

# Ethnicity or Tribe?

## Social Cleavage in Omani Employment Patterns

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### 要旨

本稿は、中東、湾岸諸国で近年大きな社会問題となっている雇用問題を取りあげ、オマーン人の就業状況から国民内部の社会的亀裂を論じるものである。湾岸諸国の多くでは外国人が国民の人口を上回っており、劣悪な労働環境に置かれた外国人労働者の人権問題や、文化的他者あるいは脅威としての外国人の存在がとりあげられるなど、雇用問題や労働市場は国民／外国人の構図のなかでこれまで分析されてきた。しかし、自国民／外国人の格差への過度な注目は、一般国民内部の多様性や格差を隠蔽してしまう。そこで本稿では、1980年代以降政府が推進する労働力の自国民化を底辺で支えているのが、主流派のアラブ系オマーン人ではなく、非アラブ系やアフリカ帰りの混血オマーン人であることを筆者の参与観察やインタビュー資料から明らかにする。こうしたデータをみると国民内部の分業体制はエスニシティに基づいているようにみえるが、エスニシティと重なりながらも部族という要因が作用していることを論じる。近代化していく社会の中で薄れつつあると言われる部族意識は、1980年代以降顕著になってきた公的機関への就職難、さらには結婚相手の選択可能性という、自身の部族アイデンティティを改めて意識化する契機が生まれたことによって、現代的な意味合いをもった形で維持されているのである。

キーワード：エスニシティ (ethnicity)、部族 (tribe)、雇用 (employment)、オマーン (Oman)、湾岸諸国 (Arab Gulf Countries)

## 1. Introduction

### 1-1 Framework of the citizen and the immigrant

This paper explores social cleavage among Omani citizens and examines employment issues, which have become a major social concern in contemporary Arab Gulf countries (AGC). Because AGC citizens are a minority in their own countries, apart from Saudi Arabia and Oman, scholars have explored how the presence of immigrants has influenced the economy and society of the region. Many anthropologists have recently focused on the immigrants themselves, rather than local citizens, describing their diversity and lived experiences [Longva 1997; Gardner 2010; Kanna 2011; Vora 2013]<sup>(1)</sup>. The social structure of the AGC cannot be discussed without the presence of immigrants, and employment issues and the labor market have been analyzed within the analytic framework of citizen/immigrant.

However, the excessive attention paid to the difference between the two categories conceals variety and disparity in the idea of the “citizen.” The general image of the AGC as homogeneous societies has prevailed; as a result, governments frequently utilize a nationalistic discourse in order to conceal disparity between ethnicities, religious sects, and social classes.

Oman is an Arab nation but one diverse in terms of ethnicity and religious sects among the citizenry. Omani citizens constitute approximately 57% of the total population of four million [NCSI 2015: 72]. The majority are Ibadhi<sup>(2)</sup> Arabs but considerable numbers of non-Arab citizens exist as well.

For instance, the Lawatiya, Indian Shi'a Muslims, settled in Oman a few centuries ago, while the Banyan, Indian Hindus, established themselves in the late 19th century as a mercantile class. In addition, the Baluchi, the second largest ethnic group next to Arabs, are Sunni Muslims brought to Oman as soldiers from the present Pakistan, while the Ajam are Shi'a Muslims with a Persian origin. Moreover, there is a lower class called *Mawālī*, which includes the *Khuddām* (of slave origins) and the *Bayāsira*, who cannot trace their tribal descent. In addition to these old Omani residents, there are new citizens, who returned from East Africa, mainly Zanzibar<sup>(3)</sup> after 1970. They are descendants of those who migrated from Oman to East Africa decades or even a century before; many of them have African maternal ancestry and can speak Swahili. Although they are genealogically Arab, I use the term "Swahili Omanis" to refer to them in order to differentiate them from the majority of Arab Omanis.

In discussing the employment issue, I will first explain the Omanization of manpower, a policy enacted by the government since 1988, which is aimed at replacing immigrant workers with trained Omanis. Far from this policy being successful, some Omanis have become blue-collar workers in the private sector, an employment option generally avoided in Omani society. In the next section, I present the finding that such blue-collar citizens are mainly non-Arab Omanis according to my participant observation and interview data. The division of labor among citizens is seemingly based on ethnicity, but in the following section, I examine how the tribal factor affects the disparity within the citizenry. I would like to consider how tribalism is maintained in contemporary Oman in terms of employment and other social-cultural events.

## 1-2 The Omanization of the work force

Here I briefly describe the labor market of Oman. The immigrant worker who constituted 7% of the working population in 1970 has increased rapidly to 65% within a decade, and the number doubled between 1980 and 1985 [Valeri 2009: 201]. As a consequence, the government started nationalizing the work force at the end of the 1980s. The governmental sector has achieved a high Omanization rate of 82.6% in 2005, 85.6% in 2010, and 84.5% in 2014 [NCSI 2015: 98-99]. It has gradually become difficult to find employment in the government sector, but Omani youth, and Arab Omanis in particular, hesitate to work in the private sector and service businesses because of poor working conditions. Subsequently, the ministry of Manpower which was founded in 2001 has regularly announced the percentages of Omanization to be adopted by the private sector and ordered full Omanization of low skilled professions such as heavy vehicles drivers, petrol station salesman, and so on.

New employees in the private sector increased until the Arab Spring of 2011 (cf. Table 1). However, the number of new employees decreased sharply from 49,376 to 18,391 in 2012, while the number of foreign workers continued to increase. As of 2014, the percentage of Omanis in the private sector was only 11.6%, but the fact that banks (92.3%), a telecommunication company (90.5%), and an oil and gas company (78.5%) have achieved a high Omanization rate confirms that it is becoming difficult to find white-collar jobs even in the private sector [NCSI 2015: 149].

Thus, after the mid-2000s, Omani youth started to appear as cashiers in shops and employees in restaurants. This phenomenon could not be imagined in the late 1990s when I visited Oman for the first time. Nor do we see many citizens working at blue-collar jobs in other Arab Gulf countries. Oman is perceived to be

Table 1 : The number and rate of Omanis working in the private sector

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
No. of Omanis	147,194	158,315	177,716	174,441	172,066	181,860	197,510
New entrants	29,445	24,983	32,390	49,376	18,391	18,079	24,590
Leavers	53,204	48,217	56,715	72,524	58,828	46,132	54,143
No. of foreigners	794,935	874,245	955,630	1,114,590	1,316,182	1,527,241	1,510,393
Rate of Omanis (%)	15.6	15.3	15.7	13.5	11.6	10.6	11.6

(Source: National Center for Statistics and Information, 2009–2015)

one of the most successful countries in the region in nationalizing its manpower. So what kinds of Omanis are engaging in blue-collar work in the private sector?

## 2. Blue-collar Omanis in the Private Sector

I will first introduce the blue-collar Omani workers in the private sector, who I interviewed during field-work in 2013 and 2014. The first workplace was the Sports Complex in Muscat. As this complex is a public facility, the employees are civil servants, but cleaners and technicians in charge of facility management and maintenance are employees from a subcontractor in the private sector. It seems that Omanization in the government sector is almost accomplished because Omanis occupy clerical positions as civil servants while employees in the private sector—many foreigners and fewer Omanis—are dispatched from the subcontractor to work in technical fields in the same office.

One of the subcontractors, Bahwan Engineering Company (BEC), is a leading company in this field and dispatches numerous Omani engineers and technicians. According to the four Omani employees that I interviewed—one cleaner and three technicians in their twenties and thirties—their basic salary is 225 Omani rials (OMR), which is the minimum wage for Omanis in the private sector. Although their salary has increased by OMR 100 since the minimum wage rise in 2013<sup>(4)</sup>, it is not enough to maintain a family in the capital. Three of these workers work away from their home village and are given free accommodation by the company. They work for eight hours a day and have enjoyed two-day weekends in the last few years. They are satisfied with their situation because BEC is a stable company.

A 24-year-old mechanical assistant who has been employed by BEC for three years lives with his family in Muscat. Judging from his tribal name, birthplace, and physical appearance he appears to be a Swahili Omani. He talks about his future prospects as follows:

The salary is now enough because I live with my family, but it will be insufficient if I get married. There is very little employment for technicians in the government sector, and it is almost impossible for a preparatory school graduate like me to be a civil servant. I would like to finish secondary school for promotion. I would move for a better job if any<sup>(5)</sup>.

As for their educational background, three are preparatory school graduates and one is a secondary graduate. All of them hope to find employment in the government sector, but have given up trying to do so because of their lack of qualifications.

Another 28-year-old electronic assistant has been employed by BEC for seven years. He lives in company accommodation because he is from the South Batinah region, less than a two hour drive from Muscat. After graduating from secondary school, he had studied in a technical college for a year.

I used to work as a cashier in a supermarket. The salary was only OMR 160. I quit the job after only one month. My colleagues were mainly Indian and prayer time was not assured. I spent an hour getting to work by shared-taxi every day<sup>(6)</sup>.

His salary of former job was OMR 160, but the starting salary from BEC was OMR 150 in 2007. However, big companies like BEC have some advantages like free accommodation and meals.

Low salary has become a main social concern. Among 177,716 Omanis working in the private sector in 2010, there were 128,602 people (72.4%) with less than 200 OMR of basic salary<sup>(7)</sup> (cf. Table 2), and the average salary was OMR 228. As a result of the Arab Spring in Oman in 2011, the Omani minimum wage in the private sector was gradually raised to OMR 225 in 2013<sup>(8)</sup>. The low-income citizen who earns less than OMR 300 makes up 65.3% of the total. It is the ethnic minority citizens, such as the Baluchi, the Swahili, or the *Mawali* that are employed as cheap labor.

The next example is that of a secondary graduate, who was promoted according to the length of his service in the company. As a manager who supervises blue-collar employees dispatched from BEC to the sport complex, he is a Swahili Omani, who has worked for BEC for 19 years and now earns around OMR 800.

There were very few Omani technicians when I began to work. I came out of the village to work as an assistant technician because I dropped out of secondary school without any qualification or connections. My first salary was OMR 100, but I was gradually promoted because I worked hard. I also grad-

Table 2 : Income distribution of low-income Omanis working in the private sector

	2010	%	2011	%	2012	%	2013	%	2014	%
OMR 120	46,860	26.4								
OMR 120-140	24,080	13.5								
OMR 140-160	31,506	17.7								
OMR 160-180	14,060	7.9								
OMR 180-200	12,096	6.8	84,576	48.5	56,067	32.6				
OMR 200-300	21,105	11.9	46,160	26.5	60,164	35.0	118,786	65.3		
OMR 300-400	9,678	5.4	17,840	10.2	22,781	13.2	25,807	14.2	49,182	24.9
OMR 400-500									42,709	21.6
Total		89.7		85.2		80.8		79.5		46.5
Average of basic salary (OMR)	228		313		350		378		599	
Employees in the private sector	177,716		174,441		172,066		181,860		197,510	

uated from secondary while I worked....Omanis in the technical field are hardworking<sup>(9)</sup>.

It was unusual for an Omani to be a blue-collar employee in the private sector in the days when this man started to work for BEC in the 1990s. There are two other Omani females dispatched from BEC in clerical jobs in the same sports complex. One is 30 years old and has been working for BEC for eight years, and the other is 34 and has worked for 12 years. Both earn more than OMR 500 monthly. Graduating from two-year technical colleges, they experienced internships in the government, but were not employed. Their starting salary was around OMR 170 in the private sector, and has now increased almost threefold. They still hope to work in the government and say that they are ready for a career move if any better conditions arise. These two are Baluch and Swahili Omanis.

I will introduce another workplace: a golf course in Muscat. There are 3 Omanis among the 21 employees working outside as caddies and restaurant workers; it is a service business, which many Omanis would like to avoid. Among the Omanis, two of the three workers are caddies, one is a receptionist, and the others are immigrants from Pakistan and the Philippines. Their basic salary is OMR 225, the minimum wage regulated by the government. Two are Baluch Omanis and the other is a Swahili Omani; two are preparatory graduates and one is a secondary graduate. Ali, the Swahili Omani is aged 30 and is developmentally disabled. He is satisfied with his present post, but said, "I would like to graduate from secondary school in the future to get a better post."

Another employee is Musa, a 20-year-old Baluchi Omani. Born in Qatar, he went to Pakistan at the age of eight because of his father's work and came to Oman ten years later. Both of his parents are ethnic Baluchis, his father a Pakistani national and his mother an Omani national. Because of this background Musa can apply for Omani nationality without residing there for 15 years, the length of time that a foreigner normally should stay in Oman to be naturalized. He had not acquired Omani nationality by August 2014 but, exceptionally, he was employed under the same conditions as a citizen.

I chose this workplace because I knew Baluchi friends here. I am inexperienced and a preparatory graduate. My father will acquire Omani nationality within one year. Then, I will be given Omani nationality automatically. I am now going through manual labor, but it is hard and hot outside. I can apply for the army and the police job. I can even start my own business. I will leave here if I get nationality<sup>(10)</sup>.

There are several Baluchi employees in this workplace. All of them are Pakistani nationals except Musa and another. Ya'qub is a Pakistani caddie aged 27, who immigrated to Oman from Gwadar, Pakistan in 2011. His father had been working for many years in the Omani army, but Ya'qub was a Pakistani because he was born after his father left for Pakistan. He graduated from university and worked there, but came to Oman for a better salary, leaving behind his wife and children in Pakistan. His salary is OMR 230 because he is a foreigner while Musa, younger and less qualified, earns OMR 325 because he is treated as an Omani citizen. Both immigrated to Oman at almost the same time. They do the same work, communicate with each other in the Baluch language, and have a strong Baluch identity. We can see the disparity in their salaries as a function of their different nationalities.

### 3. Employment and Tribe

#### 3-1 Ethnicity or tribe

The interview data discussed above suggests that minority citizens are over-represented among blue-collar workers. It appears that the division of labor within the citizenry depends on ethnicity.

However, non-Arab Omanis are not homogenous. For example, Swahili Omanis, who received an English education in Africa, studied further, and worked abroad were highly appreciated as bureaucrats, doctors, and scholars who contributed to nation building after they returned to Oman during the 1970s as there were no Omani institutions of higher education in those days. In contrast, there were lower class Swahili Omanis who either did not achieve educationally or could not afford to enroll in university or study abroad. This differentiation mainly is a result of social class in Africa in the past [Okawa 2010]. They became blue-collar workers because they needed to enter the labor market early to support their families financially. There are very few elite Swahili Omani tribes, such as al-Harhi, al-Rawahi, or al-Lamki among the blue-collar workers I interviewed. This suggests that non-elite tribesmen among the non-Arabs support the Omanization of blue-collar jobs.

The same is equally true of Arab Omanis. They are disinclined to work in the private sector, and in blue-collar work in particular. However, it is preparatory graduates or those coming from the rural areas among Arab Omanis who engage in blue-collar work in the private sector. We find few elite Arab tribes such as al-Busaidi, al-Maawali, al-Salimi, or al-Khalili among blue-collar Omanis. Thus, we can see that the tribal hierarchy in an ethnic group affects their employment.

I would like to consider further the relationship between employment and tribe. The Supreme Council for Planning conducted a survey in 2013 aimed at understanding Omani youth orientation in the job market<sup>(11)</sup>. The survey comprised a sample of three categories of Omani youth, including higher education students, job seekers, and employees from different sectors. The results revealed that Omani youth are disinclined to work in the private sector and this is clearly visible among job seekers where only 5% are willing to work in the private sector as compared to 32% of higher education students [al-majlis al-a'lā lil-takhṭīṭ al-amāna al-'amma 2014: 36]. The results also revealed that the average salary received by youth working in the private sector is about OMR 500 compared with about OMR 800 for those working in the government sector. The disparity is negligible for university graduates as the average salary received is about OMR 900 in both sectors [al-majlis al-a'lā lil-takhṭīṭ al-amāna al-'amma 2014: 40]. The orientation of higher education students toward working in the private sector may be because of their expectations of a meritocracy existing with respect to promotion and salary.

It should be noted that the majority of all three groups (higher education students: 59%, job seekers: 89%, and employees: 56%) think the government is responsible for providing employment for all young people, although they do not take into account that employment in the government sector is not conducted in a fair way. Instead they need connections (*wāsiṭa*) and prestige (*maḥsūbiya*) to obtain a post in the government sector [al-majlis al-a'lā lil-takhṭīṭ al-amāna al-'amma 2014: 42-47]. These two features relate not to the individual's qualifications or skills, but to his or her tribe. The interview data presented in the previous section reveals that many Omanis give up on gaining employment in the government sector because they do not have both qualifications and connections. In other words, it is possible for an elite tribal member without qualification to be employed in the government sector by using connection.

People often talk about tribal connections with respect to employment. For example, an Omani jobseeker named Hamad hoped to find employment with one of the well-known oil companies. He checked recruitment information and visited the company where he was asked about his tribal name at the reception desk. The receptionist said laughingly, “Al-Jufaili? I have not heard of it. You had better go home<sup>(12)</sup>.” This treatment made him and his family angry. His tribe is small, with only several hundred members in Oman. Hamad is a Swahili Omani with a university qualification but speaks perfect Arabic because he was born and raised in Muscat. It is uncertain whether the receptionist judged Hamad as Swahili by his physical appearance. But at least we know that tribe counted for more than ethnicity at that moment judging from the fact that Hamad was asked about his tribal name directly.

Ethnicity, whether Arab or non-Arab, can almost always be assessed by tribal names in Oman. People also know whether one is a Swahili Omani or not by an individual’s way of speaking, Arabic accent, dress, and context. Tribe is a more limited concept than ethnicity. Tribal name tells us not only about the person’s ethnicity but also about the tribe’s prestige. This prestige is referred to as *nasab* (descent) or *hasab* (nobleness). For instance, Hamad’s tribe is small and not considered as elite although 9 out of 11 of his siblings are university graduates, some have received masters’ degrees abroad, and his elder brother, who often appears in the media, is general manager of the Fund for Development of Youth Projects group. *Nasab* and *hasab* relate not to recent economic conditions or academic background but to tribal size, accessibility to power, and family lineage.

Employment is one of the most important aspects of life. However, the “injustice” of a tribal connection, which an individual cannot control, plays a powerful role in Oman while the high unemployment rate remains a major social issue, and Omani youth depend on the government for their employment. A worsening unemployment situation such as this makes Omani youth ever more conscious of tribal belonging.

### 3-2 The modern meaning of tribe

Nationality (whether one is a citizen or a foreigner), religious sect, and ethnicity have, to this point, been considered as factors that affect the labor market. I have also been conducting research into Swahili Omanis for a decade and am conscious of their ethnic identity. When explaining this group’s ethnicity, people tend to say in Arabic, “He has African blood,” or “Half Arab, half African.” Some Arab Omanis even say that Swahili Omanis are not Arab [Okawa 2010]. I had not heard any particular Arabic word meaning “mixed blood” when talking with Omanis. So when I asked my friend whether there is a specific Omani Arabic word or concept meaning “mixed blood,” after an interval she said thoughtfully, “(I don’t know because) we count more on tribe than ethnicity.” Her saying stood out in my memory and made me realize that ethnicity is not necessarily the main factor that motivates Omanis’ social-cultural activities, such as employment and marriage.

Tribes existed as opponents to central power before 1970 in Oman, and tribalism still remains influential although its political and social meanings have been declining in the modern state. Diwan, the ministry in charge of palace affairs, provides financial support to shaykhs (tribal leaders) regularly as well as on special occasions in order to obtain loyalty from the tribe, and control opposition to the government. Moreover, the signature of the shaykh is necessary when applying for a passport or submitting official documents to the government and the Sultan.

Such tribalism was not originally observed among the non-Arab inhabitants in Oman. However, the government decided to appoint the tribal shaykhs as mediators of the community for non-Arab community in

1980. Moreover, the official decision was made to give every citizen a patrilineal tribal name in 1981. This decision focused on non-Arab group citizens, and their ethnicity became their tribal name such that the Baluchi are referred to as al-Balushi, a tribal name. This meant that the government tribalized non-Arab citizens to incorporate them into the nation [Valeri 2013: 272].

In other words, tribal belonging or tribal name became one marker of citizenship. Tribalism has attracted scholarly attention again in the last decade and, in particular, in reference to nationalism in the Arab Gulf countries [e.g. Alshawi & Gardner 2013, Cooke 2014]. Tribe and tribalism have been a main theme among the anthropologists of the Middle East, and they refer to Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiya* as the fundamental bond of society and the basic motivating force of history. Ibn Khaldun wrote about two distinct forms of social organization: *badw* (nomadic) and *hadar* (sedentary), and *asabiya*, which is most strong in the nomadic phase and decreases as civilization advances. *Asabiya* stems from blood ties, alliances and clientships, with blood ties having the most weight in fostering the leadership bond. Nomadic Bedouin live under circumstances where they are forced to remain close to each other to survive, while sedentary group live in urban ease where their solidarity weakens. He described the cycle of civilization by noting that as this *asabiya* declines, another more compelling *asabiya* may take its place [Ibn Khaldun 2001].

Subsequently, anthropologists have explained the political acts of tribes in the Middle East within the framework of segmental lineage systems. However, tribesmen do not necessarily follow that ideology in practice. There are tribal identities as "implicit practical notions held by people, which are not elaborated into formal ideologies" [Eickelman 1989: 127]. I will introduce some examples of this tribal identity in the AGC below.

Based on data from a questionnaire conducted with 800 young Qataris, Alshawi & Gardner analyze the background that tribalism persists in the Gulf where almost all of the population has settled in the city [Alshawi & Gardner 2013]. Qatar has one of the highest per capita GDPs in the world and according to Ibn Khaldun's hypothesis, *asabiya* (tribal solidarity) should decline as living standard improves. However, Gardner and Alshawi's results show a strong correlation between income and tribal solidarity: the higher the income is, the stronger one expresses support for tribal leadership, traditional tribal norms, and a vote for one's own tribe in elections. As for the latest election results, 78.3% including both city and village dwellers voted for candidates from the same tribe, 14.1% did not vote, and only 4.8% voted for a candidate from a different tribe [Alshawi & Gardner 2013: 52-54]. Gardner and Alshawi argue that tribal solidarity is maintained even in modern and financially secure society through the articulation of tribal belonging on the occasions of national day celebrations conducted by each tribe, elections, and access to national resources such as land, parliamentary posts, and positions in government [Alshawi & Gardner 2013].

Is the same true of Oman? As mentioned above, the state authority enforced the official decision to tribalize the citizen by giving a tribal name to every Omani in 1980. Like Qatar, the election of a Consultative Council, introduced in the 1990s, is also an event that made Omanis conscious of their tribal belonging. The 84 seats in the Consultative Council are elected in 61 administrative districts (*wilayat*). *Wilayat* with fewer than 30,000 inhabitants have one seat while those with more than 30,000 inhabitants have two representatives. People tend to vote for a candidate from the same tribe except in the capital. Furthermore, employment in the government sector became difficult in the 1990s without tribal "*wāsita*." The new system, and circumstances introduced in the last few decades, provided opportunities for citizens to be conscious of their tribal belonging. Given the fact that non-elite tribesmen become blue-collar workers in the private

sector, tribal belonging generates divisions of labor and class.

Generally, the standard of living has improved in the AGC because of the oil boom after the 1970s. While Ibn Khaldun explained that *asabiya* declines as the tribe acquires a more luxurious urban life, Alshawi & Gardner demonstrate from the election result that tribalism is adversely preserved in Qatar. However, Oman has serious unemployment problem among the youth, who cannot hope for employment in the government sector. The disparity of wages between nationals and foreigners in Oman is not as big as in neighboring countries [Matsuo 2015: table 3]. The fact that Oman has experienced recent runaway inflation and the worst unemployment rate in the AGC, and that more than 60% of Omani employees received less than OMR 200 until a few years ago (as shown in the previous section), suggests that the country is not particularly wealthy or, more precisely, is in an economically critical situation. Inflation in the capital area has been very serious since 2008 when the price of crude oil rose, and Omanis working in the private sector complain of the difficulty of earning a livelihood<sup>(13)</sup>.

Oman is different on this point from Qatar, one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Therefore, Alshawi & Gardner's explanation is not applicable to the Omani case. Rather, this economic crisis, like the unemployment experienced after the 1990s, has preserved and enhanced tribal identity in Oman more than other factors, such as elections. Enhancement of *asabiya* under the economic hardship may be an inevitable consequence according to the Ibn Khaldun hypothesis.

The same goes for marriage. Endogamy was common until the 1970s. According to some research, the rate of consanguineous marriage in Oman is still 52%, higher in the villages and lower in Muscat [Muscat Daily 3/17/2013]. This is because Arabs prefer not only patrilineal parallel cousin marriage but also cousin marriage in general.

However, as people migrated from villages to cities after the 1970s and women started to work, they had more opportunities to marry someone outside the tribe, whom they met in the university or office. Young Omanis now try to avoid consanguineous marriage and can choose their partner by themselves.

Tribe is most consequential when choosing a spouse. Specifically, it is the tribal prestige of the husband toward the wife's side that matters. *Kafa'a* in marriage, which refers to the equivalence of the man and the woman in Islamic legal terminology, is emphasized. Article 20 (A) of the Omani Personal Status Law states that *kafa'a* in marriage is the right of the woman and the guardian. Therefore, the husband should be equal or superior to the proposed wife in terms of his socio-economic and racial status [Al-Azri 2013: 18]. In practice, many Omanis, both elder and younger, care about this *kafa'a* in marriage. It applies to not only marriage between different social castes such as free-born and (ex-) slaves, but also, and more likely, between tribes of different prestige. Few people in Oman envision marriage between different social castes or ethnicities from the outset. Therefore, as they have only recently come to choose a spouse by themselves, they have more opportunities to objectify their own tribe.

#### 4. Conclusion

The conventional studies on the labor market in the AGC have emphasized the disparity between citizen and foreigner. The difference in salaries certainly exists between the two categories in Oman, but not as much as in other AGC. Characteristically, Omanis work as blue-collar employees in the private sector while citizens work in the government sector and foreigners work in the private sector in neighboring countries.

We may think that the division of labor depends on ethnicity if we consider the fact that non-Arab Oma-

nis tend to work as blue-collar workers in the private sector. However, as members of elite tribes, whether Arab or non-Arab, Omanis are less frequently found in blue-collar jobs in the private sector. We know that the division of labor and the disparity of the corresponding wages are attributed more to tribe than ethnicity. Thus, the new circumstance where Omanis have encountered the difficulty of gaining employment in the government sector has generated more opportunities for Omanis to objectify their tribal affiliation and identity. This new circumstance may extend to the introduction of elections and changes in style of marriage, where Omanis have come to be able to select their own marital partners.

Is such tribalism the same as *asabiya* which might form political alliance as what Ibn Khaldun argued? The modern tribalism observed in Oman as well as other Arab Gulf countries is not political but social; it contains the concept of authenticity in citizenship because a tribesman (or a holder of a tribal name) means "an Omani citizen." In this respect, the Omani government should welcome this kind of tribalism, which enhances national identity.

Will Omanization be promoted if non-elite tribesmen go into the private sector as blue-collar workers? As mentioned in the previous section, Omanization has stagnated since the Arab Spring of 2011. The Omani government quickly assumed a conciliatory attitude to citizens and agreed to pay unemployment allowance, and ensure the creation of 100,000 jobs in the government sector. As a result, Omani youth started to hesitate about working in the private sector once again, and the number of Omani working there dramatically declined after 2011. Insofar as there are limitations to creating jobs in the government sector while Omanis avoid working in the private sector as blue-collar workers, there could be competition between citizens and foreigners for the white-collar jobs in the private sector. Here the foreigners are not unskilled immigrant workers but middle-class Indians. There are about 112,000 foreign specialists in the private sector [NCSI 2015: 147]. I frequently heard of the emergence of Indians as middle and upper-middle class, and heard Omanis complaints about them during fieldwork.

Oman's economic and business landscape has been dominated for centuries by non-Arab families such as al-Zubayr and Bahwan, who originated from South Asia. Their business conglomerates recruit Indians as the CEOs and the managerial class. Such Indian specialists, with a good command of English, business experience, and technique are highly appreciated in these companies and are provided with high allowances for housing and children's education. Omanis working in the private sector feel dissatisfied with a situation where they are more ill-treated than Asian immigrants.

This tendency was accelerated by the recent liberalization of the rules of expatriate ownership of real estate in the Sultanate. As a result of land ownership being extended to foreign individuals [Royal Decree 12/2006], many middle class foreigners have purchased real estate within designated integrated tourism complexes (ITCs) in Oman<sup>(14)</sup>, because the owner and his dependents then become eligible for residency visas. Since middle class foreigners bring their families to Oman, unlike single unskilled immigrant workers, they must be concerned with not only their own employment but also the family's residency visa and children's education. As they cannot get any support from the Omani government, they "purchase" residency visas in order to stay in Oman if they should be suddenly fired. It is an investment for residence security in the future.

Non-elite Omanis do not welcome a situation where many foreigners take white-collar work in the private sector. In contrast, companies would like to employ more experienced and competent but less expensive Indians. There should be many blue-collar jobs available in the private sector because the government has been making an effort to create jobs since the Arab Spring, and has promoted the Omanization of the

private sector. In a sense, a high unemployment rate in Oman means that Omani youth stick to employment in the government sector. They do not mean to, exclude unskilled foreign workers in the private sector to take their place. The more affluent middle-class Indians and potential competitors become, the more frustrated Omani youth become. We cannot deny the possibility of further social instability given that 50,000 new graduates join the labor market annually.

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#### Notes

- (1) I have listed ethnographic books here. See other articles by these authors, Leonard (2002, 2003) and Nagy (1998) as well.
- (2) The Ibadis is a moderate sect of Islam dominant in Oman.
- (3) Zanzibar consists of Unguja island, Pemba island and 30 others, which are 40 km off the coast of East Africa. In a population of 1,300,000 people (2012), most are Sunni Muslims. Since Zanzibar and the coastal area came under Omani rule at the end of the 17th century, migrants from Oman increased in number. It became a British protectorate in 1890 and achieved independence in 1963. But the revolution by African inhabitants occurred the following year, and most Omanis left the islands to return to Oman after 1970.
- (4) Not only the basic salary but also the allowance was increased. In the case of OMR 225 of minimum basic salary, approximately OMR 100 is added as an allowance.
- (5) Interview, 13 August 2014.
- (6) Interview, 13 August 2014.
- (7) Transportation and residence allowance of OMR 20 for each are added to basic salary of OMR 120, and become OMR 140 in total.
- (8) Although the minimum basic salary has not been raised since 2013, the average of basic salary dramatically increased in 2014. I assume the reason is that the total amount of the basic salary and allowance has been displayed in the chart since the 2014 version. The minimum basic wage was written as OMR 225 in 2013, but OMR 325 in the 2014 version [NCSI 2014, 2015].
- (9) Interview, 13 August, 2014.
- (10) Interview, 8 August, 2014.
- (11) The survey included samples of Omani youth aged between 18 and 29. They are 2031 university or graduate school students, 3146 job seekers, and 1059 employees.
- (12) Interview, 17 August 2014.
- (13) According to the IMF database, consumer price index (CPI) generally continued to be flat from the base year of 1990 (=100) to 2005. However, it became 131 in 2008, 146 in 2011, and 153 in 2014 [IMF, World Economic Outlook Database].
- (14) Even a middle-class foreigner can afford a small apartment at OMR 75,000 in the case of "The Wave," the most popular residence complex close to the Muscat airport. There are Omanis who purchase these villas or apartments for investment purposes, but mostly they are purchased by foreigners, such as Europeans or Indians.

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