribal- cultures.

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<sup>66</sup> Cooke: 105.

<sup>67</sup> UNESCO, *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. (March 29, 2019): 1.

Throughout the document, the applicants refer to the link between the formal states (Oman and the UAE) and Bedouin culture “in which the camel plays a central role.”<sup>68</sup> This association underscores how camel racing was identified as a national symbol for the *whole* nation. Doing so linked the exterior and the interior.

Camel racing also worked as a shared piece of national heritage because of the existing practices and cultures around it that made passing down knowledge and national pride possible. According to the UNESCO application, activities surrounding camel racing provided “opportunities for young people to acquire knowledge and skills related to camel breeding, thereby enhancing their national identity”<sup>69</sup>. Additionally, camel racing extends beyond just the owners of the camels. The long list of people involved in the industry (“clan tribal groups, camel owners, farms owners, camel breeders, race representatives in all, governorates and regions, artisan women who produce racing tools, and practitioners”) are given acknowledgement for maintaining “the continuity of the element since ancient times in various non formal ways”<sup>70</sup>. Camel racing was- and remains- an activity that enlists a large portion of a community and represents a link to a shared past and the promotion of camel racing in Muscat after Qaboos’s rise to power helped expand this.

This kind of bond around a common past provided a perfect opportunity to stoke ethnic nationalism. Official recognition and promotion of camel racing made efforts for citizens in Muscat to appreciate and identify with the tribal origins of camel racing, while simultaneously signaling to citizens in the interior that they and their heritage were

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<sup>68</sup> UNESCO: 2.

<sup>69</sup> UNESCO: 5.

<sup>70</sup> UNESCO: 2.

accepted by Muscat. The establishment of the Royal Camel Corps made camel racing link with the Omani state official. The RCC continues to host an annual camel racing festival in Muscat<sup>71</sup> and provides specialized training for Omani youth<sup>72</sup>. The establishment of an Omani racing organization helped set the pastime apart from the camel racing in other nations and contained it. The continuation of this tradition proves the long-lasting legacy of early camel racing policies.

Within Oman, camel racing is a uniting element, but even among other GCC states, Oman regards itself as the leader in camel racing. In a statement, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said spoke of the renown of the Al Bashayer camel racing track, stating that it is one of the “most advanced camel racing tracks”<sup>73</sup>. The venue also includes antiques from Al Bashayer and nearby villages. The inclusion of these artifacts promotes the cultural ties of the sport and the region. The pride placed in this track exemplifies how camel racing provides a point of pride and nationalism for Omani citizens. Uniting behind this sense of pride contributes to a sense of national pride in the face of internal and external audiences. The internal audience- the Omanis- get the feel pride in the superiority of their heritage and camel racing history in comparison to other Gulf countries, the external audience.

Today, camel racing remains a point of pride for Oman and is celebrated as a national pastime that has endured many changes to the industry in recent decades. The

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<sup>71</sup> UNESCO, *Horse and Camel Ardah* (December 2018): 17.

<sup>72</sup> UNESCO: 3.

<sup>73</sup> “Camel sports accorded HM’s constant attention: Sayyid Asaad”. *Muscat Daily*. October 2, 2020. <https://muscatdaily.com/Oman/388205/Camel-sports-accorded-HM%E2%80%99s-constant-attention:-Sayyid-Asaad>.

biggest change was the switch from child jockeys to robot jockeys in 2004. This came as a result of the increase in human trafficking and abuses towards these children jockeys- often from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Sudan- throughout the 1980s and 1990s across the Gulf.<sup>74</sup> The scandal and horror stories that came out of this revelation did not stop the practice from evolving. Now the use of robotic jockeys is very common. According to the oral history of Anwar Rashid Al-Hajri, Chairman of the Camel Committee in Bidiyah, camel racing focuses more on camels' age, nutrition, and distance, but the "competitive spirit" is the same. The way this sport has endured, despite scandal and evolution, demonstrates the impact it has had on the culture and identity of Oman.

The practice of camel racing continues through the institution of annual racing festivals. The Oman Camel Racing Federation organizes races and oversees practices, as well as provides education programs to educate youth on camel racing.<sup>75</sup> Festivals, like the one in the pictured schedule of the 2018-2019 racing festival (Figure 1) provide opportunities for those in the camel industry to travel while the public widely watches these races on television today. This access to the public allows younger generations to be exposed to the sport as well. Because there is no betting allowed in camel racing, races can be fully enjoyed without watching in person. The practice of following camel races remotely proves how embedded it is in the everyday culture.

Camel racing remains important in Omani culture outside of state-organized events. It also continues to occur in non-official settings, such as weddings. A 2019 article from *The National*, a UAE-based news website, described both camel and horse

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<sup>74</sup> Sam Borden, Sprinting Over the Dirt, With a Robot on the Hump. *New York Times*. Dec 26, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/28/sports/camel-racing-in-the-united-arab-emirates-is-a-blend-of-centuries-old-traditions-and-modern-technology.html>.

<sup>75</sup> UNESCO: 13.

racing that occurred before a wedding in Yahmadi, a small village two hours outside of Muscat. These kinds of events do not occur on professionally designed tracks. This race in particular used a track made out of dirt and gravel with mounds of dirt on the side that onlookers used as bleachers<sup>76</sup>. The practice of camel racing outside of a formally organized race underscores the important role it plays in the lives and culture of Omanis. The country's love of camel racing, and the efforts taken to preserve it in the face of modernization, demonstrate the important role it plays in Omani nationhood.

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<sup>76</sup> David Ismael. "Riding 'for love': The traditional Omani camel and horse races that have no prizes." August 26, 2019. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/riding-for-love-the-traditional-omani-camel-and-horse-races-that-have-no-prizes-1.902424>.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Evaluation of both the military magazines and the various camel racing sources indicate that both were used as symbols to unite Oman in Qaboos' first twenty years. To conclude my research, I evaluate how the claims Anthony Smith makes with his ethno-symbolic approach line up with nationalism efforts in Oman,

First, ethno-symbolism recognizes *la longue duree*, the idea that the origins of nations span over long periods of time, not just the time of a nations official conception.<sup>77</sup> Both symbols delve into the past and produce evidence for a shared history, however, camel racing is the symbol that does this most effectively. While the military relies on the existence of armed forces pre-Qaboos to be compared to, this comparison is focused largely in Muscat and not in the interior. Camel racing existed across the country and provided a link to Oman's tribal ties at a time when the interior was still being led by tribally selected leaders. The 2019 UNESCO application in particular demonstrates the pride that Oman places in its "Bedouin"<sup>78</sup> connections.

Second, when discussion the ethnic foundations of nationalism, Smith identifies five attributes that designate a group an "ethnic community": an identifying name or emblem, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories and traditions, one or modern elements of common culture, a link with a historic territory or homeland, and a measure of solidarity (at least among elites)<sup>79</sup>. Viewing the military as a cultural symbol helps meet several of these criteria. First, the magazines emphasize shared memories and

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<sup>77</sup> Smith 23

<sup>78</sup> UNESCO 2019

<sup>79</sup> Smith 25

traditions, particularly when it comes to national holidays. Additionally, they emphasize solidarity. Articles like the one discussing the 1985 5K promote the idea that the military is made up of citizens from across Oman, pointing out that the military is *Omani* instead of made up of foreigners and that the military members come from different parts of Oman.

With the attributes of ethnic communities in mind, Smith argues that “state-nations” in Africa and Asia formed post-colonization must develop a cultural unity and identity that match “nations built on pre-existing ethnic ties” if they are to survive in the international system.<sup>80</sup> Not only did Oman have to compete with the comparison of other established nation states in the world, it also had to compete with itself and its former status under British rule.

Smith also negates previous distinctions drawn between an “open and flexible” civic nation versus a “rigid and closed” ethnic nation. The ethnic elements of nationhood, which are focused on perceptions of individuals and communities, over time produce a structure of relations and processes that “provide a framework for the socialization of successive generations” through the use of symbols.<sup>81</sup> Instead of delineating civic and ethnic nations, Smith argues that the ethnic component of nationhood can promote openness. We see this in Oman, with the language presented in the magazines surrounding industry and modernization. In short, this openness was deemed necessary for Oman’s survival as a nation, and it was passed down and clarified by the symbolic military. Another practice that develops during Oman’s nation-building

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<sup>80</sup> Smith 26

<sup>81</sup> Smith 26



process is the use of the state to formalize a cultural practice, such as the establishment of the Oman Camel Racing Federation and the Royal Camel Corp.

Smith also discusses the importance of a group's ethno-history, the ethnic members' memories and understanding of their communal past<sup>82</sup>. The emphasis that is placed on the Renaissance narrative in Oman demonstrates this. Instead of focusing solely on the common past pre-Qaboos, additional emphasis is put on the events of 1970. The magazine issues repeatedly referred to this as the "blessed renaissance".

The importance of the use of cultural symbols, as defined by Smith, allowed Qaboos to both build on existing links between Omanis and forge new ones that last into the 21st century. These symbols continue to be an integral part of Omani nationalism today, as evinced by the continuation of military displays on National Days and the 2020 press release reassuring the public of Qaboos's successor's- Haitham bin Tarik's- love for the pastime. Figure 1 and Figure 2 display the schedule for the 2018-2019 national racing season. The two demonstrate the continued prevalence of camel racing.

Moving forward, more research could be done with these sources, particularly the copies of *Jund Oman Al Adad*. The issues are a valuable resource for studying the development of the SAF and how its image evolved. A more in-depth content analysis of these issues could reveal more subtleties in the marketing of the military. This research was also limited in terms of relevant camel racing sources. With more resources, it would be interesting to trace migration patterns in Oman in the 1970s and 1980s in conjunction with camel races to see the more direct impact the elevation of camel racing had. The emergence of Oman's monarchy centered on a single person, while the other

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<sup>82</sup> Smith 28

monarchies that evolved in the region during the same period elevated entire families. It could be valuable to evaluate the of cultural symbols in other Gulf monarchical nations to view Oman's use of camel racing and military pageantry in a larger context.

Evaluating these cultural symbols allowed for a better understanding of how Qaboos used nationalism strategies in his first twenty years of rule to establish nationhood for Oman. Qaboos's efforts to unify Oman were not just limited to the paternalistic image he crafted around himself. This research helped fill a gap in the literature on the formation of modern Oman as a state by presenting Qaboos's first twenty years in power in a different light.



### The Annual Program for the National Camel Races Festival 2018 - 2019

No	Governorate	Wilayat	Date
1	DaKhilia	Adam	12-13 / 9 / 2018
2	Sharqia North	AL-Mudaibi	26-27 / 9 / 2018
3	DaKhilia	Adam	10-11 / 10 / 2018
4	Batina North	Suhar	24-25 / 10 / 2018
5	Dhofar	Thumrit	2-8 / 11 / 2018
6	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij' (AL-Ardah Running)	12-15 / 11 / 2018
7	Sharqia North	AL-Mudaibi	21-22 / 11 / 2018
8	Batina North	Suhar	5-6 / 12 / 2018
9	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij'	19-20 / 12 / 2019
10	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij' (Camel Beauty Competition)	6-10 / 1 / 2019
11	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij'	15-17 / 1 / 2019
12	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij'	30-31 / 1 / 2019
13	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij'	20-21 / 2 / 2019
14	Batina South	Barka 'AL-Felaij' (Final Race)	18-21 / 3 / 2019









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Figure 1: Retrieved from Royal Camel Corps Media

**Notice**

الإتحاد العماني لسباقات الحمير  
Oman Camel Racing Federation

وزارة الشؤون الرياضية  
Oman Camel Racing Federation

Oman Camel Racing Federation pleased to announce the places and dates of Camel racing events in the Sultanate's Governorates for 2018/2019 according to the following schedule:

No.	Governorate - State	Race type	Race date
1	Al Wusta - Hima	Race	18/10/2018
2	Batina North - Saham	General Race	11-13 /12/2018
3	Dakhilia - Adam	Race	27/12/2018
4	Al-Dhahirah - Ibri	Race	3 /1/2019
5	Batina South - Al Musannah	Beauty Festival	20-24 /1/2019
6	Batina North - Sohar	Annual race	4-7 /3/2019
7	Batina North - Al Suwaiq	Ran vulnerable	25-28 /3/ 2019
8	Sharqia South Al Kamel & Al Wafi	Race	10-11 /4/2019
9	Dhofar	Dhofar Autumn Festival for Beauty & Milk	16-25 /7/2019

for more information : 24490494 / 24492610 /99777260/ 99456547



Figure 2: Retrieved from Oman Camel Racing FE

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