

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

Saudi Arabia's Urban Revolution

Oil Urbanization and Protest
in al-Ahsa'/the Eastern Province



Claudia Ghrawi

BRILL

Saudi Arabia's Urban Revolution

Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia

FOUNDING EDITOR: C.A.O. VAN NIEUWENHUIJZE

Editor

Dale F. Eickelman (*Dartmouth College*)

Advisory Board

Bettina Gräf (*Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*)

Robert W. Hefner (*Boston University*)

Ruth Mandel (*University College London*)

VOLUME 136

The titles published in this series are listed at brill.com/seps

Saudi Arabia's Urban Revolution

*Oil Urbanization and Protest
in al-Ahsa'/the Eastern Province*

By

Claudia Ghrawi



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Funding: German Research Foundation (DFG) and German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (2011–2015 and 2016–2017)

Cover illustration: Inauguration of the Saudi Railway in Dhahran in 1951. National Archives and Research Association, Maryland

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ghrawi, Claudia author

Title: Saudi Arabia's urban revolution : oil urbanization and protest in al-Ahsa'/the Eastern Province / by Claudia Ghrawi.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2026] | Series: Social, economic and political studies of the Middle East and Asia, 1385-3376 ; volume 136 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025027210 (print) | LCCN 2025027211 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004735507 hardback alk. paper | ISBN 9789004735514 ebook

Subjects: LCSH: Urbanization—Saudi Arabia—Sharqīyah (Province)—History | Urbanization—Saudi Arabia—Hasa (Province)—History | Petroleum industry and trade—Political aspects—Saudi Arabia—Sharqīyah (Province) | Petroleum industry and trade—Social aspects—Saudi Arabia—Sharqīyah (Province)

Classification: LCC HT384.S332 S5344 2026 (print) | LCC HT384.S332 (ebook)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025027210>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025027211>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1385-3376

ISBN 978-90-04-73550-7 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-73551-4 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004735514

Copyright 2026 by Koninklijke Brill BV, Plantijnstraat 2, 2321 JC Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill BV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Brill Wageningen Academic, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau and V&R unipress.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher. Requests for re-use and/or translations must be addressed to Koninklijke Brill BV via brill.com or copyright.com.

For more information: info@brill.com.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

To my family



Contents

Acknowledgments	IX
Note on Transliteration	XI
List of Figures and Tables	XII
1 Introduction	1
1 The Power of Oil	6
2 Oil Histories	11
2.1 <i>Urban Revolution</i>	14
2.2 <i>Modernity</i>	19
2.3 <i>Resistance</i>	22
3 A Word on Sources	28
4 Outline of the Book	30
2 Society and Politics before Oil	34
1 The Two Oases	40
1.1 <i>The Principal Towns</i>	44
1.2 <i>The Oasis Villages</i>	49
1.3 <i>The Notables</i>	53
2 The New Saudi State	61
3 Some Thoughts on Sectarianism	66
3 The Emergent Oil Conurbation	78
1 Labor Camps, Boom Towns and Hinterlands	82
1.1 <i>The "Saudi Towns" Dammam and al-Khobar</i>	86
1.2 <i>Social Engineering in the Labor Camps</i>	90
1.3 <i>Decline of the Oases</i>	99
2 Conflicts over Land and Expropriation	103
3 Changing Social Geographies	108
4 Control and Surveillance	115
4 Popular Politics on the Oil Frontier	123
1 The Saudi Labor Struggle	125
1.1 <i>Precarious Labor in a Budding Oil Industry</i>	128
1.2 <i>The Birth of an Organized Labor Movement</i>	133
1.3 <i>The Strike of 1953</i>	136
2 Contested Frontiers – a Politicization of Space	141
2.1 <i>Tear Down the Fences! – Space as Mobilization Strategy</i>	143
2.2 <i>Resurging Imperialism</i>	147

5	Urban Revolution	155
1	Ambivalent Urbanities	157
1.1	<i>Notables, Intellectuals and Businessmen – New Actors’ Networks</i>	159
1.2	<i>Local Notables and the Politics of Modernization</i>	165
2	Urban Struggle and Repression	173
2.1	<i>From Labor to Urban Struggle</i>	177
2.2	<i>Taming Urban Disorder and Rebellion</i>	186
6	Fractured Cities	195
1	The Old Polities	196
2	A New Urban Reality under the Aegis of Petro-capitalism	197
3	How the Urban Revolution Unfolds	200
4	Alliances between Labor and Urban Classes	202
5	Social Malaise	205
6	Sectarianization as Counter-revolution	206
7	Rural Rebellion	209
	Epilogue	214
	Appendix	219
	Bibliography	222
	Index	240

Acknowledgments

Writing this book would have been impossible without the various invaluable contributions of many people to whom I am deeply grateful. My heartfelt thanks go to Ulrike Freitag, whose steadfast support and relentless help and inspiration formed the solid foundation for this book. Besides her professional guidance as an extremely versed researcher of the Middle East in general and of Saudi Arabia in particular, her spirited passion for the history of the Arabian Peninsula and her hands-on attitude were a great inspiration and fueled my own research. Nelida Fuccaro, the great connoisseur of the modern history of the Arab Gulf, was the second reader of my dissertation. Her council, criticism, creative approach of the field and her humor have countless times helped to carry me over the more frustrating and difficult aspects of doing research in this fascinating and at times challenging part of the world. I owe very much to my wonderful colleagues at the ZMO, whose thoughtful insights and criticism have never failed to improve my work. I particularly want to thank Nora Lafi, Nushin Atmaca, Khaled Adham, Jeanine Dağyeli, Dietrich Retz, Peter Wien, Steffen Wippel, Abdoulaye Sounaye and Jeanne Féaux de la Croix for their collegial support and friendship. I would like to thank Silke Nagel, Svenja Becherer, Michael Schutz, Thomas Ripper, Ursula Benzin and Alisher Karabaev for making possible almost everything that was necessary to conduct this project – from helping with the arrangement of research trips and with publishing parts of my research to retrieving digital data and moving piles of books from and to the ZMO library. A special thanks goes to Patrick Winkelhorst who brilliantly completed the dire task of organizing hundreds of archival documents.

I am very grateful for the assistance that I have received by the researchers and staff at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh during two field research trips in 2012 and 2013. I express my deepest gratitude to Sa'ad Sawayan and Ahmad al-Shanbary for their council, introspective and help. I am also very grateful to Jafar al-Shayyeb and Abdulrasul al-Gheryafi for inviting me to Qatif and turning my visit into an extremely illuminating and memorable experience. There are no words to express my gratitude to the many amazing people in Riyadh, the Eastern Province and the United States who have welcomed a foreign doctoral student in their offices and homes, who have not tired of tapping into their personal networks and who have entrusted me with their personal memories and perspectives. I am especially grateful to A.M. who took a personal interest in my research, opened otherwise closed doors and lent me mobility. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Jim Mandaville, who not only agreed to a telephone interview but read and commented on

my work, copied countless maps and helped me to interpret them, answered e-mails and encouraged me to go on. I want to thank the staff at the archives and university libraries in the United States, the United Kingdom and in Saudi Arabia, whose work was essential for my research. Another special thanks goes to Nienke Brienens-Moolenaar from De Gruyter Brill who skillfully guided me through the process of publication as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful recommendations.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family and friends who have never wavered in their faithful care and encouragement. I thank the wonderful Ola Ghrawi, Nahida Soued and Rahaf Shami who helped me with interpreting my Arabic sources as well as Jenny Orantek and Wolfgang Welscher who have been extremely generous with their support during the last stages of writing this book. I especially thank my parents for being there whenever they were needed. And I thank my wonderful husband Amer Ghrawi, without whose encouragement I would never have embarked on this journey and who has since been my most steadfast ally.

Note on Transliteration

Transliteration of Arabic (and in rare cases Turkish and Persian) terms is based on the IJMES transliteration system. To enhance readability diacritics are not used, except in the references. Only the Arabic letters 'ayn and hamza' are included in transliteration, except the initial hamza which is dropped. Arabic names of individuals and places as well as Arabic terms are spelled in accordance with English norms as specified in the Meriam Webster dictionary or as used in the literature. If such norms do not exist, the above outlined transliteration system is used, based on the original Arabic term. The article al- is dropped in some cases in which this is the established English norm.

Figures and Tables

Figures

- 1 [Author unknown], "Map of Hasa, Saudi Arabia" (detail) 1939[?], India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/2115, British Library, Qatar Digital Library 36
- 2 Detail from a map of Hofuf: Arabian American Oil Company, [untitled], 1961[?], Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress 47
- 3 Qatif town. Detail from a map of the Qatif oasis: Arabian American Oil Company, Exploration Department, "Qatif Oasis, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia," 1972, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress 48
- 4 Date garden in Qatif in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi 51
- 5 Detail from a map of the Qatif oasis centering on 'Awwamiyya and the Ramis: Arabian American Oil Company, Exploration Department, "Qatif Oasis, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia," 1972, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress 58
- 6 Ruins of the Qal'at al-Qatif in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi 73
- 7 Detail from a map of the Dhahran area: Arabian American Oil Company, Exploration Department, "Dhahran Area, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia," 1975, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress 85
- 8 Harold Corsini, Markets next to mosque, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1947, Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection, ULPA SONJ_57820, University of Louisville Photographic Archives – Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville, https://digital.library.louisville.edu/concern/images/ulpa_sonj_57820?locale=en 96
- 9 Old oil workers' dormitories (former general camp) on the campus of the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi 97
- 10 The emir of al-Ahsa', Sa'ud b. Jiluwi (center), during a visit of the US Commander Middle East Force and US Consulate in Hofuf in April 1951: "Photographs, 1950–51," US Consulate, Dhahran, 1951, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, National Archives and Research Association, Maryland 116
- 11 Members of the US Commander Middle East Force and US Consulate staff pose with the Saudi Head Executioner (center) during an official visit to Hofuf in April 1951: "Photographs, 1950–51," US Consulate, Dhahran, 1951, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, National Archives and Research Association, Maryland 121

- 12 Harold Corsini, Arabian workers being transported, Ra's Tannūrah, Saudi Arabia, 1947, Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection, ULPA SONJ_58693, University of Louisville Photographic Archives – Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville, https://digital.library.louisville.edu/concern/images/ulpa_sonj_58693?locale=en 126
- 13 Harold Corsini, Applicant being interviewed, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1947, Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection, ULPA SONJ_57882, University of Louisville Photographic Archives – Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville, https://digital.library.louisville.edu/concern/images/ulpa_sonj_57882?locale=en 131
- 14 Harold Corsini, Arabian workers on payday, Ra's Tannūrah, Saudi Arabia, 1947, Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection, ULPA SONJ_58708, University of Louisville Photographic Archives – Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville, https://digital.library.louisville.edu/concern/images/ulpa_sonj_58708?locale=en 133
- 15 Coffee shop in Kuwait in 1918: [Author unknown], "Koweit: Coffee Shop," 1918, India Office Records and Private Papers, Photo 496/6/36, British Library, Qatar Digital Library 176
- 16 Last remains of the Qal'at al-Qatif (2013), Claudia Ghrawi 213
- 17 The Ramis in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi 215

Tables

- 1 Overview of population growth for selected towns and areas in the emergent oil conurbation 220

Introduction

This book discusses the history of oil urbanization and popular contention in Saudi Arabia's oil rich Eastern Province (al-Mintaqa al-Sharqiyya), or al-Ahsa', as was the name of the historical governorate until 1952.¹ The book presents to the reader the history of a region whose oil wealth has helped to transform its places and people within the span of few decades and has enabled breathtaking economic, infrastructural and social development. At the same time, it offers insights into how oil was crucial in the development of specific *urban forms* that can be described, in short, as charged with social conflict and intensely politicized. These new urban environments – transformed or created by oil – gave rise to new practices and experiences and hence to a particular Saudi oil modernity.² The larger part of the book spans the roughly four decades from the beginnings of oil industrialization in the 1930s to the 1970s, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in particular the Eastern Province underwent tremendous changes due to oil industrialization, when political opposition throughout the kingdom was crushed in recurrent waves of mass arrests and when Saudi Arabia entered and into a phase of accelerated modernization and the parallel Islamization of internal politics. It sheds light on a crucial period of oil development and intense popular contention which preceded the oil boom and Islamization politics of the 1970s and 1980s and the co-optation of larger segments of local society by the Saudi state. The book shows how local elites, the nascent Saudi state and the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) strove not only to exploit local labor and to secure oil

-
- 1 The Eastern Province was created in 1952 and comprises besides the Rub' al-Khali, Dahna and Nafud deserts also the territory of the historical emirate of al-Ahsa' (*al-Aḥsā'*). The name al-Ahsa' determines either the large inland oasis or the historical governorate (until 1952), whereas al-Hasa is the colloquial Arabic name for both, the oasis and the old governorate. In the following, the name al-Ahsa' will be used for the region and governorate when referring to the time before 1952, whereas Eastern Province will be used for the time afterwards. To avoid confusion, the large inland oasis will be referred to as al-Hasa. However, this is merely a decision to enhance readability and does in no way reflect the historical evolution nor the use of the names al-Ahsa' and al-Hasa, as has already been remarked on by Federico S. Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa* (Arabian American Oil Company, 1955), HathiTrust (digitalized version by Google), used version: 2020-04-27 11:44 UTC, OwnerID: 13510798885553691-5/Seq: 1, 3–4.
 - 2 For the relating concept of oil modernity see Nelida Fuccaro, "Introduction: Histories of Oil and Urban Modernity in the Middle East," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2020327>.

production, but to control local communities in the emergent Saudi oil conurbation through means of surveillance and the application of force as well as through social engineering and urban planning. It will be argued that these policies affected internal politics in Saudi Arabia well into the twenty-first century. As such, the book intends to contribute to reassembling the “complex, multidimensional social history” of popular opposition in Saudi Arabia under the aegis of petro-capitalism in its capacity to “produce forms of rule and identity that are often fragmented, unruly and violent” – a history that has been curbed and disembodied by imperial, corporate and state stratagems.³

The book engages in a discourse largely set within North American and European academia where since the early 2000s researchers have traced the roles of underprivileged groups within Saudi society as local protagonists of history, albeit always within a larger context such as the evolving Saudi state, the tightly networked Persian Gulf, British and US imperialism and oil development.⁴ This is not to say that scholarly interest in a social or grassroots history of oil does not exist in Saudi Arabia itself. On the contrary: This book continues the efforts made by Saudi researchers and writers to document the impact of oil on the transformation of local places and communities as well as

3 On the complex social history of popular opposition in Saudi Arabia see Rosie Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia,” *Past & Present* 238, no. 1 (2018): 237, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx057>; Rosie Bsheer, *Archive Wars. The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford University Press, 2020), 52–57.

The term “petro-capitalism” was put forward in 2004 by Michael Watts in his critical reading of how oil and the “logic of oil extraction ... figure centrally in the making and breaking of community” in Nigeria. It has since been widely used by scholars to describe similar processes in other parts of the world. Michael J. Watts, “Antinomies of Community: Some Thoughts on Geography, Resources and Empire,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, no. 2 (2004): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-2754.2004.00125.x>. Although a comparison of petro-capitalism and other kinds of capitalism (i.e. relying on other commodities, markets, structures, etc.) lies beyond the scope of this work, the conceptualizations of oil urbanization that will be presented and expanded throughout this introduction suggest that petro-capitalism does, in fact, form a particular case of capitalism. An insightful case study on petroleum-based capitalism is offered in Fernando Coronil’s seminal work on the oil industry in Venezuela. Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (University of Chicago Press, 1997). Coronil argues that “as the oil industry came to occupy a central role in the domestic economy and as producing wealth was identified with capturing oil rents, capitalism in Venezuela developed by establishing a singular relationship among nature, the nation, and the global economy.” Coronil, *The Magical State*, 389.

4 Some of the most influential participants in this discourse are frequently referred to throughout this book, amongst them Madawi al-Rasheed, Robert Vitalis, Toby C. Jones, Pascal Ménoret, Stéphane Lacroix, Toby Matthiesen, Rosie Bsheer and – although with a stronger focus on Bahrain – Laurence Louër.

the roles that the local people played in this transformative process.⁵ It further responds to Saudi researchers' critical assessment of early oil development in the Eastern Province.⁶

Referring to the idea that tensions and contradictions are intrinsic to the social production of time and space and that conflicts can be seen as pace-makers of human history, the focus on power structures, their physical manifestations in the oil conurbation, and their popular contention shall help to grasp the nature, extent and limitations of oil modernity in Saudi Arabia.⁷ Importantly, the Saudi experience of interlaced oil-fueled urbanization, recurrent protest and the repression thereof does in no way prove an Arab or even Middle Eastern exceptionalism but must be read as one specific case of societal transformation under the aegis of oil. Scholarship suggests that oil urbanization differs from other forms of urbanization. Researchers have put forward the concept of a "global petroleumscape" which comprises a multitude of urban spaces that differ greatly according to their specific geographic, cultural, political, etc. contexts, yet are "still intimately connected" by their shared denominator of being "spatial realities of petroleum and its representation."⁸ Research also points to the contentious nature of oil urbanization which often – albeit in no way universally – leads to violent conflict. For instance, in the 1990s, staff housing estates of oil companies in Nigeria showed exceptional rates of conflict and violence and the development of sizable paramilitary security systems. Under the impact of oil, natural and build space, powerful petro-capital, labor migration, local identity-making and (often militant) social movements

5 See for instance Muḥammad S. al-Muslim, *Sāḥil al-Dhahab al-Aswad: Dirāsa Tārīkhīyya Insāniyya li-Minṭaqat al-Khalīj al-‘Arabī* (Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1960); ‘Abdullah N. al-Subay‘ī, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Ijtimā‘īyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya, 1352–1380 h./1933–1960 m.: Dirāsa fī al-Tārīkh al-Ijtimā‘ī* (Tawzī‘ al-Dār al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1987) and Muḥammad al-Anṣārī, *Tuḥfat al-Mustafīd bi-Tārīkh al-Aḥsā’ fī al-Qadīm wa-l-Jadīd*, 2 vols. (Maṭābi‘ al-Riyād, 1960).

6 Faisal A. al-Mubarak, "Oil, Urban Development and Planning in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia: The Case of the Arab American Oil Company in the 1930s–1970s," *King Saud University Journal of Architecture and Planning* 11 (1999): 31–51. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abdullah Tāmir Aḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt al-‘Arabiyya al-Amrikiyya (Arāmkū) fī Tanmiyat al-Mintaqa al-Sharqīyya al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya, 1363–1384h, 1944–1964m: Dirāsa fī Tārīkh al-Tanmiyya* (Aḥmārī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abdullah Tāmir, 2007).

7 See Fuccaro, "Introduction: Histories of Oil and Urban Modernity," 1–2; Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, 1989), 129.

8 Carola Hein, "Space, Time, and Oil. The Global Petroleumscape," in *Oil Spaces. Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*, ed. Carola Hein (Routledge, 2022), vii, 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367816049>.

and struggles over citizenship amalgamated into a violent local setting.⁹ At roughly the same time, Texaco's oil operations in Ecuador caused extreme environmental damage and robbed the poor indigenous population in the oil operations area of their land as well as of their basic rights, turning them into "phantom like citizens" whose collective protests were brutally repressed by the military.¹⁰ Two decades and thousands of kilometers from there, in 2011, Khazakhstan's booming oil town Zhanaozen witnessed the spreading feeling of social injustice amongst the local population, which culminated in violent mass protest and the arrests of opposition leaders.¹¹ Hence it was concluded that "fossil fuel extraction and consumption have given rise to carbon cities that are underpinned by (and extend) forms of racial, colonial, capitalist, gendered, and environmental violence and injustice."¹² Yet, as others have pointed out, the impact of oil urbanization is always space and time specific:

Rooting conflict and particular sorts of politics in a global commodity – even a resource as indispensable as oil – tells us little about the ways patrimonial regimes can deliver very different political and economic orders, how we think about the uneven institutional and governance capabilities across petro-states, and why violence occurs in different forms in different places, and in some parts of the world not at all.¹³

-
- 9 Femi Aborisade, "Petro-Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Labour and Community Mobilization in Nigeria," *LABOUR, Capital and Society* 43, no. 1 (2010): 34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43158363>. Aborisade cites Michael Watts, *Human Rights. Violence and the Oil Complex* (The United States Institute of Peace, 2004); International Crisis Group, *Scramble for the Congo* (ICG, 2000) and International Crisis Group, *God, Oil and Country* (ICG, 2002). Michael Watts, "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity," in *Violent Environments*, ed. Nancy L. Peluso and Michael Watts (Cornell University Press, 2001), 189–90.
- 10 Suzana Sawyer, "Fictions of Sovereignty: Of Prosthetic Petro-Capitalism, Neoliberal States, and Phantom-Like Citizens in Ecuador," *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 6, no. 1 (2001): 156–197, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlca.2001.6.1.156>. Sawyer turned her research on the lawsuit of the indigenous people of Ecuador against Texaco/Chevron into a book. Suzana Sawyer, *The Small Matter of Suing Chevron* (Duke University Press, 2022).
- 11 Dossym Satpayev and Tolganay Umbetaliyeva, "The Protests in Zhanaozen and the Kazakh Oil Sector: Conflicting Interests in a Rentier State," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 122–29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2015.03.005>.
- 12 Michael Simpson, "Fossil Urbanism: Fossil Fuel Flows, Settler Colonial Circulations, and the Production of Carbon Cities," *Urban Geography* 43, no. 1 (2022): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1840206>.
- 13 Hannah Appel et al., "Oil Talk," in *Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas*, edited by Hannah Appel et al. (Cornell University Press, 2015), 16.

Keeping this in mind, this book strives to understand the specific local impact of a rocketing worldwide demand for oil in the twentieth century in a region that remains the world's largest producer of oil and gas in the present and is a focal point for future visions for the production of alternative energies. The contested (r)evolution of Saudi Arabia's petroleumscape is regarded both as heritage and responsibility that need to be acknowledged and accepted as the world's largest industrial producers and energy consumers "face the need to transition to a new energy landscape and imagine the possibilities and challenges of a post-oil future."¹⁴ Its history must also be kept as a point of reference in present times, when European governments endeavor to safeguard energy supply and internal political stability while facing warfare and political escalation on the Eurasian continent.

By focusing on the parallel processes of oil urbanization and the formation of political dissent in the emergent Saudi oil conurbation, this book problematizes and challenges some of the tropes that used to dominate the literature on the history of Saudi Arabia for a long time and that scholars have begun to challenge in the past decades: the prevalence of primordial categories in understanding Saudi societal and political developments and transformations in the twentieth century, the believe that oil industrialization was the catalyst of a short lived political modernity where political opposition stayed contained within specific socio-cultural, sectarian or ideological contexts, and the often claimed "color-blindness" of the Arabian American Oil Company with regard to the religious affiliation of its Saudi employees – a widespread delusion that obscures the impact of Aramco's ambiguous politics vis-à-vis the local communities which generously tapped into the imperial vocabular and concepts that Britain used to further her interests in the Gulf.¹⁵

To this end, the book makes several analytical propositions: First, oil needs to be taken seriously. Rather than merely regarding it as "discrete commodity" or in terms of money or rent that "befalls" society, this book will pay attention to the space and society shaping capacities of oil.¹⁶ The second proposition states that regional and local histories and their trajectories into the oil era

14 Hein, "Space, Time, and Oil," 1.

15 On Aramco being "color-blind" in recruiting Saudi workers see James Buchan, "Secular and Religious Opposition in Saudi Arabia," in *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Tim Niblock (Croom Helm, 1982), 119. Buchan quotes a former chairman of the oil company. The argument was later repeated by Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis* (Routledge, 1993), 32.

16 Hein, "Space, Time, and Oil." This book thus takes on the challenge prominently formulated by Hein in the introduction to her book on the *Global Petroleumscape*, published in 2022.

need to be considered if one wants to truly grasp the nature and extent of oil urbanization and contentious politics in the twentieth century. Third, looking at the emergent oil conurbation as a living and struggling organism shall help to gain a more differentiated and nuanced understanding of contentious politics in the early decades of oil development in Saudi Arabia. Although corporate and state policies will be discussed, this book focusses whenever possible on the politics of the neighborhoods, streets and labor camps.

1 The Power of Oil

Oil is a curious thing. As a commodity, it has been the catalyst of extreme socio-political, spatial and ecological transformations. Yet, at the same time, its creations have in various ways been described as insubstantial and dysfunctional: societies that lack internal coherence and the means to enact themselves, political systems that resemble hollow bureaucratic containers whose only function is the unobstructed accumulation of power and wealth, and toxic environments that grow inhabitable.¹⁷ Oil is also a great illusionist. Like a prism, oil distorts, slants or colors whatever social or political phenomena are viewed through it. Yet, while a prism dissects and isolates the spectral colors of light without changing its physical properties, oil has more lasting effects.

Oil has effectively shaped Saudi society and politics, yet always within a historical context and always in tandem with individuals, local communities, international corporations, state officials and their diverse agendas. This is reason enough to address oil and its transformative capacities at this point, although this book will not discuss the commodity per se, nor take it as vantage point, but rather the societies that were involved in bringing the black gold to the surface and that were altered and changed in the process. Hence, when referring to “oil” the book addresses the organizational systems, the institutions and infra-structures as well as the various corporate and political

17 See for instance Coronil, *The Magical State*; Michael Watts, “Petro-Violence”; Michael Watts, “Resource Course? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Geopolitics* 9, no. 1 (2010): 50–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040412331307832>; James Ferguson, “Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Afrika,” *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 377–382, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3567023>; Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Verso, 2011) and Nelida Fuccaro, “Reading Oil as Violence: Kirkuk and Its Oil Conurbation, 1927–58,” in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, ed. Ulrike Freitag et al. (Berghahn, 2015).

actors that have been operating on local, national and international levels to get the Saudi oil bonanza going.¹⁸

Oil has played an important role in the creation of several misconceptions about the Gulf in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, some of which are outlined above. Aramco early on created a monopoly over the historiography of oil industrialization and its role in societal transformation. The company barred independent researchers from its archives and censored solicited books and reports that were deemed too critical or did not reflect the image of philanthropic development.¹⁹ After the nationalization of the oil industry, the Al Sa'ud endeavored to embellish their own role in the history of oil development and created a dynastic interpretation of national unification and oil modernization.²⁰ Like in other oil producing countries in the Gulf, the conjunction of corporate and dynastic endeavors in monopolizing the history of oil development resulted in an academic discourse which put the parallel processes of state formation and economic transformation as its vantage points. This approach became especially apparent in the rentier state literature of the 1990s which developed a long-lasting impact on how the local societies were perceived.²¹ While scholars acknowledged the socio-economic effects of oil – such as the emergence of a large societal segment of industrial laborers, rapid urbanization and uneven development – and their potential threat for internal stability, the actual role assumed by the local population and urban communities in societal change was downplayed, or even outright denied. Local opposition was understood as a temporal and insular phenomenon which

18 See also Watts' notion of the 'oil complex' that describes oil-fuelled transformation of space and society in Nigeria. Watts, "Antinomies of Community," 199. For a similar approach see Hein, "Space, Time, and Oil," 8.

19 Robert Vitalis. *America's Kingdom. Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, updated ed. (Verso, 2009), xi–xvi.

20 Determann calls it "The Saudization of Dynastic Historiography." Jörg M. Determann, *Historiography in Saudi Arabia. Globalization and the State in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2014), 101–138. See also Bsheer, *Archive Wars*, 64.

21 See for instance Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (University of California Press, 1990); Giacomo Luciani, "The Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State and Democratization," in *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salamé (I.B. Tauris, 1994) and Kiren A. Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Cornell University Press, 1997). For a critique of state-centered approaches see Eric Davis, "Theorizing Statecraft and Social Change in Arab Oil-Producing Countries," in *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil Historical Memory, and Popular Culture*, ed. Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides (Florida International University Press, 1991) and Nazih Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 1995).

eventually faded out through the achievement of material wellbeing for large segments of the respective societies. Societies of the oil producing countries of the Arab Gulf were portrayed as politically passive, being merely at the receiving end of the trickle-down of oil wealth.²² As a result, Saudi Arabia for a long time appeared in the literature as “place without history, inhabited by ‘apolitical people.’”²³

Even today, the causalities between oil wealth in the Arab Gulf, alleged political quiescence of the respective societies and authoritarian rule are not well understood. For instance, Cammett et al. state in the 2018 edition of their *Political Economy of the Middle East* that “at best, oil has sustained despotism, but it does not explain its initial establishment,” while at the same time glossing over the early decades of oil industrialization and their impact on state formation.²⁴ The failure to see the causal links between oil wealth and the formation of authoritarian government seems to result from a somewhat hazy understanding of the historical roots of today’s political economies which is further aggravated by difficulties in locating and accessing primary sources, especially local ones, which could tell a different story. Another reason has been identified as deep-rooted cultural determinism of the local societies which too easily disqualifies individual contributions to communal life as “religious, traditional, or exclusivist” phenomena rooted in tribalism or sectarianism instead of a “broadly defined, pluralist, contested civic space.”²⁵ Furthermore, non-Saudi academics only relatively late began to tap into the “narrative plurality” of local historiography. Increasingly since the 1970s, Saudi writers have produced a number of localized and particularistic historiographies that challenged the national unification literature on the one hand, and rentier and development studies on the other.²⁶ Curiously, although a few of these alternative

22 John A. Shaw and David E. Long, *Saudi Arabian Modernization: The Impact of Change on Stability* (Georgetown University, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1982); Turki al-Hamad, “Political Order in Changing Societies: Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context” (PhD diss., University of California, 1985), 133, <https://doi.org/10.25549/usctheses-c36-375624>; Tim Niblock, “Social Structure and the Development of the Saudi Arabian Political System,” in *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Tim Niblock (Croom Helm, 1982).

23 This image of Saudi Arabia was criticised more recently by Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 276–277.

24 Melani C. Cammett et al. *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 4th edition (Routledge, 2018), 76–77. I thank Christin Sander who guided me to the respective quote.

25 Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.

26 On the “narrative plurality” that emerged in Saudi historiography especially since the 1970s see Determann, *Historiography*, 3–12.

historiographies have in the past two decades entered broader, i.e. predominantly Anglo-American academic discourse, this has not led to a systematic dismantling of determinist and primordial arguments in explaining Saudi society. On the contrary, when it comes to the history of political protest, essentialist arguments still tend to dominate scholarly and political discourse and sectarian identity is too often construed in an unhistorical fashion.²⁷

Why is this still the case? The answer that this book attempts to put forward is: Oil not only has the power to distract our view from better explanations, but it has also quite successfully striven to construct the very socio-political realities that are widely attributed to primordial societies. The myth first created by Aramco that societal modernity in Saudi Arabia was an immediate outcome of oil industrialization survives largely unchallenged. The internal and often intricate workings of local society, its complex transformation over longer periods of time and the eventual historical conjunction of relatively slow-paced modernization and the faster processes of state building and oil industrialization have for a long time not received sufficient attention. In response to this general shortcoming in the historiography of the Arab Gulf, historians have increasingly striven to explain societal transformation in the oil era on the long durée, as a process whose twentieth century traits lead back one century at the very least.²⁸ To aggravate the problem of historical contextualization, British and US American imperial and corporate officials in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have put forward their own categories and interpretations of local society which are too often extracted from primary sources in an uncritical manner. Accordingly, these categories and interpretations still deeply permeate scholarly discourse. Yet, they require constant and vigorous problematization regarding the historical context of their production, which reaches back into the times before oil. Going back to these primary sources and reading them in the light of converging imperial rule and petro-capitalism is one key to unravelling the tropes that have been spun by foreign agents in

27 This critique has been put forward poignantly by Sultan Alamer, "Beyond Sectarianism and Ideology. Regionalism and Collective Political Action in Saudi Arabia," in *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (Oxford University Press, 2018), 99. In a similar fashion, widespread notions of Saudi Wahhabism are prone to create ahistorical understandings of Saudi culture and politics. Pascal Ménoret, *The Saudi Enigma* (Zed Books, 2005), 61.

28 See for instance Alex Bodrookas and Arang Keshavarzian, "The Forever Frontier of Urbanism: Historicizing Persian Gulf Cities," *International Journal of Urban Regional Research* 43, no. 1 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12664> and Lawrence G. Potter, *Society in the Persian Gulf: Before and After Oil*, Georgetown University Qatar Occasional Paper 18 (Center for International and Regional Studies, 2017).

the region.²⁹ Still, the power of oil goes beyond establishing the dominant framework for existing research. For instance, the degree of force and outright violence used by the Saudi state vis-à-vis non-aligned parts of the Saudi population, which was covertly sanctioned by its foreign allies and partly aided by the oil company, has not yet been fully comprehended. The idea that “at best, oil has sustained despotism, but it does not explain its initial establishment” is rendered absurd when looking into the ways in which oil worked towards institutionalizing violence as mode of governance at the micro-level of the Saudi oil towns.³⁰

Furthermore, as will be argued in this book, oil had also a direct impact on shaping the physical and socio-political realities that helped to govern – and ultimately to repress – the kingdom’s local populations. Oil produced distinct patterns of spatial structuration, logics of social organization as well as temporalities, i.e. of labor-intense industrial build up on the one hand, and mass release of labor into the local job market on the other. Oil intervened in local leadership and communal relations and ultimately manipulated social heterogeneity into political difference and dissent. Put in different words, in answering to the need to control and survey the oil workers and local communities in Saudi Arabia’s emergent oil conurbation, corporate planners, foreign administrative officials and the Saudi authorities created a political and physical environment that aimed at cementing social categories and divisions which in the traditionally “hybrid societies” of the Gulf used to be in constant flux and whose boundaries used to be flexible and shifting.³¹ In their constant quest to secure oil production, they encouraged forceful modes of local

29 For a critique of British imperial sources see Nelida Fuccaro, “Knowledge at the Service of the British Empire. The Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia,” in *Borders and the Changing Boundaries of Knowledge*, ed. Inga Brandell et al. (Swedish Research Institute, 2015) and Omar H. al-Shehabi, “Contested Modernity: Divided Rule and the Birth of Sectarianism, Nationalism, and Absolutism in Bahrain,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017): 333–355, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1185937>.

30 Cammett, et al., *Political Economy*, 77. See for instance Claudia Ghrawi, “A Tamed Urban Revolution: Saudi Arabia’s Oil Conurbation and the 1967 Riots,” in *Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Nelida Fuccaro (Stanford University Press, 2016); Claudia Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence in Saudi Arabian Oil Towns, 1953–56,” in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition From Empire to Nation State*, ed. Ulrike Freitag et al. (Berghahn, 2015).

31 On the concept of “hybrid” societies of the Gulf see Lawrence G. Potter, “Introduction,” in *The Persian People in Modern Times. People, Ports and History*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

governance that undermined state-society relations and other forms of mediation between conflicting parties.

2 Oil Histories

Throughout the past decade, scholars have entered a vibrant discourse about oil fueled societal transformation in Arab Gulf countries. They have debunked “modernist” and “state centric” paradigms as “brainchild of the modernization literature produced in the 1950s and 1960s” and further disproved of construing the changes brought on by oil as “an irreconcilable break with the past.”³² While none of these works deny that the beginning of oil production triggered unparalleled historical change, they have produced new intriguing analyses of how these changes occurred. They have begun to demonstrate that changes brought on by oil as well as the historical continuities that had shaped people’s life for centuries molded societal transformation in unique ways. Gulf cities – and by extension their societies – are increasingly approached as laboratories in which imperial policies and corporate planning converged and interlaced with local state building.³³ For instance, these works demonstrate how throughout the 1930s and 1940s oil cities were modelled after company towns in the United States, thereby effectively transplanting Fordist economic ideals and racist segregation into the Gulf. These new urban(-izing) spaces not only resembled each other in physical ways, but also in their capacities to hatch animosity and even violence between different ethnic and national groups which were fanned or backed up by local rulers and foreign administrations. On the other hand, they also created the contexts in which solidarity, cooperation and nationalist political movements were able to grow despite the ethnic or confessional divisions of their inhabitants.³⁴

From a comparative perspective, this process took place on a global scale. Transplanting the same standardized urban form to Africa and Latin America created oil towns such as Marsa el Brega in Libya, the oil towns of Patagonia or on the Caribbean Island of Aruba. As a result, local societies made similar

32 Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama Since 1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

33 Bodrookas and Keshavarzian, “The Forever Frontier,” 2.

34 Rasmus C. Elling, “War of Clubs. Struggle for Space in Abadan and the 1946 Oil Strike,” in *Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Nelida Fuccaro (Stanford University Press, 2016); Rasmus C. Elling, “On Lines and Fences. Labour, Community and Violence in an Oil City,” in *Urban Violence in the Middle East. Changing Cityscapes in the Transformation from Empire to Nation State*, ed. Ulrike Freitag et al. (Berghahn, 2015).

experiences of segregation, solidarity, protest and repression – yet with different context-specific outcomes.³⁵ Other studies on Arab oil towns pointed towards imported ways of suburban life and consumption on the one hand, and towards the “cultural vitality” and “social effervescence” of the early oil era on the other, which became epitomes of oil-fueled modernity in the Gulf.³⁶ Especially the former aspects resonate with a critical reading of a materialistic oil modernity in other parts of the world: In the US American Sunbelt, post-World War II unionist mobilization of oil workers was rendered inconsequential and was ultimately ended through the creation of “fractionated lives” in suburban neighborhoods where individual existence centered around private consumerism and the cultivation of individualized entrepreneurial capacities and where the working place became largely depoliticized.³⁷

Thus, in dialogue with research on oil urbanization and oil modernity in other parts of the world, a new picture of societal transformation in the Gulf has begun to emerge – a picture that shows that throughout the twentieth century local societies were decidedly versatile and that the process of oil development was indeed highly contentious. Scholars have demonstrated the conflict-ridden interrelatedness of oil development and social engineering, and they have pointed towards the various transnational networks that sustained political opposition.³⁸ Yet, importantly, it has been argued that the

-
- 35 Elisabetta Bini, “Oil Workers, Trade Unions and the Emergence of Oil Nationalism in Libya, 1956–1969,” *EUI Working Papers MWP* 27 (European University Institute, 2012), <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/24176>; Suzana B. Torres and Marcelo J. Borges, “Labor Resistance and Accommodation among Immigrant Workers in the Oil Company Towns of Patagonia, Argentina,” in *Company Towns: Labor, Space and Power Relations Across Time and Continents*, ed. Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and Dawn S. Bowen, “In the Shadow of the Refinery: An American oil Company Town on the Caribbean Island of Aruba,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 36, no. 1 (2019): 49–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2018.1502398>.
- 36 Nelida Fuccaro, “Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain: Consumerism, Leisure, and Public Communication in Manama and the Oil Camps, 1932–1960s,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 74, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2072721>.
- 37 Matthew T. Huber, *Lifeflood: Oil, Freedom and the Forces of Capital* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 62–64. This argument is discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4, pages 61–95 and 97–127.
- 38 Farah al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed. A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford University Press, 2016); Arabella Bet-Shlimon, “The Politics and Ideology of Urban Development in Iraq’s Oil City: Kirkuk, 1946–58,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 26–40, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2072703>; Arabella Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold. Oil, Ethnicity, and the Making of Modern Kirkuk* (Stanford University Press, 2019); Reem Alissa, “The Oil Town of Ahmadi Since 1946. From Colonial Town to Nostalgic City,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and*

political complexity of Gulf societies is comprehensible only when brought into dialogue with their pre-oil history and complex human geography.³⁹ In the Arab Gulf states a scarcity of written sources, traditionally “hybrid” societies and the more recent phenomenon of identity politics have exerted great influence over the writing of history. There cannot be put too much emphasis on Louër’s prompting to “distinguish between history itself and the way people have integrated it in their representation of self and use to substantiate political positions.”⁴⁰ Any attempt to write a history of al-Sharqiyya, as the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is casually called with reference to its official name, will probably remain dissatisfactory with regard to the cultural richness and political complexity of the region’s past. However, some historical trajectories leading into the oil era need (and will) be highlighted to fully grasp twentieth century developments. Among these trajectories is the importance of date farming and agriculture, which for thousands of years existed alongside nomadic life in the desert and created a rich sedentary culture in the large inland oasis of al-Hasa and in the smaller seabound oasis of al-Qatif. A second trajectory is the continued exposure to a multitude of ethnicities, cultures, languages and confessions, as well as the importance of trade, which prompted the formation of uncounted translocal networks with the neighboring regions of Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq and Iran.⁴¹ Furthermore, both Sunni Islam and Shi‘ism are rooted in the region and play important roles in the formation of the identity of the local communities and their internal organization. The strong position of the religiously learned, rich merchants and big landowners in the communities of al-Ahsa’ has been crucial in the formation of localized

the Middle East 33, no. 1 (2013): 41–58, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2072712>; Kaveh Ehsani, “Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan’s Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman,” *IRSH* 48 (2003): 361–99, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859003001123>; Kaveh Ehsani, “The Social History of Labour in the Iranian Oil Industry: The Built Environment and the Making of the Working Class (1908–1941)” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014), <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28983>. On transnational networks see John Chalcraft, “Migration and Popular Protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79, no. 1 (2011): 28–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S014754791000030X> and John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 312–92.

39 Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 6 and Ménoret, *The Saudi Enigma*, 28–30.

40 Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics. Religious and Political Networks in the Arab Gulf* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 12. For a critical evaluation see Madawi al-Rasheed, “Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London,” in *Transnational Connections in the Arab Gulf*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (Routledge, 2005).

41 On the concept of translocality see Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (eds.), *Translocality: The Study of Globalizing Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Brill, 2010).

power and is echoed in the formation of local opposition in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The last trajectory that warrants mentioning at this point is that of imperial politics in the region. Ottoman, British and US imperialism in opposition to or in conjunction with Saudi aspirations towards a unified state have left their mark on the ways in which local society is perceived and perceives itself in a dialectic process of interpreting the respective presents and thinking and writing about the region's past.

2.1 *Urban Revolution*

The modern Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is home to the Dammam Metropolitan Area (DMA) which is one of the most rapidly urbanizing areas in the Arab world.⁴² It is formed by the largely intergrown cities Dammam, al-Khobar and Dhahran, the administrative, commercial and industrial centers of the Eastern Province, respectively. The Golden Triangle, as the three cities are called due to their character as metropolitan center of the province, started to develop after the discovery of oil. Dhahran then served as drilling site and headquarter of the oil company in Saudi Arabia, besides housing a considerable portion of the company staff and oil workers. Al-Khobar quickly developed into the main shipping port for the oil area and living place for company employees. Dammam became the infrastructural and human hub for administrating the oil area. Since 1952 it has been the administrative capital of the Eastern Province.

Besides the three emergent towns, the early Saudi oil conurbation comprised also the large inland oasis of al-Hasa with its numerous villages and the old towns Hofuf and Mubarraz as well as the sea-bound oasis of Qatif with its walled urban center and rural outskirts. One century ago, before oil induced the accelerated urbanization of al-Ahsa', the two oases formed the region's main population centers. Together with several tribal settlements in the area, they were home to the first generation of Saudi oil workers. By the mid-twentieth century the two oases had developed into large commuting centers for the oil industry. Furthermore, the early oil conurbation comprised the oil towns Abqaiq in the vicinity of the Hasa oasis and Rahima close to the Ra's Tanura oil terminal and refinery, the small village and port of Jubail which was developed into an industrial city in the 1970s, and a number of small-ish settlements that evolved from pumping stations situated along the Trans Arabian Pipeline (Tapline), the oil pipeline that until 1976 transported Saudi

42 Anta A. Aboukorin and Faez S. Al-Shihri, "Rapid Urbanization and Sustainability in Saudi Arabia: The Case of Dammam Metropolitan Area," *Journal of Sustainable Development* 8, no. 9 (2015): 52–65, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v8n9p52>.

oil to the Mediterranean. Between 1938 and the 1970s, these places formed the nuclei of the Saudi oil conurbation and worked as the pacemakers of industrialization and urbanization in the Eastern Province.

Historical research on Arab oil cities has resulted in a conceptualization of oil urbanization in the Gulf as “infrastructural” and “hinge urbanism.” While the former term acknowledges the fact that oil urbanization is not limited to the oil towns alone but comprises as well the industrial infrastructures within growing conurbations, the second term expresses the notion that oil towns served “as powerful connectors” or “hinges” between traditional and industrial topographies and ultimately “linked companies, local governments, and indigenous populations in concentric circles, binding them at local, national, regional, and international/global scales.”⁴³ This book chooses the emergent oil conurbation and its contestation by various old and new social actors – ranging from traditional local elites to oil workers and subaltern classes –, the Saudi state, and foreign oil syndicates as its analytical vantage point. It will show how the Saudi oil polity – a polity whose “contours” had been shaped by the physical as well as “cultural, ideological and social markers of oil” – emerged from an amalgam of “bonds of [social, economic and political] patronage,” trans-Arabian migration, a nascent Saudi state and corporate as well as imperial interests and how it was shaped and animated by the people who build and inhabited it.⁴⁴

The notion of “urban revolution,” borrowed from the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), takes on a double meaning: the rapid urbanization which broke with the region’s urban past and irrevocably changed the traditional oasis environment and merchant economy – a revolutionary process in itself – and the types of resistance and rebellious fervor that were triggered by the concentration of labor and industrial production in the new urban centers.⁴⁵ Of course, the settlements that began to evolve in the Saudi East in

43 Nelida Fuccaro, “Arab Oil Towns as Petro-Histories,” in *Oil Spaces. Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*, ed. Carola Hein (Routledge, 2021), 142, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367816049>.

44 Michael Watts, “The Rule of Oil: Petro-Politics and the Anatomy of an Insurgency,” *Journal of African Development* 11, no. 2 (2009): 27, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jafrideve.11.2.0027>; Frederick Anscombe, “An Anational Society: Eastern Arabia in the Ottoman Period,” in *Transnational Connections in the Arab Gulf*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (Routledge, 2015), 22. Insertion added. On the joint impact of imperial rule and petro-capitalism on the formation of new urbanities in the Persian Gulf countries see Bodrookas and Kheshavarzian, “The Forever Frontier,” 6–8.

45 Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minnesota University Press, 2003); Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'Espace* (Anthropos, 1974); Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre. Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City* (Routledge, 2012). On the double notion of urban revolution and its ideal model of “Western” cities see

the first decades of oil industrialization were not the type of city that Lefebvre had in mind when writing about the urban revolution – it was the Paris of the 1960s. Yet, Lefebvre's contentious understanding of the production of space has had a great influence on the development of social and particularly urban history of the Middle East in the past decades, as it contributed to a fundamental new conceptualization of conflict and social mobilization in the urban sphere.⁴⁶ Importantly, it has as well inspired more recent scholarship on the transformations of space and society under the aegis of oil and in particular in the Arab Gulf.⁴⁷

Whereas an exhaustive discussion of Lefebvre's work does not lie within the scope of this book, his ideas about capitalist urbanization and the disintegration of socio-spatial relationships under the logics of material accumulation and exclusion are taken as a point of departure and as a lens through which history is viewed. They appear especially poignant in the context of the emergent oil conurbation: Both, the oil company and the Saudi government established their own power structure through infrastructural rebuilding, demographic reorganization, the centralization of urban governance, and the application of modern surveillance and policing methods. In this aspect, the Saudi oil conurbation resembled other urbanizing places across regions and time.⁴⁸ However,

Eric Sheppard et al., "Introduction. Urban Revolutions in the Global Age of Urbanism," in *Urban Studies* 52, no. 11 (2015): 1948, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980155590>.

- 46 See for instance Edmond Burke III, "Towards a History of Urban Collective Action in the Middle East: Continuities and Change 1750–1980," in *État, Ville et Mouvements Sociaux au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient: Urban Crisis and Social Movements in the Middle East, Actes du Colloque C.N.R.S.-E.S.R.C., Paris 23–27 Mai 1986, Proceedings of the C.N.R.S.-E.S.R.C. Symposium Paris, May 23–27th, 1986*, ed. Kenneth Brown et al. (Editions L'Harmattan, 1989); Walter J. Nicholls, "The Urban Question Revisited: The Importance of Cities for Social Movements," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 4 (2008): 841–859, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00820.x>; André Raymond, "Urban Networks and Popular Movements in Cairo and Aleppo (End of the 18th–Beginning of the 19th Centuries)," in *The Proceedings of the International Conference of Urbanism and Islam (ICUIT)*, vol. 2, ed. Research Project 'Urbanism and Islam' (Middle Eastern Culture Center, 1989); Guilain Denoeux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon* (State University of New York Press, 1993).
- 47 Nelida Fuccaro, "Preface: Urban Studies in the Arabian Peninsula: 6 Thoughts on the Field," *Arabian Humanities* 2 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.2530> and Hein, "Space, Time, and Oil," 8.
- 48 See for instance Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory* (Polity Press, 2005); Sami Zubaida, "Urban Social Movements, 1750–1950," in *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750–1950*, ed. Peter Sluglett (Syracuse University Press, 2008); Dina Rizk Khoury, "Violence and Spatial Politics Between the Local and Imperial: Baghdad, 1778–1810," in *The Spaces of the Modern City. Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*, ed. Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse (Princeton University Press, 2008).

Lefebvre's perspective, and by extension those of his students, direct attention towards power structures as well as towards the central questions of how urban configurations are influenced by economic commodities and production processes and how they function as catalysts for socio-political struggles in which a marginalized urban populace can assume historical agency.⁴⁹ As such, oil urbanization as directed by the demands of commodity extraction and circulation within a "global petroleumscape" and assuming the forms of "infrastructural" and "hinge urbanization" expresses a specific type of urban revolution. Applying this lens allows us to expand existing concepts towards an understanding of oil urbanization as an inherently contentious process.

Hence, a considerable part of this book deals with the transformative power that Saudi Arabia's oil industry and emergent state exerted on local urban(-izing) landscapes. The early oil conurbation developed unique physical spaces that accommodated and (re-)created social networks outside the direct influence of the state and ultimately functioned as both, spaces of repression and enabling context for popular contention.⁵⁰ Oil modernity in this particular context meant, for example, the foundation of new political and civic institutions, such as elected municipal councils and local sports and literary clubs that became venues for the political activities of a more radical generation of the traditional urban elites.⁵¹ Noteworthy, these elites mobilized their traditional clientele in the name of modernism, and at the same time pursued their own interest in reinforcing traditional leadership. Popular contention in the emergent Saudi oil conurbation included unionist and party movements in which local elites opted to take a leading role if it met their own interests. It

49 See for instance David Harvey, *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2013) and Neil Brenner et al. (eds.), *Cities for People, Not for Profit. Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City* (Routledge, 2012).

50 See William H. Sewell, Jr., "Space in Contentious Politics," in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, ed. Ronald R. Aminzade et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2001). On the politics of the labor camps see Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 88–125 and Ghrawi, "Structural and Physical Violence."

51 On political modernity and the formation of a critical press see Toby C. Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 145–150 and Toby Matthiesen, "Migration, Minorities, and Radical Networks: Labor Movements and Opposition Groups in Saudi Arabia, 1950–1975," *International Review of Social History* 59, no. 3 (2014): 485–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859014000455>. On the history of municipal council elections in the Eastern province see Toby Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations and the Emergence of a Public Sphere in Saudi Arabia: The Municipal Elections in the Eastern Province, 1954–1960," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2014): 320–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.947242>.

further comprised subaltern unrest that was directed against corruption, discrimination and oppression.⁵²

These protagonists of popular contention came from various social and religious backgrounds. Among them were oil workers, urban youth, government employees, day laborers and peasants. They all followed complex rationales within the context of the local oil polity. Labor protest was originally directed against racist discrimination by the oil company and confined to the labor camps but eventually inspired organized labor struggle in the wider oil conurbation. Sectarian strife or what appeared as such, and violent contention by subaltern groups were directly and indirectly connected to the uneven transformation of the traditional environment into a sprawling oil metropolis. Frequent land expropriation, precarious labor and underdevelopment became rallying points for subaltern struggle, sometimes in conjunction with the interests of traditional elites and sometimes against them. Local notables continued to exert influence on local politics and communal life, and the subaltern classes remained at least partly dependent on urban-based merchants and landowners. Traditional urban-rural rivalries contributed to recurrent outbreaks of local contention. Hence, local dissent assumed various forms – from traditional petitioning, shooting rifles against unwanted intruders and spontaneous responses to everyday violence in the labor camps and local towns in the form of minor brawls, to organized demonstrations and fully-fledged urban rioting. This restive situation was further aggravated by a general politicization of the oil area through regional conflict and rivalling foreign interests which acquired their own political meaning at local and national levels.

It will be argued that the often-presumed impact of religious affiliation on popular contention entered the region primarily through imperial and corporate interventions in local governance. Initially, British agents in the Gulf promoted the ideas that religious difference was the root of conflict and strife among the local communities and that there existed an unavoidable antagonism between the local Shi'a and the Sunni Ottoman and Saudi governments. This brainchild of British imperial agents was later adopted by American corporate and diplomatic staff in dealing with and perceiving the local communities. Especially in times of local unrest the idea of religious strife flashes up in corporate and diplomatic reports and it would be easy to mistake it for a historical continuity. Yet, the notion that political struggle in Saudi Arabia's

52 On the concept of popular contention in Middle Eastern societies see Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*. For comparison with other world regions see Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

oil rich Eastern Province during the early decades of oil industrialization and state consolidation was contained within narrowly defined socio-political contexts, or were the signs of the political assertiveness of distinct pre-defined groups needs to be problematized. This book further suggests that the “sectarianizing of politics” that has been diagnosed for later decades was to a considerable extent the long-term result of imperial as well as of corporate and foreign interventions in local politics.⁵³ It came into life as a way to control and survey the local communities and oil workers and left its mark in the spatial restructuring of the province in the context of petro-capitalism. In a similar vein, it is necessary to challenge notions of political modernity in the context of the oil polity and to highlight the ambivalent role played by more progressive secular elites in shaping popular contention in the early oil conurbation. It is surmised that a too narrow focus on class or religious affiliation will only ever transmit a fractured and incomplete image of oil modernity.

2.2 *Modernity*

The present Saudi state was founded in 1932. Only one year later, an US American oil syndicate began oil exploration works in al-Ahsa'. Oil began to flow in commercial quantities in 1938 and financed the development of the Saudi kingdom into a centralized state. Hence, modernity in Saudi Arabia is often presented as inextricably bound to the parallel processes of state formation under the Al Sa'ud and oil-fueled transformation. In the context of national Saudi scholarship modernity is understood as intricately bound to oil development: new urban infrastructures and modern homes, anti-disease campaigns and the allocation of medical treatment in hospitals sponsored by the oil company or by private Saudi investors, company training and the emergence of a Saudi class of skilled oil workers, managers and government employees.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Saudi historiography has argued that due to the influx of migrant laborers from all over the kingdom, al-Ahsa's emergent oil conurbation assumed the function of a melting pot, amalgamating members of different tribal and geographical origins into the first generation of the

53 On the sectarianization of politics in the Eastern Province see Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't* (Stanford Briefs, 2013).

54 Al-Muslim, *Sāhil al-Dhahab al-Aswad*; 'Abdullah N. al-Subay'i, *Al-Ḥayā al-'Ilmiyya wa-l-Thaqāfiyya wa-l-Fikriyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya 1350–1380 h./1930–1960 m.: Dirāsa fī al-Tarikh al-Ijtimā'i* (Tawzī' Dār al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1987); al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naḡf wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Ijtimā'iyya*; 'Abdullah N. al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naḡf wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya, 1352–1380 h./1933–1960 m.: Dirāsa fī al-Tarikh al-Iqtisādi* (Tawzī' Dār al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1987); Aḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*; al-Mubarak, “Oil, Urban Development and Planning.”

Saudi nation.⁵⁵ This particular view of oil urbanization has become a very successful national narrative that is also well ingrained in the memory of many Saudis from the Eastern Province who were employed in the early oil industry and counted among the first residents of the local oil towns.⁵⁶ On a contrary notion, others intervened that cohabitation and shared life and work experiences of Saudis from different parts of the country have barely resulted in a real growing together of the culturally and historically distinct regions of the kingdom, not least because religious and structural discrimination prevailed in state politics.⁵⁷ A relatively isolated group, until today, was formed by the thousands of labor migrants from other Arab countries and South Asia, who nevertheless contributed considerably to the growth of the oil industry and popular protest and left a still mostly unacknowledged mark in Saudi history.⁵⁸

Critics also refuse the second great narrative of the Saudi oil experience: namely that of the wise political leader who relocated oil wealth to its people to build a modern Saudi state. This recurring image in Saudi history writing was a product mainly of the years prior to and during the initial phase of the oil boom. During that politically instable period, King Faysal b. 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud (1964–1975) attempted to derive legitimacy for the Al Sa'ud's absolute monarchy from their role as modernizers, although in a clearly defined religious framework. Development narratives formed one pillar of Saudi national historiographies published on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the kingdom and since then have witnessed a renaissance in state-sponsored history production.⁵⁹ However, the historical narrative of oil modernization has served not only for the Al Sa'ud as a source of historical legitimacy. The American oil pioneers and Aramco competed with the Saudi government about the title of the benevolent modernizer. Already in 1947, Karl Twitchell,

55 Al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Ijtīmā'iyya*, 14.

56 The melting pot theory was put forward in many of the interviews and informal conversations with Saudis during field research in the Eastern Province in May 2013.

57 Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia* (Saqi, 2006), 56–57; Gwenn Okruhlik, "Excluded Essentials: The Politics of Ethnicity, Oil, and Citizenship in Saudi Arabia," in *The Global Color Line: Racial and Ethnic Inequality and Struggle From a Global Perspective*, ed. Pinar Batur and Joe R. Feagin (Jai Press, 1999).

58 See Chalcraft, "Migration and Popular Protest," 42.

59 Centenary celebrations took place in 2001/02, at the anniversary of the recapture of Riyadh by the Al Sa'ud. Determann, *Historiography*, 127–37. The overall development strategy followed by King Faysal was "... to develop and transform the kingdom's economic and physical infrastructure, while keeping political reform and social change in check for the sake of preserving Islamic values and the traditional fabric of society." Sarah Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia. The Crucial Years of Development, 1960–1982* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 117, 95–117.

the US American mining engineer who had surveyed the mineral and water resources of the Arabian Peninsula on behalf of the businessman and investor Charles R. Crane and took part in the negotiation of the Saudi oil concession, claimed that “Saudi Arabia is presumably the only country in the world whose development of oil and mining resulted from purely philanthropic sentiment.”⁶⁰ While Britain and France continued their old imperial visions of a civilizing mission in their new mandates over Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, the imagined role of the “civilizing power” in Saudi Arabia was assumed by the oil company. Aramco became very active in promoting its own role in building the Saudi oil industry literally from scratch and in lifting the country’s living standard from (presumably) the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. The company successfully created (and still maintains) the image of a benevolent modern enterprise which in the spirit of “enlightened self-interest” undertook great efforts in building the kingdom’s infrastructure, training its Saudi employees, fighting diseases in the area, and developing the local communities.⁶¹ More recent Saudi and foreign research has cast doubts on the company’s genuine interest in developing the oil operations area, let alone the whole kingdom.⁶² Furthermore, the not always subtle role that Aramco assumed in Saudi internal politics was carefully omitted from the company-sponsored history production. In countering Aramco’s corporate historiography, more independent writers have put forward an image of Aramco as “state within the state.”⁶³ Whereas the precise impact that the oil company was able to exert on internal and local politics remained for a long time completely in the dark, the oil company was accused of a “colonialism” that shaped local Saudi society

60 Karl S. Twitchell, *Saudi Arabia. With an Account of the Development of Its Resources*, 3rd ed. (Greenwood, 1969), 211.

61 The *Aramco World* magazine is published since 1949 in Houston, Texas. The magazine covers a wide range of subjects that frequently include Middle Eastern history, economics and oil. A recurrent topic is Aramco’s role as machine for local development. Other publications are for example Arthur P. Clark; Muhammad A. Tahlawi and William Facey, *A Land Transformed: The Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Aramco* (Aramco Services, 2006); Kyle L. Pakka, *The Energy Within: A Photo History of the People of Saudi Aramco* (Saudi Aramco Oil Company, 2006); Thomas A. Pledge, Ali M. Dialdin and Muhammad A. Tahlawi, *Saudi Aramco and Its People: A History of Training* (Saudi Arabian Oil Company, 1998).

62 Aḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*, 71–129; Yizraeli, *Politics and Society*, 36.

63 Ghassan Salamé, “Political Power and the Saudi State,” in *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, ed. Albert Hourani et al. (University of California Press, 1993), 582; Jamil E. Jreisat, *Politics Without Process: Administrative Development in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 194.

according to its needs and market interests.⁶⁴ On the other hand, such views do not account sufficiently for the fact that the company management often acted on explicit demand by the Saudi government, which in a reverse manner exerted great influence on company politics. Ultimately, the Saudi government and the oil company shared mutual interests, namely to secure oil production and to keep local communities and oil workers “in line” with petro-capitalism.

2.3 *Resistance*

The subject of political resistance in Saudi Arabia is not alien to academic research. Yet, for quite some time, Islamist opposition since the 1970s has received the bulk of scholarly attention. The focus of these works is mainly on the ideological and organizational framework. A real scrutiny of the socio-economic factors for Islamist mobilization has only begun to enter the discussion.⁶⁵ Furthermore, since a couple of years, there (re-)surfaces an interest in the evolution of leftist movements in the kingdom – again largely from the perspective of ideological and organizational developments. This new strand of literature has taken on the re-valuation of twentieth century political history of Saudi Arabia and emphasizes the strong impact of secular political ideology on internal and transnational politics.⁶⁶ Of special importance is Rosie Bsheer’s argument that the Islamization of internal politics in the 1970s must be seen as a strategy of the “counter-revolutionary Saudi state” to fight widespread secular and leftist opposition in the country. Moreover, in her reading of “the silenced archives of the Saudi Left,” the mobilization of political Islam as a response to the progressive politics of the 1960s became the decisive moment in the consolidation of the present conservative state.⁶⁷ Still, studies on other sources of resistance besides the ideological or religious are still largely missing and especially subaltern resistance outside the circle

64 ‘Abdullah J. al-Shaykh, *Arāmkū, al-Naft wa ‘l-Isti‘mār* (Dār al-Jazīra, 1985), 31.

65 Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam. The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Harvard University Press, 2011); Thomas Heghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, “Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-‘Utaybi Revisited,” *IJMES* 39, no. 1 (2007): 103–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743807002553> and Toby C. Jones, “Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery: Modernity, Marginalization, and the Shi‘a Uprising of 1979,” *IJMES* 38, no. 2 (2006): 213–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743806412320>.

66 See for instance Mohammed T. al-Sudairi, “Marx’s Arabian Apostles: The Rise and Fall of the Saudi Communist Movement,” *Middle East Journal* 73, no. 3 (2019): 438–457, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3751/73.3.15>; Toby Matthiesen, “Saudi Arabia and the Cold War,” in *Salman’s Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (Hurst & Co, 2018) and Rosie Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State.”

67 Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 240.

of intellectual elites and organized dissident groups lies largely in the dark.⁶⁸ A rare exception forms Pascal Ménoret's insightful work on youth rebellion in modern Riyadh which offers a compelling history of urban planning and socio-economic exclusion in the context of oil wealth and state building.⁶⁹

As an exception to the general rule, the labor politics at Aramco during the 1940s and 1950s form an integral part of the literature on the political history of Saudi Arabia. When some critical researchers in the late 1970s started to challenge Aramco's image as benevolent modernizer and to shed some light on the repressive Saudi government, they were able to do so because of a few abroad publications by Saudi opposition groups and political activists.⁷⁰ These works transmitted a new picture of secular struggle in the orthodox Islamic Saudi state. At the same time the political impact of secular opposition groups in Saudi Arabia was assessed at best as a disturbance in the oil sponsored process of state building.⁷¹ This negative evaluation is usually linked to the historical failures of Arab nationalism and Pan Arabism to decide the political

68 Rosie Bsheer forwards the notion of a "popular political struggle" rather than "an elite intellectual one," yet focusses on "Saudi intellectuals, members of political parties, journalists, labor organizers, writers and literary critics" – a contradiction which is likely rooted in the circumstance that autobiographies and pamphlets form the bulk of sources on the subject of popular resistance in that period. Bsheer, "A Counter-Revolutionary State," 239, 263.

69 Pascal Ménoret, *Royaume d'Asphalte: Jeunesse Saoudienne en Révolte* (Éditions La Découverte, 2016).

70 Frank Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Penguin, 1979), 65–69; Helen Lackner, *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca Press, 1979), 89–109. The most famous Saudi activist is probably Nāṣir al-Sa'īd (1924–1979), founder of the Pan-Arab and leftist *Ittiḥād Sha'b Al-Jazīra Al-'Arabiyya* (Union of the People of the Arabian Peninsula), who gained some prominence outside political opposition circles through his harsh critique of the Al Sa'ūd and the brutal regime of the *Wahhabis*. Nāṣir Al-Sa'īd, *Tārīkh Āl Sa'ūd* (Manshūrāt Ittiḥād Sha'b al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya, ca. 1979); Arab Support Committee, *Struggle, Oppression and Counter-Revolution in Saudi Arabia, Translated from the Original Arabic Articles Appearing In the 1972 Issues of Al-Jazeera Al-Jadeedah, The Political Organ of the People's Democratic Party of Al-Jazeera* (Arab Support Committee, ca. 1972); 'Adnān 'Aṭṭar, ed., *Al-Ḥarakat al-Taḥarruriyya fi 'l-Hijāz wa-l-Najd 1901–1973* (Ma'tuq Ikhwan, 1973). The struggle of Saudi oil workers against adverse working- and living conditions in Aramco's oil towns has also entered Saudi national historiography. Saudi writers used it as a carriage to convey the message that traditional personal rule of the Saudi king with its counselling and allocative functions worked also in times of increasing state bureaucratization and diversification of ministerial offices. Aḥmarī. *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*, 161–67. For a thorough analysis of the newly emerging bureaucratic order see Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

71 Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 116; Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, 67–68. The argument has also been made in more recent times by al-Rasheed, who stated that the workers'

fate of the Arab states and their subsequent replacement by Islamist politics.⁷² Echoing these beliefs, many writers regarded political opposition in the Saudi oil industry largely as a Shi'a movement.⁷³ More recent studies have shown that local Shi'a with connections to leftist organizations in Bahrain, Iraq and Kuwait have formed one important column of labor activists, thus contributing to the ideological and organizational formation of a mixed labor movement at Aramco.⁷⁴

After the major breakdown of secular political opposition in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Islamist movements became the node of oppositional politics in Saudi Arabia, culminating in the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by a group of Saudi Salafis and in protests in Qatif and other urban centers in the Eastern Province that led to severe state violence, both in 1979.⁷⁵ After the traumatic events of 1979, exiled Shi'a continued the long literary tradition of Qatif and began to publish alternative political histories about their home region that can also be read as expressions of the increasingly salient Shi'a identity politics in the Arab Gulf.⁷⁶ These activist writers have left a deep mark in local

protests did not have a wide base outside the labor camps and thus remained confined to the camp boundaries. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 110.

72 See for instance Buchan, "Secular and Religious Opposition," 115. The argument is still seen as a valid one. Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 90. Interpretations that state a 'disillusionment with secular politics' overlook the purposeful mobilization of Islamists as counterrevolutionary measure. Bsheer, "A Counter-Revolutionary State," 237.

73 See for instance Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 32–39; Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (MacMillan, 1999), 44; Joseph A. Kechichian, *Succession in Saudi Arabia* (Palgrave, 2001), 97–98; Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power. The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 47–49; Laurence Louër, "Shi'i Identity Politics in Saudi Arabia," in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East. Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation*, ed. Anh N. Longva and Anne S. Roald (Brill, 2012), 225.

74 Matthiesen, "Migration," 502.

75 In Qatif, protests were led by the followers of the Iranian religious leader Shaykh Muḥammad al-Shirāzi (1928–2001), whereas demonstrations in other urban centers were organized by leftist groups. Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery," 224–27.

76 See Madawi al-Rasheed, "The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia: A Minority in Search of Cultural Authenticity," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (2007): 121–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530199808705657>; Toby Matthiesen, "Shi'i Historians in a Wahhabi State: Identity Entrepreneurs and the Politics of Local Historiography in Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 25–45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743814001433>; Mamoun Fandy, "From Confrontation to Creative Resistance: The Shia's Oppositional Discourse in Saudi Arabia," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 9 (1996): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10669929608720089>. Among the most productive writers were members of the Organisation for the Islamic Revolution in the

historiography. They decidedly published against the discrimination of Shi'i communities under the Al Sa'ud and in particular of the communities of Qatif. Their works contributed not only a history of Qatif's Shi'i communities but also offer insights into the evolution of local resistance and identity politics, beginning from early Saudi rule in al-Ahsa' until the late twentieth century.⁷⁷ Noteworthy, these works convey a pronounced sectarian interpretation of resistance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they generously tapped into British archives and thus into the vast British imperial documentation and interpretation of local events. Due, perhaps, to their ideological background, they repeated British imperial interpretations of a sectarian divisiveness of the local societies and religious strife as motives behind local conflict. The extremely fruitful production of local historiography by Qatifi activist writers has moreover resulted in a great number of non-Saudi academic works that center around Shi'i opposition emanating from Qatif. Other localities like al-Hasa, the second Shi'i center in the Eastern Province, remain under-addressed by foreign researchers.⁷⁸ Even this study cannot completely disengage from this mechanism, despite its deliberate choice of a different analytical framework. Still, the resulting imbalance in research interests needs to be problematized, since it does lead to an unjustified generalization of the case of Qatif towards Saudi Shi'a in general. More importantly, it has furthered notions of local conflict and resistance that focus on religious divisions, at the expense of other explanations.⁷⁹ Local historiography is, in fact, more pluralistic in its aims and motivations. While some

Arabian Peninsula, (*Munazzamat al-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi 'l-Jazira al-'Arabiyya*), the exile organization of the Saudi *Shiraziyyun* (the followers of the sheikh al-Shirazi). In 1991, the organization was re-named into Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia (RMS) (*al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi 'l-Saudiyya*) in an attempt of reconciliation with the broader political opposition in the Gulf. Since then, its members are frequently referred to as *Islahiyyun*. Al-Rasheed, "The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia," 124–25; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 143–44.

77 See for instance Ḥamza al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a fi 'l-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya al-Saudiyya*, 2 vols. (Mū'assasāt al-Baqī' li-l-Ihyā' al-Turāth, 1993); Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*; 'Alī al-Aḥmad, *Sha'b al-Qaṭif fi 'l-Qarn al-Ḥādī wa-l-'Ashrīn: Dirāsa Taḥlīliyya li-Ḥādīr wa-Mustaqbal al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī al-Shi'i fi 'l-'Alfiyya al-Thālītha* (Dār al-'Arab, 2007).

78 Concerning the apparent abstinence from popular politics by the Shi'a of al-Hasa, it has been suggested that the latter were socially better integrated in the Saudi state and much less politically confrontational than the Shi'i communities in Qatif. This in itself is a remarkable observation that until today has not received any thorough attention by researchers, despite some very tentative attempts for explanation. Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 52. Others have linked Qatifi prowess toward political mobilization in contrast to Hasawi quietism to confessional specifics in the two localities. Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery," 217; Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 19. For the latter see also chapter 2 in this book.

79 Alamer, "Beyond Sectarianism," 100.

works are mainly interested in the preservation of knowledge about the history of the homeland, others address the exploitation of Saudi resources and labor by the foreign oil company and integrate them in a critique of a new capitalist imperialism.⁸⁰ Again others are accounts of leftist political opposition in the oil province, like the autobiographical work of the late political activist Sayyid ‘Ali al-Sayyid Baqir al-‘Awwami which played an important role in the revival of academic interest in Saudi left-wing movements.⁸¹

When diplomatic reports issued by the US administration in the oil operations area were declassified in the 1990s and the Saudi state gradually opened for foreign researchers in the early 2000s, this resulted in new questions and findings about the contentious character of the initial years of oil industrialization.⁸² For instance, after extensive examination of archival sources in the United States, Robert Vitalis could for the first time point to the wide scope and remarkable intensity of oil workers’ protests in the 1940s and 1950s as well as to the omnipresent latent violence of segregated livelihood and racial discrimination in Aramco’s labor camps. He showed how Aramco’s oil bonanza in Saudi Arabia reproduced backward and often violent societal patterns of the American homeland in a “Jim Crow” mannerism.⁸³ Half a decade later, Toby Jones demonstrated how the Saudi state continuously fought to enhance its capacity to control its natural resources to administer and order nature and built environment and thus to shape political authority. Jones found that, where the state’s strategy exacerbated deteriorating social and environmental conditions, there it created the preconditions for the “politicization of oil and environment,” which culminated in the disastrous political uprisings of the marginalized Shi‘i minority and uprooted tribal elements in 1979.⁸⁴ Crucially, Jones put his finger onto one of the prominent misconceptions of Saudi history, arguing that

80 On the former see for instance al-Muslim, *Sāhil al-Dhahab al-Aswad*; al-Subay‘ī, *Al-Ḥayā al-‘Imīyya wa ‘l-Thaqāfiyya*; al-Subay‘ī, *Iktishāf al-Naḥḥ wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Ijtimā‘iyya*; al-Subay‘ī, *Iktishāf al-Naḥḥ wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*. On the latter see for instance al-Shaykh, *Arāmku, al-Naḥḥ wa ‘l-Istī‘mār* and Tawfiq al-Shaykh, *Al-Bitrūl wa-l-Siyāsa fī ‘l-Mamlaka al-‘Arabīyya al-Sa‘ūdīyya* (Dār al-Ṣafā wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1988).

81 Sayyid ‘Alī al-Sayyid Bāqir al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya Sharq al-Sa‘ūdīyya 1373–1393 h/1953–1973 m*, 2 vols. (Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 2012).

82 Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom*; Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (Saqi, 2000), 336–37; al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 92–96; Jones, *Desert Kingdom*; Chalcraft, “Migration and Popular Protest,” 37–43; Matthiesen, “Migration.”

83 Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom*, xiii.

84 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 146.

popular politics has rarely been regarded as serious and has been viewed instead as anomalous. But in fact the middle decade of the century saw the politicization of citizens both inside and outside the labor camps in the Eastern Province. Omission of this fact stems from the challenge of locating and identifying what constituted political activity.⁸⁵

Partly in response to Jones' argument, Toby Matthiesen has examined Shi'i identity politics in the Eastern Province throughout the twentieth century. He discussed the ways in which Shi'i activists were politicized and how their activism turned from secular ideologies in the 1950s to Shi'i Islamism by the mid-1970s.⁸⁶ Existing research also points to a certain degree of social malaise in the emergent oil conurbation which contributed to dissatisfaction amongst urban subaltern groups, however this element is introduced merely as a sidenote.⁸⁷ To the present day, the historical agency and politics of the subaltern classes in the rapidly urbanizing Eastern Province has so far not been subject of systematic analysis. Nor have political activities by members of the local elites on both sides of the religious divide or political activism of the laborers and civil servants in the local towns. Yet, all these groups have contributed to a particular Saudi oil modernity and played key roles in the urban revolution that evolved in the early decades of oil industrialization. This omission in existent research likely results partly from what Jones identified as the inability to recognize political action at a grassroot level, and partly from the general problem that these groups only infrequently appear in state and foreign documentation, which are among the historian's primary sources.⁸⁸ Yet, it is also a result of a predetermined and exceptionally strong interest of researchers in the role of religious affiliation in (violent) confrontations between governments and subjects in the Middle East. While this interest in itself is understandable, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the *a priori* attention towards confessional divisions of the respective societies determines research questions, prompts the creation of rigid categories and filters non-confirmative findings, even in the most original and well-documented studies. This is illustrated, for example, by a continuous juxtaposition of Shi'i and Sunni communities in the Eastern Province, which is reflected in the

85 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 147.

86 Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*; Matthiesen, "Migration" and Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations."

87 Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 33. See also Jones discussion of environmental politics in the Eastern Province. Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 161–79.

88 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 147.

misled imagination of the emergent oil conurbation as consisting of the thriving predominantly Sunni towns Dammam, Khobar and Dhahran on the one hand, and the underdeveloped (predominantly) Shi'i peripheries of al-Hasa and Qatif, on the other.⁸⁹ However, it can be seriously doubted that resistance against underdevelopment and material neglect in the oil conurbation worked strictly along sectarian lines. A better grasp of the socio-spatial geography of the emergent oil conurbation will most probably alter this assumption and garner new findings about the politics of resistance during the first decades of oil industrialization.

3 A Word on Sources

As a study in history, the book makes use of imperial, corporate and Saudi archival sources, local historiography, memoirs, and interviews with former activists and oil workers. Some sources that have been frequently cited in existing research, for instance US-documentation on the strike of Saudi oil workers in 1953, will be re-read, complemented and newly interpreted in the light of hitherto under-used and new sources. To this end documents and reports compiled by the American Arabian Oil Company, by the US administration in Dhahran and by the British Residency in Bahrain, as well as ordinances and regulations issued by the Saudi government are examined. All these primary sources have at the time been accessible for researchers in archives in the United States, in the United Kingdom and partly as well in Saudi Arabia. At the time of completing this research, the branches of the archives of the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh and Dammam proved extremely helpful, whereas Saudi Aramco repeatedly promised to give access to its archives, but in the end granted none. Hence, Aramco reports cited in this book exclusively stem from archives in the United States. Another work frequently cited is Federico S. Vidal's seminal study of *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, which draws on field research Vidal conducted while working for Aramco's Arabian

89 See for instance Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 142–43. By using the term “periphery” for al-Hasa and Qatif, Jones glosses over this methodological juxtaposition. However, the fact that al-Hasa and Qatif did not develop as quickly and thoroughly as Dhahran, Dammam and al-Khobar is not primarily rooted in their confessional geography (more on that in chapter 3 in this book). Jones writes that “... not everything was great in Dammam, Dhahran, and al-Khobar either. There were real problems and real tensions *even* there, although the degree of deprivation and suffering was mitigated considerably as a result of the attention – and resources – received from both the state and Aramco.” Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 175. Italics added.

Research Division in 1951.⁹⁰ The resulting book was published in 1955 by the oil company and has been cited countless times as it is both, one of the most comprehensive and insightful studies on a society that is on the verge of oil industrialization and an extremely rare account of al-Hasa's social, economic and administrative situation in the middle of the twentieth century. In 1964, Vidal presented his findings in the form of a PhD dissertation at Harvard's Department of Anthropology. In preparing for this book, a microfilmed copy of Vidal's dissertation has been read alongside the book of 1955. Besides the obvious text editing, the content of the dissertation differs from the book in a number of details. It would be interesting yet is ultimately too time and page-consuming to retrace the exact process of editing and see what information from Vidal's field research did not make it into the Aramco publication. Instead, both versions are used and cited in this book.⁹¹

Local perspectives, particularly from members of the local communities and political activists, are much harder to obtain. During field research in the Eastern Province in spring 2013, interviews with inhabitants of the oil conurbation, former oil workers and political activists as well as local historians and experts in Saudi law, urban planning and social sciences were conducted. These interviews were mostly informal and focused on personal experiences or insights of the interviewed. They took place in homes and offices, in restaurants, hotel foyers or during trips to a certain place or locality. In some cases, a whole day passed talking and explaining, but the average time of an interview was between two and three hours. The information and insights collected during these encounters will at times be incorporated directly into the argumentation and in general provide the background against which empirical findings are tested and interpreted.⁹²

Quite extensive use is made of the already mentioned historiographies by Saudi activist writers and to a smaller extent of political pamphlets and local newspapers.⁹³ A third group of sources used throughout the book are autobiographies by Saudi and foreign oil workers, company officials, and political activists. Such firsthand accounts add perspective to state and corporate

90 The Arabian Affairs Division (AAD) was Aramco's "inhouse intelligence and research department" while the government relations organization (GRO) became "Aramco's equivalent of the US State Department." Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 31, 69.

91 Vidal. *The Oasis of al-Hasa*; Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1964), Microfilm.

92 In compliance with the wishes of most Saudis who have shared their histories and insights, their names will be anonymized throughout the book.

93 Local newspapers from the 1940s to the 1970s are exclusively used in translated or reprinted form, as original copies proved unobtainable.

documentation, they often shed a different light on events and sometimes even reveal new and unexpected explanations. Yet, they require the same extent of skepticism that is applied for official accounts. For example, 'Ali al-'Awwami's two volumes on the national movement in the Eastern Province are among the most important and most frequently cited in this book. They convey a first-hand account of many events mentioned in archival sources, but still need to be read critically and tested against al-'Awwami's personal background in the old urban-based nobility of Qatif and his self-perception as member of a young and modern generation of secular activists. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that al-'Awwami wrote his book in the early 2000s, decades after the described events happened, aided by his memory, diary entries and the consultation of co-activists.⁹⁴

In a different manner, the frequently used local historiographies often put additional hurdles to the researcher: Some convey accounts of events in the way in which they are orally passed on from one generation to the next without providing any sources or references, thus blending the long tradition of oral history in the Gulf with the tradition of written historiography. Others tap into family archives that are not accessible to outsiders, let alone foreigners. Against others refer to books or documents that prove unobtainable, despite months spent hunting down footnotes. This book opts to integrate such historiographies into its argumentation in a cautious and transparent manner, as has been demonstrated by other researchers who were confronted with similar issues.⁹⁵ Foreign researchers, pressured by the need to produce original research and publish it, are easily tempted to deny local historiography the same academic respect that they pay their colleagues in anglophone academia. Yet, local history writing usually is serious research that, with the help of the internet, is widely publicized and increasingly perceived (and used) by an international group of researchers. Hence, this book aims to engage with these discussions and interpretations and to bring them into dialogue with wider academic discourse whenever possible.

4 Outline of the Book

The introduction to this book aimed at presenting a general outline of the topic and introducing some key concepts and ideas. In many instances, it used a very

94 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 11–15.

95 See for instance Ulrike Freitag's book on Jidda and her approach on the use of various local sources. Ulrike Freitag, *A History of Jeddah. The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 27–30.

big brush to draw a general image of what will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. The second chapter “Society and Politics Before Oil” establishes the oil production area as a historical place. After introducing the reader to the history of the Eastern Province and spending a few more pages on the already mentioned historical trajectories into the twentieth century, the chapter describes the social composition and political economy of the region in the pre-oil era. Physical and social geographies are discussed regarding processes of economic production, land use patterns, urban geographies and religious composition of the local communities. The chapter stresses that religious difference, and in particular the Sunni-Shi’a divide, was only one of many factors that constituted local society and structured local space. Another important characteristic was the traditional power disequilibrium between town and village which was marked by economic hardship and comparative powerlessness of the villagers and their strong dependence on urban-based notables in whose hands rested control over land, local administration, and religious leadership. In this context, the Saudi annexation of the area in 1913 altered land accumulation, involvement of local notables in provincial government, and relations between the two confessional groups. The latter is exemplified by looking at incidents of seemingly sectarian strife before and after the Saudi takeover, paying special attention to actors, spatial configurations and hidden rationales.

The third chapter “The Emergent Oil Conurbation” traces the rapid urbanization of the area under the aegis of petro-capitalism and its impact on local society, thereby establishing the oil conurbation as an object and theatre of popular contention. It showcases uneven urban growth, which was guided mainly by corporate considerations of the oil company and found its expression in the emergence of new boom towns and dystopic industrial settlements. At the same time, the emergent state as a revenue seeking and regulating agent, the transition to a globalized petro-capitalism and the manipulation of religious heterogeneity gained increased significance in changing the traditional political economy and in remodeling the spatial organization of local society. The last part of the chapter discusses violence as an inherent part of the early oil polity, be it as a mode of governance or of spatial and industrial control.

The fourth chapter “Popular Politics on the Oil Frontier” places the emergent oil conurbation in the setting of Arab nationalist policies in the wider Middle East, a globalized oil market controlled by powerful international oil consortiums and overlapping and often conflicting imperial interests that competed with or sponsored the not yet consolidated Saudi state. On the other hand, it touches on the situation of the local communities in the 1940s, which was marked by a general precariousness in the realms of labor and daily existence in the oil area. Starting from early instances of labor struggle by Saudi

oil workers at Aramco, the chapter sheds light on the role of contractor firms in the exploitation of local and foreign labor and highlights Aramco's role in the issuance of a strongly biased Saudi labor law in 1947. It is shown how the different regional origins of Saudi oil workers, their pre-existent networks of resistance and local bonds of patronage played key roles in sustaining the Saudi labor struggle between 1953–1956 and in providing it with political fuel. A special focus lies on the spatial dimensions of the Saudi labor movement, its entanglements with social and political conflict in neighboring Bahrain, and its role in territorial disputes between Saudi Arabia and Great Britain.

Chapter 5 “Urban Revolution” carves out and, at the same time, problematizes the urban modernity that began to appear in the oil province in the 1950s. It is argued that this modernity played an ambivalent role in shaping popular contention and that the language of modernism masked widely practiced exploitation of cheap Saudi and foreign labor and the expropriation of small landowners. It will be argued that the recourse to violence and radical opposition by parts of the local communities must be understood also as a reaction to the ambivalent roles of oil modernization and its elitist agents. The second half of chapter 5 retraces the spill-over of labor contention into the streets and political centers of the oil conurbation. It traces the fierce struggle fought by political activists, radical opposition groups, urban youth, laborers and subaltern segments of urban society against the detrimental effects of petro-capitalism and showcases their increased readiness to voice their anger and desperation in the forms of mass politics and collective disorder. It will be argued that widespread unrest in the oil conurbation in June 1967, whose scope and impact have been largely overlooked in academic discourse, marked a turning point in the political history of the kingdom in whose aftermath the Saudi government became aware of and chose to violently counter large scale dissent by the urban masses, systematically using strategies of securitization and sectarianization against the local communities.

The sixth and concluding chapter “Fractured Cities” summarizes the arguments of the book and stresses the historical mechanisms at work in transforming local space and society under the aegis of oil. It is argued that oil urbanization and modernization in Saudi Arabia ultimately created local socio-economic and political fissures, markedly between urban power centers and suburban and rural peripheries. At the same time petro-capitalism in Saudi Arabia gave birth to a systematic manipulation of social, religious and ideological differences which are expressed as well in the spatial organization of the oil conurbation. This fracturing of Saudi society had major implications for the formation of future unrest in the Saudi East and has also notably shaped

the ways in which local communities are perceived today. Questions of underdevelopment, economic and political marginalization of suburban peripheries vis-à-vis urban centers, destruction of human livelihood and unchecked profit making remain central to recurrent unrest in the Eastern Province and attest to an unabated urban(-izing) dimension of local dissent.

Society and Politics before Oil

In contrast to the widespread notion of an oil frontier at which oil pioneers pressed forward into an unknown wilderness, al-Ahsa' never was a frontier in the senses of an untamed wilderness or no-man's land. Quite to the contrary, the American foray into Arabian oil wealth took place in a region which had seen thousands of years of human civilization and whose cultural and trade networks connected it with such near and distant places as Bahrain, the Hadramaut, Persia, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean region, the Indian subcontinent and the East African coast.¹ Looking back into history, al-Ahsa' formed part of a culturally integrated region that stretched from the Shatt al-'Arab along the southern Gulf littoral towards the Qatar peninsula and Oman to the West and the Central Arabian Plateau to the South. The Bahrain archipelago and adjacent coast formed the heartland of the historic al-Ahsa' (Figure 1).² European travellers found that until the eighteenth century the names Bahrain

1 Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣāliḥ Shurafā'. *Al-Ḥayā al-Iqtisādiyya fī 'l-Mintaqa al-Sharqīyya min al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiya al-Sa'ūdiyya*, vol. 1 (Muḥammad 'Alī Shurafā', 1994), 29–30.

2 Since late antiquity, the region was known under the name of its capital Hajar. In the ninth century AD, the vast inland oasis of al-Hasa (colloquial Arabic for al-Ahsa') became the region's new political center. In the sixteenth century, the name al-Ahsa' began to gradually replace Hajar as name for the entire region. During Ottoman rule (1551/1552–1790), al-Ahsa' became the official name of an administrative sub-province (*Laḥsā Sancak*). It remained the official name until the twentieth century. Only in 1952, when the present Saudi state underwent an administrative reorganization, was the official name al-Ahsa' replaced by the newly created Eastern Province. Carsten Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien. Aus Eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande Selbst Gesammelten Nachrichten* (Breitkopf und Sohn, 1772), 339; Federico S. Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 1–11; Federico S. Vidal, "Al-Ḥasā," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Brill, 1986), 237–238; Jon E. Mandaville, "The Ottoman Province of al-Hasā in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 3 (1970): 488, <https://doi.org/10.2307/597091>. During the third phase of Ottoman rule between 1871 and 1913, al-Ahsa' formed part of the Ottoman *sanjāk* of Najd which belonged to the *wilayā* of Basra. Still, John G. Lorimer found that al-Ahsa' was referred to as Sanjak of its own, a name that Lorimer, despite its wrongness, found "to be the least unsuitable that can be suggested: The only possible alternative is 'Eastern Arabia'" – a name that Lorimer denounced as "too comprehensive and too vague." John G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical (Superintendent Government Printing, 1908), 657, Qatar Digital Library. Accessed May 12, 2016. http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023515711.0x00000d.

and al-Ahsa' were used interchangeably when referring to the coast opposite of the islands.³

This region has seen human civilization approximately since the sixth millennium BC, thanks to a unique circumstance: the existence of vast groundwater aquifers which, in contrast to the arid inland territory, allowed for the cultivation of palm trees and water-intense crops and hence for the evolution of sedentary life.⁴ Yet, since thousands of years, this fertile land has also been threatened by wandering sand dunes and by the salination of the soil.⁵ Whereas the twentieth century brought even more radical changes in the form of oil urbanization, the long agricultural past of the region and its slow (and then quickened) demise continued to play a crucial role in the history of the Saudi oil bonanza.⁶

Shi'ism took a foothold in al-Ahsa' and Bahrain not long after it appeared in Iraq in the seventh century. The great schism within Islam created the two major branches of Sunnites and Shi'ites. The local 'Abd al-Qays tribe early on embraced Shi'i doctrine. In the late ninth century, the Qaramita, an Isma'ili movement that defied the rule of the Abassid caliphate in Iraq, took hold in al-Ahsa'.⁷ The Qaramite state maintained vast agricultural estates in Bahrain as well as in the seabound oasis of Qatif and the inland oasis of al-Hasa. Contemporary accounts of a utopian society organized according to egalitarian social principles had a lasting legacy in the Gulf and today feed local nostalgia for a glorious Shi'i past.⁸ Saudi Shi'a form a minority in the kingdom which is majorly Sunni and where the ultra-orthodox Sunni doctrine of Wahhabism takes the role of a state religion. Today, Saudi Shi'a suffer considerably from religious discrimination and political repression, although under Saudi rule this has not always been the case to the present extent, as will be seen later in this chapter. The inhabitants of Qatif and al-Hasa commonly identify as *Qatifyyin* or *Hasawyyin*, respectively. The local Shi'i communities are often referred to as *Baharna* (sgl. *Bahrani*), a name which stresses their historical unity with the neighboring Shi'i communities of Bahrain. These terms have

3 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 5–6.

4 D.T. Potts, "The Archaeology and Early History of the Persian Gulf, in *The Persian Gulf in History*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 27–29.

5 Al-Muslim, *Sāhil al-Dhahab al-Aswad*, 24; Potts, "Archaeology," 40.

6 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 110–15.

7 Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 21–22; Juan R. Cole, "Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shi'ism in Eastern Arabia, 1300–1800," *IJMES* 19, no. 2 (1987): 177–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800031834>.

8 Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 24; Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 123–24. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 14.



FIGURE 1 “Map of Hasa, Saudi Arabia,” 1939[?] (detail), British Library. Dashed and dotted lines in the original show borders of British territorial interests and demarcation of the Red Line Agreement (1928), respectively.

strong localist and nativist connotations that indirectly reflect on the more recent history of immigration from Central Arabia as well as on the emergence of modern states in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula in the twentieth century.⁹

Local wealth and Shi'ism had considerable influence over the internal organization of local societies and effected the formation of a class of clan elders, urban merchants and landholders that presided over the oasis dwellers.¹⁰ Translocal networks of religious learnedness and trade between Iraq, Persia and the Arab littoral of the Persian Gulf further aided the formation of this local elite. In the words of Juan Cole, its members functioned as a Shi'i merchant-*'ulama'* (sgl. *'alim*) who combined activities in pearl trade with professions in the local judiciary (where they administered Islamic law) and religious education.¹¹ Their diverse incomes rendered them comparatively resilient against changes in the regional political landscape.¹² This specific form of localized power did survive – at least in parts – until the twentieth century and into the present Saudi state where it also played a role in the formation of the local oil polity.

Under the Bani Khalid tribe who followed Sunni doctrine and took control over al-Ahsa' in the fifteenth century, the role of Shi'i *'ulama'* in the local judiciary was greatly diminished. Still, Shi'i elites continued their economic activities and acted as spiritual and communal leaders in the local villages and towns.¹³ Shi'i *'ulama'* also remained involved in translocal networks of religious teaching and learnedness that connected them to the Shi'i communities in Iraq, Persia, and Bahrain.¹⁴ When in 1551/1552, Ottoman troops overthrew the rule of the Bani Khalid, control of the desert territories was handed over to local tribal leaders, while the administration of town and village districts was transferred to Ottoman officials.¹⁵ The Ottoman rulers appointed their

9 Until today, Shi'i Islam is practiced by a considerable part of the inhabitants of the southern littoral of the Persian Gulf. Despite the fact that all modern Arab Gulf states except Oman are nominally Sunni, Shi'a constitute a majority in Bahrain and a large minority in Saudi Arabia, where they live mostly in the Eastern Province. In Bahrain, the name *Baharna* distinguishes Arab Shi'a from those of Persian origin. It can also have a strictly political connotation. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 11–12, 29–30.

10 Cole, "Rival Empires," 178–179.

11 The term *'alim* means a person who is knowledgeable or learned in religious matters. The *'ulama'* are the religious establishment or religious leaders of the local society.

12 Cole, "Rival Empires," 178–80; Faisal A. Alwazzan, "Politics, Economy and Religion in a Near Eastern Periphery: The Region of Bahrayn in East Arabia c. 1050–c. 1400 CE" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2015), 156–163, <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/31021>.

13 Cole, "Rival Empires," 181–82.

14 Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 16–17.

15 Mandaville, "The Ottoman Province of al-Hasā," 488, 503.

own Sunni chief judges to the province who oversaw the implementation of Islamic law according to Hanafi doctrine. However, it seems that judicial arbitration and mediation in the villages remained in the hands of local sheikhs who followed their own *madhhab* (school of law within Islamic jurisprudence) as would be the common Ottoman practice in later phases of Turkish administration in al-Ahsa'.¹⁶

Already in 1602, Bahrain had come under the control of Safavid Persia (1501–1722). Safavid administration rested on a clerical elite which prospered due to the payment of the *khums* and through founding and controlling large landholdings in the form of religious endowments (*wilayat al-awqaf*).¹⁷ Safavid rule also led to an increased Persian intellectual and religious influence that centered on Bahrain, yet left its traces as well in al-Ahsa'.¹⁸ During that time Bahraini landholders who might have been Persians (Turkish: *'acem*; Arabic: *'ajam*) were in control of large properties in Qatif and leased out their land to local tenants. Economic exploitation of the poor peasant population by these big landholders was widespread and harsh – a social circumstance that persisted in later times and under different rulers.¹⁹

In 1790 al-Ahsa' passed under the control of the emirate of Dir'iyya in the Najd region of Central Arabia, whose ruling family, the Al Sa'ud, had forged an alliance with the religious movement of Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and established their rule over the larger part of the Arabian Peninsula, founding the so-called First Saudi State (1744–1818). The Saudi conquest and subjugation of al-Ahsa' was apparently quite violent. Saudi troops are recounted to have killed three hundred inhabitants of the village Fadul in the Hasa oasis in 1788. The Wahhabis (the adherents to 'Abd al-Wahhab's movement) also caused a major bloodshed in Qatif in 1800 when they took the town by force. This incident foreshadowed the uneasy relations between the town and the Al Sa'ud for the future. During the first Saudi grasp on power in al-Ahsa', non-Muslims apparently left the region. The heavy-handed Saudi government went not without local response. In 1795, a major insurrection by the Bani Khalid and prominent local leaders was defeated after it had smoldered for the duration of three years.²⁰

16 Mandaville, "The Ottoman Province of al-Hasā," 506, 512.

17 In Twelver Shi'i and Zaydi Shi'i practice one-fifth (*al-khums*) from an individual's wealth is paid towards specific causes.

18 Cole, "Rival Empires," 188–90.

19 Mandaville, "The Ottoman Province of al-Hasā," 498–99.

20 Ibrāhīm al-Haṭlānī. *Al-Shi'a al-Su'ūdiyyūn. Qarā'a Tārikhiyya wa Sīyāsiyya li-Namādhij Maṭlabiyya* (Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 2009), 88–89; Hans-Jürgen Philipp, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa (Saudi-Arabien), Band 1: Historischer Verlauf und Traditionelles*

In 1818, Egyptian forces captured the Wahhabi capital Dir‘iyya on behalf of the Ottoman Empire and briefly also occupied al-Ahsa’. When the Egyptian forces began to gradually withdraw from the Arabian Peninsula, the Al Sa‘ūd were able to establish their second state (1824–1891) and to extend their power also towards al-Ahsa’. Between 1819 and 1871, control over al-Ahsa’ alternated between the local tribal ruler Rahma bin Jabir, the Bani Khalid, the Egyptians and the Wahhabis. The latter ruled al-Ahsa’ for a longer stretch of time between 1830–38. Later, Saudi-Wahhabi control over al-Ahsa’ grew weaker not least due to internal Saudi power struggles.²¹ From a local perspective, the second phase of Saudi government in al-Ahsa’ and especially between 1830–38 proved less conflict ridden. While religious freedom remained curtailed, prominent locals seem to have maintained a certain degree of their local power. Under the reinstated Saudi rulers, the commercial and business activities of local merchants went largely unrestricted.²² As before under the Ottomans, local leaders remained instrumental in ruling society at the local level. For example, the profitable office of tax collection in Qatif rested in the hands of the Qatifi merchant Ahmad b. Mahdi b. Nasrallah, who was considered a local ruler at that time.²³

In 1871 Ottoman forces were able to take al-Hasa and Qatif from their Wahhabi rulers.²⁴ Local elites now gained larger roles in Ottoman rule over al-Ahsa’. Wealthy merchants and landowners participated in local government in Hofuf and the smaller town of Mubarraz, and presided over the communities of Qatif and in the villages of the Hasa oasis.²⁵ However, Ottoman laws “regarding land tenures, succession, and probate duty” also provoked the

Bild, Sozialökonomische Schriften zur Agrarentwicklung 23 (ssip-Schriften Breitenbach, 1976), 75. Wahhabi forces beat the Bani Khalid in 1790. However, it took time to establish control over al-Ahsa’. Lorimer states that by the year 1795, the emir of Najd had “broken the power of the Bani Khālid and had taken partial possession of Hasa.” John G. Lorimer and Lockington Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān, and Central Arabia*. Vol. 1, Historical, reprint (Farnborough Gregg, 1970), 947.

21 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 947–65; al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 35–36.

22 Jacob Goldberg, “The Shi‘i Minority in Saudi Arabia,” in *Shi‘ism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan R. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie (Yale University Press, 1986), 232–33; Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 88–91, 164–165; Al-Haṭṭānī, *Al-Shi‘a al-Su‘ūdiyyūn*, 108.

23 Mahdi Muḥammad al-Suwaydān, 2004, “Dhakariyyāt min Mādī al-Qaṭīf,” *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf*, 4 November, <http://www.qatifoasis.com/index.php?act=artc&id=399&hl=%C7%E1%D1%C7%E3%D3> [site discontinued].

24 Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-‘Uthmāniyya fī al-Mutasarrifiyya al-Aḥsā: 1288–1331 h./1871–1913 m.* (Dār al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, 2006), 334.

25 Ḥamza al-Ḥassan, *Al-‘Amal al-Maṭlabī fī Mīat ‘Ām: Tajrūbat ‘Amal Wujāhā’ al-Shi‘a fī al-Sa‘ūdiyya* (Dār al-Multaqā, 2010), 41–42; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 30.

anger of the local population and especially merchants and landholders in Qatif were prone to frequent retaliation against Turkish taxation of exported dates.²⁶ The Ottoman attempt for a census and poll tax in al-Ahsa' was met by violent protests both in al-Hasa and Qatif.²⁷ Insofar, the younger history of al-Ahsa' is frequently also a history of protest placed in an urban-rural socio-economic setting.

In the 1880s, severe droughts hit Central Arabia and many Najdis immigrated to al-Ahsa' and Bahrain. Najdi camel drivers quickly took over the landbound trade between al-Ahsa's main port 'Uqair and Hofuf. Prominent amongst them was the Ghosaibi family, who originated from the Najdi village Gassab. With gradually decaying Turkish power, the influence of Najdi families grew and the Ghosaibi developed into a "Najdi fifth column in Hasa."²⁸ During the last years of Ottoman rule, Ibn Sa'ud (1875–1953) appointed his own representative in Hofuf, a fact that the Turks resented as "government within their government" but were apparently unable to stop. In fact, the group of Najdis in Hofuf seemed to have been decisive in the relatively easy conquest of al-Hasa by Saudi forces in 1913.²⁹ The political leaders of Qatif, who were without exception Shi'a and feared the loss of religious freedom, weighted the costs of resistance against peaceful surrender, but ultimately opened the gates of their town to the conquering Saudi forces.³⁰

1 The Two Oases

Apart from religion, three major social divisions have had an impact on identity formation and historical agency of al-Ahsa's local communities in pre-oil and pre-national times. The first division was that of settled and nomadic communities, which found its spatial equivalents in the geographical division between oasis and desert. The second was that of long-term inhabitants of the two oases and later immigrants. The third division was that of urban and rural, which was connected as well to economic specialization and comprised further horizontal subdivisions. Throughout the history of the region, economic

26 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 982; Philipp, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa*, 133, 146.

27 Philipp, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa*, 133, 146.

28 Michael Field, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States* (Overlook Press, 1985), 220.

29 Al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-'Uthmaniyya*, 314–15, 320–21; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 35.

30 Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 24. The successive annexation of al-Ahsa', 'Asir (1920), Ha'il (1921) and the Hijaz (1925) established the territorial core of the present Saudi state.

necessity and intra-tribal conflicts have recurrently prompted local nomads or Bedouin (Arab. pl. *badu*, sgl. *badawīyya*) to give up their itinerant lifestyle and gradually assume sedentary (*hadar*) life. In the process, it also happened that they assumed the cultural and religious habits of the oasis people. Among the tribes who thus over time converted to Shi'ism were branches of the 'Ajman, Subay', Bani Hajir, Shammar, Qahtan and Bani Khalid. Hence, the coincidence of sedentary life in the two oases with Shi'ism can be read as the result of social adaptation as much as of the rather fluid boundaries between the different lifestyles and confessions.³¹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, John Gordon Lorimer (1870–1914), administrator of the British imperial government in India, compiled a detailed survey of al-Ahsa's settlements and population groups. The survey puts an emphasis on the religious composition of the local communities and meticulously notes the proportions of Shi'i and Sunni inhabitants for each village in the two oases.³² British agents in the Arab Gulf paid close attention to the confessional division of al-Ahsa's society and the implications for British imperial policy in the Gulf – a routine that became even more pronounced after al-Ahsa' came under Saudi rule.³³ Lorimer estimated the sedentary population of the Hasa oasis at 67,000 inhabitants, of whom about one half lived in one of the two major towns Hofuf and Mubarraz and the other half was divided among the villages within the oasis. He further claimed that about two thirds of the oasis population were Shi'a, whom he believed to be the indigenous people of al-Ahsa' rather than "immigrants even of old standing."³⁴ The Qatif oasis, on the other hand, counted only about 26,000 people, including the roughly ten thousand residents of the principal town, the Qal'at al-Qatif and its suburbs. Another 3,500 people inhabited the nearby island of Tarut. Lorimer stated that the Shi'a formed nearly the entire population of the Qatif oasis and Tarut island. The exception to this rule were some villages at the outskirts of the oasis and in the utmost South of Tarut, where Sunni tribes settled

31 Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 17, 24; Hamzah al-Hassan, "The Role of Religion in Building National Identity (Case Study: Saudi Arabia)" (PhD diss., University of Westminster, April 2006), 95; Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 22.

32 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 645–55, 1537–42.

33 See for instance "Fortnightly Political Diaries," October 16, 1908, IOR/R/15/2/1498 and "Al-Bahrain Newspaper," January 15, 1930–January 10, 1931, IOR/R/15/2/1498, India Office Records, British Library, London, United Kingdom (hereafter: IOR/).

34 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 815.

during the seasons of pearl diving and date harvest and periodically committed acts of piracy.³⁵

Noteworthy, Ottoman documents seem not to convey an image of local society as being formed by two monolithic sectarian blocks. Anscombe, one of the most intimate connoisseurs of Ottoman sources on al-Ahsa', stressed the "existence of further significant religious divisions or classifications within the [local] population." In contemplating the Ottoman survey of al-Hasa of 1871, he found that

the majority of villagers living outside Hofuf and Mubarraz were either Shi'i or followed Hanafi doctrine, as postulated by one of the four major schools of Sunni law. In the towns, however, the majority were Hanafi, Shafi'i or Maliki, with a few Wahhabis remaining after the Sa'udi withdrawal.³⁶

The Shi'a who lived in the two oases were mostly Shaykhi and Usuli in Hasa and Usuli and Akhbari in Qatif.³⁷ The presence of small groups of Jews and Christians in Hofuf and an Indian trading colony in Qatif added to what Anscombe described as a "relatively cosmopolitan society."³⁸ The relative heterogeneity of al-Ahsa's population was largely an outcome of its location on the Persian Gulf. In this cultural melting pot, economic, political and genealogical linkages crisscrossed confessional divisions. Consequently, religion was only one among the many factors that defined local society:

The strongest elements of identity in Eastern Arabia, however, were naturally those that came from each person's daily experiences: blood ties of clan and tribe, defined through the well-developed, arcane lore of genealogy; bonds of social, economic or political patronage; economic activity,

35 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 1536, 1546.

36 Anscombe, "An Anational Society," 23–26.

37 According to Jones, affiliation to either of the three law schools did probably play a role in the ways in which the communities could or could not be mobilized for open protest. Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery," 217. Louër states that the local people "consider that Akhbarism is by nature a more quietist doctrine than Usulism," and that "Usulism was deeply associated with Safavid Iran so that its proponents could be easily suspected of being a vector of Iranian influence." Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 19.

38 Anscombe, "Anational Society," 23.

based upon commercial partnerships and the guild structure of trades; and locale, be it a village, a quarter in Hofuf or a port town such as Qatif.³⁹

Local environment as well as economic pursuit played significant roles in the identity formation of al-Ahsa's local communities. Towns, villages and palm groves in the specific geographical setup of the oasis formed cohesive social, economic and political entities that were held together by strong urban-rural ties. The two oases of al-Hasa and Qatif functioned as semi-autarkic economic producers and consumers with agricultural crop production and animal husbandry located in the oasis villages, and small-scale manufacture as well as export- and import trade in the towns. The latter rested in the hands of the urban-based merchant nobility. The main crops of the oases (besides vegetables and fruits) were dates, which were exported raw or as a cooked variation called *saluq*, a specialty from Qatif. In al-Hasa, other crops were cultivated besides dates, mainly lucerne, barley and – in the water abundant center of the oasis – rice. Among the local livestock were cattle, sheep, donkeys, horses and camels.⁴⁰ Another source of income – and in fact of tremendous wealth for local merchants – were the pearls harvested in the shallow waters of the Gulf and sold to Bahrain by urban based brokers. The main pearling centers were Darin on the island of Tarut and Jubail, as well as al-Khobar and since the early twentieth century also Dammam on the coast north and south of Qatif, respectively. Qatif itself served as a local trade entrepot for the pearling industry. The actual trade rested in the hands of wealthy urban-based merchants.⁴¹

Yet, the ecosystem of the two oases that sustained the lives of townspeople and villagers was also fragile. Hundreds, possibly even thousands of years of crop extraction had caused the slow but steady salinization of the soil. Artificial irrigation transported washed out salts towards the outer belt of palms that served as a natural barrier against inwards-moving sands dunes. Consequently, this green belt was steadily eroding, melting away from the sandy winds of the desert. For centuries, the encroaching sand had fed on the edges of cultivated land where village after village had to be relinquished to the desert.⁴²

39 Anscombe, "Anational Society," 21–22.

40 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, 656, 1543. [Vidal ergänzen – Saluq!]

41 On pearling in the Gulf and the role of Qatif see Robert A. Carter, *Sea of Pearls. Arabia, Persia and the Industry that Shaped the Gulf* (Arabian Publishing Ltd./Alfardan, 2012).

42 Federico S. Vidal, "Date Culture in the Oasis of al-Hasa." *Middle East Journal* 8, no. 4 (1954): 425, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4322638>; Ibrahim S. al-Abdullah al-Elawy, "The Influence of Oil Upon Settlement in al-Hasa Oasis, Saudi Arabia" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1976), 135, <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1855/1/1855.pdf>.

Unsurprisingly, the geographic peculiarity of the oases – the fragile spectacle of fresh-water springs and lush vegetation in the blazing heat of the desert – created as well a specific socio-spatial pattern in which social and economic hierarchies became tangible and gained historical significance.

1.1 *The Principal Towns*

The townspeople of al-Ahsa' derived their position in society first and foremost from their profession or trade. The lowest ranking group were day laborers who sought work as carriers, street cleaners, etc. A large group was formed by artisans who probably banded together in some form of organization depending on their trade, did wage-work for the wealthy owners of manufacturing places or were self-employed in their small-scale businesses.⁴³ Slaves were an integral element of al-Ahsa's society, yet they do seldom appear as a social group in historical sources.⁴⁴ The urban economic and political elite was formed by a group of wealthy merchants who traded the seasonal harvest of dates and pearls as well as the locally manufactured textiles and copper works, owned the local manufacturing industries and were members of administrative and municipal councils. This influential nobility was also able to accumulate large portions of privately owned land in- and outside the towns.⁴⁵

Hofuf, al-Hasa's principal town, owed its growth in size and political importance to the Ottoman rulers who in the sixteenth century chose the place as their administrative capital. During the rule of the Bani Khalid between 1670 and 1790, Mubarraz had served as the seat of their government.⁴⁶ Under the Al Sa'ud, Hofuf's role as main marketplace for goods traded between the Eastern Arabian port of 'Uqair and the Najd was strengthened, which favored both, migration of merchants from Central Arabia to Hofuf and their economic as well as political prospering.⁴⁷

The oldest part of Hofuf was the Kut (the walled fortress) which accommodated the seats of the Ottoman and later Saudi governments. Located inside the Kut were the chief citadel, the Kut al-Hisar which housed the Turkish garrison,

43 Paul. W. Harrison, *The Arab at Home* (Cromwell, 1924), 54–59.

44 Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 10; Anscombe, "Anational Society," 26. Lorimer stated that "negro slaves are fairly numerous and owned by tribes." Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 665. Ann Monteith Harrison repeatedly mentioned Baluchi slaves in al-Hasa. Ann M. Harrison, *A Tool in His Hand* (Friendship Press, 1958), 101–102, 105, 115, 140, 142.

45 Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, 11; Harrison, *The Arab at Home*, 55–56.

46 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 160–62.

47 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 666; Philipp, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa*, 143.

as well as two fortified palaces, the Qasr al-‘Abid which functioned as a jail and the Qasr Ibrahim, to which locals referred to as Qasr al-Qubba, due to its large dome. The latter accommodated the Turkish *mutasarrif* (governor) and his administration.⁴⁸ The three old quarters of Hofuf, the Kut al-Hofuf, Rif‘a and Na‘athil, were intersected by the town’s central market, the Suq al-Khamis, which was flanked by a long row of arcade shops, the so-called Qaysariyya.⁴⁹

Lorimer’s brief description of the Rif‘a and Na‘athil quarters conveys a good impression of the remaining town:

The Rifā‘ah quarter forms the entire eastern side of the town; it is healthier and somewhat higher than the others, and in it there are residences of a number of the better families. Na‘āthil includes the southern and western parts of the town and is, in extent, a good half of the place; it is inhabited promiscuously by all classes. [...] it is separated from Kūt by a date grove; and within its limits are enclosed occasional gardens and a few trees, the latter chiefly figs and citrons. The principal mosque of Hofūf, which belongs to the Shī‘ah sect and is probably the largest mosque in Eastern Arabia, is in Na‘āthil.⁵⁰

In unison with Lorimer, Zwemer commented in 1900 on the quarters of Hofuf: “The Rifa‘a quarter has the *best* houses, while Na‘athil has the largest number; the ‘East-end’ of Hofuf being for the rich and the ‘West-end’ for the poor.”⁵¹ Rif‘a and Na‘athil were developed in the middle of the nineteenth century under Saudi rule, when the town had considerably expanded outside the borders of the Kut due to tribal immigration.⁵² Hofuf’s Shi‘i families were the traditional residents of Rif‘a, which faced the inner-date belt and was closer to their gardens in the oasis, while the Sunni administrative staff of the Ottoman and Saudi governments as well as nineteenth century Sunni immigrants made up the majority of the population in the Kut, Na‘athil and Salihhiyya, an extra-rural

48 Vidal, “The Oasis of al-Hasa,” 111, 114, Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 901, al-Elawy, “Influence of Oil Upon Settlement,” 174.

49 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 901; Vidal, “The Oasis of al-Hasa,” 109.

50 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 901.

51 Samuel M. Zwemer, *Arabia. The Cradle of Islam, Studies on Geography, People and Politics of the Peninsula With an Account of Islam and Mission-Work* (Fleming, 1900), 115. Italics in the original.

52 Al-Elawy, “Influence of Oil Upon Settlement,” 168.

suburb inhabited mainly by Ottoman soldiers and staff.⁵³ How difficult it is to assess the confessional geography of the town becomes clear when considering that even in the nineteenth century, religious affiliation was rather fluid. For example, the Al 'Ajaji, one of the most prominent families in Hofuf, comprised both Sunni and Shi'i branches.⁵⁴

The predominance of the two confessional groups in the different quarters of Hofuf likely was the consequence of different waves of immigration rather than deliberate segregation. Physical segregation of religious groups in the towns of al-Hasa as such did not exist. In 1920 St. John Philby observed that Hofuf's population was divided over the different quarters according to their occupation as artisans, merchants and "professional class."⁵⁵ In 1951, Vidal made the corresponding observation that

there is no strict geographical segregation between religious groups living in the old town [of Hofuf]. Religious differences in everyday life become mainly apparent in the division of labor (a majority of traders being Sunnis; a majority of craftsmen being Shiites) and in education.⁵⁶

Each quarter of Hofuf was subdivided into smaller clusters of houses, the so-called *furuq* (sgl. *fariq*), the smallest subdivisions of a quarter which encompassed the residential buildings of an extended family or of an occupational group.⁵⁷ As elsewhere in the Middle East, culturally denoted limits of socialization, specifically the necessity to allow women free yet discrete movement in between the residential buildings of the extended family, were crucial in the formation of the *furuq* of Hofuf.⁵⁸ As families clustered together in their respective *furuq*, this naturally allowed religious groups to dominate one neighborhood and be less present in another.

53 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 182.

54 Field, *The Merchants*, 82.

55 St. John Philby, "Across Arabia: From the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea," *The Geographical Journal* 56, no. 6 (1920): 450, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1780467>.

56 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 133–34. Insertion added. Vidal falsifies the claim that the Shi'a of al-Hasa's two principal towns lived in segregated quarters. Guido Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 239.

57 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 182. Nelida Fuccaro suggested in her work on Manama that the usage of the term *fariq* (*farij*) meant in fact the continuing "identification of urban milieus with tribal identity." Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 30. This observation still needs to be tested in the context of al-Ahsa'.

58 Mashary A. Naim, "The Dynamics of a Traditional Arab Town: the Case of Hofuf, Saudi Arabia," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies: Papers From the Thirty-Seventh Meeting of the Seminar of Arabian Studies Held in London, 17–19 July 2003* 34 (2004): 193–207, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41223817>.



FIGURE 2 Detail from a map of Hofuf, 1961[?] by Arabian American Oil Company. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

The town of Qatif was regarded as a smaller counterpart to Hofuf, since both shared similar administrative, economic, and architectural patterns. As the smaller of the two oases, Qatif ranked behind al-Hasa in economic and political importance. Whereas Hofuf fulfilled the role of the provincial capital and commercial marketplace for Central Arabia, Qatif looked traditionally towards Bahrain, to where many Qatifis were tied by family and trade connections.⁵⁹ The fortified inner city of Qatif was known by the name of Qal'at al-Qatif and was connected to the central market of the town, the Suq-al-Khamis. The walled town – the Qal'a – consisted of four neighborhoods that were subdivided into various *furuq* which bore the names of their respective residential families.⁶⁰ Lorimer counted around seven hundred houses and palm huts within the walls of the Qal'a which further accommodated the government offices and a small Turkish garrison. The western side of the Qal'a opened towards the coastline and natural port, while the north was flanked by a dense palm forest. The main suburbs of Qatif were situated in the south and east of the Qal'a. In

59 Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 69.

60 Shams M. al-Shamasi, "Socio-Cultural and Climatic Architectural Strategies for a Sustainable Domestic and Neighborhood Environment in Qatif, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia" (PhD. diss., University of Western Australia, 2015), 66.



FIGURE 3 Qatif town. Detail from a map of the Qatif oasis, 1972 by Arabian American Oil Company. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

Lorimer's time, these suburbs were still distinguishable as villages that were slowly incorporated into the town.⁶¹ Characteristic for both the Hasa and Qatif oases was the location of palm gardens within the walled towns which illustrates the strong economic and cultural links between principal towns and the surrounding oasis.

1.2 *The Oasis Villages*

Owning and cultivating land in the two oases was not only rooted in economic necessity. Travelers and researchers alike report that the people of al-Ahsa' found pleasure and pride in their gardens and plantations. The gardens of al-Hasa, and likely of Qatif, too, had also an important social function. They served as gathering places for upper-class Hasawis (and Qatifis, respectively) and informal communication centers for the gardeners.⁶² Most importantly though, the village population differed in economic and social status regarding whether one owned a garden, cultivated the land of others as long-term tenant or was a hired laborer. Already in the nineteenth century, Sunni and Shi'a notables had begun to accumulate large landholdings that were worked by tenants, sometimes with the help of hired workers. Beside these large landholdings, medium and small-sized farms that were worked either by tenants or, in fact, by their owners were a common sight in the two oases until the second half of the twentieth century.⁶³ At the turn of the twentieth century, a large part of al-Hasa's Shi'i peasants worked on land owned by the Ottoman sultan (*amlak al-saniyya*) or in private gardens owned by the wealthy urban elite, but many also cultivated their own small plots of land. In the early 1950s, Vidal documented the continuing existence of various traditional forms of individual, multiple and joined land ownership and cultivation practices that were organized in a cooperative and communal manner and included self-employed work as well as wage labor.⁶⁴

The Saudi doctoral student Abdullah al-Elawy, who had conducted several months field work in al-Hasa during the first half of the 1970s, built the convincing argumentation that al-Hasa's autochthonous Shi'i peasants traditionally

61 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 1660–661; Abdulla M. al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province with Particular Reference to Urban Settlement and Evolution in Eastern Saudi Arabia" (PhD diss., Durham University, 1976), 254–62, <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1972/>.

62 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 151.

63 Saleh H. Humaidan, "Policies and Management Guidelines for Optimum Resource Utilization at al-Hasa Irrigation and Drainage Project, Saudi Arabia" (PhD diss., Oklahoma City, State University, 1980), 38–39.

64 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 645–54, 678–79; Vidal, "Date Culture," 421–22; Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 51–59, 132–33.

lived inside the cores of the oasis, within the extensive garden area, where the soil was of better quality but water abundance and insufficient drainage also posed the problems of over-irrigation and recurrent malaria epidemics.⁶⁵ In contrast, al-Hasa's rural Sunni communities were of tribal descent but had eventually chosen sedentary life as date cultivators or shepherds. These former Bedouin ranked at the bottom of nomadic hierarchy and often lived on the margins of the oasis, where the soil was of inferior quality and the heated and sandy desert winds were a constant threat to land cultivation. Their villages had to resist moving sands and the hot desert winds but were considered healthier regarding the danger to fall ill of malaria and other illnesses associated with stagnant water. Over time, the former Bedouin began to gradually move further into the oasis, establishing new villages there. Al-Elawy believes that at this point cultural and confessional differences caused segregation of Sunni and Shi'i villages and that Shi'i inhabitants reacted to Sunni immigration by retreating to other parts of the oasis where they founded new villages.⁶⁶ When Vidal conducted field research in al-Hasa in 1951, he found that a small number of villages were inhabited by both sects and that in these mixed villages "Shiites were usually in the minority." In contrast to Hofuf and Mubarraz, where no deliberate religious segregation was apparent, the two groups tended to cluster in different areas of the villages. Vidal further noted a new tendency of al-Hasa's villages to become more uniform in their religious composition, a tendency that did apparently not exist in the two principal towns. Interestingly, one cannot but notice a certain degree of contradiction in Vidal's discussion when he stated that "villages with mixed Sunnite and Shiite populations are rare." In fact, of the villages and groups of settlements that he listed, almost one third were mixed and furthermore often belonged to the larger and more prosperous villages in the oasis.⁶⁷

Following the occupational preferences of their inhabitants a number of al-Hasa's larger and more prosperous Sunni majority villages in the most

65 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 204.

66 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 205–29; Mishary A. al-Nuaim, "State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation: The Dialectics of Two Modes of Production and the Role of the Merchant Class, Saudi Arabia, 1902–1932" (PhD diss., University of California, 1987), 127, ProQuest.

67 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 35, 42–73. Vidal appears to have somewhat downplayed the extent of religious cohabitation in al-Hasa. This resulted probably from the analytical onset of his study, which will be discussed in the last part of this chapter. Furthermore, a clear correlation between confessional affiliation, the quality of the soil and the direct access to fresh water for irrigation, as has been attempted by Jones, does not withstand a systematic reading of Lorimer's and Vidal's survey data. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 645–54. Jones takes the example of al-'Umran district (provided by Vidal) and generalizes it for the entire of al-Hasa. Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 114.



FIGURE 4 Date garden in Qatif in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi

southern part of the oasis were located along the road that led from Hofuf to the port of ‘Uqair. Lorimer noted that many of the inhabitants owned camels that were used in trade.⁶⁸ The high salinity of the soil in these peripheral areas limited agriculture to date cultivation and animal husbandry. Some large date

68 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 645–51; Vidal, “The Oasis of al-Hasa,” 51–53.

plantations were crown land, both during Ottoman and Saudi government.⁶⁹ Many inhabitants also cultivated their own land or worked in what British primary sources referred to as “tribal date groves.”⁷⁰ The Sunni communities at the fringes of the Qatif oasis and on the island of Tarut were mostly pearling communities. In addition, the Bani Khalid owned substantial date plantations in the Qatif oasis where a temporary camp of palm huts was established every year during the date harvest season in vicinity of the village of ‘Anik.⁷¹ A small Sunni community of *hula* (also referred to as *hawala*) consisted mainly of artisans who lived in some villages inside the Hasa oasis as well as in the town of Qatif.⁷² In al-Hasa, Sunni villages or villages where Sunnis formed the majority contributed about one third to the total number of the rural population. Qatif’s Sunni population, including the members of the Ottoman government and garrisons, did not exceed five percent of the overall population.⁷³ In Qatif the overall organization of cultivated land and villages was quite similar to that of al-Hasa, as the Qatif oasis mirrored al-Hasa’s socio-geographic conditions, yet at a considerably smaller size. Sunni villages were located either in the north-western outskirts of the oasis, such as ‘Umm al-Sahik, or on the coastal fringe, such as ‘Anik. Darin, another Sunni dwelling, was situated on the utmost south of Tarut island. Again, the location of these villages reflected the nomadic origin of their inhabitants and their more recent conversion from pastoral nomadism to date cultivation, fishing, pearl diving and occasional piracy.⁷⁴

In a nutshell, settlement pattern in the towns and villages of al-Ahsa’ followed the logics of a nomadic-sedentary and a confessional dichotomy, periodic immigration, kinship ties, and economic diversification rather than aiming at a deliberate religious segregation. This was most pertinent among the religiously diverse communities of Hofuf but applied to the rural communities as well. Confessional differences in the villages together with the practice of wider families to band together led to segregation in the realms of religious

69 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 47.

70 “Persian Gulf: Katif; Disturbances in 1908,” Political agent in Bushire to India Office, August 9, 1908, File 395/1908, IOR/L/PS/10/134/2.

71 “The Bedouin,” undated manuscript, Box 7, Folder 15 “Bedouin,” William E. Mulligan Papers, Library Booth Family, Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington, DC (hereafter: Mulligan Papers).

72 According to Fuccaro, the *hawala* are “Arabs with a tribal pedigree but originally from Iran.” Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 33.

73 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 832, 847.

74 Ibrahim, *The Shi‘is of Saudi Arabia*, 51–52.

and communal life, since the different confessional groups followed different religious traditions and rituals, frequented different mosques and, in the case of the Shi'i communities, the *husayniyyat*, commemoration halls where a large part of the religious and communal life took place.⁷⁵

1.3 *The Notables*

It has been stated that without independence from foreign rule, real power remained out of reach for al-Ahsa's local elites who therefore lacked a sense of political self-esteem and responsibility.⁷⁶ Others have explicitly distinguished between Sunni and Shi'i notables (*wajha'*, sgl. *wajih*) whose means to assume political power largely differed between the two population centers al-Hasa and Qatif.⁷⁷ Both these assertions hold some truth. When the Ottomans reinstated their rule over al-Ahsa' in 1871, the Hasa and Qatif oases were integrated into the district (*sanjak*) of Najd, which belonged to the governorate (*vilayet*) of Basra. Hofuf and Qatif each represented a *qada'* (pl. *aqdiyya*), a judiciary sub-district of a *sanjak*.⁷⁸ Government over the province was centralized and the Ottoman *mutasarrif* resided in Hofuf. The *mutasarrif* acted as the governor of the *qada'* (*qa'im maqam*) of Hofuf. Qatif, on the other hand, was administered by its own *qa'im maqam* who resided in the fortified town of the oasis. He acted as the Turkish representative in civil matters. Authority over the Turkish military and administration remained with the *mutasarrif* in Hofuf. Customary courts and a Shari'a court were located in Hofuf and in the town of Qatif.⁷⁹ Ottoman government over al-Ahsa' adopted administrative reforms that had been implemented in other provinces of the empire in 1864–67 and henceforth structured the relationship between the local population and their Ottoman governors.⁸⁰ Whereas local notables lacked political power vis-à-vis their foreign rulers, they wielded a great influence over the local communities and were able to secure lucrative offices under Ottoman government. The notables

75 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 393.

76 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 36–37; al-Ḥassan, *Al-'Umal al-Muṭalibī*, 18.

77 Steinberg states that in contrast to Hofuf and Mubarraz where Shi'i notables such as the Abu Khamsīn and the Āl al-Sayyid Salmān had no political role, the notables of Qatif belonged to the ruling elite. Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 239.

78 The two remaining of the four *aqdiyya* of the *sanjāk* of Najd were Qatar and Najd.

79 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 737; Anscombe: *The Ottoman Gulf*, 49. The *qaḍā'* of Hofuf was divided into the four *nāhiyas* of Hofuf, Mubarraz, Bāb al-Jafr (one of the larger villages in the Hasa oasis) and 'Uqair. The *qaḍā'* of Qatif had no subdivisions.

80 Anscombe: *The Ottoman Gulf*, 49–50.

acted as intermediaries between rulers and local communities, especially during times of conflict.⁸¹ Formal participation in local government existed in two instances: First, in the cases of the Hofuf and Qatif administrative and municipal councils (*majlis al-idara* and *majlis al-baladiyya*). Half of the council members were appointed by the Ottoman governors, the other half was elected. The councils existed for different administrative entities (*qada'*, town, village). Among their responsibilities were the monitoring of financial matters and the reconciliation of disputes over land ownership and irrigation rights. Council members would frequently use their position for their own benefits, like the accumulation of landholdings in the two oases and the foundation of new villages, such as in the cases of the Bin Mansur and the Al Faris from Qatif.⁸² Directors of municipal councils originated from prominent notable families, such as the Al Jishi or the Al Faraj in Qatif and the Al 'Arfaj in Hofuf.⁸³ Still, employment of locals in urban government was underdeveloped in comparison to other parts of the empire, which possibly prompted Lorimer's conclusion that the Ottoman government in al-Ahsa' resembled that of a "military occupation."⁸⁴

The local elites' relative lack in political power was somewhat counterbalanced by their lucrative roles in local administration. Prominent families from al-Hasa and Qatif were able to claim offices in the administration of local land under a new system of land registration introduced under the Ottoman Land Code of 1858. The registration of land cultivation rights (*tapu senedi*) had been designed to ensure security of land tenure for local farmers but also to promote agricultural development. Under the *tapu* system, state land (*miri*) could be assigned to any person who was willing and able to cultivate it. In al-Ahsa', the office of overseer of the land registration system was frequently filled by members of the most influential families of Hofuf and Qatif. Apparently, local intervention in the *tapu* system was so successful that by the end of the nineteenth century a portion of distributed state land had fallen out of Ottoman control.⁸⁵ Similarly, the management of the *amlak al-saniyya* rested in the

81 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-'Umal al-Mutalibī*, 114.

82 Al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-'Uthmāniyya*, 121–22; 162.

83 "Fortnightly Political Diaries," Political Agency, Bahrain, October 16, 1908; IOR/R/15/2/1498; Khālid b. Jābir Gharīb, *Kitāb Minṭaqat al-Aḥsā' 'Abra Aṭwār al-Tārīkh* (Dār al-Waṭaniyya al-Jaḍida al-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1986), 226.

84 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 674.

85 Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, 38–39. On the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 and its significance for imperial government see E. Attila Aytekin, "Agrarian Relations, Property and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 6

hands of wealthy and influential local families who used their position to accumulate great wealth. One prominent example was the Qatifi merchant Mansur b. Jum'a, who at the beginning of the twentieth century administered large parts of the *amlak al-saniyya* in the two oases and was known as the richest man in al-Ahsa'.⁸⁶ Still another source of income for the local notables was tax farming. At the turn of the century, the Ottoman government frequently sold the right to harvest taxes (*iltizam*) from agricultural production in the two oases as well as customs at the Qatif and 'Uqair ports to the Al Mansur in Qatif and other notables. This practice relieved the government from the quarrelsome process of tax collection among the resistant peasant population and added considerably to the income of local notables.⁸⁷

As in past centuries, the economic and localized political leverage of prominent families was derived from two major social institutions: the system of landholdings and religious leadership.⁸⁸ Whereas a family could be famous either for its wealth or for its piety, often both spheres coincided. Urban based merchants usually owned gardens in the two oases which they leased to local tenants. Furthermore, wealthy families sponsored higher religious education for their sons which allowed them to enter into the social realms of the *'ulama'*.⁸⁹ Besides taking spiritual guidance of the local communities in their hands, this also enabled the leading families to fill the position of religious judges (*qadi*, pl. *quda*). Both, Saudi and Ottoman rulers over al-Ahsa' had ensured that Sunni *'ulama'* were appointed as judges in the Shari'a courts of Hofuf and Qatif (Hanafi judges during times of Ottoman and Hanbali ones during times of Saudi rule). However, they did grant some judicial independence for the different confessional communities by tolerating that disputes were settled with the help of locally respected *'ulama'*. Hence, besides the Shari'a courts in the two principal towns which maintained approving authority, a number of customary *quda* were active in both districts. People could appeal to these customary courts for arbitration in personal affairs as well as

(2009): 935–951, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200903268694>. Extension of the Ottoman system of land registration to al-Ahsa' in 1891 caused great discontent among the local peasant population, especially in Qatif. Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 982.

86 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 981.

87 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 983; al-Nuaim, "State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation," 97–99; Anscombe, "Anational Society," 29.

88 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-'Umal al-Muṭalibī*, 41; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 37.

89 Al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-'Uthmāniyya*, 30, 88.

for matters of endowments (*awqaf*, sgl. *waqf*) and inheritances. The office of customary *qadi* usually was held by the same families for several generations.⁹⁰

A kind of lower nobility was located in the villages where local sheikhs fulfilled the roles of community leaders. The office of village headman (*ʿumda*, Turkish: *mukhtar*) was usually held by the village sheikh who passed the title on from father to son. The sheikhs acted as intermediaries between the Ottoman state and the local communities and played a key role in anchoring state rule in local custom and tradition.⁹¹ In his role as *ʿumda* or *mukhtar* the village sheikh collected taxes on behalf of the government, organized the defense of the village against Bedouin attacks, and acted as *mufti* who administered the law outside the realms of religion. The village nobility also owned property such as date gardens, fishing grounds and trading places and leased land to smaller tenants. They thus dominated their villages socially and economically.⁹² During the last period of Ottoman rule over al-Ahsa' (1871–1913), the foreign governors attempted to curb the power of local notables and *ʿulama*'. Apparently, the Ottomans intended to replace hereditary officeholders with their own personnel. Local sheikhs were banned from courts in al-Hasa and Qatif and the office of *mufti* henceforth remained in the hands of a member of the Al Mala' from Hofuf, a family of famous *ʿulama*' that had immigrated from Unayza in Central Arabia.⁹³

Nowhere have the importance and longevity of the intersecting spheres of religion and landholdings become as pronounced as in the institution of endowments. As Matthiessen has pointed out for the Shi'i communities of Qatif, the probably most important material as well as political resource of local notables was the administration of vast agricultural endowments.⁹⁴ In al-Ahsa' as elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, the system of endowing land for the provision of religious and other services was a well-used means to "safeguard family wealth against government interference."⁹⁵ While landed property bestowed as *waqf* did not longer technically belong to the person who

90 Harrison, *The Arab at Home*, 60; Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, 83; al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-ʿUthmāniyya*, 115–16; Muḥammad al-Nimr, "Quḍat al-Qaṭīf fi Dhākira Naṣrallāh," *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf* 21 (2006), accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=1224> [site discontinued].

91 Al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-ʿUthmāniyya*, 116.

92 Al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-ʿUthmāniyya*, 112–13; Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 71, 88; al-Ḥassan, *Al-ʿUmal al-Muṭalibi*, 41.

93 Al-Qarīnī, *Al-Idāra al-ʿUthmāniyya*, 113, 150; Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ʿOmān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, 674. Arabic script in the original.

94 Matthiessen, *The Other Saudis*, 39.

95 Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, 51.

had endowed it, the administration of these lands usually remained in the hands of the same families – often for several generations – who then benefited threefold: from the social credentials derived from their charity, from their economic and political leverage as administrators of large landholdings and employers of a large part of the local villagers, and finally from a ten per cent service fee on all income generated in the *waqf*.⁹⁶

Al-Ahsa's Ottoman governors attempted to bring local *awqaf* under a state registry, which presumably served the curtailing of abuse but would have also meant extra income for the Ottoman administration. In the center of these attempts stood the popular local practice to regard *awqaf* as charitable properties rather than commons whose use needed to be put under clear regulations. State oversight of the *awqaf* should ensure that profits were used for communal benefit and did not "stick to the hands of their managers and others."⁹⁷ However, due to consistently changing rule over al-Ahsa' and a general local mistrust of any form of official registration, ownership registration of *waqf* land remained erratic far into the second half of the twentieth century.⁹⁸ A famous and illustrative example for such practice and its long-term historical impact is the Ramis. This large agricultural land is located in the Qatif oasis between the village of 'Awwamiyya and the Gulf littoral. The Ramis was brought from the Ottoman state in 1882 by Shaykh Salman b. Muhammad b. Husayn al-Faraj al-'Awwami who donated it as *waqf* for the benefit of the people of 'Awwamiyya.⁹⁹ Endowing the Ramis was a well-timed measure taken by the sheikh to secure his local power in times of dwindling Turkish rule. Salman al-'Awwami belonged to a locally influential family of religiously learned men whose members were acknowledged local leaders, a role that probably dated back to the year 1783 or 1784 when a famous ancestor by the name of 'Ali b. Muhsin b. Zahir b. Nimr al-'Awwami had defended the community against foreign attackers. Upon buying the land and turning it into a religious endowment, Salman also managed to secure the office of administrator of the *waqf* for himself. The transactions were performed by

96 Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, 51–52; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 38.

97 Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, 51–52.

98 Humaidan, "al-Hasa Irrigation and Drainage Project," 38; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 38; Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, 37–38.

99 Nabih al-Ibrāhīm, "Waqf al-Rāmis: Al-Namūdhaj Yuhṭadhā fi l-Awqāf al-Ijtīmā'iyya," *Waḥat al-Qatīf* 9 (2004), accessed July 14, 2017, <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=145> [site discontinued]; 'Alī Zayna, "Al-Zaḥīf al-'Umrānī Yuhadid Arḍ al-Rāmis al-Zarā'iyya," *Majalla al-'Usbū'iyya*, February 6, 2005, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=508> [site discontinued].

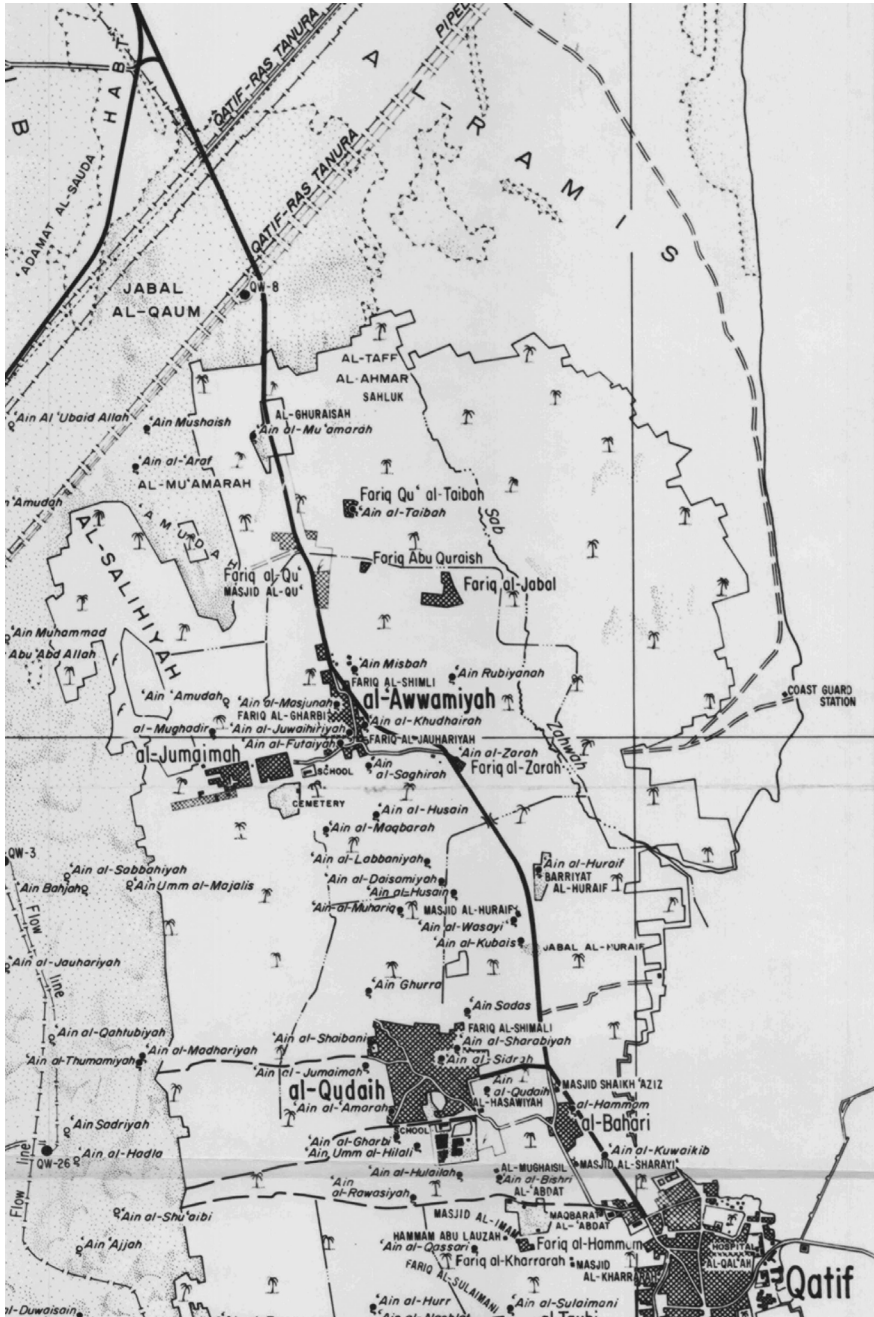


FIGURE 5 Detail from a map of the Qatif oasis centering on 'Awwamiyya and the Ramis, 1972, by Arabian American Oil Company. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress. Oil pipelines were built on land that was part of the endowment.

the *qadi* in Qatif, Shaykh ‘Ali Abu ‘Abd al-Karim b. Hassan ‘Ali al-Khunayzi.¹⁰⁰ Upon Salman’s death in 1882 the endowment fell under the management of his son Shaykh Muhammad b. Salman who inherited the office from his father. Throughout the twentieth century, the Ramis remained under the administration of the Al Faraj branch of the family that continued to intermarry with the branches of the Al ‘Awwami and the Al Nimr.¹⁰¹ Although parts of the Ramis were lost in the process of official land registration in 1941, the *qada* of Qatif ensured the family’s continuous hold of the *waqf* and thus also defended the Ramis against partitioning and land speculation in the era of oil urbanization.¹⁰²

The existence of several prominent families in al-Ahsa’s two oases and old urban centers who competed among each other over positions and influence was a double-edged sword. Local writers have argued that al-Ahsa’s notables were mainly interested in the pursuit of their own interests instead of the communities.¹⁰³ Yet, rivalries between the leading families certainly also prompted political and cultural assertiveness of the local communities. For instance, local ‘*ulama*’ would compete over status in religious matters not least through making use of their vast social capital, i.e. their authority as customary judges, the provision of endowments and, in the case of the Shi‘i senior religious authority (*mujtahid*), the forming of bonds of patronage through the promotion of local and regional institutions of religious learning (*hawza ‘ulmiyya*).¹⁰⁴ Crucially, al-Ahsa’s local communities looked for legal advice and religious and political guidance towards the same families that also harvested the bulk of profits generated in agriculture and pearling. Sharecropping was a common mode of surplus extraction in the oases of the Arabian Peninsula. Urban-based merchants in al-Ahsa’ and elsewhere spent much of the profits made in trade for buying date plantations in the two oases, which were seen as safe investment. The land was then either cultivated by hired laborers from the villages

100 Al-Ibrāhīm, “Waqf al-Rāmis.”

101 Wāhat al-Qaṭīf, “Al-Usar al-‘Ulmiyya fī al-Qaṭīf,” *Majallat al-Mawsim* 19, no. 3 (2004), accessed December 13, 2016, <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=6&print=1> [site discontinued].

102 Al-Ibrāhīm, “Waqf al-Rāmis.” For a different interpretation see Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 38.

103 ‘Abd al-Muḥsin b. al-Shaykh ‘Alī al-Khunayzī, “Aḍwā’ ‘Alā Malaf (Waq‘at al-Sharba)” *Majallat al-Wāḥa* 3 (2007). Accessed February 22, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210419193401/http://www.alwahamag.com/?act=artc&id=91>; al-Ḥassan. *Al-‘Umal al-Muṭalibī*, 42.

104 Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 73–78; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 42.

or leased to tenants.¹⁰⁵ Even in the still numerous cases in which small farmers cultivated their own land a considerable share of their income was creeping into the hands of notables. The financial risks of a bad harvest or a flailing market lay with the crop producer, which created economic dependencies that bound the oasis villagers to the wealthy upper class. During his prolonged stay in Hofuf the English missionary and physician Paul W. Harrison found the conditions of that said economic dependence to be “hard and oppressive.”¹⁰⁶ According to one commonly practiced form of land lease, tenants had to deliver a fixed number of harvested crops to the owner of their gardens which meant that a bad harvest usually condemned the gardener to borrow money, usually from the landowner, and buy the crops at a high price in the public market. In such cases, the tenant would request to be relieved of a part of his duty or otherwise would become indebted to his landlord. On the other hand, it was the vital interest of a landowner that land value was continuously raised, that the irrigation system and other appliances were kept in good repair and that his tenant would not starve. Hence, Harrison conceded that the dependence between landlord and tenant was mutual, albeit not well balanced.¹⁰⁷ In a similar vein, the system of trade exchange between self-employed farmers and merchants bound the former in economic as well as social aspects to the latter and created solid social bonds between the two groups. Again, this system worked to the disadvantage of the farmer who was paid his share of profit only after the harvested crops were sold on the local markets.¹⁰⁸ In this, the communities of al-Ahsa’ were no exception. The socio-economic contract between merchants and farmers in Central Arabia worked along similar lines. Arabia’s tenants and small self-employed farmers were generally at the mercy of the wealthy merchant nobility:

The crop was seldom enough to cover the farmer’s debt leaving him handcuffed by incessant debts and mortgaged tools. The accumulation of debts reduced some farmers to misery ... [and] ... in some cases, the population of a whole village was indebted to a merchant family for unpaid-for purchases.¹⁰⁹

105 Al-Nuaim, “State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation,” 135, 137.

106 Harrison, *The Arab at Home*, 51.

107 Harrison, *The Arab at Home*, 51–54.

108 Shurafā, *Al-Ḥayā al-Iqtisādiyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya*, 56.

109 Al-Nuaim, “State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation,” 139. Nuaim conducted his study mainly for the provinces of Najd and al-Ahsa’. Insertion added.

Another case of crude economic exploitation was created by the brokerage system imposed upon the pearl divers of Qatif and Tarut. Divers and crews of the small, rented vessels that combed the shallow waters of the Tarut bay for pearls carried out an arduous and unhealthy work that put them and their families at the risk of starvation. Their limited life expectancy and meagre share of profits often indebted them over the course of several generations to the wealthy pearl brokers in al-Ahsa' and Bahrain.¹¹⁰ Economic hardship, conflicts, and natural disasters such as droughts recurrently prompted local communities to migrate to other places in the wider region, where they found better conditions.¹¹¹

2 The New Saudi State

When al-Ahsa' passed under Saudi rule in 1913, the former governor of the Qasim, Abdullah b. Jiluwi (1870–1938), was installed as emir of the newly founded governorate of al-Ahsa' (*al-īmarat-l-Ahsa'*). The new government took residence in Hofuf.¹¹² Qatif remained a district within the governorate of al-Ahsa'. As such, it was ruled by a Saudi emir who replaced the Turkish *qa'im maqam*. The post was given to Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Suwaylim, one of the politically influential Najdi notables of Hofuf.¹¹³ Under the new government local representation in governing the two oases at the level of *'umda* was kept intact and even largely remained in the hands of the same families.¹¹⁴ Other administrative structures remain opaque, not least

110 Michael S. Cheney, *Big Oil Man From Arabia* (Ballantine Books, 1958), 204–5; Hermann Burchardt, "Ost-Arabien von Basra bis Maskat auf Grund eigener Reisen," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (1906): 313.

111 See for instance al-Hirz, Muḥammad 'Alī. "Al-Qabā'il wa-l-Usar al-Aḥsā'iyya al-Muhājira ilā al-'Irāq," *Majallat al-Wāḥa* 34 (2011), <https://web.archive.org/web/20210619063608/http://www.alwahamag.com/?act=artc&id=1345>. Vassiliev used the concept of a "feudal" society to describe the stark economic dependency of peasants and pearlors on local elites. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 54–55. Regarding the amalgamation of religious and economic leadership, al-Ḥassan argued that in al-Ahsa', "political feudalism" resulted from "economic feudalism." Al-Ḥassan, *Al-'Umal al-Muṭalibī*, 20. The use of the concept of feudalism for the historical context of the Near and Middle East has been subject of criticism. Alexander Schölch, "Zum Problem Eines Außereuropäischen Feudalismus: Bauern, Lokalherren und Händler im Libanon und in Palästina in Osmanischer Zeit," *Peripherie* 5, no. 6 (1981): 107–121.

112 Philipp, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa*, 158.

113 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 261.

114 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 33.

because a centralized state administration and collection of state dues were instated not earlier than one decade after the Saudi annexation of al-Ahsa'. Descriptions of the daily routines of government by foreign visitors to Hofuf imply that the new government centered on the person of Bin Jiluwi, who himself relied in his rule on a handful of technocrats, some of whom had possibly already been employed by the Ottoman governors.¹¹⁵ The emir was further assisted in his work by "unofficial privy councils" in which prominent Hasawis advised him in administrative and political matters. While initially these councils consisted mostly of tribesmen, members of the urban merchant nobility increasingly gained access during later decades. In the 1950s, the most prominent Sunni traders of Najdi descent such as the Ghosaibi and the Al 'Ajaji were "frequent advisors to the governor."¹¹⁶ Representation of the urban elite in administrative councils might have been discontinued for a couple of years, but was reinstated once local government was raised from *ad hoc* measures to more institutionalized structures. Municipal governments were again introduced in al-Ahsa' in 1925 or 1926 to oversee maintenance and sanitation in the towns and larger villages, as well as the expansion of streets and the demolition and construction works connected to urban modernization projects. Municipalities were organized on a district basis and each district *'umda* monitored the functions of the municipality in his neighborhood. Members of the most prominent families represented their respective *furuq* in the respective municipality.¹¹⁷

Throughout the early decades of Saudi rule, the primary concern of government was that of collecting revenue which would finance the solidification of Saudi rule over the Arabian Peninsula. However, the emergent Saudi economy was hit hard by the world financial crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as by plummeting world market prices for dates and pearls. In response, Ibn Sa'ud levied harsh taxes in all his governorates and increasingly went also about the private savings of his wealthy subjects, be it through extensive borrowing or confiscation. Based on a system of estimated harvest, taxation of al-Ahsa's agricultural produce worked soundly in the interest of the revenue

115 Robert E. Cheesman, *In Unknown Arabia* (Macmillan, 1926), 61, 97.

116 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 145–46.

117 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 140–44. Al-Aḥmad writes that the municipalities of Qatif and al-Hasa were abolished in 1913 and reinstated in 1927. Al-Aḥmad. *Sha'b al-Qaṭīf fī 'l-Qarn al-Ḥādī wa-l-'Ashrīn*, 28. A British report mentions that in 1930 "Al Jishi the newly appointed president [of the Qatif municipality] was found unsuitable for the post and Khalid al Faraj Kuwaiti the former president has been reinstated." "Fortnightly Political Diaries," Political Agency, Bahrain, October 16, 1930, File 16/5, IOR/R/15/2/1498. Insertion added.

collector – a practice that already under Ottoman rule had stirred the resentment of the local population.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the canonic tax of *zakat* was made compulsory, which people regarded as aberration from customary practice.¹¹⁹ Al-Ahsa's Shi'i communities were exempted from military conscription and instead had to pay the so-called *jihad*-tax.¹²⁰

Immediately after the Saudi annexation in 1913, Ibn Sa'ud received tributary payments by the leading notables of Qatif and in turn on principle confirmed local leadership. He reduced the tax on date gardens and farmed out customs receipt at the port of Qatif to the Qatifi notables 'Ali b. Faris and 'Ali b. Mansur b. Akhwan. On the same occasion, Ibn Sa'ud restituted the property of Qatifi merchants who not long before had fallen victim to raiding Bedouin.¹²¹ At the same time, Saudi exactions mounted high and left the communities of Qatif struggling at the hands of the customs collectors. However, at this, Qatif was no exception. For instance, the people of Jubail, a small fishing hamlet some fifty miles north of Qatif, only agreed to pay the amount of levied taxes when Ibn Sa'ud threatened to arrest their elderly chief and his brother. Jubail had been founded by the Al Bu 'Ainain, Maliki Sunnis from Qatar who lived mainly from pearl fishing.¹²² Hence, the British Agency in Bahrain anticipated mass emigration from Jubail at the end of the pearling season.¹²³

The Saudi ruler appointed a local Maliki scholar as new *qadi* in Hofuf who acted as chief judge for the entire province. However, he was replaced in 1920 with a "Wahhabi hardliner" from Riyadh, a political decision that shows that Ibn Sa'ud by then felt the political need to answer to Wahhabi demands for a more radical policy vis-à-vis al-Ahsa's Sunni and Shi'i communities. The Wahhabi chief judge controlled the local judges in the province who continued to administer the law for their communities.¹²⁴ Customary courts had apparently ceased to exist *in the villages* of al-Hasa during Vidal's field research in the early 1950s. Vidal merely states that by then, law cases in the villages were uniformly referred to Hofuf, where a Shi'i *qadi* continued to practice the

118 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 243.

119 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 241.

120 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 205–206; Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 140; Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 246.

121 "Weekly Report No. 25," June 29, 1913, and "Weekly Report No. 26," July 22, 1913, British Agency, Bahrain, File No. 4/5 Weekly Diary Files, 1913, IOR/R/15/2/58.

122 "Al Djubayl," 1961[?], Box 3, Folder 7, ARD, Mulligan Papers.

123 "Weekly Report No. 27," July 14, 1913, and "Weekly Report No. 30," August 5, 1913, British Agency, Bahrain, File No. 4/5 Weekly Diary Files, 1913, IOR/R/15/2/58.

124 Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 247. "Notes on the 'Akhwan' Movement," Major H.R.P. Dickson, May 1920, IOR/L/PS/18/B340.

law in family matters, inheritances and religious endowments for al-Hasa's Shi'i communities.¹²⁵ In the town of Qatif, the customary court also remained intact. The Ja'afari court, as it was commonly called after the Shi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, continued to administer the law concerning endowments and inheritances across confessional divisions.¹²⁶ State centralization since the 1950s led to a gradual decline of its impact, and the authority of the Ja'afari court was ultimately limited towards personal status law.¹²⁷ Until then, the *qada* of Qatif played a decisive role in safeguarding big landholdings in the oasis against claims by the state and oil company. Hence, prominent Shi'i families in al-Ahsa' and especially those from Qatif retained parts of their local influence as well after the Saudi conquest. They initially also continued to produce their share of *mujtahidin* who could exert religious and informal legal authority over the local communities, like the Abu Khamsin from Mubarraz.¹²⁸

Still, the Shi'i communities proved most vulnerable to exploitation and expropriation at the hands of the Saudi rulers. Following the annexation of al-Ahsa', the new Saudi government had seized all land that was not privately owned and put it under a land lease system (*al-'aradi-l-amiriyya*). Whereas this was designed as a measure to gain control over the new province and to generate additional income for the Saudi purse, it was as well a tool to remunerate the supporters of the Saudi campaign and to ensure the loyalty of fellow tribesmen. The ability or inability to prove ownership of land became the decisive element in this process. However, the (proof of) registration and re-distribution of landed property often worked in arbitrary ways and involved the expropriation of many of the original landowners in the two oases. Wealthy Sunni merchants like the Al 'Ajaji and the Ghosaibi, Saudi princes and war allies received their share of the largest gardens in the Hasa and Qatif oases. Parts of the extensive landholdings of the Ottoman Sultan was handed towards Bin Jiluwi himself.¹²⁹ Prominent Shi'i families in al-Hasa, like the Baqshi from

125 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 33; Louër, "Identity Politics," 224.

126 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 337.

127 On customary (Shi'i) courts in Qatif and al-Hasa see Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 54–64. On the curtailing of the Ja'afari court in Qatif see al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 337–38.

128 "The Shia of Saudi Arabia," [author name illegible], April 26, 1967, Box 3, Folder 28, Chronological January–June 1967, Aramco, Arabian Affairs Division (AAD), and William E. Mulligan notes to Sam Clevenger, September 30, 1959, Box 1, Folder 71, Arab Miscellaneous Biographies 01/16/1959–02/17/1975, AAD, Mulligan Papers. By the mid-twentieth century, the *mujtahidin* of al-Hasa and Qatif usually referred directly to the religious authorities in Najaf, the center of Shi'i Islam in Iraq. Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 240.

129 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 251; al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 1, 203–4; Cheesman believed Abdullah Ghosaibi to be the king's exchequer. If his assumption was correct, all land

Rif'a, claimed that they were expropriated through blackmail or an extreme binding of the law, which allowed the Saudi authorities to take Shi'i land literally "for any reason."¹³⁰ Later decades which were marked by the building of a modern state and intensified oil urbanization saw at least the formal attempt to prevent the worst forms of illegal land appropriation. "Freed" land was allocated to the Saudi purse (*idara al-maliyya*) and redistributed according to fixed principles that anticipated possible corruption and land speculation. However, especially Shi'i landowners and poor peasants were disadvantaged by the system.¹³¹ Before they were divested of their capacity to regulate local endowments in the second half of the twentieth century, the *quda* of Qatif had been able to ensure that many prominent local families remained in control of their vast religiously endowed lands.¹³² Hence, these wealthy and influential families remained able to derive a part of their social status and income from their landed properties. This was less common in al-Hasa. In the 1950s, Vidal found that land in the Hasa oasis was mostly owned by Sunnis, but he still counted a few prominent Shi'i families, like the Al Khalifa in Mubarraz, among the urban based landholders.¹³³

Given the status and power that were connected to private landholdings, it does not wonder that instances of forced expropriation are still vivid in local memory.¹³⁴ The most prominent case was that of the Qatifi merchant 'Abdul Husayn b. Jum'a. The latter had inherited the position as Qatif's leading notable from Mansur b. Jum'a, who died in 1912. As the most important pearl merchant of Qatif and owner of vast landholdings he was well connected among the big traders and ruling circles of al-Ahsa' and Bahrain and competitor of important Najdi merchants in the region such as the Ghosaibi and the Kanoo.¹³⁵ Bin Jum'a became a target of the new Saudi ruler as early as in 1913. According to local rumor, Ibn Sa'ud resented the latter's powerful position under the Ottomans as much as the fact that Bin Jum'a had – unavailingly – approached

confiscated and re-distributed must have passed Ghosaibis hands. Cheesman, *In Unknown Arabia*, 14, 89. See also Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 468.

130 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 251–52.

131 Document no. 102, Jumāda al-Thānī 7, 1362H/June 9, 1943, Majlis al-Shūrā, Institute of Public Administration, Dammam, Saudi Arabia, Documentation Center (hereafter: IPA). See also chapter 3 of this book.

132 Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 38–39.

133 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 86.

134 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 251–59; al-Muslim, *Sāḥil al-Dhahab al-Aswad*, 166–69.

135 When the struggle between Ibn Sa'ud and Bin Jum'a began to evolve, Bin Jum'a temporarily escaped to Bahrain and returned to al-Ahsa' equipped with a letter of recommendation issued by the ruler of Bahrain. "Weekly Report No. 30," August 5, 1913, British Agency, Bahrain, File No. 4/5 Weekly Diary Files. 1913, IOR/R/15/2/58.

both, the retreating Ottomans and the British in Bahrain for their help against the Al Sa'ud.¹³⁶ It seems that Ibn Sa'ud chose to make an example of Bin Jum'a, to dispose of a local leader, and at the same time to lay hands on the extensive properties owned by the family. Not long after the Saudi takeover of the province, Bin Jum'a was arrested and killed while his wealth in pearls and his extensive landholdings were confiscated and handed to the Ghosaibi and Bin Jiluwi.¹³⁷

3 Some Thoughts on Sectarianism

The fate of the wealthy merchant and leading notable of Qatif, Bin Jum'a, is not only exemplary for the ruthlessness with which Ibn Sa'ud acted against his political adversaries, it also illustrates the precarious political position in which Qatif's political leaders had come by the turn of the century. Both, the Ottoman government in al-Ahsa' and imperial Britain in Bahrain held political claims over the local communities. Al-Ahsa' constituted a "frontier society" in which British and Ottoman empires as well as the fast-expanding Saudi polity fought over "political influence, the imposition of legal authority over the indigenous population and the control of commercial routes" and thus were "instrumental in the emergence of a new type of identity politics."¹³⁸ Britain had mostly commercial interests. Since the seventeenth century, Qatif had developed into one of the Gulf's pearling centers. Although its importance diminished over the following centuries and especially during the pearling boom of the nineteenth century, when other places such as Manama in Bahrain and Bandar-i Lingeḥ at the northern Gulf littoral developed into the Gulf's main pearling hubs, the town continued to be part of the British pearling empire. At the turn of the twentieth century, Qatif's pearls were traded via Bahrain to Bombay and from there to the rest of the world.¹³⁹ In the late nineteenth century, British imperial

136 Telegram, Political Agent, Bahrain to British Resident Bushire, July 25, 1914 and Confidential report, Political Agency, Bahrain to Sir Percy Knox, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, July 14, 1913, File E/8 I Ibn Sa'ud, 10R/R/15/2/31; Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 252–55; Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil al-Dhahab al-Aswad*, 166–69.

137 Report by Yusuf b. Ahmad Kanoo on treatment of Abdul Husayn b. Juma, July 17, 1914, File E/8 I Ibn Sa'ud, 10R/R/15/2/31; Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 245.

138 Fuccaro, Nelida, "Between *Imara*, Empire and Oil: Saudis in the Frontier Society of the Persian Gulf," in *Kingdom Without Borders. Saudi Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (Hurst & Company, 2008), 41.

139 Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 86, 233.

policy with regard to al-Ahsa' was dictated by the trading empire's foothold in neighboring Bahrain and the Trucial Coast on the one hand, and by Britain's relationship with the rivalling powers on the Arabian Peninsula, the emirs of Najd and the Ottoman Empire, on the other. Britain sought to increase security for its commercial activities in the Gulf which included the movement of people and safe passage of merchant vessels between al-Ahsa' and Bahrain. It thus recurrently interfered in the province as advocate of Bahrain's "foreign populations" and of British subjects and protégées in al-Ahsa'.¹⁴⁰ British political agents in Bahrain supported the small Indian merchant community in Qatif as well as Persians who were engaged in trade with Central Arabia via the old port of 'Uqair and the smaller port of Qatif. British interest further extended towards Bahraini subjects who either resided in al-Ahsa' or commuted frequently between Bahrain the mainland.¹⁴¹

The late nineteenth century witnessed various attempts to delineate the blotted boundaries of British influence in al-Ahsa'. As a result, Qatif got increasingly roped into the realm of British imperial policies.¹⁴² Britain chose the notorious acts of piracy emanating from seafaring tribes in Qatif and Dammam for maintaining its naval presence in the vicinity of Qatif. In 1881, British imperial officers went so far as to press their right to take all necessary measures to secure al-Ahsa's coast, thereby severely intruding into the domain of Ottoman government.¹⁴³ In addition to the constant nuisance of piracy, competition between Indian traders and local merchants in Qatif peaked in the second half of the nineteenth century and in 1895 conflicts between Hindu, Persian and Arab traders turned violent. Hindu calls for British protection and ongoing conflicts involving Indian and Bahraini subjects led to recurrent attempts between the 1880s and 1930 to delegate a British representative to al-Ahsa'. British aspirations for political interference in local affairs were met by resistance, first by the Ottoman government and again in 1927–1930 by

140 Letter No. 24, Political Resident Bushire to Foreign Department, January 4, 1914, and "Memorandum of Interview with Bin Saud on 15th–16th December 1913," File XXV/2 Arabian Affairs (including Iraq), IOR/R/15/6/31 Qatar and al Hassa (Bin Saud). See also al-Shehabi, "Contested Modernity," 334–36.

141 Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 962–96.

142 Sugata Bose in this context describes the coast of al-Ahsa' as "uncertain frontier" between the British and Ottoman empires. Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 80.

143 Pirate attacks emanating from the coast of al-Ahsa' peaked in 1845–1850, 1854, and again in 1878–1881. Lorimer and Birdwood, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, 962–65, 973–79.

Ibn Sa‘ud, who regarded Britain’s foray as an attempt to impair his sovereign rule over al-Ahsa’.¹⁴⁴

Before the Saudi conquest of al-Ahsa’, imperial Britain had observed Saudi expansion towards the coast of al-Ahsa’ with unease as it took place in close vicinity of de facto British territory. At the turn of the century, when a Saudi annexation of al-Ahsa’ seemed to be a mere matter of time, some British officials hoped to come to an agreement of protection with the Saudi ruler similar to the agreements that established the British protectorates of the Trucial Coast.¹⁴⁵ However, London was not keen on an “Arabian adventure” that could endanger British-Ottoman agreements concerning British hegemony over Mesopotamia and the Gulf. Another reason for British reservations with regard to a British-Saudi understanding was that Britain as de facto ruler of a large number of tribal Arabs in the southern Gulf observed Wahhabism, the religious movement behind Saudi power aspirations, as considerable political threat.¹⁴⁶ Especially the tribal adherents of Wahhabism, the so called Ikhwan (Brethren) were noted for their religious fervor and violence.¹⁴⁷ Only after the Saudi annexation of al-Ahsa’ in 1913, Britain sought a political settlement with Ibn Sa‘ud. In 1915, they prepared the ground for “friendly relations” in a contract that was negotiated in Qatif. The Qatif treaty granted Ibn Sa‘ud the yearly payment of a British subsidy and ensured that imports and pilgrims from across the empire continued to reach Saudi ports. In exchange, Ibn Sa‘ud accepted British political claims in Kuwait, Qatar, the Trucial sheikhdoms and the coast of Oman.¹⁴⁸ The Saudi ruler had thus submitted to British

144 Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 79–81. The proposal that the political agent in Bahrain should be consul at Qatif is discussed at length in the political correspondence which took place from December 14, 1927, to December 31, 1930, File 19/194 (C 36), IOR/R/15/1/360. On the protection of British traders in Qatif see British negotiations with Ibn Sa‘ud in 1913. File xxv/2 Arabian Affairs (including Iraq). Qatar and al Hassa (Bin Saud), IOR/R/15/6/31.

145 “Historical Memorandum on the Relations of the Wahhabi Amirs and Ibn Saud with Eastern Arabia and the British Government, 1800–1934,” P G India Office Memorandum No B.437, P.Z.5620/1934, September 26, 1934, page 29, paragraph 145, IOR/R/15/1/745.

146 Since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Wahhabism had spread from the Najd to parts of Oman, the Trucial Coast, al-Ahsa’ and elsewhere. “Notes on the ‘Akhwan’ Movement,” Report by Major Harold R.P. Dickson on his visit to al-Ahsa’ in 1920, IOR/L/PS/18/B340.

147 On the Wahhabi movement and the Ikhwan see Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 72–81; 227–31 and al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 59–71.

148 “Relations with Ibn Saud,” Memorandum No. 2, Enclosure No. 1, Arab Bureau Iraq to Arab Bureau Cairo, January 12, 1917, IOR/R/15/2/68; Letter No. 4005-M, Political Resident to Foreign Department, December 2, 1913, File xxv/2 Arabian Affairs including Iraq, Qatar and al Hassa (Bin Saud), IOR/R/15/6/31. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, Britain and Saudi Arabia clashed in a prolonged dispute over the oasis of Buraimi

protection. At the same time, his influence over Najdi tribes in the wider Gulf remained strong.¹⁴⁹

To shield British interests and to thwart Saudi political aspirations in the Gulf protectorates, Britain's imperial officers in the Gulf recurrently invoked sectarian strife as a smokescreen. For instance, during so-called "baladiyya affair" that entailed violent clashes between Najdi tribes and Persians in Muharraq in 1923, one British official personally warned Ibn Sa'ud against consigning his agent in Bahrain to investigate the violence. He cautioned the Saudi emir that the Persian government would respond to this by demanding the right to send their own agent who "would not rest ... until he became a focus of intrigue and disorder among the Shia inhabitants of Al Hasa."¹⁵⁰ Local notables as well demonstrated an aptitude towards employing sectarian strategies.¹⁵¹ This is demonstrated, for instance, during the violent siege of Qatif by local Bedouin in 1908, when numerous Qatifis were killed, villages raided and palm groves destroyed before the defenders of the oasis were able to defeat their attackers.¹⁵² During the siege, Bahraini merchants appealed for British intervention in the conflict because they feared the loss of their properties in Qatif.¹⁵³ Clearly attempting to exploit British interests in al-Ahsa' for their own ends, they planted the rumour that Ibn Sa'ud had ignited the Wahhabi zeal of the local Bedouin against the Qatifis to win control over the oasis.¹⁵⁴ Britain treated these rumours with caution, although British

at the border between Saudi Arabia and Oman. In the following decades, disagreements between the Saudi ruler and Britain arose because of the Hashemite kingdoms in Transjordan, Syria and Iraq. Askar H. al-Enazy, *The Creation of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914–1927* (Routledge, 2010), 133. The Anglo-Saudi relationship was further burdened as the exact borders of the respective territories along the Gulf littoral remained yet to be drawn. See John B. Kelly, *Desert Dispute: The Diplomacy of Boundary-Making in South-East Asia*, ed. Saul B. Kelly, vol. 2 (Gerlach Press, 2020), 279–443.

- 149 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 238; al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 42.
- 150 Correspondence between Political Agent, Bahrain, and Ibn Saud, no. [none], May 27, 1923, no. 172, June 20, 1923, and Telegram no. 432, May 11, 1923, File 19/166, 168 (C 25) (1) Nejdīs and Persians (2) Mehdi Al Jishi, IOR/R/15/1/341. On the so-called "baladiyya affair" see Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 157–160.
- 151 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Umal al-Muṭalibī*, 18.
- 152 "Persian Gulf: Katif; Disturbances in 1908," November 6, 1908, File 395/1908 Pt 2, IOR/L/PS/10/134. For a local commemoration of the battle, see Waḥat al-Qaṭīf. "Waq'at al-Sharba wa Ḥiṣār al-Qaṭīf 'Ām 1909m" *Waḥat al-Qaṭīf* 2 (2009), <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=34> [site discontinued].
- 153 See Fuccaro, "Between *Imara*, Empire and Oil," 46.
- 154 Letter no. 2582, Political Agent, Bushire to India Office, August 23, 1908, IOR L/PS/10/134/2.

correspondence concerning the violence reveals that some British officers readily adopted the interpretation of local conflict as sectarian strife between Wahhabi tribes and Shi'i villagers.¹⁵⁵ In the end, Britain sent naval forces to secure maritime passages in the area and to observe the situation in Qatif but refrained from direct interference.¹⁵⁶ British imperial officers ultimately connected the Bedouin attacks to the failure of the pearl fishery earlier the same year which increased the economic strain on the local communities and particularly on the pearling tribes.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Ottoman government in al-Ahsa' had apparently refused the local tribes to collect their seasonal surplus of dates from the oasis, which led to the violent siege of Qatif.¹⁵⁸

Still, the claim of the Bahraini merchants was not entirely unfounded. During his rise as ruler over most of the Arabian Peninsula, Ibn Sa'ud wielded his Wahhabi Brethren as a weapon, but not without difficulties. The problem was to make concessions to the religious zeal of the Ikhwan and to otherwise keep check on Wahhabi extremism when it came to the realities of government.¹⁵⁹ During the first decades of Saudi rule over al-Ahsa', religious discrimination never was an absolute and uniform historical reality. Rather, the Saudi ruler chose to exploit the religious zeal of his war allies and to restrict religious freedom especially for the Shi'a communities under certain circumstances and for limited periods of time. This pragmatic approach towards ruling the Shi'i communities was rooted in fiscal considerations and in the need to consolidate Saudi rule.¹⁶⁰ Besides varying degrees of religious discrimination, Ibn Sa'ud noteworthy also granted "an amount of institutional recognition as

155 Letter no. 2582, Political Agent, Bushire to India Office, August 23, 1908, and Memorandum no. 2419, First Assistant Resident Bushire to Foreign Department Simla, August 9, 1908, IOR L/PS/10/134/2.

156 "Situation at El-Katif," Commander in Chief of the H.M.S. Sphinx, Basra, August 28, 1908, IOR L/PS/10/134/2.

157 Telegram no. 97, Commander in Chief East Indies to India Office, August 13, 1908, IOR L/PS/10/134/2.

158 Fuccaro, "Between *Imara*, Empire and Oil," 47–48, cited in Louër, "Identity Politics," 223.

159 Major Harold R.P. Dickson visited al-Ahsa' in 1920. He noted "... that the present ruler of Najd, Bin Sa'ud, has been forced to associate himself with the movement [of the Ikhwan] and become its leader, I think, there is little doubt. In my opinion, he, in the first place, thought to make use of the movement to strengthen his position, but in the end found he was forced to spread its doctrines and become its leader lest he should go under himself." "Notes on the 'Akhwan' Movement," Major H.R.P. Dickson, May 1920, IOR/L/PS/18/B340. Insertion added.

160 Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 237.

distinct sect (*madhhab*) within Islam” as he continued the institution of customary courts in the two oases.¹⁶¹

The late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed an increased strain on local economy and politics which resulted from economic world crisis, during which the kingdom came close to bankruptcy, and internal political uprisings against the Al Sa‘ud, markedly the Ikhwan rebellion of 1928–1930. In congruence with his overall politics that were designed for internal stability, Ibn Sa‘ud’s repressive dealings with his Shi‘i subjects during the 1920s were directed by internal struggles over the political and ideological future of his alliance with the Ikhwan.¹⁶² The latter kept the upper hand in al-Ahsa’ until 1922 and brutally dealt with the multi-confessional communities. In 1920, the British major Harold R. P. Dickson reported how in the time immediately after the Saudi conquest, the Ikhwan terrorized the residents of Hofuf and shot individuals for minor offenses like smoking cigarettes. Dickson continued that “at that time Bin Sa‘ud and Bin Jiluwi, the Amir of Hasa, had summarily to shoot several of the Akhwan before they could bring them to their senses.” Dickson further reports frequent acts of violence that were directed especially against al-Ahsa’s Shi‘i communities, including acts of killing.¹⁶³ After a short alleviation of the situation between 1922 and 1925, a renewed strengthening of the extremists after 1925 led to the formal loss of religious freedom for al-Ahsa’s Shi‘i communities in 1927, which lasted until 1930. The repressions against the Shi‘a of al-Ahsa’ included the prohibition of public religious ceremonies and forced conversions.¹⁶⁴ Not immediately able to bring about a martial defeat of the Ikhwan, Ibn Sa‘ud was urged to keep the Wahhabi Brethren in check through the payment of subsidies, which were partly financed by increased taxation throughout the country. At the same time, the pearling industry collapsed due to the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls into the world market. Consequently, poverty and despair spread among the peasant and pearling communities of al-Ahsa’.¹⁶⁵ In response to religious oppression and economic exploitation, several hundred Shi‘a from Qatif and al-Hasa fled to Bahrain, where they were offered shelter and support by local sheikhs, such as Hajji Ahmad b. Khamis in the village of Sanabis or the Bahraini trader Yussuf Fakhru. According to al-Hassan, their adverse conditions prompted the

161 Louër, “Identity Politics,” 224. Italics in the original.

162 Goldberg, “The Shi‘i Minority in Saudi Arabia,” 234.

163 “Notes on the ‘Akhwan’ Movement,” Major H.R.P. Dickson, May 1920, IOR/L/PS/18/B340.

164 Steinberg, “The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia,” 248–250; Goldberg, “The Shi‘i Minority in Saudi Arabia,” 236; Ibrahim, *The Shi‘is of Saudi Arabia*, 26–27.

165 Al-Hassan, *Al-Shi‘a*, vol. 2, 269.

communities of Qatif to ask the British political agent in Bahrain for British protection. However, Britain feared that a Shi'i diaspora would lead to social and political unrest in Bahrain and abstained from interference on behalf of the refugees.¹⁶⁶

One consequence of religious oppression and economic strain was the revolt led by the sheikh Muhammad al-Nimr against the Saudi government in 1929–1930. The rebellion began as an act of resistance against years of harsh taxation and was additionally fueled by the Wahhabi zeal of local Bedouin which peaked during the concurrent Ikhwan uprising against Ibn Sa'ud. It emanated from several villages in the Qatif oasis, notably from the village of 'Awwamiyya where al-Nimr held the status of a local religious leader, and spread into Qatif's fortified town, the Qal'a. At the onset of the rebellion, the Wahhabi emir of Qatif, Ibn Suwaylim, called up local Bedouin and Sunni men from 'Umm Sahik and Darin and ordered them to fire their arms in front of the mosques and *husayniyyat* "day and night." This obvious threat made the intended impression on Qatif's political establishment. Qatif's notables, who had for years unsuccessfully petitioned Ibn Sa'ud to lower the taxes, now asked Nimr's men to lay down their weapons, telling them none of the rebels would become martyrs if they died in this battle.¹⁶⁷

The different spaces in which the conflict between the Wahhabi governor, the rebels and the notables was fought out reveal part of the tensions and conflicts inherent to the communities of Qatif. The Qal'a as a place for the exhibition of Bedouin presence and martial strength shows not only how the different communities were played against each other by the Saudi authorities, it entails also a clear act of intimidation by the Saudi governor against the notables of Qatif. At the same time, the uprising marked a confrontation between Qatif's political establishment and parts of the village nobility who opposed the urban based notables as much as the Saudi rule which they represented.¹⁶⁸ This is especially noteworthy, because the urban-rural divide which appears in the al-Nimr rebellion acquired a specific political dimension in later decades. As we will see, by the 1960s, oil urbanization pitted the urban based political establishment, the so-called Qal'awis, against the rural population, the so-called Barranis.¹⁶⁹ Of interest in this context are the explanations

166 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 260.

167 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 260–61.

168 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 260–61. See also the remarks by 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Khunayzī on internal conflicts between Qatif's prominent families from the Qal'a and between Qal'awis and village nobility, especially the leaders of al-'Awwamiyya, which continued far into the second half of the twentieth century. Al-Khunayzī, "Aḍwā' 'Alā Malaf (Waq'at -l-Sharba)."

169 See chapter 5 in this book.



FIGURE 6 Ruins of the Qal'at al-Qatif in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi

given by al-'Awwami, himself son of a prominent family of notables who resided in the Qal'a. According to al-'Awwami, the term *qal'awi* is derived from the Qal'at al-Qatif, the fortified center of the town of Qatif, where the most prominent and influential families of notables traditionally resided and occupied their political offices. In contrast, the term *barran* means "located outside" the walls or "in the open land." The terms held a political connotation as well. While Qal'awi was equated with intelligence and reason, Barrani was used synonymously for zealotry or a lack of reason.¹⁷⁰

Very telling is also the settling of the al-Nimr rebellion, which happened only after Ibn Sa'ud had put an end to the uprising of the Ikhwan and restored his political authority. Following the plea of a group of prominent notables from the Qal'a, Ibn Sa'ud came to Qatif to confer with the petitioners. As a result, taxes were lowered and a general amnesty granted to the rebels. Ibn

170 Al-'Awwami, *Al-Haraka al-Wataniyya*, vol. 1, 231. In the novel *Adama*, Turki al-Hamad's main protagonist Hisham is told about Barranis and Qal'awis in Qatif by the Shi'i Marxist Mansur. Turki al-Hamad. *Adama. A Novel*, transl. Robin Bray (Saqi Books, 2003), 37–38. *Adama* is the first book of a trilogy, followed by *Shumaisi* and concluded by *Karadib*.

Suwaylim was dismissed as governor.¹⁷¹ On this occasion, Ibn Sa‘ud guaranteed religious freedom for the Shi‘a of Qatif. However, restrictions on public Shi‘i ceremonies remained intact in al-Hasa, where Saudi rule had not been met with the same resistance as in Qatif and where a confessionally mixed society demanded that Shi‘i practices were followed in the more discrete environs of the home, the mosque and the *husayniyya*.¹⁷² Despite their relative “local autonomy in religious and legal life,” Ibn Sa‘ud mistrusted any displays of self-assertiveness by the Shi‘i communities of al-Ahsa’.¹⁷³ Goldberg’s conclusion that after the defeat of the Ikhwan in 1930, Saudi Shi‘a were integrated into Saudi society and economy, is probably a misapprehension.¹⁷⁴ However, the idea that sectarianism was a primordial condition, i.e. a historical incompatibility of the two religious groups which leads to recurrent conflict and strife, is not supported by historical evidence.¹⁷⁵ Clearly, religious affiliation was an important element of local identity and contributed to the internal organization of the local communities. However, historical evidence discloses a history of mostly peaceful cohabitation, which was disrupted at times by violent conflict rooted in economic hardship. Sectarianizing strategies by powerful players in the region appeared only at the brink of modernity and became a frequently used tool in the late phase of European imperialism as well as in the process of state formation under the Al Sa‘ud.¹⁷⁶ Rather than assuming sectarianism to be

171 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi‘a*, vol. 2, 262–64.

172 Ibrahim, *The Shi‘is of Saudi Arabia*, 26–27, Louër, “Identity Politics,” 222.

173 Steinberg, “The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia,” 252. When some individuals from Qatif attempted to promote the cultural education of local children, Ibn Sa‘ud perceived their efforts as possible political threat and stopped the initiative. British officials in Bahrain interpreted the issue as “gross oppression of the Shia in Hasa and Qatif” “Al-Bahrain Newspaper,” January 15, 1930–January 10, 1931, IOR R/15/2/1498.

174 Goldberg, “The Shi‘i Minority,” 237.

175 Sectarianism as a concept is permeable enough to offer “a definitional free-for-all,” as was pointed out by Fanar Haddad, “‘Sectarianism’ and its Discontents in the Study of the Middle East,” *Middle East Journal* 71, no. 3 (2017): 365, <https://doi.org/10.3751/71.3.12>. Makdisi found the term sectarianism to be “inherently elastic and ambiguous.” He also pointed to the fact that “... the Arabic term for sectarianism – al-ta’ifiyya – was coined as a negative term in relation to national unity” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century under the impact of European imperialism and Arab nationalism. Makdisi, “The Mythology of the Sectarian Middle East,” 4, 3. See also Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (University of California Press, 2000), 166–174.

176 See Courtney Freer, “The Symbiosis of Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Rentierism in the Saudi State,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2019), 91–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12287>. Freer uses a concept of “sectarianization” that differs from a (primordial) sectarianism, put forward by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, “Introduction:

“a static given,” the *sectarianization* of local politics was a purposeful process which included the “popular mobilization around particular (religious) identity markers.”¹⁷⁷ Sectarian discrimination, mostly at the hands of the Wahhabis, does not prove the existence of a *primordial* sectarianism, but rather the emergence of a “sectarian rhetoric” that accompanied the struggle towards a Saudi national unity.¹⁷⁸

Still, as has been argued above, the idea that Sunnis and Shi‘a in al-Ahsa’ were intertwined in a time-enduring conflict deeply permeated the minds of contemporary foreign agents in the region. In that regard the US American oil company management did not differ from British officials: Frank Jungers, Aramco President, Chairman and CEO who worked for the company from 1947–1978, states in his autobiography that “from the beginning, Aramco was acutely aware of compatibility issues between Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims.”¹⁷⁹ Vidal’s report on the oasis of al-Hasa, which he wrote when working for Aramco’s Research Division and which was published in 1955 (before turning the material into a doctoral thesis in 1964) is the only findable source which pays noticeable attention towards relations between Sunni and Shi‘i communities in al-Hasa in the mid-twentieth century. As such, it has been cited uncounted times since its publication. In his doctoral thesis of 1964, Vidal observed that the Shi‘i communities of al-Hasa suffered from traditional structures of underdevelopment and isolation. He noted the fact that local Shi‘a had “almost no opportunity to acquire a formal education” and that “Shiite children are usually not sent to school” and were thus “usually held away from higher positions in the government and elsewhere.” In short, Vidal found that “the Shiites of al-Hasa are in fact only second-class citizens.”¹⁸⁰ Interviews with Saudis from al-Hasa in 2013 and rare mentions of the subject in local historiography seem to confirm that in the middle of the twentieth century, especially Shi‘a found it difficult

The Sectarianization Thesis,” in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, ed. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Hurst&Company, 2017), 4–5, 8–9.

177 Hashemi and Postel, “Introduction: The Sectarianization Thesis,” 4–5. The authors argue further that authoritarianism in the Arab Middle East and its struggle for political survival is the main driver for the process of sectarianization.

178 For the link between sectarianism and nationalism in the Middle East see Ussama Makdisi, 2017, “The Mythology of the Sectarian Middle East,” *Papers of the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy*, 13 February, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/mythology-sectarian-middle-east>. Wahhabi ‘ulama’ traditionally used anti-Shi‘a rhetoric, which was sanctioned by the present Saudi state. Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi‘a Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

179 Frank Jungers, *The Caravan Goes On. How Aramco and Saudi Arabia Grew Up Together* (Medina Publishing, 2013), 62.

180 Vidal, “The Oasis of al-Hasa,” 83.

to escape from poverty and socio-cultural limitations in a hierarchical society. Also, Sunnis in the Eastern Province until today occasionally display feelings of paternalism, superiority or even contempt when talking about their local Shi'i compatriots, which seems to confirm Vidal's observations.¹⁸¹

To evaluate Vidal's account, it helps to put his work into the time and context of its creation. In many ways Vidal's systematic study resembles the one by the British colonial officer Lorimer, who also ranged amongst Vidal's most important sources. Vidal, despite his brilliance as an observer and his linguistic prowess, was understandably still a person of his time – a time that had not yet seen anti-colonial interventions in the science of anthropology.¹⁸² And there is also another factor that needs to be considered when using Vidal as a source on the relations that were formed by the religious communities of al-Hasa. Vidal himself explains his keen interest in the matter as rooted in his work for the oil company. In 1948, Aramco had discovered a giant oil field near al-Hasa which was named al-Ghawar.¹⁸³ The discovery meant that thousands of Saudi oil workers needed to be brought into the area where they would work and live together. Hence, Aramco's Research Division was asked to work out

181 Interview with former Aramco vice-president, Dhahran, May 18, 2013. Interview with a member of a prominent family from al-Hasa, Dammam, May 19, 2013. A former high executive manager of the oil company who grew up in al-Hasa and has a Shi'i background remembered the poverty as well as the strict social hierarchy in his home village and a society that "... did not offer [him] anything." Another interviewee from al-Hasa, son of a wealthy Sunni family from Hofuf, refused the existence of broader conflict and pointed towards the aspects of shared life and cohabitation of both groups, e.g. the local schools where children from both confessions were taught together. Asked specifically about the relations between Sunnis and Shi'a in al-Hasa, Sunnis from al-Hasa – perhaps displaying a particular kind of social blindness vis-à-vis underprivileged groups that is distinguishable as well in other societies – would usually answer that both groups used to live in harmony, just like fathers and their children (comparing the Sunnis to the former and the Shi'a to the later). The notion was mentioned by local acquaintances to Ulrike Freitag during her field trip to Hofuf in early 2016, which she kindly shared with the author. Still, the fact that the author interviewed known Shi'a during her field research in the Eastern Province in May and June 2013 caused many raised eyebrows and derogatory comments from her Sunni interviewees.

182 On the anthropological ideas current in Britain until 1945 see Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within. The Social History of British Anthropology 1885–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). For anti-colonial interventions in the science of anthropology see for instance Diane Lewis, "Anthropology and Colonialism," *Current Anthropology* 14, no. 5 (1973): 581–602, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2741037>; Faye V. Harrison, *Decolonizing Anthropology. Moving Forward Toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Association of Black Anthropologists/American Anthropological Association, 1991) and Richard G. Fox, *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present* (School of American Research Press, 1991).

183 The Ghawar oil field still holds the record of being the world's largest oil field.

recommendations on possible locations for labor camps which considered the costs as well as questions of feasibility and corporate security. As the bulk of workers in the Ghawar field would be provided by the towns and villages of al-Hasa, the young anthropologist and Arabist Vidal was given the task to conduct a thorough study on the oasis and its inhabitants which could also be used for Aramco's long range planning.¹⁸⁴ Hence, Vidal had his research interest already cut out for him by the oil company when he started to conduct his fieldwork in al-Hasa in 1951. In the preface of the resulting book, he wrote that

a vital question that has attracted the Company's interest with regard to the oasis, refers to the composition of the population of al-Hasa in terms of groups with different cultures. Aside from the more obvious components of religious denomination and residence patterns, how many and how large are the cultural differences between Sunnite farmers, Shiite farmers and craftsmen, and Sunnite Bedouins? Do these aspects concern only the more superficial aspects of material culture ..., or do they reach into the deeper lying, more covert elements of social structure and value systems?¹⁸⁵

Vidal's last research question was whether there were "any significant physical differences between the three groups."¹⁸⁶ In fact, Vidal's work was far from independently formed research, but instead an investigation guided by concerns for profit accumulation and workmen control that, in true "colonial" tradition, justified a keen interest in religious divisions. Furthermore, while there is nothing to suggest that Aramco solicited Vidal with this work on behalf of the Saudi government, Jones has pointed out that by its corporate ways of knowledge production in the interest of profit accumulation, "Aramco not only provided details of society and social relations to its state hosts, but also imparted a specific way of understanding society" and therefore also an understanding of "how to better manage" the local communities.¹⁸⁷ Vidal's report is thus not just an important source on the physical, social and cultural geographies of al-Hasa. It provides also an example for the oil company's view on local society, a perspective which has considerably influenced company planning and was a crucial element in the processes of oil urbanization and social engineering in the Eastern Province, which will be the subjects of the following chapter.

184 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 428.

185 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, first two unnumbered pages of the preface.

186 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, first two unnumbered pages of the preface.

187 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 104.

The Emergent Oil Conurbation

Sightings of petroleum spills near Qatif had been reported to Istanbul by the Ottoman governor of al-Ahsa' already at the turn of the twentieth century.¹ However, in 1908, British geologists ruled out the existence of large oil reservoirs at the Arab Gulf littoral.² This decision guided British policy in the region for the coming decades. Britain's interest in Middle Eastern oil henceforward focused on Iran and in 1912 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) started to ship Iranian oil from the Iran's province Khuzestan. After the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, British investors additionally reached for a majority share in the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) who held the concession for oil in Mesopotamia. Oil reservoirs in Iraq were prospected as enormous, which prompted the United States, back then only a minor player in the Middle East, to throw in their weight as war allies and demand a share of crude oil in the former Ottoman provinces for US oil companies.³ Negotiations culminated in the Red Line Agreement of 1928 which stipulated that Iraqi oil reserves had to be more or less evenly divided among the world's leading oil companies. The agreement further required that projecting and extracting oil in the former Ottoman territories and on the entire Arabian Peninsula must be carried out with the approval of all signatories. Henceforward Britain had to accept the presence of non-British oil enterprises in the region except in the territories already under control of APOC.⁴

At the same time, Ibn Sa'ud and his treasurer and later minister of finance, Abdullah Sulayman, were in dire need for money to sustain the fledgling Saudi state. Defeating the Ikhwan rebellion, ongoing armed conflict on the Saudi border with Yemen, and growing state expenditure had been financed through loans from wealthy merchants and by the levying of high taxes, which especially burdened poor crop producers. An opportunity arose in the figure of the British major, adventurer and businessman Frank Holmes who against all

1 Harold R. Dickson; *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (Allen & Unwin, 1956), 268–69.

2 Scott McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1 (Aramco Services Company, 2011), 15.

3 McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 21; Irvine Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and Saudi America: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy 1933–1950* (Princeton University Press, 1981), 16–21.

4 “The Red Line Agreement,” Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/red-line>; Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 94–98.

contrary theories firmly believed in the prospect of oil in al-Ahsa'. In 1923, with Holmes as main orchestrator, the Eastern and General Syndicate Ltd, London obtained permission by the Saudi ruler to investigate potential oil reservoirs. However, British oil companies still concentrated all efforts on Iraq and Persia and failed to show interest in Saudi oil. Accordingly, the concession was terminated in 1927 without any resulting discoveries of petroleum.⁵ To make things worse for the Saudi ruler, the world-wide economic crisis of 1929–1930 had reduced the stream of pilgrims during the yearly *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of Ramadan) to a mere trickle and the kingdoms' major source of income had ceased to generate the usual revenue. An additional source of income had to be found.⁶

In 1930, potential Saudi oil reserves were again considered a prospect as the US oil company Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) gained the concession for searching and exploiting oil in Bahrain through the newly formed Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO). BAPCO was established as a Canadian subsidiary of SOCAL to meet the requirements of the Red Line Agreement.⁷ Another interpretation suggests that Britain, who jealously guarded its political role in Bahrain, had succeeded in gaining oversight over BAPCO, making sure that the company de facto remained a "British entity" with a British management and exclusive British and Bahraini staff.⁸ Bahraini oil was finally struck in Jabal al-Dukhan in 1932, in viewing distance of the Saudi coast. This fed SOCAL's expectations to find oil as well in al-Ahsa'. Hence, SOCAL initiated an attempt to gain access to Saudi oil reservoirs. The Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) and the Eastern and General Syndicate joined the negotiations.⁹ Despite or perhaps because of the rather halfhearted British companies' attempts to gain the concession over al-Ahsa' for themselves SOCAL succeeded to win the oil concession in 1933. It has also been suggested that SOCAL won the concession due to its willingness to bid the highest price and – an argument that became central in development literature – due to agreeing to the development of the oil area.¹⁰ The original concession granted SOCAL the exclusive rights for searching, exploiting and exporting oil in Eastern Arabia for the length of a sixty-year

5 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 42–43; McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 14, 17; Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 314. Philby states 1928 as the year in which the first Saudi oil concession was terminated. St. John Philby, *Saudi Arabia* (Ernest Benn Limited, 1955), 329.

6 Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, 314–15.

7 Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and America*, 22–23.

8 McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 29.

9 Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, 330–31.

10 Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and America*, 24–25.

period. In the same year, SOCAL transferred the rights to its subsidiary, the California Standard Oil Company (CASOC). In 1944, CASOC changed its name to Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco).¹¹

By the time the oil concession was signed, the economic situation in al-Ahsa' had reached crisis point. In addition to the ever-rising taxes and the breakdown of the date and pearl markets, the world economic crisis brought large parts of al-Ahsa's sedentary and nomadic populations to the point of economic despair.¹² Many people were forced to emigrate, flocking out of al-Ahsa' in hundreds at once. In early 1933 the British political agent in Bahrain reported:

Recent arrivals from the mainland state that the inhabitants of al-Hasa are in a miserable state and are experiencing great hardships in paying the heavy taxes imposed on them. As a result many Baharina have fled to Bahrain and about two hundred have arrived at [the village of] Sanabis with their womenfolk, who were smuggled out of Qatif disguised as men.¹³

The people of Safwa and Sayhat in the Qatif oasis flatly refused to pay the taxes imposed on them and threatened to withstand any exactions by force.¹⁴ To make things even worse, a severe drought hit al-Ahsa' and the Najd at the turn of the year 1934.¹⁵ Ibn Sa'ud ordered the inhabitants of Jubail, Qatif and al-Hasa to pray for rain on which British reports sardonically remarked that the "people of the al-Hasa province are said to be praying against King Sa'ud because of his extortionate demands."¹⁶

11 McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 48–56; Arabian American Oil Company, *Aramco Handbook: Oil and the Middle East*, revised ed. (Arabian American Oil Company, 1968), 112; Twitchell, *Saudi Arabia*, 220–24.

12 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 269.

13 "Weekly Diary of News from Sa'udi Arabia. B.S. 1 of 1933," Political Agent, Bahrain, File 8/34 Saudi Arabia – Bahrain Weekly Diaries, IOR/R/15/2/330. Insertion added.

14 "Weekly Diary of News from Sa'udi Arabia. B.S. 1 of 1933," Political Agent, Bahrain, File 8/34 Saudi Arabia – Bahrain Weekly Diaries, IOR/R/15/2/330. The original wording is "... the tribes [sic] of Safwa and Saihat." Insertion added.

15 "Weekly Diary of News from Sa'udi Arabia. NO: 4 of 1934," Political Agent, Bahrain, File 8/34 Saudi Arabia – Bahrain Weekly Diaries, IOR/R/15/2/330.

16 "Weekly Diary of News from Sa'udi Arabia. NO: 2 of 1934," and "Weekly Diary of news from Sa'udi Arabia. NO: 11 of 1934," Political Agent, Bahrain, File 8/34 Saudi Arabia – Bahrain Weekly Diaries, IOR/R/15/2/330.

Meanwhile, US American geologists entered al-Ahsa' not even four months after the concession was signed and began with a surface examination of the coastal region south of the fishing village Jubail. By 1935, their works had been narrowed down to a hilly geological structure located south of Qatif, which they named "Dammam Dome" after the nearby smallish settlement and fort. In 1938, it became evident that Dammam Dome more than fulfilled the dreams shared by the American explorers and the Saudi king. Drilling works had finally hit a vast oil reservoir that allowed for commercial exploitation.¹⁷ Oil production in the years 1938/39 remained very modest, totaling in less than 3,5 million barrels per annum comparing to around two hundred million barrels in 1950 and nearly one billion in 1967.¹⁸ Still, oil royalties considerably increased the income of the Saudi state in the years 1938–1944.¹⁹ The Second World War brought oil production temporarily to a near complete stand still. Although SOCAL agreed to extend a considerable loan to the Saudi kingdom during the war years, Saudi Arabia remained largely dependent on British support – economically as well as politically. Britain also ensured that Iranian and Iraqi oil was sold to the Allied forces at the expense of US enterprises in the region.²⁰ Following an urgent request by Aramco to extend direct US aid to Saudi Arabia in order to stall British influence, the United States included the kingdom in their Lend-Lease Program in 1943. In the same year, Aramco succeeded in circumventing British restrictions on the international oil market and Saudi oil production resumed, quickly topping the output of the pre-war years. Saudi Arabia and the United States entered rapid diplomatic exchange which resulted inter alia in the extension of US supply of arms and military equipment to the kingdom and the training of the Saudi army by an US military mission in Dhahran in 1943, as well as the construction of the Dhahran military airfield and air force base which began in 1944. In the same year, the newly established US General Consulate moved into temporary offices in Aramco's small compound in Dhahran. Ibn Sa'ud's chance to shake off British threats towards Saudi independence – Britain had already installed dependent monarchies in Egypt, Iraq and Iran – arrived in 1945, when the United States entered the quest for hegemony over the Middle East and its oil reserves and

17 Arabian American Oil Company, *Aramco Handbook*, 113–17; Don E. Totten, *Erdöl in Sa'udi-Arabien* (Keyser'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung), 1959, 86–88.

18 Arabian American Oil Company, *Aramco Handbook*, 135.

19 Philby, *Sa'udi Arabia*, 333. Philby states that Saudi annual income in this period amounted to four or five million Pound Sterling with oil royalties adding another million.

20 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 323–24.

guaranteed the kingdoms independence from foreign occupation in return for maximum access to Saudi oil.²¹

1 Labor Camps, Boom Towns and Hinterlands

The discovery of oil changed al-Ahsa's physical and social geography within less than two decades to a degree that was unequalled in the region's long history. Aramco was the engine that powered development of main services in al-Ahsa' and in other parts of the kingdom including the capital Riyadh. In the words of Madawi al-Rasheed

ARAMCO filled a gap where public services, education and health facilities were underdeveloped and in some parts of the country virtually non-existent. In the absence of a state apparatus, ARAMCO was the state subcontractor. It provided vital services (water and health provisions) for the royal household in addition to highly visible public projects, consolidating royal authority.²²

However, this process was not a straightforward one. The oil company, because of understandable logistic challenges and operational difficulties as much as because of economic considerations, only gradually and often grudgingly agreed to undertake investments that lay outside its key economic interest to extract and sell oil. An immediate outcome of oil production was the urbanization of al-Ahsa'. The development of four major oil fields by the end of 1945 – Dammam, Qatif, Abu Hadriyya and Abqaiq – sparked the growth of industrial sites and new settlements in the area south and west of the Qatif and the Hasa oases and on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Back then, the emergent Saudi oil towns did not yet meet the size and geographic scope that are today associated with the Arab Gulf. Yet, thinking about the old and new settlements and industrial areas as an *emergent oil conurbation* will help to spot links and causalities of social, economic and political nature that might otherwise be easily overlooked and thus to understand the ways in which people acted upon or influenced the process of transformation. Noteworthy, in the mid-twentieth century, the boundaries between nomadic, rural and urban lives in this emergent oil conurbation were extremely fluent. Local Bedouin

21 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 325–27; Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and America*, 40–41, 46–56, 133–144; McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 49, 55; al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 100.

22 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 92.

gradually settled down on the fringes of industrial sites and oil towns, peasants worked on the oil fields and lived in labor camps during the workweek and returned to their farms on weekends, and townspeople continued to “exercise socio-economic influences on their hinterlands” as they had done in the centuries before.²³ Aramco as the mastermind behind and main actor of development and modernization of the Eastern Province must be regarded to a certain degree as corporate myth created in the development literature and company publications.²⁴ Particularly up to the 1970s, oil urbanization in al-Ahsa’ was an uneven, seldom straightforward process which was supervised and carried out by various actors. Furthermore, oil industrialization did not invariably translate into equal improvement of local conditions. Petro-capitalism created as well zones of blatant underdevelopment – the backside of modernization that lingered on the urban fringes and in the abandoned backyards of the new industrial glitz.

The German architect and urban planner Horst Reichert, who lived and worked in Dammam in 1976, identified four different forms of new urban development in the oil province: The first was the labor camp, the “prototype” or “primordial cell” of the industrialization process, which in some cases developed into real towns due to their function and geographic location, and in others grew only marginally and did not assume the character of truly urban settlements. The second type was the spontaneous settlement or shanty town on the fringes of labor camps and oil towns; the third were the small or medium sized towns that developed out of traditional settlements into commuter towns, usually in proximity to the oil metropolises. The fourth type were the new “native” or “Saudi” towns that developed into the administrative and commercial centers of the oil province.²⁵ When CASOC in 1938 developed the first permanent structures to facilitate oil exploration works and oil shipping from Saudi Arabia, it could do so without any restriction or interference by the Saudi government. The company’s administrative headquarter in Dhahran was

23 Al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 69.

24 Yizraeli, *Politics and Society*, 36, 56.

25 Horst Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province von Saudi-Arabien und Ihre Konsequenzen Für die Regional- und Stadtentwicklung*, Schriftenreihe des Städtebaulichen Instituts der Universität Stuttgart 10 (Karl Krämer, 1980), 96–97. Horst Reichert worked for many years as urban planner in different developing countries and taught international urban planning at the university of Stuttgart. In 1976, he was invited by the dean of the College of Architecture of the King Faisal University in Dammam to support the curriculum and teaching at the newly founded college. During his three months stay in Dammam, he collected the data for his PhD dissertation. He later conducted several urban planning projects in Saudi Arabia. Telephone-interview with Horst Reichert, urban planner and architect, February 16, 2022.

established in 1940, the Ra's Tanura pier and refinery in 1945. The old ports of Qatif and 'Uqair were found unsuited for the requirements of the oil industry – Qatif's shallow port was accessible only by the light local dhows used for trade between Qatif and Bahrain, while 'Uqair was located too far from the oil fields. Therefore, a new port was built near the village of al-Khobar in 1935, a technical decision that had lasting effects since it decided the location of the emergent economic heartland.²⁶

In 1947, the provincial governorate sought company assistance to bring the still largely un-harmonized growth of industrial development under a first general master plan for the development of the oil area.²⁷ Because now the port of al-Khobar also proved too shallow for large ships, a new port was completed in 1951 at the eastern rim of Dammam. The new seaport was connected via railroad to Dhahran, Hofuf and Abqaiq and led on from there to Riyadh.²⁸ It further facilitated the traditional traffic by boat between Bahrain and al-Ahsa' and thus added to the geographical permeability of the region. The twenty-five kilometers distance between Dammam and Bahrain was traditionally overcome by boat. In the oil era traders, laborers and entire families commuted by boat between Dammam and Bahrain, following work, business, and marriage opportunities by crossing forward and backward over the shallow waters of the Gulf. These boat trips continued to form one element of everyday life in the province until 1986, when the King Fahd Crossway between Dammam and Bahrain was opened.²⁹

In 1949, the US consulate moved to a new office at the road that connected Dhahran to al-Khobar, which also was the first paved road in al-Ahsa'.³⁰ The US consulate compound and chancery were completed between 1949–1951 near the Dhahran airfield which functioned as base for the US military mission

26 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 268, 288, 326–27.

27 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 298; Saba G. Shiber, "Report on City Growth in the Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia," in *Recent Arab City Growth – Al-Numū al-Ḥādir lil-Madīna al-'Arabīyya: Being Primarily an Arranged Selection of the Writer's Articles Appearing in the Kuwait and Lebanese Press During 1959–1967* (Kuwait Government, 1967), 430; Al-Hathloul, Saleh Ali and Saleh Anis-ur-Rahmaan, "The Evolution of Urban and Regional Planning in Saudi Arabia," *Ekistics* 52, no. 312 (1985): 206, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43620712>.

28 Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province*, 70.

29 Interview with the granddaughter of a big merchant from al-Ahsa', Dammam, May 15, 2013. She made the trip uncounted times during her childhood and youth after her grandfather had decided to move his family from Bahrain to Dammam in 1965. Informal conversation with a businessman from Dammam, Dammam, May 11, 2013. He also remembered his childhood trips between Bahrain and the Eastern Province.

30 Al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naḥl wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 145.



FIGURE 7 Detail from a map of the Dhahran area by Arabian American Oil Company, 1975. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

and Saudi air force, but was also used for civil purposes by Aramco and the US consulate. Attached to the oil operation sites grew permanent structures for the accommodation of US American oil company employees. Already in 1937, a number of American employees had brought their families into the oil operations area and family compounds, the so-called American camps, were built in Dhahran (1938), Ra's Tanura (1939) and Abqaiq (1944).³¹ In contrast, during that first stage of oil exploration, very little company investment took place in the development of the local communities. Local Saudi oil workers were expected to provide their own shelter as the oil company did not arrange for their accommodation. Thus, during the early phase of oil urbanization, wild grown agglomerations of *barastis* (*barasti*, pl. *barastiyya*), huts made from palm trunks and woven palm mats, and Bedouin tents emerged everywhere on the fringes of the oil operation sites. These make-shift formations formed the nuclei for the so-called Saudi labor camps of later decades. They were inhabited by workers only during the time of their employment, but soon developed into more permanent communities as the provincial authorities gradually extended some form of government. Already in the late 1930s, the Saudi government began to gradually assume responsibility for the emergent communities through the appointment of a *qadi* and through the stationing of police forces in each of the three districts. Mosques were built on government

31 Reichert, *Die Verstadterung der Eastern Province*, 69; McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 83.

costs.³² The same applied to Bedouin encampments in the area. Starting from the mid-1950s, these settlements gradually developed into permanent town-sites and acquired a minimum of infrastructures.³³

1.1 *The “Saudi Towns” Dammam and al-Khobar*

The establishment of the al-Khobar and Dammam ports including custom areas kicked off the growth of the two villages into smallish towns.³⁴ In US documents of that time, the two towns are often called “Saudi towns” or even “native towns” due to their historical traits into pre-oil times and their growth independent from the company. The original settlements of Dammam and al-Khobar had been founded by members of the ‘Utayba tribe who arrived at the Gulf shore opposite Bahrain during the late eighteenth century. During the early twentieth century, the then abandoned settlements and fort were inhabited by members of the Dawasir tribe who had emigrated from Bahrain but traced its origins back to southern Najd from where the Dawasir had left to Bahrain during in the mid-nineteenth century. Once settled, the Dawasir sustained their lives through pearling. Dammam and al-Khobar belonged to the legal and administrative district of Qatif and depended economically on Qatif as marketplace.³⁵ During the initial years of oil exploration in al-Ahsa’, many Dawasir became workers on the oil fields while others specialized in selling a variety of goods to the growing community of oil workers and thus lay the foundation for the later development of the two towns.³⁶ Additionally, prominent local merchant families such as the Dossari from Bahrain, the Ghosaibi from Hofuf and the Al Khalifa from Mubarraz began to organize local trade with construction materials and foodstuff while others such as the ‘Ali Tamimi, Qahtani, Fu’ad and Rashid established construction firms under sub-contract with Aramco that carried out contracting work for the oil company and the Saudi government.³⁷

In 1942, the Saudi government established the municipality of al-Khobar with the two subdivisions Dammam and Dhahran. Thus, Dammam and al-Khobar began their gradual rise towards the administrative and commercial

32 Al-Subay’i, *Iktishāf al-Naḥl wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 145–59; Jon Parssinen and Kaizir Talib, “A Traditional Community and Modernization: Saudi Camp, Dhahran,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 35, no. 3 (April 1982): 14–15.

33 Al-Subay’i, *Iktishāf al-Naḥl wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 141.

34 Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province*, 69.

35 Al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 283–86; al-Subay’i, *Iktishāf al-Naḥl wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 143.

36 Al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 284, 327.

37 Field, *The Merchants*, 213.

centers of the oil area, while the importance of Qatif as local marketplace declined considerably. This decline had been accelerated as the pearl trade, which half a century earlier had been Qatif's major source of income, had practically come to an end and what remained of the Gulf's pearl industry was no longer based in Bahrain, but in Dubai.³⁸ In 1952, Dammam replaced Hofuf as provincial capital of the newly-established Eastern Province, which comprised the old governorate of al-Ahsa' with its oil installations and the vast uninhabited Rub' al-Khali desert.³⁹ In contrast to the company sites in Ra's Tanura, Dhahran and Abqaiq, which were planned and built by the oil company, the development of Dammam and al-Khobar was supervised by the Saudi government. The initial development of the two places involved just a minimum of urban planning.⁴⁰ People simply moved into the area and took any available land for the erection of basic shelters from local materials and scraps. During this early phase of urbanization "land ownership could be neither ascertained nor recorded and temporary possession was based on actual occupancy."⁴¹ A land-use-system for the two future townsites was established in 1939 upon Ibn Sa'ud's expressed wish to develop the two Saudi towns. The oil company oversaw the creation of a master plan for urban development. The plan envisioned a layout of streets running from north to south and from east to west in an iron grit pattern. In between the crisscrossing streets land was divided into plots that were assigned specific uses such as for the construction of private dwellings, commercial buildings and administrative structures.⁴² Out of concern for the frequent destruction of whole neighborhoods by fire, houses in the two towns were not allowed to be built higher than one floor except for the first line of buildings facing the coast. Construction had to be carried out in stone or cement and the building of barastis and wooden houses was prohibited except in some places in the distant south of al-Khobar that were located far from oil company installations.⁴³

In 1949, a royal order instigated the development of Saudi communities in Dhahran, al-Hasa and the surrounding areas. Up to that year no comprehensive plans existed for the development of al-Ahsa's old communities. The still limited state budget was largely consumed by construction projects in the towns

38 Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 262.

39 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 209, 268, 290; al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya*, 143.

40 Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province*, 70.

41 Shiber, "City Growth," 430.

42 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 209; al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya*, 146.

43 Majlis al-Shūrā, document no. 102, Jumāda al-Thāni 7, 1362h/June 9, 1943, IPA.

of the Hijaz, which were involved in the annual Hajj, and in the capital Riyadh. Following the royal plans of 1949, representatives of the Ministry of Finance were sent to al-Ahsa' in order to inquire with the municipalities of Hofuf, Qatif, al-Khobar and Dammam what projects were most urgently needed. Their task was as well to organize a budget for each municipality and to win over Aramco planners and engineers for the project.⁴⁴

As a considerable part of the land included in the planning fell under the oil reservation, the provincial government was required to pay a rent to the oil company if the land was used for other purposes.⁴⁵ These circumstances sustained the Saudi notion that local communities should be developed by and at the expense of the oil company, a claim which Aramco could never entirely disengage from. As a compromise between the Saudi government and the oil company, Aramco facilitated the planning and building of Dammam and al-Khobar through commissioning international firms like the Californian Bechtel and the Greek Doxiades with the urban planning. Furthermore, the company helped local contractors to set up their business and take over construction works as well as the provision of basic services in the two developing townsites.⁴⁶ Nowadays, a visit to the Dammam Chamber of Commerce illustrates how the public remembrance of local entrepreneurs and their role in the development of the oil towns forms the Saudi counter-narrative to the Aramco-sponsored version of company driven community development.⁴⁷

In the three decades between 1938 and 1970 Dammam and al-Khobar grew into smallish towns, numbering several thousand inhabitants by the early 1950s and sixty- and fifty thousand inhabitants in 1965 and 1967, respectively.⁴⁸ By the late 1960s Dammam, al-Khobar and Qatif had received a system for the provision of fresh water, which was initially connected to the upper and middle-class neighborhoods inhabited by Aramco employees, civil servants

44 Majlis al-Shūrā, document no. 30, Šafar 2, 1368H/December 2, 1948, IPA.

45 Wuzāra al-Māliyya, document no. 13191, Jumāda al-Thānī 10, 1380H/November 28, 1960, IPA. The oil concession effectively put most of the land in the 829,000 square kilometers large concession area under reserve of the oil company. The oil reservation will be discussed in the section on "Conflicts Over Land and Expropriation" in chapter 3 in this book.

46 Interview with amateur historian from a prominent local family, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.

47 In 2013, the Chamber of Commerce building in Dammam showed a permanent exhibition about famous local entrepreneurs and their roles in the construction of the oil towns and foundation of local businesses. The narrative has been repeated to the author various times by the people of al-Sharqiyya who are extremely proud of their industrious founding fathers.

48 Reichert, *Die Verstadterung der Eastern Province*, 71–72.

and merchants. In 1973, more than forty percent of the houses in al-Khobar and roughly seventy percent in Dammam were connected to the freshwater system.⁴⁹ In contrast, local villages remained without a freshwater system for a much longer time. In 1980, most people in the Eastern Province still lived in traditional clay houses either in villages or smaller towns. Fresh water supply and garbage disposal were unsatisfactory and sewage and energy supply still waited to be implemented.⁵⁰

By 1980, the impact of oil urbanization in Dammam and al-Khobar could be discerned as well in their spatial organization. Reichert described the two towns as primarily structured by oversized highways and a grit of building blocks which remained rather disconnected from each other. The towns were only accessible via motor highways; pedestrians were not provided with commuting space. Reichert did not detect public spaces for social interaction but instead found highly anonymous and isolated buildings surrounded by man-high walls.⁵¹ As elsewhere in the country and in fact in the Middle East, foreign firms made high profits through the provision of master plans and ready-made architecture and technical solutions to the local municipalities whose workability was more than questionable. Sewage systems did not work or were altogether missing, so that the few asphalted streets were flooded during occasional heavy rainfalls. Public buildings did not withstand the extreme heat during the summer and an oversized motorway system including electric lighting overwhelmed the local electric supply system.⁵²

The spatial and social organization of these new towns differed considerably from al-Ahsa's old oasis towns with their intimate narrow streets, semi-public cul-de-sacs, extended family homes and strong communal and economic ties between the members of urban and village communities. In contrast, the new towns apparently provided spaces of relative anonymity, as the mention of secret gambling places in a local newspaper implies.⁵³ Apart from such early proof of new urban liberties (although clearly illegal) older forms of affiliation and social bonds (as well as control) partly endured new urban organization. Immigrants from nearby Bahrain or Central Arabia brought with them their

49 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 318, 350.

50 Reichert, *Die Verstadterung der Eastern Province*, 75.

51 Reichert, *Die Verstadterung der Eastern Province*, 97.

52 Telephone-interview with Horst Reichert, urban planner and architect, February 16, 2022.

53 "Secrets," January 27, 1956, Digest of selected items from Akhbār al-Dhahran, Dammam fortnightly, 28 September 1955–29 April 1957, vol. 1, no. 26, Arabian American Oil Company, Government Relations Dept., Arabian Research Division, Stanford University, P.T. Hoover Institution (hereafter: Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran).

local identities. Moreover, moving to either of the new oil towns was facilitated by tribal and family bonds or business relations. Members of such networks shared flats in the new towns, they lived in the same streets and populated the same neighborhoods. These networks were so strong that on the occasion of public festivities or a royal visit to the oil area, each community decorated their neighborhood with arches and banners that proudly displayed their nationalities or regional origin.⁵⁴

1.2 *Social Engineering in the Labor Camps*

When oil production peaked after the end of the Second World War and thousands of labor migrants came into the oil area, accommodation for Saudi and third nation workers became a major issue of oil development. As other authors have shown before, adverse work and living conditions in provisional labor camps became the rallying cry for workers' protests.⁵⁵ In the early camp-like structures, Saudi oil workers lived in palm huts, tents and occasional brick houses. Water had to be carried from wells and was cooled in large clay pots, toilet facilities were informal, and fires caused by candles and kerosene stoves were frequent.⁵⁶ Apart from the basic Saudi attempts at government mentioned above, the inhabitants of the early "native" oil camps were left to their own devices. Furthermore, the government followed the notion that it was Aramco's responsibility to provide materially for the Saudi oil workers. As a result of labor strikes in 1944, 1945 and 1953 it urged the company to improve the situation of its Saudi employees.⁵⁷

Aramco grudgingly agreed to provide basic accommodation for Saudi oil workers and hence basic L-shaped dormitories were built by Yemeni carpenters and masons. Housing designs were copied from the Bahrain Petroleum Company and included double bedrooms, electric lights as well as shared kitchen, toilet and bathing facilities. However, there were not enough

54 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Persian Gulf," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 31, 1966, POL 2 SAUD, General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, National Archives and Research Association, Maryland (hereafter: NARA); Interview with amateur historian from a prominent local family, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.

55 The presently most detailed studies are Alḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*; Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*; Ghrawi, "Structural and Physical Violence."

56 Parssinen and Talib, "A Traditional Community and Modernization," 14–15; 'Awwami, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 112–13.

57 Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 92–110. See for instance "Strike of Two Thousand Saudi Arab Employes of the Arabian American Oil Company at Dhahran," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 28, 1945, 890F.5045/7-2845, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

dormitories to house all workers and temporal housing in tents continued to exist parallel to the new permanent structures.⁵⁸ The new dormitories were overcrowded and did little to change the adverse living condition for Saudi oil workers that are often repeated in literature and local narrative. Illustrative of the living conditions in the company's Saudi camps is the fact that Typhoid fever, a disease caused by bacteria infected drinking water and food, recurred in Aramco facilities throughout the 1940s and 1950s and reached its peak in 1956 with eighty-four reported cases. It declined steadily afterwards, due to the introduction of anti-epidemic campaigns by the oil company in 1955.⁵⁹

To stay clear from any accusations of racist discrimination, Aramco in 1950 introduced a system of formal classification of its employees into senior, intermediate and general ranks. This new system barely veiled the fact that Saudis formed the bulk of Aramco's unskilled general workers. Foreign Arab and South Asian translators, clerks and teachers were classified into intermediate ranks. Americans and the small number of Europeans then employed by Aramco were exclusively considered senior staff. The spatial organization of Aramco's company towns enforced national and ethnic segregation and isolation of the different staff ranks. Senior camps were almost absolutely US American, intermediate camps largely South Asian, and general camps were overwhelmingly Saudi.⁶⁰ Yet, in disregard of the actual intentions of the staff ranking system, employees continued to use the informal names "Saudi camp" and "American camp." To counter this widespread habit, Aramco looked into local history and colloquial Arabic for more "natural" names for the Saudi communities in the three industrial districts and finally settled on "Salama" and "Rahima" for the general camps in Dhahran and Ra's Tanura, respectively.⁶¹ Aramco's policy of segregation was palpable also in the physical geography of labor camps. Senior camps, where the company was responsible for security and order, were fenced and surrounded by roads and wastelands. In the physical outlay of the industrial zones, intermediate camps functioned as "buffer zones" between senior and general camps. By 1950, intermediate workers had been provided with air-conditioned housing, running water, a swimming pool and movie theater. Meanwhile, American camps in the three oil districts had

58 Ahmari, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*, 165–67; Parssinen and Talib, "A Traditional Community and Modernization," 14–15.

59 Carol Hicke, *American Perspectives of Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Producing Company, 1930s to 1980s: Oral History Transcript* (University of California, 1995), vi.

60 McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 165.

61 Ghrawi, "Structural and Physical Violence," 247; Telephone-interview with Jim Mandaville, former Aramco employee, Arabian Affairs Division, March 28, 2013; Interview with amateur historian from a prominent local family, al-Khobar, 19 May 2013.

assumed the looks and atmosphere of the typical white American middle-class suburb replete with the value systems and social hierarchies that marked US society at that time. One wife of an Aramco employee even bitterly remarked on the “Texas herrenvolk atmosphere” that pervaded American camp.⁶² The underlying racism and disregard for the needs of Saudi oil workers had a deep impact on the fledgling Saudi communities in the industrial core land. One retired Saudi Aramco executive manager who had started his career as mail boy in Ra’s Tanura in 1957 remembered that his wish to escape the heat and cramped living in Saudi camp ultimately was his motivation to obtain company training and climb the job ladder.⁶³ Many others were instead (or additionally) driven to resistance and open rebellion.⁶⁴

The distinction of staff levels permeated the whole organization of oil labor in the company towns. All workers carried colored badges and identification cards that featured their employment numbers and identified them as members of their respective ranks.⁶⁵ Strict segregation along ethnic and national lines had been fashioned by APOC in Abadan and IPC in Kirkuk and was replicated in the oil towns built in the first half of the twentieth century all over the Middle East. It followed a common pattern “dictated by the requirements of the oil industry” to enforce the industrial hierarchy and to secure discipline.⁶⁶ Aramco furthermore learned from the experiences made by CASOC in building Bahrain’s oil town Awali which served as blueprint for its own towns with their embedded hierarchies and organizational systems.⁶⁷ For sure, the racism displayed in Aramco’s townsites (and frequently also by Aramco staff and management) reflected the racism ingrained in US society and resource extracting industries, yet it was also a result of exposure to British “colonial” practices and the accompanying mindsets which were swiftly adopted and copied by Aramco staff.⁶⁸

62 Robert Vitalis, “Aramco World: Business and Culture on the Arabian Oil Frontier,” in *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 163, 160–66.

63 Interview with former Aramco employee, Dhahran, May 14, 2013.

64 Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom*, 88–120.

65 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Haraka al-Wataniyya*, 112. The numbering system was introduced in 1938. Mc Murray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 80.

66 Ehsani, “Social Engineering,” 376.

67 McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 80; Fuccaro, “Arab Oil Towns as Petro-Histories,” 138.

68 Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom*, 57, 119; Fuccaro, “Introduction,” 4–5. On a detailed discussion of the US racism that permeated the oil industry at the time as well as Aramco’s company towns see Robert Vitalis, “Black Gold, White Crude: Race and the Making of the World Oil Frontier,” in *The United States and the Middle East: Diplomatic and Economic Relations in*

In contrast to the image of well-ordered and planned corporate community development, the growth of the so-called Saudi camps was largely unregulated. During the 1940s, Saudi camps developed into “crowded places that bustled with oil workers and folk that had no formal affiliation with the oil company.”⁶⁹ People from the area began to set up their own small-scale businesses in and around general camps, where they opened makeshift grocery stores and restaurants or ran repair shops or sold their products from open trucks. Male relatives of oil workers moved into the bachelor dormitories that were provided by the oil company while they looked for a job in the oil industry or worked for one of Aramco’s numerous sub-contractors. Saudi oil workers who had brought their families into the oil production area frequently had no choice but to start a home in the informal townships that grew on the edges of the company towns. Local Bedouin who worked for the company on a day-to-day basis camped in vicinity to the oil camps and industrial sites.⁷⁰

In 1956, the oil company became increasingly worried about the thousands of Bedouin from the Murra tribe who flocked into the Ghawar field area, where they had access to freshwater wells and could camp close to relatives who had taken up jobs in the oil sector or joined the Saudi National Guard, an armed force into which parts of the Ikhwan movement had been absorbed and that became routinely employed in the defense of internal security.⁷¹ Nassir al-Ajmi, Saudi Aramco vice-president from 1988 to 1993, remembered his childhood in the Bedouin encampment near al-Ghawar as a life at the brink between tradition and modernity.⁷² Another Bedouin encampment in the area was al-Thuqba, which was located between al-Khobar and Dhahran and named after a local water well.⁷³ The Bedouin from al-Thuqba were poor and, as one long-time inhabitant of al-Khobar recounted, usually kept to themselves.⁷⁴ Symptomatically, travelling between al-Thuqba and al-Khobar was difficult, due to the lack of transportation facilities. The majority of Bedouin from al-Thuqba who worked for the oil company did so on short term contracts and did not retain the status of regular employees nor were they eligible for

Historical Perspective, ed. Abbas Amanat (Yale Center For International and Area Studies Council on Middle East, 2000).

69 Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence,” 245–46.

70 “Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company,” WJ. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA; al-Subay’i, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya*, 138–39.

71 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 76–78; Niblock, “*The Saudi Arabian Political System*,” 88.

72 Nassir Ajmi, *Legacy of a Lifetime* (North Star Publishing, 1995), 27–29.

73 Al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 331.

74 Interview with amateur historian from a prominent local family, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.

company services like health care.⁷⁵ In 1965, Vidal scribbled a note to William Mulligan, Head of Aramco's Arabian Research Division, who was planning to write a history of the division. "The Bedouin in Arabian Affairs," Vidal wrote, "make a fine distinction among themselves, as to their employee status: Some are 'abu nimrah,' the ones with batch numbers, or regular employees. The others, casual relators, are just called 'ahl al-Kis,' the people of the Sack."⁷⁶ This was probably meant as an amusing linguistic vignette. However, it also was a succinct expression for a harsh reality, namely that a considerable portion of Aramco's Saudi employees was basically rightless and could be "sacked" anytime.

The informal shanty towns on the edges of the new industrial districts were regulated neither by the company nor by the Saudi government. They were not included in any plan for development and remained in their slum-like condition for decades to come. In 1948, a report issued by the US consulate in Dhahran stated that "the conditions existing in Dhahran, where a number of married Arab workers have set up their own married quarters, are intolerable and ... are a disgrace to Aramco and American enterprises."⁷⁷ The extent of informal housing in the oil conurbation and its continued existence can only be fathomed from archival sources. Also in 1948, a disastrous fire hit a labor camp (probably for contractor workers) in Sayhat in the Qatif oasis where, as a consequence, between three and four thousand people had to be moved to barasti camps in the local towns.⁷⁸ When in 1954 another fire caused by a defective kerosene stove cooker destroyed between one and two thirds of the so-called Bedu camp in Abqaiq, the company took pride in supplying food rations for one thousand affected people.⁷⁹ More than one decade later, an

75 "Biographical information on Muhammad b. Salim," August 24, 1952, Box 7 Folder 16, Bedouin June 1947–August 1978, Mulligan Papers; "Local News Briefs," January 15, 1956, vol. 1, no. 24, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

76 Handwritten note dated October 1965 and signed FeV, Box 3, Folder 25, ARD, Chronological, August 1965 to December 1965, Mulligan Papers. While the linguistic worth of this note is unclear, its intent tells us a lot about work conditions at Aramco. There are more examples in the Mulligan Papers for the seemingly strange expressions that resulted from translating English expressions into Arabic and the humorous and playful way in which Saudis applied them.

77 "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

78 "Minutes of U.S. Consulate Meeting," October 6, 1948, Thomas C. Barger, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

79 "Items of Interest from the Relations Meeting of August 2, 1954," Box 2, Folder 43, Mulligan Papers.

article in *The Economist* mentioned a “Tin village” near Dhahran, where “Saudi contractors live in abject poverty and degradation.”⁸⁰ Who “told the world that Aramco has lifted the people of the Eastern Province from their misery and given them opportunities to live as human beings,” an article in a nationalist Saudi newspaper from the Eastern Province commented in 1955, should have “visited the shacks of Subaikhah and al-Thuqbah ... [and] would not have hesitated a minute to condemn himself as a traitor.”⁸¹

While informal settlements and contractor camps fell out of all government or corporate planning, the provincial government had acknowledged the increasing size and importance of the Saudi communities in the three industrial districts by the mid-1950s, giving them the status of municipalities.⁸² Each “Saudi camp” by then featured a police station, a jail, haphazardly erected shops, restaurants, coffeehouses, sport fields and at least one larger mosque. The latter played an important role as places for assembly, where workers met after Friday prayers and discussed labor and political issues or watched the punishment of wrongdoers by the local Saudi authorities.⁸³ Still, Aramco was partly held responsible for making improvements in local infrastructure, e.g. in the case of al-Salama, where in 1958 the company replaced the old shack buildings of the local market by ninety-six new stalls which provided space for most of the resident merchants. In the late 1950s Aramco assisted the local municipalities in clearing company townsites from shack buildings, which were considered “eyesores,” and to move their inhabitants from the area. However, this caused difficulties, because many people refused to leave their dwellings.⁸⁴

In 1981, al-Salama was demolished to make room for the modern campus of the University of Petroleum and Minerals, the former Petroleum College which had been founded in Dhahran in 1963. The university had inherited “the Camp,” as al-Salama was still widely called, from the oil company. The demolition of al-Salama left its inhabitants bereft of their homes and workspaces and

80 Special correspondent, 1961, “The Awakening Saudis,” *The Economist*, June 10.

81 “Secrets,” December 1, 1955, vol. 1, no. 21, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

82 Special correspondent, 1961, “The Awakening Saudis,” *The Economist*, June 10; Jon Parssinen and Kaizir Talib, “The Development of Dhahran (Saudi Camp) as a Community,” in *The Arab City: Its Character and Islamic Cultural Heritage*, ed. Ismail Serageldin and Samir El-Sadek (Arab Urban Development Institute/Arab Towns Organization, 1982), 180; “Preliminary Report Baladiyah Election Rahima,” May 22, 1960, Box 3, Folder 1, ARD, Chronological Files, May–June 1960, Mulligan Papers.

83 Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence,” 247.

84 “Summary of Activities January 1958,” February 20, 1958, and “Summary of Activities February 1958,” March 15, 1958, Box 2, Folder 18, Local Government Relations, K.A. Webster, Mulligan Papers.



FIGURE 8 Markets next to mosque, Dhahran (al-Salama), Saudi Arabia, 1947 by Harold Corsini. Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville

effectively eradicated Dhahran's long-established Saudi community. The only structures that were kept intact were the bachelor dormitories that had been erected in the early 1950s for Saudi general workers. They were later used by the university as student dormitories.⁸⁵

Considerations of industrial security and the increasingly politicized question of family housing for Saudi employees prompted the company to further develop the "native" towns and villages located in the vicinity of the oil installations to accommodate the growing Saudi population. Aramco never fully succeeded to explain to the Saudi government why family housing in the industrial districts was provided for American employees but not for Saudi workers. Whereas job-level classification was a ready argument – general staff was simply not eligible for accommodation exceeding shared rooms in bachelor dormitories – the Saudi government repeatedly requested a solution for Aramco's married Saudi employees after Saudi workers protested against their living conditions in the provisional labor camps in 1945 and 1948.⁸⁶ The government probably also had in mind substantial company assistance in developing the Saudi communities in the province. However, Aramco hesitated to build family homes for her Saudi employees on company grounds (i.e. in

85 Parssinen and Talib, "A Traditional Community and Modernization," 14–17.

86 Aḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*, 162–67.



FIGURE 9 Old oil workers' dormitories (former general camp) on the campus of the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi

the three industrial districts), since it was hardly practicable to reclaim these houses after an employee quitted his job with the company.⁸⁷ Ultimately, it was decided in 1951 that the company would support her Saudi employees by granting interest free loans as well as technical knowhow for the development of so-called workers' neighborhoods (*ahya' ummaliyya*) in the new Saudi towns Dammam and al-Khobar, Madinat Abqaiq, and Rahima. Following a revision of Aramco's Home Ownership Program in 1956 the home scheme was extended towards Safwa and Sayhat in the Qatif oasis and further included the possibility to build or modernize family homes in the local villages and existing communities. Land in the newly established townsites was distributed for free for participants in the program, in contrast to the rising prices for construction land in the already developed neighborhoods in the local towns and villages. As a result, the population of the labor camps in Dhahran and Ra's Tanura "began to decline significantly in the late 1950s." By 1962, almost sixty percent

87 "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944-1949, RG 84, NARA.

of the Saudi employees had moved from the company's bachelor quarters into the two oases. Many others had bought houses in Dammam and al-Khobar.⁸⁸

Aramco's home ownership scheme was also an instrument of social engineering.⁸⁹ It created lasting economic bonds between the company and her Saudi employees which remained in effect for years or even decades into the future. Furthermore, it also was a feasible instrument of controlling an employee's behavior. In essence, a Saudi employee who wanted to obtain a company loan for building his family home needed to belong to a higher income group, must have served the company for several years and be able to present a clear work record. Similar conditions were to be met for successful applications for company training. Repayments of loans were automatically subtracted from the employee's monthly salary.⁹⁰ By the 1960s, when Saudis began to rise into higher job levels and the new company policies regarding the housing of Saudi employees were put into effect, population numbers in the Saudi "camp-towns" declined further.⁹¹ The preceding two decades of segregation and the deeply ingrained social hierarchies that marked the cohabitation of Americans, Saudis and other nationalities in the company towns had apparently also created feelings of resentment and discontent especially among Saudi residents which occasionally turned into violent aggression. Archival sources imply a "continuing disparity between the Saudi and American communities that inhabited the oil conurbation, which was furthered by mutual perceptions of cultural 'otherness' and incompatibility."⁹²

88 "Preliminary Results – Home Ownership Survey," September 25, 1961, Phebe A. Marr, Box 3, Folder 9, ARD, Chronological Files, September–October 1961, Mulligan Papers; Dalal M. Alsayer, "Paternal Partnerships: How Aramco Transformed Saudi Environments, Bodies, Minds, and Homes, c. 1930–1970s," *Planning Perspectives* 40, no. 1 (2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2024.2371947>; Ian Seccombe and Richard Lawless, *Work Camps and Company Towns: Settlement Patterns and the Gulf Oil Industry* (Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1987), 75–76. Seccombe and Lawless falsely state 1953 as starting year for the HOP.

89 On social engineering in APOC's oil towns, which developed into blueprints for Middle Eastern oil towns, see Ehsani, "Social Engineering."

90 Aḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*, 180; al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 318; Interview with former Aramco employee, Dammam, 19 May 2013.

91 Seccombe and Lawless, *Work Camps and Company Towns*, 76.

92 Ghrawi, "Tamed Urban Revolution," 115. See also Peter C. Speers, Interview by Carol Hicke, *American Perspectives of Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Producing Company, 1930s to 1980s: Oral History Transcript* (University of California, 1995), 508. See also Thomas F. O'Dea, "Social Change in Saudi Arabia: Problems and Prospects," unpublished report (Special Study Group, Feb.–Aug. 1963), J. Willard Marriot Library, Special Collections. This chapter relies on the summary of O'Dea's report in Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 256–62. "Incidents

1.3 *Decline of the Oases*

By the mid-1970s, the economically thriving new oil towns on the Saudi Gulf littoral were commonly referred to as the Golden Triangle, whereas the Hasa and Qatif oases had lost their former political and economic importance. The economic decline of Ahsa's old oasis districts that began with the economic world crisis and the collapse of date prices was further accelerated by the growth of the oil industry. Local agriculture was no longer life sustaining so that local farmers increasingly looked for jobs in the oil industry. The introduction of a monetary system which gradually replaced payments in shares of produced crops together with the relatively higher salaries paid in the oil sector, the increase of imports and change of local diet, and not least the over usage of land and water resources and rising land value due to new construction projects all contributed to the rapidly decreasing importance of agriculture as economic occupation.⁹³

Al-Hasa's urban based merchants and landowners, who were mostly of Najdi origin and dominated privy and municipal councils in Hofuf as well as in the new oil towns, had early on entered business alliances with the Saudi rulers and were able to take over local commerce, trade and construction business in the oil province.⁹⁴ Vidal observed that "besides working in the gardens and as craftsmen many Shiites have now become contractors, and since they will accept any kind of work, from the bottom on up, they are forging ahead."⁹⁵ In fact, Vidal found that villagers from al-Hasa, who had left the oasis and did contracting work in the oil sector, often returned to their home villages with new "wealth" and with the prospect of rising into the village aristocracy.⁹⁶ Noticeable, Vidal's account of the opportunities linked to working as contractors differ from the bleak image that transpires from the bulk of sources. It is thinkable that both perspectives to a certain extent are true, since contractors from the old local communities could probably avoid some of the hardships of a contractor worker's existence by tapping into their local family and economic networks and establishing their own small contractor firms – resources that many Bedouin and people from more distant parts of the kingdom did not

Involving U.S. Personnel and Saudi Police at Dhahran Airfield," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 22, 1960, 786A.56311/8-2260 HBS, General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

93 Philipp, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa*, 264–65; Subayrī, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya*, 134–35.

94 Field, *The Merchants*, 213.

95 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 85–86.

96 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 88.

have. Also, as a company employee, Vidal probably was more inclined to highlight the advantages of contractor work and the successful examples rather than the existing problems. After 1945, large size immigration from al-Hasa into the emergent oil towns took place. However, the decline of the oasis population had been reversed by the 1970s. In comparison with the smaller and still largely agricultural Qatif, the old capital and commercial center of Hofuf and the surrounding Hasa oasis were by then able to regain parts of their former economic status. Hasawis who took up work in Abqaiq returned to their homes with ten times the income that they had gained as farmers and began to build new family homes in the oasis. The growth of Hofuf had already gained momentum in 1944 due to the Abqaiq field discovery.⁹⁷ Yet, the decisive difference to Qatif was that a number of new industries were founded in al-Hasa. While al-Hasa's old manufactures suffered from cheap European imports and a changing lifestyle, one of the few surviving traditional businesses in Hofuf in the 1950s was textile manufacture of local bishts (traditional cloaks worn by men). In 1963, the National Weaving Company was founded in Hofuf.⁹⁸ Other industries established in al-Hasa included a cement factory, motor car factories, a date packing factory and several smaller businesses that supplied the oasis directly with everyday goods and repair services.⁹⁹ Between 1951 and 1960, al-Hasa's population began to grow again. This trend continued between 1960 and 1970, due to the continuation of the widespread effects of regional growth.¹⁰⁰

Although Qatif's traditional elites did also establish their private businesses in the oil sector, all attempts to set up major industries in the Qatif area failed. In 1962, Aramco claimed in a report on communal development in Tarut that the local authorities had evaded development of the island because they regarded the local Shi'a as second-class citizens. Aramco further criticized the bypassing of Tarut's fishing communities in a royal concession for shrimp fishing as well as in the plans of the Ghosaibi to build a fish packaging plant, which was ultimately established in Dammam.¹⁰¹ The already established infrastructures in the new towns including ports, railway and commercial facilities, as well as the role played by big merchants in municipal councils in al-Hasa and in the new oil towns have likely contributed to these decisions. Hence, many

97 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 220.

98 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 322–26.

99 Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 327.

100 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 242.

101 Rada A. Nazer, "Tarut Island: A Preliminary Survey On Its Planning Needs," August 1962, Box 9, Folder 8, Tarut, Mulligan Papers; William Tracy, "Pink Gold," *Saudi Aramco World* 17, no. 5 (1960), <http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/196605/pink.gold.htm>.

Qatifis continued their lives anchored in traditional agriculture and stayed remote from the thriving oil business and industries in the neighboring new oil towns. Others worked in the oil fields, established small construction and contractor firms or became self-employed businessmen. Still, in 1962–1963, the number of local businesses established in Qatif was only a fraction of those in other parts of the province, including al-Hasa.¹⁰² Hence, the backflow of oil wealth into the oasis was most discernible in the newly built Aramco neighborhoods in Safwa and Sayhat. Only few Qatifi's were able to reap the fruits of the oil industry at a large scale, like the Qatifi businessman Abdullah Matrood who established a number of successful businesses in the Eastern Province.¹⁰³ By 1970, Qatif had developed into a still largely agricultural commuter suburb of the oil industry – located in the immediate vicinity yet not well integrated in the economic heartland of the Dammam-Dhahran-al-Khobar area.¹⁰⁴

One important factor that furthered the increase of local population in al-Hasa (and to a lesser extent in Qatif) was the change in Aramco's private home loaning scheme that made it possible to secure Aramco loans for the modernization or construction of family homes in the old villages and neighborhoods and which motivated numerous workers to return from the new oil settlements to their home places in the two oases.¹⁰⁵ Saudi immigration into the Hasa oasis, particularly of Aramco employees and others working in the oil sector, seemed to have played as well a major role in the growth of the oasis and its principal towns. Al-Hasa's religious heterogeneity – in contrast to the almost homogeneously Shi'i Qatif – seemed to have eased immigration from other parts of the country as especially the Sunni majority villages grew in population numbers.¹⁰⁶ The same held true for the old capital. Hofuf at first grew largely uncontrolled. New arrivals seized every part of land in the old town that was still available, and urban growth ate away most of the garden plots inside the town walls.¹⁰⁷ At the same time the town expanded quickly at its outskirts.¹⁰⁸

102 The share of local businesses for Dammam, Khobar and Hofuf counted around thirty per cent each, whereas Qatif contributed only five per cent. Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 174.

103 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 83, 241.

104 During his field research in 1972–73, al-Shuaiby found no major industries in Qatif: The majority of businesses were small businesses with one to two employees and only a small number of businesses had ten employees and more. Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 270–72.

105 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 223.

106 Houses paid for by Aramco were predominantly constructed in the Sunni villages of the oasis. Al-Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 379.

107 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 84.

108 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 231.

The newest suburb, al-Ruqayyiqā, emerged outside Hofuf's town wall on a former Bedouin camping site. Until well into the 1960s, it largely remained a conglomeration of tents, barastis and a few more permanent-looking buildings and was mainly inhabited by Bedouin and their families who were seeking jobs in Hofuf or at the oil installations between 'Uthmaniyah and Abqaiq.¹⁰⁹ Al-Hasa's urban modernization in the early decades of oil also accentuated municipal deficiencies as illustrated by a letter to the editor in a local newspaper:

Any visitor to Hofuf will see that the Municipality ... is in a deep trance or state of suspended animation. From the Hofuf car terminus, you will have to walk on foot a few miles before you can reach any local destination, because it is impossible for cars to pass through the town except on the central road to the suq. Heaps of garbage and debris are piled up like pyramids in front of each gate. Terms such as "lightning," "grading" or cleaning the streets are unknown in the Hofuf Municipal "dictionary." Nothing disturbs the Hofuf Municipality's slumber except the municipal tax collectors rudely collecting the "ground" tax even from peddlers.¹¹⁰

Yet, despite all local criticism, development certainly took place. In 1956 alone, a new shopping center was opened, streets were widened and asphalted.¹¹¹ Beginning from the early 1960s, the old city walls were demolished, more streets were made accessible for cars and new suburbs were established on previously uncultivated and undeveloped land.¹¹²

In contrast, Qatif felt the drawing effects of the nearby oil fields and new oil towns. Beginning from the 1950s, the old oasis villages Safwa and Sayhat grew into middle-sized towns due to Aramco's development of workers' neighborhoods in the two places. However, the town of Qatif and the rest of the oasis largely lacked behind. Although populations numbers rose and urban modernization took place, it did not translate into growth similar to that of the new oil towns or even Hofuf. In contrast to earlier times, Qatif in the 1960s was largely dependent on Dammam as administrative center and as a marketplace.¹¹³ In 1958, the old walls surrounding the Qal'a were destroyed,

109 Federico S. Vidal, "Al-Hasā and al-Hufuf," July 27, 1964, Box 3, Folder 21, ARD, Chronological Files, May-July 1964, Mulligan Papers; Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 93–95.

110 "Which is More Inert: Hofuf Municipality or Jubail Municipality?," December 31, 1955, vol. 1, no. 3, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

111 "Abu al-Fawaris' and the Hofuf Municipality," January 15, 1956, vol. 1, no. 24, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

112 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 225.

113 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 396–97.

and some streets were widened. An aerial photo from 1970 shows a huge traffic circle that occupied much of the space in the old town of Qatif.¹¹⁴ Despite the advantages that were gained from making the town accessible for modern traffic and transport, the gradual transformation and ultimate destruction of Qatif's old urban core in the 1980s for many Qatifis became emblematic for their political ostracism.¹¹⁵ In the 1970s, Qatif, like the lower class neighborhoods in Dammam and al-Khobar, still suffered from insufficient fresh water and electricity supply and a complete lack of sewage system, while Aramco neighborhoods in Sayhat and Safwa were comparatively modern.¹¹⁶

2 Conflicts over Land and Expropriation

When British officials visited the Saudi oil fields in the early 1940s, they reported not only ongoing drilling and construction works at the new industrial sites. Aside from the hustle and bustle of the oil industry, the old population centers were transformed as well. A broad aisle was cut into the densely grown palm gardens of Qatif to widen the narrow and winding road that led from Ra's Tanura towards the oasis center. At the coast between Qatif and Dammam large areas of land had by then passed into the ownership of high-ranking government officials, new wells were dug and thousands of date palms waited to be planted.¹¹⁷ As in the times before oil, questions of land ownership continued to occupy an important place in the relations between the Saudi government and the local population. The presence of the oil company further complicated the situation as the oil concession clashed with the already complex and contradictory system of land tenure. Large parts of the arable land in al-Ahsa' were either occupied by the local tribes or had been transferred to merchants or state officials. These properties were usually leased out

114 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 262–63.

115 Walaa al-Khulaitit, "The Mythical Fort: The Role of Myth in the Construction of Shia Identity in Qatif, Saudi Arabia," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 24, no. 1 (2012): 25–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41945760>.

116 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 263, 275.

117 Letter no. C/570, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Secretary to the Government of India, November 19, 1941; and Supplement to letter no. C/369 "Visit to al-Khobar," Political Agent, Bahrain, March 15, 1943, Coll 6/48 "Oil: Concessions in Saudi Arabia. (Hasa)," IOR/L/PS/12/2115; Mohammed A. al-Jabr, "Agriculture in al-Hassa Oasis, Saudi Arabia: A Review of Development" (PhD diss., Durham University, 1984), 49, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7146/>. Al-Hassan claims that by the early 1990s only two percent of the land surrounding Qatif was still in the hands of the original owners, while the rest had been claimed by government circles and the royal family. Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 332.

to tenants. Around fifteen percent of the cultivated land in al-Ahsa' was *waqf* land. Furthermore, in the two oases, about one sixth of the land under cultivation was owned by the village communities. Another large portion of the cultivated land in al-Hasa and in Qatif belonged to self-employed farmers.¹¹⁸ The Saudi state owned all mineral sources in the country and was entitled to take necessary measures that allowed for their exploitation. Hence, in the concession agreement between the Saudi government and the oil company the former allowed the later to conduct all works connected to the oil enterprise in the concession area and to "provide itself with the means and facilities with which to do so."¹¹⁹ Not only would the document "function as the basis governing relations between American oil interests and the Saudi government for decades to come."¹²⁰ In order to give maximum priority to oil extraction the concession effectively put most of the land in the 829,000 square kilometers large concession area under reserve of the oil company. Article 25 of the oil concession stipulated that the Saudi government empowered the company "to acquire from any occupant the surface rights of any land which the Company may find necessary to use in connexion with the enterprise, provided that the Company shall pay the occupant for depriving him of the use of the land."¹²¹

The harsh reality was that in the area under the oil concession, all rights connected to local land were de facto transferred to the oil company, except in rare cases in which the company was forced to release land from the reserve. As a result, the oil company fought countless cases against individual land claimants in the oil concession area before the local courts. Could a claimant testify land ownership through providing the necessary documents or through the testimony of at least two respected members of his community, the company would either pay compensation or, less frequently, release the land to the claimant. In the latter case, land ownership had to be registered with the Ministry of Finance through the notary at one of the province's Shari'a courts.¹²² However, due to inconsistent and often lacking land registration during Ottoman and Saudi administration in al-Ahsa', claimants often lacked the required documents to prove ownership. In addition, people hesitated to register their land

118 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 413–14.

119 Arabian American Oil Company, *Aramco Handbook*, 112.

120 In the original concession agreement of 1933 the concession area covered 829,000 square kilometers between the border of Iraq, the Dahna desert and the Rub' al-Khali. McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 56.

121 S.R. Jordan, British Embassy Jidda, to Anthony Eden, Copy of Oil Agreement between the Standard Oil Company of California and the Saudi Arabian Government, November 28, 1943, Coll 6/48 "Oil: Concessions in Saudi Arabia. (Hasa)," TOR/L/PS/12/2115.

122 Interview with a former Aramco lawyer, al-Khobar, May 9, 2013.

at the Shari'a courts that frequently repealed customary court decisions concerning land ownership. Hence, many claimants whose landed property lay within the concession area, particularly near the oil fields of Qatif, were never compensated.¹²³ Moreover, during the early years of oil industrialization a routine was established between the oil company and the Saudi government in which Aramco took over or assisted the provision of all necessary infrastructure and in exchange expected that the Saudi government held the company harmless from any private property claims. Only in few cases the company was forced to retreat from privately owned land, as in one case relating to the landed property of the Ghosaibi from which the company had to remove the already installed pipelines and power line.¹²⁴

The major concessions made by the Saudi government for the benefit of the American enterprise had far reaching consequences as struggles over land ownership and expropriation became a frequent source of conflict between the oil company, local government, and the local communities. Two prominent cases of expropriation in particular are ingrained in the local historiography. Local activist writers have circulated the apparently frequently told version of forced expropriation of two large properties, the Jawan and Rahima areas that are located in between Qatif and the Ra's Tanura peninsula. One version states that Hussayn b. Saleh from the village of Safwa in the Qatif oasis claimed that his father had bought the thirty square kilometers large Jawan in 1859 or 1860 from a local Bedouin by the name of Ibn 'Ubaija or Ba'ija. The transaction apparently was not legalized by the local courts and Husayn b. Saleh never received compensation from the oil company. The second case is that of the Rahima which became the namesake of the oil town founded in the area in 1938. The account goes that Muhammad Taqqi al-Yussif bought the then uninhabited land, and that the Saudi government "gave" Rahima to Aramco during the early years of oil exploration, i.e. the land came under reservation of the company. Al-Yussif spent his whole life unsuccessfully seeking compensation

123 Al-Hassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 331-37; Interview with Abdulrasul al-Gheryafi, local historian and activist, Qatif, May 16, 2013. Difficulties faced by Shi'a in registering their land at local Shari'a courts are also mentioned in US reports. "Discrimination in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia Against the Shi'a and Their Increasing Discontent," Walter M. McClelland, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 27, 1960, 886A.413/12-2760 HBS, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

124 "Summary of Activities, December 1957," January 21, 1958, Box 2, Folder 18, Local Government Relations Department, Mulligan Papers.

for his land. The documents that prove him to be the legal owner of Rahima are said to be still in the possession of the family.¹²⁵

Besides cases of land expropriation due to the agreements of the oil concession, the process of rapid urbanization also led to frequent cases of expropriation that mainly affected small farmers and house owners in the coastal villages Dammam and al-Khobar. Oil industrialization and a growing population due to labor migration resulted in the growing need for construction land and a considerable rise in land value. This opened the floodways to land price speculation, which became a problem as early as the 1940s. This is illustrated by regulations issued by the Saudi government to forestall speculation on land value in the growing towns of Dammam and al-Khobar. In 1943 the *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Council) stipulated that the price of construction plots in the two future towns was fixed for ten years after selling it to investors for urban development. Furthermore, the land assigned to an investor had to be developed within a period of two years or otherwise would be resold.¹²⁶ Following numerous petitions by the local communities to the king and crown prince, land for Saudi home builders was distributed in the whole province for free. The Ministry of Finance assigned *miri* land to any applicant who was a Saudi citizen. The Shari'a court in Qatif issued contracts for land distribution in the two emergent towns and documented land transactions as well as previous land ownership. Transactions needed further to be approved by the provincial governor, who acted as representative of the king. Land that had been inhabited by the Dawasir before the issuance of the plan and was now claimed for urban development could be registered for free, yet ownership had to be proved before the Shari'a court. Only if evidence was successful, compensations for demolished buildings were paid.¹²⁷ The problem of urban squatting in the area, which first appears in US consular reports and company papers at approximately the same time, indicates that many people were forced from their homes without hope of receiving compensation and with no means to build a new home elsewhere.

By the 1960s, the Hasa and Qatif oases developed into commuting districts for the oil industry. A modest yet stable stream of labor remittances and oil wealth began to flow back into the old villages and Saudi oil workers built their

125 Khalifa Fahd, *Jaḥīm al-Ḥukm al-Sa'ūdi wa-Nirān al-Wahhābiyya* (al-Ṣafā lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1991), 196; al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 151–52.

126 Majlis al-Shūrā, document no. 102, Jumāda al-Thānī 7, 1362h/June 9, 1943, IPA.

127 Majlis al-Shūrā, document no. 102, Jumāda al-Thānī 7, 1362h/June 9, 1943, IPA; al-Subay'ī, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya*, 144–45; al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 291.

family homes under the umbrella of Aramco's new Home Ownership Program. Hence, construction land in the most coveted parts of the old oasis districts came into high demand.¹²⁸ As a result, agricultural land in the two oases was very gradually transformed into construction land – a process that was also linked to the fact that agriculture as occupation became less and less attractive. Vidal found that in the early 1950s the declining quality of soil and the effects of oil industrialization such as the introduction of a cash economy and the increasing absorption of local labor force in the oil sector urged many small landowning farmers in al-Hasa to give up their gardens and become wage workers “out of necessity.” As land did no longer sufficiently sustain its owners, maintaining a garden or palm grove for many Hasawis became a luxury and a symbol of affluence and social prestige for those who could afford it.¹²⁹ On the other hand, small farmers in Qatif and al-Hasa often “burned or cut their plants and palms, and divided their land into smaller areas for the new urban area of the town, preferring to sell their land rather than to cultivate it.”¹³⁰ The process of urban sprawl and the destruction of farmland gained momentum in the 1970s when population numbers rose more quickly and the oil boom created new wealth and investment in local land culminated in land price speculation at a large scale.¹³¹

Harsh disputes arose concerning the widespread endowments and especially around the agricultural *awqaf* of al-Ahsa'. In the old population centers of al-Ahsa', such endowed agricultural land was plenty and traditionally formed an important element of the local political economy.¹³² Whereas control over the agricultural *awqaf* and their income had always been coveted by local elites and governments, these large expanses of land gained new importance during the oil age. One of the most famous endowments that played a role in the mobilization for local unrest well into the twenty-first century is the Ramis in Qatif. In the course of oil development, outside investors early on began to stretch their fingers to get a hold on the Ramis, the largest of the agricultural endowments in the area.¹³³ The Ramis was not only located in the

128 Elawy, “Influence of Oil Upon Settlement,” 374–84; Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province*, 8.

129 Vidal, “Date Culture,” 424–27.

130 Al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 228.

131 See chapter 6 in this book.

132 ‘Abdullah N. al-Subay‘ī, *Al-Qudā’ wa-l-‘Awqāf fī al-Aḥsā’ wa-l-Qaṭīf’ wa Qaṭar Athnā’ al-Ḥukum al-‘Uthmānī al-Thānī*, 1288–1331h/1871–1913m (*Dirāsa Wathā‘iqiyya*) (Maktaba al-Malik Faḥd al-Waṭaniyya, 1999), 121–26.

133 Majlis al-Shūrā: document no. 102, Jumāda al-Thānī 7, 1362h/June 9, 1943, IPA. For more information see chapter 2 in this book.

heart of the oil area but comprised a large stretch of coast land as well. Already in 1939 or 1940 outside investors started a dispute over the exact boundaries of the endowment. In pre-oil times geographic knowledge had been based upon distinctive landmarks and oral tradition. In the course of oil development, the boundaries of the Ramis had yet to be defined per a new technological standard. Things became even more complicated when the Al Faraj, in whose hands the administration of the Ramis traditionally rested, proved unable to provide the founding documents. The subsequent confiscation of the disputed parts of the endowed area by the municipality of Qatif was met by strong local resistance under the leadership of Shaykh Jaʿfr Abu Makarim al-ʿAwwami and Ḥassan b. ʿAli b. ʿAbd Allah al-Faraj. In the following decades, the dispute remained unresolved and increased in vehemence because the Ramis effectively hindered the northward expansion of the town of Qatif which began in the early 1960s.¹³⁴

3 Changing Social Geographies

When after 1945 the worldwide demand for oil rose to new heights, thousands of labor migrants from the Najd, Hijaz, ʿAsir and Bahrain were drawn towards al-Ahsa’s oil fields, where they worked and often also lived site by site with workers from Qatif and al-Hasa and local Bedouin who were mostly hired by the oil company on day-to-day contracts for the various hard labor jobs on the construction sites. In the course of less than two decades emerged the urban nuclei of the oil conurbation that accommodated the oil industry and growing industrial labor force as well as local administration, commerce and business. By the early 1950s, the two former fishing hamlets Dammam and al-Khobar grew into smallish towns with a population that was largely made up by immigrants. The discovery of the Ghawar oil field in 1948 further spurred the expansion of the new towns and the integration of the old districts of al-Hasa and Qatif into a steadily growing conurbation that counted approximately 361,000 inhabitants in 1962–63, including several ten thousands of labor immigrants from the kingdom and abroad.¹³⁵

134 Al-Ibrāhīm, “Waqf al-Rāmis.” On the urban development of Qatif and the northwards growth of the town into the garden area see al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 264–67. On the family of al-Faraj, notables from Qatif, see chapter 2 in this book.

135 Arabian American Oil Company, *Aramco Handbook*, 117–28; al-Shuaiby, “Development of the Eastern Province,” 66.

Very little direct information on the demographic composition of the people living in the new cities or the relationship between recent labor migrants and long-term residents can be gleaned from sources. There exist mostly indirect clues that shed some light on the different communities and their relationships in the context of cohabitation in the emergent oil conurbation as well as of the labor struggles and urban malaise that unfolded in the 1950s and 1960s.¹³⁶ It appears that, due to the immigration of very different groups into the oil area, the intermingling of different cultures and the influence of a “Western” work- and lifestyle on the local communities, the newly emergent oil settlements possessed a comparatively diverse population and quickly acquired a reputation of being open-minded and fairly cosmopolitan.¹³⁷ As such, they attracted as well immigrants from the old oasis districts. The portion of Hasawis living in Dammam in 1973–74 amounted to between fifteen and twenty percent. Many Hasawis most probably lived for longer periods of time in either of the two new towns.¹³⁸ While all four Sunni *madhahib* were represented, the majority was Hanbali. Roughly one tenth of the population in the new Saudi towns were Shi‘a. Beside this Muslim majority, there also lived smaller numbers of non-Muslim foreigners – mostly Americans – in the new oil towns.¹³⁹

Labor immigration from Central Arabia and to a minor degree from the Red Sea coast was not least a symptom of the general decline of more traditional economic sectors also in these regions, such as local manufacturing, overland trade and agriculture, which resulted from a transforming national economy, from the introduction of new technological standards and from growing imports after 1945.¹⁴⁰ Dying family businesses and the consequent hardships of everyday life in the villages and towns of Central and Eastern Arabia caused thousands of young men to leave their families and seek work with the oil company.¹⁴¹ Especially Shi‘i writers have been immensely critical towards the rise of new oil towns and the parallel decline of the old districts of al-Hasa and Qatif. In their eyes, the selective urban development of the Eastern Province,

136 See chapters 4 and 5 in this book.

137 Şāliḥ M. al-Qa‘ūd, *Ra’s Tanūra*, Hadha Balādnā 28 (Wakālat Shū‘ūn al-Shabāb al-Idāra al-‘Āma lil-Nashāt al-Thaqāfiyya, 1991), 20.

138 Elawy, “Influence of Oil Upon Settlement,” 252.

139 Al-Shuaiby found that the majority were Hanbali (34 percent), followed by Shafi‘i (26 percent), Maliki (16 percent), and Hanafi (14 percent). Al-Shuaiby, “The Development of the Eastern Province,” 321, 354.

140 Al-Subay‘ī, *Iktishāf al-Naḥḥ wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 134.

141 ‘Uthmān Ḥ. al-Khūwayṭir, *Risālat Ilā ‘Aḥfādī* (Dār al-Kifāḥ li-l-Nashir wa ‘l-Tawzī‘, 2008 or 2009), 143–44.

especially after the oil-boom of the 1970s, reflected the government's discriminatory stance towards the local population and especially the Shi'i communities. Until the present day, infrastructural underdevelopment in Qatif and the surrounding area spurs Shi'i resentment against the Saudi government and associated circles of businessmen and civil servants who are criticized of having failed to build an infrastructure comparable to that in other, better developed cities of the kingdom such as Riyadh, Jidda or Medina.¹⁴² Some Shi'i writers have further argued that the massive labor immigration of Sunni labor migrants from Central Arabia into the new oil towns has significantly altered the confessional composition of the local population and hence the ability of the Saudi government to govern, influence and control the local communities.¹⁴³

It has often been stated that during the early stage of oil exploration (1938–1945) the American oil syndicate hired almost exclusively Shi'i laborers from the local villages and towns. Shi'i workers, who exclusively came from the local villages and towns, it is argued, were more inclined towards working in the oil industry than those of Bedouin descent, because they were accustomed to wage labor and manual work while the Bedouin considered wage work as self-abasing or proved unadaptable to regular work under a strict industrial hierarchy.¹⁴⁴ However, at closer examination, company records do not support this argument. Rather, these claims seem to result from a misconception of the local population which was widespread among Americans working for Aramco. Already in 1955, Vidal remarked on the composition of Aramco's local Saudi workforce that the company, due to its relative ignorance of the local social and physical geographies, had "people with widely differing backgrounds and origins lumped together" and that Aramco had thus effectively "introduced an element of bias into its statistics and their evaluation." It appears that in early company records, all workers from al-Hasa and thereabout, villagers and Bedouin alike, became Hasawis and by extension farmers.¹⁴⁵

142 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 331; Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations," 8; Goldberg, "The Shi'i Minority," 238; Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 34.

143 Shaykh, *Arāmkū, al-Naḥḥ wa 'l-Istī'mār*, 32; al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 333.

144 The argument is the foundation for a connected argument which states that the large number of Shi'a among company employees formed a decisive element in the labor movement and political opposition of the 1950s, which thus urged the Saudi government to reduce the number of Shi'a among the oil workers and even ban the employment of Shi'a after the nationalization of the oil industry. Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 287; Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 32; Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 32–33; Goldberg, "The Shi'i Minority," 237; e-mail correspondence with Ali al-Ahmed, November 27, 2011.

145 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, 10.

Although Vidal had early on spotted this problem concerning company records, the idea that the initial phase of oil extraction relied mainly on the labor of former oasis dwellers proved long lasting. While initial oil exploration works heavily relied on local labor, the question of who was hired depended on both, work location and kind of work. When oil extraction works in the province began in earnest after the discovery of commercial quantities of oil in the Dammam area in 1938, the urgent need for manual labor and local transportation came as a relief to the local communities, and particularly the long-suffering poor peasants and the pearl diving tribes. The oil company's willingness to pay the divers' debts to the owners of dhows and local brokers was an important incentive for the former to enter wage labor for the foreign company.¹⁴⁶ American labor recruiters were stationed in Hofuf and Qatif, where they conducted public examinations of local job seekers in regular intervals. Hundreds of men were checked for eye-diseases and other health impediments. The often repeated and probably quite exact version goes that Aramco would test their teeth, eyes and ears "as one would do with animals."¹⁴⁷

As a matter of labor logistics, Bedouin and villagers who originated from the coast were hired for building the refinery and pier in Ra's Tanura. In fact, many of these early oil workers still cultivated their gardens and fields at home, or at least were required to help during the sowing and harvest seasons. Others were absent from the oil fields during the months of pearling. Similarly, the Abqaiq oil field depended on labor force from the Hasa oasis, including its principal towns Hofuf and Mubarraz. A large portion of long-term oil employees of the first generation came from al-Hasa's Sunni villages.¹⁴⁸ Transportation of construction material, which prior to the development of a road and railway system and particularly during the war years was a major logistic endeavor, was mainly aided by local Bedouin.¹⁴⁹ The construction and operation of the Trans Arabian Pipeline (Tapline), which since 1950 transported Saudi oil over land to the Mediterranean Sea, was equally carried out by Bedouin who over a sequence of two decades settled around the remote pumping and operation

146 In order to cover the company's expenses, 10 Rial were subtracted from (probably monthly) payments. Al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naft wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādiyya*, 134–35.

147 Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 290. An American labor recruiter seated in Hofuf is also mentioned in archival sources. "Undercurrents in Saudi Arabia," Nils E. Lind, May 15, 1945, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

148 Elway, "Settlement," 256, 279; al-Qa'ūd, *Ra's Tanūra*, 19.

149 McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 116.

stations.¹⁵⁰ Vidal stated that until the late 1940s, oil workers originated in equal parts from the peasant and Bedouin populations.¹⁵¹

Labor recruitment changed after World War II, when mass labor immigration from other parts of the kingdom began. Beginning from 1945/46 the ratio of approximately equal parts of Sunni and Shi'a oil workers at Aramco began to shift towards three quarters Sunni and one quarter Shi'a in the late 1960s.¹⁵² Young men from Central Arabian towns such as Burayda and 'Unayza flocked into the oil operations area in search for a job with the oil company. Far from home, the social snubbing of manual work was less felt and thus working for the oil company became a real possibility to support relatives back home and earn enough to start a family.¹⁵³ Still, many of these young urban immigrants coveted a job in the intermediate ranks as office clerks or semi-skilled technical staff. Especially the sons of the relatively cosmopolite urban-based merchants were not only looking for jobs but for education opportunities. For centuries, their families had sent their sons abroad for learning family business in the commercial entrepôts of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. When brothers and uncles, former neighbors and schoolmates sent back word that not only work but also training was offered by Aramco, young men at home decided to follow in their steps and travelled eastwards. Many came to the oil fields with the clear intent to learn English which they considered the language of a prosperous future.¹⁵⁴ A member of a prominent family from Hofuf remembered that, in contrast, the sons of al-Hasa's landowning merchant class, who suffered as well from the collapse of agriculture and traditional trade, were less prone to move onto the oil fields to work side by side with the local Bedouin and peasants. They instead chose to emigrate to the Saudi capital or India, to where they were linked by family and trade connections and where they pursued new business opportunities.¹⁵⁵ It also seems that the sons of local notables, especially from Qatif, preferred to first pursue a higher education abroad

150 Al-Subay'i, *Iktishāf al-Naḥl wa-Atharuhu 'Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 138–41.

151 Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, ii.

152 Ibrahim states that until the 1970s, local Shi'a constituted up to fifty percent of Aramco's Saudi workforce. Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 17. Archival sources claim a more likely one-quarter share. "The Shi'a Community of the Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia," June 9, 1969, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, POL 13-3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

153 Interview with former Aramco employee, Dhahran, May 14, 2013.

154 Interview with former labor activist at Aramco, Dhahran, May 18, 2013.

155 Interview with a member of a prominent family from al-Hasa, Dammam, May 19, 2013. The family ranked among the most important merchant families of al-Ahsa' and originated from Najd.

and either entered the oil industry at a later time where they filled skilled positions at the intermediate and senior levels or took up government offices in their home towns.¹⁵⁶

The issue of social boundaries and values as well as the question of who mingled together with whom seemed to have influenced migration patterns to a certain extent. This pertained not only the differences in origin and social standing, but also confession. Still, no uniform picture emerges. Instead, accounts about relations between Sunni and Shi'i oil workers differ to some extent. For many Saudis, the labor camps became some sort of neutral space that brought freedom from the social constraints of their home regions. One former oil worker remembered that religious affiliation did not play a role in the everyday life of the labor camps, and that both, Sunnis and Shi'a "worked and struggled together."¹⁵⁷ Another stated that working for Aramco and living in the Saudi labor camp provided him with the opportunity to escape the meagre life in his home village in the Hasa oasis and to rise in social status regardless of his religious affiliation, something the Saudi state could not offer him.¹⁵⁸ Laborers from al-Ahsa' and those, whose families earned their living in regional trade or maintained other networks into the Gulf or the Bilad-l-Sham, freely mingled with their compatriots from other parts of the country. Some local Bedouin apparently felt a certain contempt against those with lesser or lacking tribal descent, yet life in the oil settlements unavoidably led to contacts between both groups and smoothed over some of the difficulties of daily interaction.¹⁵⁹

Aramco, however, had already incorporated "colonial" perceptions of the local society into its community development policies. Quite similar to the organization of Aramco's oil towns which followed the aim to separate different ethnic and national groups, the idea of incompatible and traditionally segregated confessional communities permeated Aramco's Home Ownership Program as well. The perception of "social difficulties of Shi'a and Sunnis living in the same immediate community" played a role in the design of the program together with considerations of industrial security, feasibility and the division of financial responsibility between the company, the Saudi government and the employees. In the end, it contributed to the decision to allow Saudi workers to build their family homes in their respective villages instead of sponsoring a completely new town where Saudis from both sects would be required to

156 Matthesen, *The Other Saudis*, 76.

157 Interview with former labor activist at Aramco, Dhahran, May 17, 2013.

158 Interview with former Aramco vice president, Dhahran, May 18, 2013.

159 Ajmi, *Legacy of a Lifetime*, 34.

live together.¹⁶⁰ Later, when the company encountered reluctance by the local Sunni and Shi'i communities to partake in the Home Ownership Program, the Shi'a of Qatif were singled out as particularly problematic. "Essentially," one member of Aramco's Research Division put it, "the Qatifi does not and cannot turn his back on his cultural environment because he is not prepared to cope with life outside his own social group." The company concluded that it was to be expected that only few well-educated (and presumably open-minded) would move to any new townsites and that therefore, it should be allowed to build houses inside the oasis or to improve existing structures at home.¹⁶¹ Consequently, while Aramco's support of long contract oil workers in building new family homes in the old oasis districts allowed for the establishment of pockets of relative affluence in the old oasis districts, it did also accentuate confessional segregation within the emergent conurbation. This policy was backward looking at its best, and deliberately divisive at its worst, as it was pursued at a time when parts of the local communities began to feel a moderate improvement of their economic conditions due to the windfalls of oil money and when traditional social hierarchies became more permeable to an extent that Sunnis and Shi'a increasingly entered into business partnerships, casual friendships and perhaps even marriages.¹⁶²

Another social division that was further accentuated under the impact of petro-capitalism was that of being relatively rich and lamentably poor. The increasing demand for workforce after the end of the world war meant also a growing need for skilled labor such as translators, clerks and medical staff. Most Saudis were not yet prepared to take over these jobs and thus remained at the lowest income level. Initially, staff for these jobs was recruited from the Arab Gulf, India and Pakistan. In the early 1940s, about 1,300 Italians from Eritrea arrived in the area where they helped to build the refinery and pier for Ra's Tanura and the small airfield for Dhahran. A large number of Palestinians

160 "Community Development Review," October-December 1955[?], Box 2, Folder 49, ARD, Mulligan Papers.

161 "Home and Family in the Qatif Oasis," Malcom Quint, January 25, 1961, Box 3, Folder 5, ARD, Chronological Files, January-February 1961, and "Preliminary Results - Home Ownership Survey," September 25, 1961, Phebe A. Marr, Box 3, Folder 9, ARD, Chronological Files, September-October 1961, Mulligan Papers.

162 Elawy, "Influence of Oil Upon Settlement," 388. Elawy refers to an interview in 1972 with Sheikh Baqir Abu Khamsin, head of the Shi'i communities of al-Hasa. Abu Khamsin related that there existed business partnerships and even marriages between both sects. Whereas no data could be ascertained to prove that intermarriage between both sects occurred, autobiographical data suggests that business partnerships and casual friendships were indeed common, as demonstrated in chapter 5 in this book.

entered work on the oil fields after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, following an invitation by Ibn Sa‘ūd who used the opportunity for a grand political gesture and at the same time preferred the employment of Arabs over that of South Asians.¹⁶³ As in pre-oil times, economic inequality among the province’s growing population effectively cut through sectarian divisions, creating large impoverished populations and small affluent elites on both sides of the sectarian divide. Beginning from the 1960s, oil wealth introduced new “western” lifestyles for the educated middle class and wealthy business elite and considerably raised the standard of living for Saudi oil workers. However, those who could not afford minimum education and did not find well-paid jobs in the oil industry or government often lived an uprooted existence marked by austerity.¹⁶⁴ Adverse living conditions were a major problem for the large group of day-laborers in the oil province who came from more distant regions in the kingdom as well as from neighboring countries. In 1976, Reichert observed that foreign labor immigrants often lived in provisory or semi-permanent camps that were not part of urban planning. Local administration took care that these labor camps were located in distance to more affluent settlements in order to prevent contact between the two social realms. The camps were fenced and guards patrolled their outskirts.¹⁶⁵ Although these observations stem from a later decade, it can be assumed that they applied also to the time prior to 1970, when a large number of foreign laborers but also numerous Saudis were not employed directly by Aramco but migrated to the oil province to work with one of the numerous local contractor firms.¹⁶⁶

4 Control and Surveillance

The growth of company towns and attached slum-like areas mainly inhabited by young male folk and subaltern groups, and the steady influx of labor migrants were met by a severe justice practiced by the first Saudi emir Abdullah b. Jiluwi (1913–1935) and his son and successor, the emir Sa‘ūd b. Jiluwi (1935/39–1967). Especially Sa‘ūd became a symbol for the state’s disciplining power and the upkeep of civil order in the oil conurbation. His authority was generally feared

163 Al-Subay‘ī, *Iktishāf al-Naḥḥ wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya*, 134–35.

164 Interview with former Aramco vice-president, Dhahran, May 18, 2013; “Aramco’s Industrial Relations Survey of Saudi Arab Employees – 1965,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 5, 1967, LAB 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

165 Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province*, 76–77.

166 For more information see chapter 4 in this book.



FIGURE 10 The emir of al-Ahsa', Sa'ud b. Jiluwi (center), during a visit of the US Commander Middle East Force and US Consulate in Hofuf in April 1951. National Archives and Research Association, Maryland

by the local communities.¹⁶⁷ Rule over the local Bedouin was still most pertinent in the collection of the zakat (the annual alms tax), a process in which the local tribes often expressed their traditional resentment of centralized rule. In 1945, Sa'ud b. Jiluwi was reported of having slain five hundred Bedouin after his tax collector had been killed on duty. Americans in the oil province further complained that the emir had his spies literally everywhere, and that he particularly disliked Aramco and the company's political authority in the province.¹⁶⁸ To Aramco and the US consulate in Dhahran Bin Jiluwi became known as incorruptible, efficient and brutal governor.¹⁶⁹

167 Sa'īd, *Tārīkh Āl Sa'ūd*, 151–52; 'Abd al-Karīm Ḥamūd, "Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-'Ummāl: al-Thawrat al-'Ummāl," in *Al-Haraka al-Taḥarruriyya fi al-Hijaz wa Najd 1901–1973*, ed. Adnān 'Aṭṭar (Ma'tuq Ikhwān, 1973), 65–68; Cheney, *Big Oil Man*, 68–69.

168 "Undercurrents in Saudi Arabia," Nils E. Lind, May 15, 1945, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

169 "Developments in Local Government in the Dhahran District Since the Departure of the Amir Khaled Es-Sudairi," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 19, 1946,

The new towns were ruled by local emirs whose main duty was the upkeep of order and the enforcement of Saudi law. For this task, they had local Saudi police and the traditional security forces of the emirate, the *khawiyya* (sgl. *khawi*), at their disposal.¹⁷⁰ Usually these local emirs did not originate from the local elites, but belonged to the more distant branches of the royal family and had proven their loyalty to the Al Sa‘ud.¹⁷¹ Throughout the early years of oil industrialization the main problem handled by local government and security forces in the industrial districts was pilferage by workers and truck drivers, which led to the increased stationing of soldiers at company gates and to regular army patrols on the local roads. Another problem was the smuggling of goods from and to neighboring countries, a situation that the embryonic Saudi state struggled to gain under control. Hence, the recurrent regress to increasing the number of soldiers and weapons in the oil area in order to enforce law and security became symptomatic for Saudi rule.¹⁷² On a different note, when local police was established in al-Hasa, Qatif and Jubail in 1937, more than 1,400 local applicants asked to be registered as policemen as this offered a steady income.¹⁷³

Especially the early oil camps became known “hotbeds” of male violence. For instance, an Aramco report mentions the outbreak of a riot in Dhahran’s Bedouin camp which followed the traditional ‘Id al-Adha dances of 1950 or 1951. Yet, archival sources and firsthand accounts imply also that the Saudi authorities did not always react to offenses against law and order by applying brute violence but frequently chose to negotiate with the concerned parties and mitigate between them on a personal basis in the spirit of traditional personalized leadership. For instance, a local emir would summon outraged workers to one of the coffeehouses in Aramco’s general camps to listen to grievances and to cool down tempers. Usually, local sheikhs intervened as

890F.00/7-1946 CS/A, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

170 Rayed K. Krimly, “The Political Economy of Rentier States. A Case Study of Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era 1950–1990,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1993), 146–47, ProQuest; Hicke, *American Perspectives*, 411–12.

171 “Undercurrents in Saudi Arabia,” Nils E. Lind, May 15, 1945, and “Developments in Local Government in the Dhahran District,” July 19, 1946, CS/A.890F.00/7-1946, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

172 Majlis al-Wukalā’, document no. 79, Jumāda al-Thānī 9, 1359H/July 14, 1940; Majlis al-Wukalā’, document no. 222, Shawwāl 23, 1359H/November 23, 1940 and Majlis al-Wukalā’, document no. 138, Rabī’ al-Thānī 12, 1358H/May 31, 1939, IPA.

173 Majlis al-Shurā, document no. [illegible], Dhū al-Hijja 26, 1355H/March 9, 1937, IPA.

arbiters in issues where their people were concerned.¹⁷⁴ In the old towns and villages of the province emir, sheikh and *ʿumda* largely ruled by consensus within the confines of the respective village or quarter. However, “in the course of oil industrialization, local modes of rule went through a process of growing depersonalization that contributed to the social and political marginalization of the local communities” and the local government increasingly retreated to the use of violence in controlling the growing number of oil workers.¹⁷⁵

The oil company also held significant power over the local communities. Converging state paternalism and oil modernization provided ample means of controlling the Saudi oil workers. Furthermore, Aramco and its data collecting Government Relations and Research Divisions became a surveillance force. The Research Division employed several local “relators,” mainly from the local Bedouin and villagers, as well as “consultants” among local merchants and businessmen. From an early stage, Aramco began monitoring the affiliation of its Saudi employees with either of the two main confessional groups. In 1957 an anonymous newspaper comment in the Eastern Province claimed that the oil company “uses the terms ‘Sunnite’ and ‘Shi’ite’ in its registers to identify its Saudi workers. This action will arouse sectarian differences between members of the same nation, and is contrary to the purely commercial functions of the company.”¹⁷⁶ A consular report of 1948 stated that “a not uncommon source of complaints [by the company’s American foremen] is the friction between Shias and Sunnis. The latter, mainly nomadic Bedouins, are much stricter in their religious practices and frequently complain that Shia gang pushers do not give them time off to pray.”¹⁷⁷ Reports issued by Aramco’s Arabian Research Division betray a keen interest in the religious affiliation of their workforce and recurrently transmitted a picture of strained sectarian relations or “minority sensitiveness,” as the staff at the division called it.¹⁷⁸ Aramco justified its

174 Telephone-interview with Ali al-Ahmed, Washington, DC, June 2, 2012; Krimly, *The Political Economy of Rentier States*, 146; Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916–1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 190–91; Saʿīd, *Tārīkh Al Saʿūd*, 791–94; “Strike of Two Thousand Saudi Arab Employes of the Arabian American Oil Company at Dhahran,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 28, 1945, 890F.5045/7-2845, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

175 Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence,” 257–58.

176 “Secrets,” April 1, 1957, vol. 2, no. 42, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

177 “Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company,” W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA. Insertion added.

178 “Shi’ite Muslimes, Eastern Province,” K.H. Webster, October 11, 1958, Box 2, Folder 61 ARD, Mulligan Papers.

interference by referring to corporate control and discipline, e.g. in regulating the usage of shelters for prayer that were provided by the company for its Saudi employees on request of the Saudi government. Saudi staff were also required to disclose their affiliation with either of the two Islamic sects if they were to be treated in one of Aramco's hospitals. The company rejected any responsibility for these policies:

Because religious affiliation is one of the items of identification required by the Government, and the Company in getting such information becomes the butt of resentment [by objecting Saudi employees], it may be considered wise to request some official document to have on hand and to be shown and explained to objectors.¹⁷⁹

Sources do not prove the existence of such government requirements. If true, they likely were connected to events that unfolded in the oil operations area in 1956 and that will be discussed in the next chapter. The company obviously regarded Sunnis and Shi'a as "antagonistic sects" who did not get along well. "The Shi'ites of Eastern Arabia," one report issued by the Arabian Research Division tells us,

tend to be apart from the rest of the community. They have their own villages, or quarters of towns; they have their own places of worship and to some extent their own civil and religious officials. The Sunni Government (...) strongly disapproves of the Shi'ites. Because of the Shi'ites status as less than first class citizens, many of the jobs in the Company which are unattractive to others have fallen to them. The Shi'ites wait on table, work in the laundry, and generally do the dirty work. Oil, needless to say, is not held in low esteem, and the greasy mechanic may be either Sunnite or Shi'ite.¹⁸⁰

Already in 1944, the American consul in Dhahran reported that Aramco maintained secret files on both, its American and Saudi employees, "the content of which is unknown by them, and even the existence of such a file is in some cases unknown." Furthermore, he stated that "the method of obtaining information for these files is often unscrupulous." Apparently, the company specifically

179 "Shi'ite Muslimes, Eastern Province," K.H. Webster, October 11, 1958, Box 2, Folder 61 ARD, Mulligan Papers. Insertion added.

180 "The People of Saudi Arabia," W.E. Mulligan, July 7, 1952, Box 7, Folder 15 ARD, Mulligan Papers.

employed a former FBI officer for this job, a practice that was also in use at the British Arabian Petroleum Company. Arab “spies” employed by the Research Division gathered information which was placed in employees’ personal files, but also the private letters by American employees were opened. The consul further complained that the company held back important information, e.g. on accidents involving Saudi citizens, and was in general aloof in its outside dealings with local Arabs. Most importantly, he remarked that “political activities in the country are fully reported from Dhahran by the company directly to its Headquarter in San Francisco with the notation ‘inform Washington.’”¹⁸¹ On the other hand, the oil company complained that its legal dealings with local employees were “complicated” by the meddling of local sheikhs on behalf of the members of their communities.¹⁸² Interference of local sheikhs in court trials rooted back to old custom in which the village leader or tribal chief adopted the role of *‘arif al-haqq* who adjudicated at customary courts.¹⁸³ The rebuffing of such customary habits both by the Saudi government and Aramco marked a crucial stage in the ongoing centralization and de-personalization of local rule and jurisdiction. For the oil company, instances such as these early criminal trials emphasized the necessity to know more about the communal background of the Saudi oil workers. Company surveillance of its workforce became a vital interest and increasingly gained political meaning, as the following decades would show.

Saudi rule formally extended into the confines of American residential areas and headquarters, but it was not really enforced there. On several occasions, the oil company went even so far as to take over the ruling authority among its American employees. Aramco’s own security force, the so-called Identification Division which consisted of retired New York policemen, kept up order and security inside American camps and Aramco property. The company avoided dealings with the Saudi authorities when Americans or Europeans were involved, but had no qualms of handing over Middle Eastern or South Asian

181 “Memorandum for Files,” October 18, 1944, Clarence J. McIntosh, 863.6-ARAMCO, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

182 “Arab Court Proceedings Against ARAMCO Employee, F.S. Bills,” Parker T. Hart to William A. Eddy, September 17, 1944, 804/320-Bills, F.S., Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

183 I thank the anonymous reviewer for the Arabic title. The original source claims that the tribal chief adopted the title of *mufti* in local court. “Arab Court Proceedings Against ARAMCO Employee, F.S. Bills,” Parker T. Hart to William A. Eddy, September 17, 1944, 804/320-Bills, F.S., Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.



FIGURE 11 Members of the US Commander Middle East Force and US Consulate staff pose with the Saudi Head Executioner (center) during an official visit to Hofuf in April 1951. National Archives and Research Association, Maryland

“troublemakers” to the Saudi police.¹⁸⁴ Aramco’s Government Relations Department handled contacts with local government officials and interfered when Americans came into conflict with Saudi law.¹⁸⁵ In 1946, the US administration in Dhahran even pondered the idea to employ American judges in the oil areas.¹⁸⁶ Occasionally, local emirs attempted to secure the assistance of the company in dealing with Saudi law breakers. In one case, Aramco was asked by a local emir “to build him a jail,” which the company initially refused as she felt this was not one of her responsibilities. In the end, Aramco must have felt that her own interests were touched as well and equipped the emir with stocks for restraining prisoners.¹⁸⁷ Everywhere else in the province, the Saudi governor

184 “Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company,” W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

185 Speers, “Interview,” 477–79.

186 Telegram, US Legation Jidda to Department of State, March 4, 1946, 310, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

187 Speers, “Interview,” 478.

ruled “with an iron fist.”¹⁸⁸ In the industrial districts, main gates that served as entrances into American camps played a crucial role for the demarcation of the boundaries between the legal and spatial terrains of the oil company and the Saudi government.¹⁸⁹ The Saudi authorities did not hesitate to stage the punishment of thieves and other criminals among the non-American population in front of the company gates, so that Saudi oil workers who returned from their workplace to Saudi camps could be forced to watch the displays of state disciplining. Reports and firsthand accounts of severed hands and feet that were hung from fences surrounding American camps and the US consulate as public reminders of the prevailing law are manifold.¹⁹⁰

Aramco urged the US consulate to make every effort to persuade the local government to stop these gruesome demonstrations. Otherwise, the company withstood interfering in the punishments, except furnishing medical aid to mitigate the suffering of the punished. However, American indignation mostly had ulterior motives: “Since the type of punishment would be regarded as cruel and unusual in many other countries,” wrote the American consul Parker T. Hart in 1944, “pictures or accounts of these punishments might well be used as an instrument of propaganda against both the company and Saudi Arabia.” In congruence with such reasoning, the company contented itself with urging the Saudi authorities to use some other location for their more coercive modes of rule.¹⁹¹

188 Interview with former labor activist at Aramco, Dhahran, May 17, 2013.

189 Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence,” 257.

190 Cheney, *Big Oil Man*, 17–18; Jose Arnold, *Golden Swords and Pots and Pans* (Victor Gollanz Limited, 1964), 206–7; Fadia Basrawi, *Brownies and Kalashnikovs: A Saudi Woman's Memoir of American Arabia and Wartime Beirut* (South Street Press, 2009), 54–56; Kai Bird, *Crossing Mandelbaum Gate: Coming of Age Between the Arabs and Israelis (1956–1978)* (Simon & Schuster, 2010), 115–16.

191 “Weekly Meeting, U.S. Consulate,” December 8, 1948, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, 125.66, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

Popular Politics on the Oil Frontier

Popular politics on the Saudi oil frontier cannot be fathomed without placing the oil province in the regional setting of powerful international oil consortiums and overlapping and often conflicting imperial interests that competed with or sponsored not yet consolidated national states. Oil prompted a new mapping of the Gulf region in the form of concession territories that were claimed by American and British oil syndicates.¹ This process rarely worked in a straightforward manner, as the Buraimi dispute between Saudi Arabia and Britain illustrates. The conflict over the oil rich borderland located between present day Oman, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia was fought over a span of two and a half decades from 1949 until 1974 with crucial involvement of Aramco and – as will be argued in the following – particularly during the 1950s has contributed to the politicization of the emergent Saudi oil conurbation.² The rivalry between British and Saudi – and by extension US American – interests added a political dimension in which foreign political and corporate agents interpreted and governed the local communities in the fashion of imperialism. Whilst Aramco's company towns and labor camps constituted important micro spaces whose actual physical form and acquired symbolism could be translated into rallying power of the oil workers, the oil province became a battleground for imperial state and corporate agents who attempted to push territorial borders and manipulate local communities in accordance with their own ambitions.

Furthermore, as imperial Britain in the Gulf reared up against growing US influence, the Pan-Arab project developed into another political key factor, with Egypt at its forefront. Meanwhile, the young Saudi state greatly struggled to govern the social consequences of entering the twentieth century capitalist age. Paternalistic modes of government were increasingly challenged by

-
- 1 The impact of oil concessions on the formation of the modern Gulf states and on boundary disputes has been first demonstrated by Rosemarie Said Zahlan in her work on the History of the Trucial States. Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates. A Political and Social History of the Trucial States* (Routledge, 1978).
 - 2 This politicization happened as well in Bahrain's oil camps. Stephen J. Ramos, "Mapping the Persian Gulf Petroleumscape. The Production of Territory, Territoriality and Sovereignty," in *Oil Spaces. Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*, ed. Carola Hein (Routledge, 2022), 75, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367816049>. On the involvement of Aramco's Research Division in providing evidence to the Saudi territorial claims see Speers, "Interview," 483–90.

decidedly anti-imperialist political movements at home and in neighboring countries which fought over legal ownership of oil profits and rested upon the shoulders of a politicized class of oil workers and intellectual elites.³ Whilst the Saudi oil industry was still in its infancy, by the 1940s the Gulf region at large experienced the struggle of oil workers for better work conditions and more political participation. Labor migration from the wider Arab world into the oil producing countries of the Gulf led as well to a migration of ideas and experiences of organized labor struggle.⁴ Oil to a considerable extent triggered the constitutional movements in Bahrain, Dubai and Kuwait. As many Bahrainis worked in the Saudi oil industry and vice versa and political news and ideas travelled easily between the island and al-Ahsa', the tide of Bahrain's labor struggle swept over as well onto the Saudi mainland.⁵

In 1943, workers at the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) staged their first general strike in which they demanded the improvement of living and working conditions. The religious and ethnic heterogeneity of Bahrain created the context for the amalgamation of labor and constitutional struggle. Crucially, "by the 1940s, religious devotion [of the Bahraini oil workers] became a conduit for the expression of the class sentiments beginning to unite oil workers, professionals and government employees."⁶ Bahrain's constitutional movement of 1954 was preceded by sectarian violence that erupted during the 'Ashura' processions of September 1953.⁷ In the aftermath of these tensions, representatives of Bahrain's Shi'i and Sunni communities demanded constitutional rights for all the people of Bahrain.⁸ In October 1954, BAPCO workers petitioned the ruler of Bahrain for free elections and a true representation of all of Bahrain's people in the government as well as for the permission to establish trade unions. British observers noted specifically the cooperation between Shi'a and Sunnis, who had equally signed the petition. The constitutional movement gained widespread support from several important sections of the population. Bahrain's Shi'a hoped for a better representation at the state level while merchants and other elites resented deficiencies in the government

3 Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 66–90; Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia in the Cold War;" Bsheer, "A Counter-Revolutionary State;" al-Sudairi, "Marx' Arabian Apostoles."

4 Matthiesen, "Migration;" Chalcraft, "Migration and Popular Protest."

5 Seccombe and Lawless, *Work Camps*, 19; Matthiesen, "Migration," 477.

6 Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 169. Insertion added.

7 In Shi'i Islam, 'Ashura' processions, mourning ceremonies and congregational meetings are held in the month of Muharram to commemorate the violent death of Husayn Bin 'Ali (d. 680), grandson of the prophet Muhammad and third imam.

8 Omar al-Shehabi, 2012, "Political Movements in Bahrain: Past, Present, and Future," *Jadaliyya*, 14 February, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25261>.

system, including the low standard of law courts.⁹ The movement was forcefully ended in November 1956 after demonstrators had protested the tripartite aggression on Egypt. Its leaders were arrested and deported from Bahrain.¹⁰ In its aftermath, the Bahraini government, aided by Britain, diverted political activism from secular politics towards easier to control Shi'i and Sunni platforms.¹¹

Although the situations in Bahrain's and Saudi Arabia's oil fields were different when it came to the composition of the workforce and politicization levels, political struggle in both countries shared many similarities, such as the traditional role of urban-based elites as sponsors of subaltern groups and the modes of industrial governance employed by the sister companies BAPCO and Aramco. Furthermore, long-established kinship ties and trade and migration networks between al-Ahsa' and Bahrain played important roles in the exchange of information, strategies, political ideas and organizational resources between the political movements in both countries.

1 The Saudi Labor Struggle

The first strike of Saudi oil workers was inspired by the concurrent protest of BAPCO workers in Bahrain. The Saudi strike began in December 1943 and ended in January 1944 and originated in the workers' demands for higher wages, better accommodation and fewer working hours.¹² This first wave of labor unrest coincided with a considerable expansion of Aramco's labor force which was made necessary by the construction of the new oil refinery at Ra's Tanura that began in 1943. Besides growing numbers of skilled US-American staff, laying down oil infrastructures during that early phase of oil operations required large numbers of unskilled workers. Faced with a need for cheap manual work Aramco relied extensively on local sub-contractors who recruited laborers not only from al-Ahsa' but also from Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq and Pakistan. Between 1944 and 1947 the company also actively recruited semi-skilled artisans, clerks and domestic servants from India, despite strict quotas issued by

9 "Development of the Internal [?] Political Situation in Bahrain," Dispatch no. 113, British Residency, Bahrain, December 26, 1954, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records from 1782 (hereafter: FOR/) EA 1016/1.

10 Falah al-Mdaires, "Shi'ism and Political Protest in Bahrain." *DOMES* 11, no. 1 (2002): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-3606.2002.tb00440.x>.

11 Al-Shehabi, "Political Movement in Bahrain," 30.

12 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 1, 294–95.



FIGURE 12 Arab Workers are being transported from Ra's Tanura to their residential areas in 1947 by Harold Corsini. Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville

the Saudi government that restricted the number of work permits for British Indian personnel in al-Ahsa'. Artisan and skilled manual labor for construction works also was imported from the former Italian settler population in Eritrea.¹³

Pakistani, Iraqi and Italian workers struggled against labor conditions at Aramco in 1943, 1944, 1945, 1947 and 1949. In early 1945, Iraqi contractor workers published their claims against the Aramco sub-contractor Muhammad 'Abdullah al-Mana' in the Iraqi newspaper *al-Sha'ab*, where they complained about hunger, long hours, small wages, and "unbearable tyranny and oppression." Others sent letters of complaint to the *mutasarriif* of Basra, who ultimately intervened on behalf of his subjects and asked the oil company to bring

13 Seccombe and Lawless, *Work Camps*, 16–20, 23–26. Between 1944 and 1947, Aramco presumably run a recruiting agency in Bombay. Richard I. Lawless and Ian J. Seccombe, "Travailleurs Migrants et Débuts de l'Industrie Pétrolière Dans le Golfe Arabe, 1930–1950," *Maghreb-Mashrek* 112, no. 2 (1986): 31.

light into the grievances. Apparently, the Saudi sub-contractor, a well-known businessman from al-Khobar, had grossly misrepresented working conditions to the Iraqi recruits and had employed them without proper work agreement. The Iraqis were ultimately repatriated and al-Mana' lost his sub-contract for the oil company.¹⁴ This episode illustrates typical conflicts that arose around oil labor in the early years of oil industrialization. Whenever faced with strikes or dissent by its workers, Aramco swiftly got rid of the offending group. The Italians, who repeatedly voiced dissatisfaction with their treatment by the company were gradually diminished in numbers through deportation from Saudi Arabia.¹⁵ In 1949, the Saudi government instructed the company to amend its recruitment policies towards the employment of Saudi nationals, Palestinian refugees, citizens of the Arab League countries and other Arabs and Muslims. Consequently, Saudis from all over the Kingdom migrated to al-Ahsa' in the search of employment with the company. The by far largest group of Saudis employed by Aramco, however, remained locals from al-Ahsa' who constituted almost two-thirds of the Saudi oil workers in 1954.¹⁶

In July 1945, not long after the Iraqi contractor workers had left al-Ahsa', Saudi workers in Dhahran began their second strike. At the peak of the three-day protest between two and nine thousand Saudi laborers stayed away from their work. The workers' demands included higher wages, improved living quarters, free medical treatment, free transportation and the preference of Saudi workers over foreign labor. Immediately after receiving the list of grievances, the emir of the Dhahran district, Khalid al-Sudayri, made it clear to Aramco that the government sided with the Saudi workers whose grievances were considered "fair and just."¹⁷ The strike of Saudi oil men confronted Aramco and the Saudi government with the possibility of mass labor organization and

14 Letter from "Iraqi Labourers Working in American-Saudi-Arabian Oil. Co. [sic]," Enclosure no. 1 to dispatch no. 570, American Legation, Baghdad, January 5, 1945, 863.6-Aramco; "Allegations That the Arabian American Oil Company and the Bahrain Petroleum Company Are Mistreating Iraqi Workers," Despatch no. 567, January 4, 1945, American Legation, Baghdad, 863.6-Aramco; Letter from US Consul Parker T. Hart, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, to Lester Sutton, American Vice-Consul, Basra, Iraq, January 10, 1945, 863.6-Aramco; "Complaints," Mutasarrifiyah, Liwa of Basra, to American Consulate Basra, January 10, 1945, 863.6-Aramco; and Letter from Lester Sutton, American Vice-Consul Basra, Iraq, to Parker T. Hart, US Consulate, Dhahran, January 16, 1945, 863.6-Aramco, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944-1949, RG 84, NARA.

15 Seccombe and Lawless, *Work Camps*, 74.

16 Seccombe and Lawless, *Work Camps*, 26, 37-39.

17 "Strike of Two Thousand Saudi Arab Employes of the Arabian American Oil Company at Dhahran," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 28, 1945, 890F.5045/7-2845, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

unrest amongst a considerable part of the local population. The government's reaction was to increase pressure on the company to raise the work and living conditions of her Saudi employees towards a standard that equaled that of foreign employees, to improve housing and medical treatment in the Saudi labor camps and to systematically train Saudi employees for higher job levels.¹⁸ Aramco's building of hospitals and schools in the oil area and the provision of health services as well as of company training for its Saudi employees were results of early Saudi labor unrest and increasing state pressure and did not stem from an "enlightened self-interest" of the oil company as was routinely proclaimed by Aramco in later years.¹⁹ Medical services included also a malaria surveillance program in the Eastern Province in which the Saudi government cooperated with the oil company starting in 1947. In 1955 Aramco began to research and counter-measure other widespread diseases such as smallpox and trachoma.²⁰ In addition, the government sought to increase and institutionalize state patronage over the Saudi workers. Complaints and grievances against Aramco were henceforth channeled through a representative of the so-called Labor and Workmen Division of the Ministry of Finance in Dammam who acted as intermediary between Saudi workers and the oil company and whom the US administration in the province regarded as "empowered to represent workers' interests" vis-à-vis the oil company.²¹

1.1 *Precarious Labor in a Budding Oil Industry*

The strike of 1945 also stressed the need for a new labor legislation. The embryonic Saudi labor law dated back to a royal decree issued in 1937 and was concerned primarily with regulations on work conditions and industrial accident compensation. It seems that the Saudi labor legislation of 1937, and especially its provisions to secure compensation for dismissed or injured workers, was not well received by the oil company and had even led to cases in which the company management had bullied physicians at Aramco hospitals

18 Announcement "To All Saudi Arab Employees," J. McPherson, Vice-President of the Arabian American Oil Company, January 7, 1946, 863.6-Aramco, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944-1949, RG 84, NARA.

19 Even historical research solicited and published by Saudi Aramco concedes that the company did not take these measures voluntarily and that "some" in the oil company "wondered whether they would ever see an adequate return on their investment." McMurray, *Energy to the World*, vol. 1, 155. On company training and medical service for Saudi employees see Arabian American Oil Company, *Aramco Handbook*, 155-159 and 167-168.

20 Hicke, *American Perspectives*, iii-v.

21 "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944-1949, RG 84, NARA.

into amending their written diagnoses in a way that saved the company from paying industrial accident compensations to injured workers.²² Not least in reaction to the Saudi labor struggle, a revised labor law was issued in late 1947. The new law mainly complemented the former regulations, especially regarding the responsibilities of employers vis-à-vis their Saudi workers. The new labor code introduced a six-day working week and an eight-hour working day, annual paid leave and paid sick leave. Employment of children below the age of ten was outlawed. The labor code further stipulated guaranteed free housing for workers in industrial firms, as well as overtime payment and paid compensation in the case of occupational injuries. However, adherence to the new labor code was unsatisfactory and it had practical implications mainly for the oil company and foreign firms.²³ Moreover, it did not necessarily lead to improvements in the status of the Saudi workmen but often worked out in the interest of their employers and especially of the oil company, which was the main target of the new legislation. For example, the revised rules for the dismissal of workers loosened the earlier regulations of 1937 and effectively allowed the employer to dismiss a worker for any reason without prior warning or compensation payment. After studying the new labor legislation, one US diplomat in Dhahran came to the scathing conclusion that

The company has been in fact, all along, violating the Saudi Arabian law in the matter of notices and dismissal indemnities. Now, however ... it will be possible to comply with the law, since the new provisions are considerably less favorable to the worker.²⁴

Hence, while public claims of Aramco's progressiveness in industrial relations clashed harshly with the reality, the troubles of 1945 and the labor legislation of 1947 bring into focus the precariousness of labor in the oil area in general as well as the difficulties to govern initial oil industrialization. During the second half of the 1940s recruitment of Saudis into the oil sector peaked, yet Aramco and contractor workers alike fluctuated greatly on and off their jobs. Among

22 "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

23 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 430–31; Translation of Labor and Workmen Regulations, March 15, 1948, 850.1, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA; "Labor Conditions in Saudi Arabia," W.E. Mulligan, 29 June 1963, Box 3, Folder 18, ARD, Mulligan Papers.

24 "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

the reasons which Aramco was obligated to provide to the Ministry of Finance upon the dismissal of a Saudi worker, insubordination ranked in the first place. Yet, the US consulate believed that a substantial part of the workers terminated their contract for the company voluntarily because of what it called the “abysmal labor conditions” in Aramco’s industrial districts. Despite the improvements negotiated between the company and the Saudi government after the strike of 1945, three years later almost all of Aramco’s Saudi employees still lived in temporary quarters under lamentable circumstances. Plans for the education and training of Saudi employees were still merely under discussion, as were systematic pay raises and the extension of medical services to the workers’ families.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, under these conditions the turnover rates of Saudi employees were “excessively high,” especially in the lowest grades. Some sources claim that “prior to 1953 Aramco had to hire 600 each month merely to replace those who had left; over a year this amounted to almost half of the total workforce.”²⁶ How voluntary the local employees really left Aramco is purely speculative. Many Saudi workers did never gain secure employment anyway because regulations of the Saudi labor code were skirted by Aramco through hiring on a day-to-day basis.

A great number of those job seekers who had been fired or rejected by Aramco based on a tainted work record or bad health were absorbed into contractor work. They were usually hired daily and often without a work contract. Even in comparison to other oil companies in the Gulf who applied the same strategies, Aramco used an especially large number of local sub-contractors with an average of 130 engaged local sub-contractors on Aramco projects in the late 1940s. In 1945, Saudi sub-contractors for Aramco employed workers mainly for construction works in the oil area. Nearly 1,300 of these men were Saudis and additional large numbers came from Iraq, India and Pakistan. The US army likewise employed contractor workers for the building of the Dhahran airport. Other sub-contractors employed workers on Tapline and the Dammam-Riyadh railroad. These men reportedly worked for higher wages than their co-workmen at Aramco, yet without medical care, at an even swifter pace than Aramco workers (who back then worked twelve-hour days, six-days a week), and under extremely strict surveillance. The number of Saudi contractor workers in the oil province rose drastically in subsequent years and in

25 “Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company,” W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

26 Ian J. Seccombe and Richard I. Lawless, “Duty Shaikhs, Subcontractors and Recruiting Agents: The Impact of the International Oil Industry on Recruitment and Employment in the Persian/Arabian Gulf,” *Orient* 27, no. 2 (1986): 265–66.



FIGURE 13 Applicant for a job being interviewed through the window of the employment office in Dhahran in 1947 by Harold Corsini, Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville

1953, a total of eleven thousand Saudis worked for local firms in al-Ahsa' that were under sub-contract with Aramco.²⁷

An example for the cynics that reigned the treatment of contractor workers stems from 1949, when Aramco together with the Saudi government initiated an insurance policy for Saudi contractor workers. The so-called Contractor's Workmen' Compensation Fund covered cases of death or disability of Saudi contractor workers. However, Aramco's real purpose was to secure the financial cooperation of the Saudi government and thus to reduce the overall costs for injured workers for all companies including itself. This strategy proved

27 "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," WJ. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4; and "Weekly Report on Arab Personnel Recruitment," October 11, 1945, 863.6-Aramco, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944-1949, RG 84, NARA; Reuters Press Statement, October 19, 1953, FOR ES 1538/2; Seccombe and Lawless. "Duty Shaikhs, Subcontractors and Recruiting Agents," 258.

successful as, immediately after issuing the new regulations, the Saudi government cut back the compensation payment for a death claim from 18,000 Saudi Riyal to 12,000 Saudi Riyal, a step that raised hopes in the oil company “that reductions may be made in other categories” as well. To literally add injustice to the injury of the contractor workers, participation of contractor firms in the fund was not even mandatory.²⁸ In the archives of the Saudi Institute of Public Administration, hundreds of cases are documented in which families demanded in vain for compensation payments from contractor firms because their brothers or sons had been injured or had died through work accidents or perished from bodily exhaustion. They usually left their families without any means for survival. Moreover, laborers who were hired by contractor firms on a day-to-day basis without regular work contracts and whose numbers in the oil province probably reached several ten thousands, were not eligible for any compensation claims.²⁹ This abysmal situation dragged on for a long time. In 1960, contractor workers still fought for one day off per week.³⁰

Oil industrialization in the 1940s meant not only precarious work conditions but also continuously rising costs of living in the emergent oil conurbation, which put extra strain on the economic situation of the local communities. An US communiqué of 1948 reported a “rampant inflation in the Dhahran area ... an area [traditionally] lacking foodstuffs sufficient to feed a scanty population [and] suddenly inundated by a flood of highly paid imported labor.”³¹ Even Aramco employees whose income had multiplied in comparison to the early years of oil exploration could not afford the local prices for food. Often, Saudi oil workers were the only breadwinners of the family and had to support not only their wives and children but also other economically dependent relatives.³² In

28 “Transmittal of Copies of Contractor’s Workmen’ Compensation Fund Founding Plan,” Despatch no. 149, US Consulate, Dhahran, December 3, 1949, 890F.5051/12-349, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

29 Majlis al-Shūra, document no. 490, Sha’bān 8, 1370H/May 15, 1951; Majlis al-Shūra, document no. 6627, Ramaḍān 12, 1370H/June 17, 1951; Majlis al-Shūra, document no. 2951, Jumāda al-Thānī 5, 1370H/March 14, 1951; Majlis al-Shūra, document no. 122, Sha’bān 8, 1370H/May 15, 1951; Majlis Wuzarā’, unnumbered and undated document that refers to a case stated in document no. 143, Dhū-l-Qa’da 27, 1374H/July 17, 1955, IPA.

30 Wuzāra al-Māliyya wa-l-Iqtisād al-Waṭānī, document no. 73, Rajab 5, 1379H/January 4, 1960, IPA.

31 “Conditions affecting the cost of living in the Dhahran area,” Elmer C. Hulen, US Vice Consul, Dhahran, October 1, 1948, 550.102, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA. Insertions added.

32 “Definition of Saudi Employee Family,” Clark Cypher, December 29, 1954, Box 2, Folder 44, ARD, Chronological Files, October–December 1954, Mulligan Papers. Abir mentions that “the local population, including Aramco’s Saudi workers, experienced hardship” due to the sharp rise of prices in the Eastern Province. Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 33.



FIGURE 14 Arab workers on payday, Ra's Tanura in 1947 by Harold Corsini, Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville

order to alleviate the economic situation of its employees Aramco subsidized basic foodstuff such as rice, tea and cooking fat through the issuing of vouchers for the purchase in one of Aramco's dry ration stores. Inevitably, as attempts to benefit one segment of the population only went so far, these so-called "chits" became highly sought after in the local black market outside the oil camps.³³

1.2 *The Birth of an Organized Labor Movement*

Due to a situation in which the budding oil business did not yet alleviate the poverty and poor living conditions of the local population, the demand for higher living allowances ranked first in the list of grievances directed by Aramco intermediate and general workers to the company management in

33 "Conditions affecting the cost of living in the Dhahran area," Elmer C. Hulen, US Vice Consul, Dhahran, October 1, 1948, 550.102; and "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

May 1953.³⁴ Social hardship in and outside the labor camp contributed to growing political unrest. In addition, the protests of Aramco workers in 1953 were inspired by the nationalist, anti-imperialist and decolonizing “zeitgeist” of the era, which permeated the entire Middle East.³⁵ Oil workers from other countries in the region and especially Palestinians, who had joined Aramco’s workforce in large numbers after 1948, contributed to political fervor in the Saudi labor camps.³⁶ In addition, the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in 1951 and the Egyptian revolution of 1952 were widely reported in the newspapers and radio broadcasts of neighboring countries like Bahrain and “sparked a new political consciousness” among workers at Aramco.³⁷

The political activism of 1953 was initiated by a relatively small group of workers who during the labor movement were able to mobilize the larger part of the Saudi workforce. Foreign Arabs among Aramco’s intermediate staff – and in particular among the teachers at the company’s industrial training centers – may have played an important role in spreading Arab nationalist and leftist thought among the oil workers.³⁸ However, the echelon of labor activists who ultimately became the leaders of the Saudi labor movement were Saudis from al-Ahsa’ and other parts of the kingdom. Presenting the list of demands to the company management was their first step for launching a Saudi labor movement at Aramco. Noteworthy, in doing so, the initiators avoided the formal procedure of addressing the Labor and Workmen Division at the Ministry of Finance in Dammam which was acting as the legal intermediary between Saudi workers and Aramco. Instead, the workers elected seven spokespersons from among their midst who represented the Saudi workmen vis-à-vis the company management.³⁹ This group, which was later termed *al-lajna al-‘umal* (the workers’ committee), consisted of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Sunayd, son of a Najdi father and a mother from al-Hasa who grew up in Iraq where he came into touch with leftist and communist ideas; Salih Sa‘ad al-Zayd from al-Hasa, who had been educated in Beirut and the United States, Ibrahim al-Faraj, whose family had long since administered the Ramis, the large agricultural endowment that surrounded the village of ‘Awwamiyya in

34 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

35 Al-Sudairi, “Marx’ Arabian Apostoles,” 442.

36 See Matthiesen, “Migration,” 477–78; Chalcraft, “Migration and Popular Protest,” 39–41.

37 Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence,” 248; Aḥmarī, *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt*, 180.

38 Matthiesen, “Migration,” 478–79.

39 “Labor Unrest in Dhahran,” US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, September 29, 1953, 886A.2553/9-2953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

the Qatif oasis, and who had received technical training in Lebanon and Long Island; ‘Abdullah ‘Ali al-Ghanim from Qatif, who worked in Aramco’s accounting department; ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Buhayjan from Qasim, who had received training at the American University Beirut (AUB); as well as ‘Omar Wazna and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Safyan, two company clerks. No formal members of the workers’ committee, yet leading activists at Aramco and involved in the subsequent negotiations between the workers and the company were Nasir al-Sa‘id and Sulayman ‘Abdullah Sahil from Ha’il.⁴⁰

Suspicious about witnessing a fledgling unionist movement, Aramco refused to deal with the workers’ committee and instead insisted on direct negotiations with the Ministry representatives in Dammam, whom it apparently expected to bring a halt to the movement. Meanwhile, the labor leaders began to mobilize their Saudi co-workers in the three oil towns for the pending labor struggle. They placed broadsides on company bulletin boards and held meetings in labor camps and local villages. Articles were published in Bahrain’s weekly newspapers. In early September, over six thousand Saudi oil workers petitioned the king for the recognition of the workers’ committee.⁴¹

Recognition was not granted, yet the seven elected labor leaders were admitted to participate in a series of meetings that were held in September 1953 between company officials and representatives of the Ministry of Finance who had been sent to Dhahran to investigate the workers’ grievances. While the ministry representatives were inclined towards supporting the workers’ grievances, the company took a less favorable stance. The joint meetings came to an abrupt halt when ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Buhayjan and Nasir al-Sa‘id, possibly after a heated disagreement with the company officials, threatened that the workers were ready to employ sabotage against the company.⁴² Aramco swiftly turned

40 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, Enclosure A, 886A.062/11-453; and “Employee Action to Bring Demands Before Company,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 19, 1955, Enclosure no. 1, 886A.2553/5-1955, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; “Biographical note Sulayman ‘Abdullah Saheel,” Harry McDonnald, October 14, 1961, Box 3 Folder 9; ARD, Chronological Files, September–October 1961, Mulligan Papers; al-‘Awwāmi, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 94, 117.

41 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, Enclosure D, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

42 Al-‘Awwāmi, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 95–96, 100; “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, Enclosure D, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

this disagreement into a case of insurgence and hoped “that the Government might of its own volition take action to oppose the activities of the leaders.”⁴³ And indeed, in mid-October, the Saudi government began to prepare for a violent confrontation with the nascent labor movement. The director of the military airfield in Dhahran was given full command over the Saudi military in the area and one thousand additional Saudi soldiers were stationed in Dhahran.⁴⁴ The emir Bin Jiluwi arrested the workers’ committee and other labor activists, including Nasir al-Sa’id, and had them transferred to Hofuf for imprisonment.⁴⁵

1.3 *The Strike of 1953*

The arrests of Saudi labor leaders were followed by recurrent meetings of oil workers and increased disturbances of public order in the company towns and local villages.⁴⁶ In Dhahran, outraged workers attacked military and company busses with stones.⁴⁷ On October 17, a general strike of Aramco workers was proclaimed. Labor activists promoted the strike among their kin and in the local communities throughout the oil area where they organized meetings that “occurred with apparent spontaneity, first in one place and then another. Speakers abruptly disappeared into the crowd at the approach of the police or other officials and few were positively identified.”⁴⁸ For several weeks the majority of Saudi oil workers in the three industrial districts stayed away from work and defied orders by the local emirs to return to their jobs. This greatly

43 “Labor Unrest in Dhahran, II,” US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, October 11, 1953, 886A.2553/10-1153, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

44 “Strike Rumors, Dhahran Area, May 1954,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 20, 1954, 886A.062/5-2054; “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, Enclosure B, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

45 “Release of Labor Leaders from Jail,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 5, 1953, 59 886A.062/11-553, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

46 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

47 Telegram no. 62, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, October 16, 1953, 886A.062/10-1653, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; al-’Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 101, 114.

48 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Insertion added.

surprised American observers who interpreted the workers' actions as hitherto unknown disobedience vis-à-vis the provincial government.⁴⁹

Kinship networks played an important role in mobilizing Saudi workers from different parts of the kingdom. Labor activists from more distant regions urged their own people among the workforce to keep the strike going. Especially workers from the Qasim had a reputation of being fierce activists.⁵⁰ Another influential group among labor activists originated from Ha'il, the capital of the old Rashidi emirate (1836–1921) and power center of the Shammar tribal confederation. Both, the Qasim and the Jabal Shammar looked back on a long history of autonomy from and revolts against Saudi rule.⁵¹ The Al Rashid had once been the main rivals of the Al Sa'ūd over territorial hegemony and tribal leadership on the Arabian Peninsula.⁵² The leader of the Shammari oil workers was Nasir al-Sa'id who in later decades gained the reputation of one of the fiercest Saudi opposition figures of that period. However, due to their local ties, Hasawis and Qatifis were the most represented among the leading organizers of the strike, among them numerous members of prominent local notable and merchant families.⁵³

Accordingly, the labor unrest at Aramco quickly spilled over into the local towns of the fledgling oil conurbation. Demonstrators, among them women and children, demanded the release of prisoners in front of the emirate building in Dammam.⁵⁴ Oil workers from Hofuf petitioned the crown prince to release the workers' committee from prison. The palace's negative and probably rude reply to the petitioners ended in a public tumult and violence in the center of Hofuf, where the representative of the emirate, who had publicly announced the royal dismissal, was attacked by the angered crowd. In the face of these events, a member of the Al 'Ajaji, one of the most important local merchant families, appealed to the crown prince that the labor leaders be released from prison and asked that the trouble be smoothed over.⁵⁵ The Al 'Ajaji

49 "Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia," Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

50 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 104; Interview with son of a former Aramco employee from Safwa, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.

51 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 188–98, 201–5, 210–27.

52 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 26–30.

53 Translations of workers' statement in Bahrain press, November 3, 1953, FOR ES 1538/9.

54 "Fi Mawqib al-Zaman," *Anbā' al-Baḥrayn wa-l-Khalij* 2, no. 4, Ṣafar 1373h/October 1953, in *Al-Kitāb al-Su'ūdīyyūn fī Majalla Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn*, 1369–1373h, ed. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Razāq al-Qash'amī (Dār Mafrudāt lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2010), 208–9.

55 "Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia," Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

owned extensive landed property in the Hasa oasis and during the advent of oil had branched out their business into al-Khobar. Their appeal was snubbed, yet shortly afterwards the leading merchants of al-Khobar were summoned for a dinner hosted by the local emir, who assured them “that the workers’ committee had not been arrested because it sought to represent the workers or had the workers’ interests at heart, but because its members had broken the law by defying the royal committee and stirring up public disorder and dissension.”⁵⁶ The Al ‘Ajaji and other local merchants were later suspected of having granted credits to the workers or at least having supported them with the provision of food.⁵⁷ Many of the strikers originated from the old local towns and villages and could rely on old networks of economic patronage from the landowning families. Moreover, hundreds of workers had fled from arrest into the old oasis districts where wealthy and prominent families offered them shelter in their houses.⁵⁸ ‘Ali al-‘Awwami, member of an old notable family who resided in the Qal‘a of Qatif and one of the strongest outside supporters of the labor movement, writes that the *husayniyyat* of the Al ‘Awwami became a stronghold of the strikers.⁵⁹

By late October, approximately one thousand workers and outside supporters had been arrested by the Saudi security forces.⁶⁰ Still, the strike dragged on, but slowly fewer and fewer workers participated in it. In early November, the strike was over, yet what exactly had tipped the scales towards ending the strike remains unclear. The sources do not conclusively rely whether the strike died because of forceful intimidation of the strikers or because the activists had failed in their aim to bring a halt to oil production or if perhaps influential members of the local communities had convinced the workers that the king would reign in their favor as long as they did not oppose government orders to

56 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

57 “Comment on the October–November 1953 Strike and the Arabian–American Oil Installations in Saudi Arabia,” John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, 886A.062/12-2953, December 29, 1953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

58 “Fi Mawqib al-Zaman.” *Anbā’ al-Bahrayn wa-l-Khalij* 2, no. 4, Šafar 1373h/October 1953, in *Al-Kitāb al-Su‘ūdiyyūn fī Majalla Šawt al-Bahrayn, 1369–1373h*, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Razāq al-Qash‘amī (Dār Mafrudāt lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 2010), 208–9.

59 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 104.

60 “Labor Disturbances in Eastern Saudi Arabia,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 886A.062/11-453; and Telegram no. 71, Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, October 20, 1953, 886A.062/10-2053, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

return to work.⁶¹ When the situation had returned to normal, the Saudi military was replaced with the traditional security forces of the provincial emir, which were stationed midway between the three oil districts. This was understood by the US administration in Dhahran as a peace-offering by the government and an attempt to avoid another outburst of local unrest in the face of strong military presence in the province.⁶²

Another matter that probably allows for deeper insight into the motives behind and organization of the strike is the behavior of contractor workers during the work stoppage. Less than one tenth of contractor workers participated in the strike, and apparently their continued labor had been instrumental in maintaining oil production at a high level during the walkout of Aramco employees.⁶³ While the strike was still in full swing, activists had in vain set up roadblocks in the local villages to stop the movement of contractor workers to the oil fields.⁶⁴ Yet, it seems that despite the thousands of Saudis who worked for Aramco's sub-contractors, the widespread image of a contractor worker was that of an Indian labor migrant. Hostility towards South Asian workers became a recurrent element of the Saudi labor movement which increased over the following two years and mirrored the strong anti-Indian sentiment displayed by the political movement of oil workers in Bahrain.⁶⁵

Again, why the contractor workers were left out of the activities remains a matter of speculation. The fact that contractor workers, whose overall numbers were almost the same as those of Aramco workers, mostly took not part

61 "Comment on the October–November 1953 Strike and the Arabian-American Oil Installations in Saudi Arabia," John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, 886A.062/12-2953, December 29, 1953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

62 "Comment on the October–November 1953 Strike and the Arabian-American Oil Installations in Saudi Arabia," John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, 886A.062/12-2953, December 29, 1953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

63 "Comment on the October–November 1953 Strike and the Arabian-American Oil Installations in Saudi Arabia," John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, 886A.062/12-2953, December 29, 1953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

64 Telegram no. 70, Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, October 19, 1953, 886A.062/10-1953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

65 "Fi Mawkiḅ al-Zaman." *Anbā' al-Baḥrayn wa-l-Khalij* 2, no. 4, Ṣafar 1373H/October 1953, in *Al-Kitāb al-Sa'ūdīyyūn fī Majalla Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn*, 1369–1373h, ed. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Razāq al-Qash'amī (Dār Mafrudāt lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2010), 208–9. The use of contract workers to maintain oil production at a high level seemed to have led to rising resentment among Saudi workers towards South Asian workers. Ḥamūd, "Sharikat Arāmū wa-l-'Ummāl," 57. Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 187–88.

in the strike of 1953, did not elude company management and US diplomatic staff.⁶⁶ One possible explanation transpires from company records. Since most contractors operating in the oil province were Saudis from the local communities, many of them members of prominent and influential families like the Al Ghosaibi, the provincial government had apparently fallen into the habit of exempting them from any obligations to fulfil the requirements of the Saudi labor law. In fact, in 1954, the newly appointed head of the Labor Office in Dammam, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rassak al-Rayyis, clashed on several occasions with the emir Bin Jiluwi over the non-compliance of Saudi sub-contractors with labor regulations.⁶⁷ While the old urban-based merchants apparently supported the strikes of Saudi oil workers against the foreign oil company, thereby sustaining traditional bonds of patronage, they had clearly no interest in doing the same for the men who were employed in their own firms. Vice-versa, the Saudi contractor workers may have felt even less empowered vis-à-vis their local employers who were granted free reign by the provincial governor and to whom they were bound by traditional ties of economic and social dependence, than they would have felt vis-à-vis a foreign company that despite all reluctance had to comply with the demands of the Saudi government. On a side note, al-Rayyis was driven from his post by Bin Jiluwi not long after his appointment. Arab activists believed that it was in fact Aramco who orchestrated the rapid come and go of heads of the Dammam Labor Office during that time. In a parody of the Quranic verse, the UAR sponsored radio broadcast Voice of the Arab Nation later put the desperate outcry "Aramco is able to do everything" in al-Rayyis' mouth.⁶⁸ Yet another explanation for the lack of mobilization of contractor workers for the labor struggle takes the spatial organization of the labor force into focus. Noteworthy, many activists later stressed that it was particularly the experience of living together in the labor camps that enabled the workers at Aramco to fully recognize their situation and to formulate a plan for action.⁶⁹ However, the bulk of contractor workers lived in their own "camps" farther away from company towns. This could have

66 "Comment on the October-November 1953 Strike and the Arabian-American Oil Installations in Saudi Arabia," John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, 886A.062/12-2953, December 29, 1953, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

67 Personal Communication to W. Burleigh, J.R. Jones, April 4, 1954, Box 2, Folder 39, ARD, Mulligan Papers.

68 "Report on Broadcasts of the Egyptian Radio Station 'Voice of the Arab Nation,' Media Digest," Federico S. Vidal, November 14, 1961, Box 3, Folder 10, ARD, Chronological Files, November-December 1961, Mulligan Papers.

69 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 331.

been a reason why they had not been mobilized in equal numbers. To gain a better understanding of the labor movement and its local social and political implications, the following sections will address in more detail the spatial dimension of the workers' actions and connect the events to local and regional political developments.

2 Contested Frontiers – a Politicization of Space

The Saudi government reacted to the strike of 1953 with a double strategy of repression of and paternalist welfare for the Saudi oil workers.⁷⁰ The newly instated King Sa'ud (1902–1969) arrived in Dhahran in January 1954 and used his first visit to the oil province to publicly announce wage increases, better housing and transportation of Saudi workers to and from their working places.⁷¹ Meanwhile, the Saudi Labor Office was moved from the Ministry of Finance in Dammam and put under direct supervision of the emir Bin Jiluwi. In the eyes of the American consul in Dhahran, this decision most probably marked a turn towards a more confrontational stance of the government which was ready to let the workers feel the full force of its disciplinary power in the face of new unrest.⁷² At the same time, Aramco attempted to take the issue of a labor union into its own hands and established so-called “communication committees” among its lower grade employees whose members were chosen by the company management.⁷³ The company's communication committees were designed such that if one worker complained “more than, say, twice,” he was warned that he was seen as a troublemaker and must watch his step. If he failed to comply with the warning, he was treated as a troublemaker and that treatment would be “extremely painful.” “The overall consequence,” as one British observer put it, “was that while the [Saudi] workman could depend on the Government to give him his rights the Company could depend

70 Ghrawi, “Structural and Physical Violence,” 251–252.

71 “King's Intervention in Aramco Labor Dispute,” J. Jefferson Jones, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, January 23, 1954, 886A.062/1-2354, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. King 'Abd al-'Aziz died November 9, 1953.

72 “Aramco Concessions in labor Dispute With Employees,” Windsor G. Hackler, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, February 8, 1954, 886A.062/2-854, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

73 “Aramco and the Saudi Labor Office,” Charles S. Kennedy, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 11, 1959, 886A.2553/6-1159, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

on the Government to discourage any troublemaker or agitator.”⁷⁴ The workers resented the appointed committees and recurrently demanded their abolition and replacement with an elected workers’ representation.⁷⁵

Another lesson taken from the previous labor struggle was that people not employed by Aramco should be hindered from entering labor camps and fences were to be erected around general camps in all three industrial districts. However, as this new rule deviated greatly from common practice, it was not immediately enforced.⁷⁶ The structuring powers of oil industrialization became probably most tangible in the segregation and increasing confinement of workers in the three company towns as well as in the uneven development of the oil conurbation. Yet, as will be discussed more thoroughly in the following paragraphs as well as in chapter 6, such material manifestations of power and repression also turned into rallying points for protests. When addressing the politicization of space in the growing oil conurbation, the regional scales of oil production and ensuing conflict over territories and political influence must also be considered, as they became increasingly intertwined with national and local politics. While the conflict between Great Britain and Saudi Arabia (and, by extension, Aramco and the United States) over territorial claims to the oil-rich region of Buraimi quickly came to a head, the neighboring Saudi oil province was turned into a stronghold of Saudi and US military. Only a couple of days after the end of the strike, crown prince Sa‘ud issued a five-year plan for the rearmament of the Saudi military which should be aided by US military assistance.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the Saudi request for US aid was justified with the labor disturbances in the Eastern Province earlier that same year. It was argued that the assembly of thousands of workers who were needed to carry out large-scale development projects in the province required additional means to prevent possible disorder in the future.⁷⁸ Whether perceived or real, the British

74 “Visit to Eastern Province,” D.C. Carden, Political Agency, Doha, November 2, 1955, FOR ES 1015/17. Insertion added.

75 “Hints of Saudi Officials’ Interest in Labor Unions,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, April 30, 1956, 886A.062/4-3056, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

76 “King’s Intervention in Aramco Labor Dispute,” J. Jefferson Jones, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, January 23, 1954, Enclosure 1, 886A.062/1-2354, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

77 “Saudi Five Year Plan for Development of Armed Forces,” J. Jefferson Jones, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, November 3, 1953, 786A.5/11-353, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

78 “Five Year Plan for the Development of Saudi Armed Forces,” J. Jefferson Jones, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, November 4, 1953, 786A.5/11-453; and “List of Equipment Which Saudi Arabia Wishes Obtain from U.S. for Implementation Five Year

government regarded the reinforcements of Saudi and US military in the oil area as a direct threat in close vicinity to Buraimi.⁷⁹ The growing British-Saudi (and US) antagonism was further deepened by the constitutional movement in Bahrain, which was likely felt by the Saudi government and oil company as a destabilizing threat for the Saudi oil industry. As will be seen, the ensuing conflict over territorial claims and political influence over the local communities in the Eastern Province, and particularly in Qatif, also structured and reinforced the struggles between Aramco workers, the oil company and the Saudi authorities.

2.1 *Tear Down the Fences! – Space as Mobilization Strategy*

Throughout the year 1954 the labor activists at Aramco did not cease their efforts to build an effective labor movement. Leaflets appeared in the oil province in which workers demanded a quick implementation of the alleviations promised by the Saudi government. At the same time, rumors of sabotage held the company management in a constant state of anxiety.⁸⁰ Saudi military in the area was given free rule in dealing with troublemakers.⁸¹ At some point in 1954, the Najdi 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin Mu'ammār, whom the American embassy in Jidda reported to have "had a copy of Marx' Capital in his bookshelf," was appointed director of the Labor Department of the Ministry of Finance in Dammam.⁸² In

Plan for Development Saudi Armed Forces," J. Jefferson Jones, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, December 29, 1953, 786A.5/12-2953.

79 "United States Military Equipment for Saudi Arabia," L.A.C. Fry, Foreign Office, April 28, 1954, FOR ES 1193/4. London considered it "most undesirable to strengthen the Saudi armed forces ... while the Buraimi dispute is still unsettled and when there is a possibility, however remote, that these forces might be used against the Trucial Oman Levies." Ministry of Defense, May 7, 1954, FOR ES 1193/4. US politicians and diplomats were aware of the British apprehension against Saudi military enforcements in the Eastern Province. Telegram no. 346[?], John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, to US Embassy, Jidda, June 5, 1954, 786A.5 MSP/6-554; and Telegram no. 522, George Wadsworth, US Embassy, Jidda, to Secretary of State, June 22, 1954, 786A.5 MSP/6-2154, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

80 "STRIKE RUMORS, Dhahran Area, May 1954," John W. Carrigan, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 20, 1954, 886A.062/5-2054, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

81 Telegram no. 185, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, May 23, 1954, 886A.062/5-2354; and telegram no. 90, US Embassy, Jidda, to Secretary of State, September 1, 1954, 786A.5 MSP/9-154, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

82 "Abd al-Aziz Al Mu'ammār Expected to be Released," Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, February 8, 1956, 786A.22/2-856, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA; Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 161-62.

fact, Bin Mu‘ammar, who shared the progressive anti-imperialist and nationalist political beliefs that were held by a considerable portion of the Saudi educated elite of intellectuals and technocrats during that time, had been leading the royal committee that had investigated conditions in Aramco’s general camps after the strike of 1953.⁸³ A decisive step in re-establishing the labor movement was made in early 1955, when a group of labor activists formed itself under the name *al-Tali‘a* (the Vanguard) in order to discuss possible strategies and to recruit others who could be trusted with the planned operations. In order not to repeat the errors of 1953 the group abstained from designating an official leadership which could become a target for state persecution. However, al-‘Awwami claims that among the main organizers of the group was Abdullah al-Hashim, who came from an old family of Hasawi notables with a long history of acting as political intermediaries between Ottoman and Saudi governments and al-Hasa’s local communities. Al-Hashim’s grandfather had risen to local fame for his role in protecting Hasawi villagers during local rebellions against the Ottoman government.⁸⁴

Around the same time, the Labor Department in Dammam was moved under the supervision of the Council of Ministers (*Majlis al-Wuzara’*). Labor Offices (*Maktabat al-Amal wa-l-Ummal*) were opened in all three oil districts where they dealt directly with grievances of Saudi oil workers. Bin Mu‘ammar staffed the local Labor Offices with renowned labor activists, among them also members of the workers’ committee who had been arrested in the fall of 1953 and meanwhile had found their ways back into the oil province. These men included ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Sunayd, Salih Sa‘ad al-Zayd and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Buhayjan. Al-Buhayjan owned his return to the oil province a family connection. He was a cousin of Sulayman Salih al-‘Ulayan from ‘Unayza, who was then one of the leading businessmen of al-Khobar and who exerted his influence in order to gain Buhayjan re-employment with Aramco.⁸⁵ Among

83 Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 233; Al-Sudairi, “Marx’ Arabian Apostoles,” 445–46.

84 Khālid al-Nazir, 2017, “Al-Sayyid Ibrahim b. Sayyid Muḥammad al-Hāshim,” *Al-Riyāḍ*, May 30, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.alriyadh.com/296171>; Khālid al-Nazir, 2017, “Min Nawādir al-Wathā’iq ... Min Risā’il al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ilā Rijalat al-Aḥsā’: Al-Saīd Ibrahim b. al-Saīd Muḥammad al-Hāshim,” *Al-Riyāḍ*, May 30, 2017, accessed May 23, 2022, <http://ads.alriyadh.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>; Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 243–251.

85 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 126–27; “Employee Action to Bring Demands Before Company,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 19, 1955, Enclosure no. 1, 886A.2553/5-1955, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Al-Sunayd and al-Buhayjan later became leading Saudi communists. They had first come into contact with leftist ideologies

the new Labor Office employees were also members of prominent Qatif families such as ‘Abdullah Mansur Ikhwan, ‘Abdullah Ibrahim al-Huqayl and ‘Abd al-Rasul (‘Abdullah) Shaykh ‘Ali al-Jishi. The latter had been employed at the court in Qatif where his father acted as *qadi* when he was approached by Bin Mu‘ammar. Bin Mu‘ammar also employed ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mansur, a Qasimi who later became an influential figure in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and who was arrested in 1964 for alleged involvement in communist activities in the oil province.⁸⁶

In April 1955 Aramco workers started a boycott of company busses that commuted on weekends between the industrial sites and their local hometowns and villages. The bus services that had been introduced shortly before by the company were declared insufficient by the boycotting workers who resented their relative lack of mobility and isolation in the labor camps. The *Tali‘a* came forward with a petition in which more than three thousand Saudi workmen requested company bus services “in keeping with the dignity” of Saudi workers.⁸⁷ Aramco immediately began to inquire about the organizers of the boycott and its supporters and forwarded the results of its investigation to the provincial emirate. In early May 1955 Bin Mu‘ammar was dismissed as director of the Labor Department. His successor became Turki al-‘Utayshan, who until then had been emir of the Buraimi district. Bin Mu‘ammar and ‘Abd al-Rasul al-Jishi were arrested.⁸⁸

during their studies at the American University Beirut and in London. Al-Sudairi, “Marx’ Arabian Apostoles,” 444.

- 86 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 126–27, 214–15. Al-Mansur was a Saudi nationalist and graduate of al-Azhar, who became Director General of Labor in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in 1961 and Director General of Labor in 1962. He was suspected of involvement in the Aramco cafeteria boycott in 1964, as a result of which mainly Qatifis were arrested. Telegram no. 415, British Embassy, Jidda, to Foreign Office, July 1, 1964, FOR BS 1017/2; “Biographical Sketches,” Harry W. Alter, July 13, 1964, Box 1, Folder 69 Arabs Miscellaneous Biographies, December 17, 1962–August 31, 1983, Mulligan Papers.
- 87 “Employee Action to Bring Demands Before Company,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 19, 1955, 886A.2553/5-1955; and “Secret Labor Group’s Letters to ARAMCO Bord Chairman Fred A. Davis,” Grant V. McClanahan, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, 886A.2553/6-1755, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 128–29.
- 88 “Employee Action to Bring Demands Before Company,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 19, 1955, 886A.2553/5-1955; and telegram no. 159, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, May 7, 1955, 886A.2553/5-755, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Chalcraft believes that Ibn Mu‘ammar was behind the bus boycott. Chalcraft, “Migration and Popular Protest,” 41.

In the weeks that followed the boycott, dozens of foreign Arab oil workers were deported from the kingdom.⁸⁹ In late May, one thousand Saudi *mujahidin*, irregular army forces of “predominantly Najdi-Wahabi [origin] with minimum ties to eastern province [sic] or industrial labor element,” were moved into the oil province into camps located in between the industrial districts.⁹⁰ While a direct connection between the boycott and these measures does not become apparent in the sources, it seems clear that the government feared the growth of new unrest among Aramco’s workforce and aimed at isolating the workers in the three districts from each other and from the local population.⁹¹ In early 1956, the government decision of 1954 to erect fences around general camps was finally implemented, which led to a violent response by Saudi workers.⁹² A crowd of several hundred workers confronted the director of the Labor Department, Turki al-‘Utayshan, with the allegation that the fences had been erected to deliberately keep them away from their families and the local communities. Shortly afterwards, workers in Abqaiq took matters into their own hands and began to tear down already erected fences poles. Disorder and vandalism lasted for two days. On the third day, thousands of workers assembled in Dhahran to demonstrate against the fencing in of general camps. Confronted with the possibility of a new strike, Aramco ultimately

89 Telegram no. 161, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, May 10, 1955, 886A.2553/5-1055; Telegram no. 176, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, May 17, 1955, 59 886A.2553/5-1755; and “Saudi Government Combats Subversion,” Alfred le S. Jenkins, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, May 31, 1955, 786A.52/5-3155, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

90 Telegram no. 184, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, May 29, 1955, 886A.2553/5-2655, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Insertion added.

91 In 1955, members of the Saudi military in Ta’if had attempted a coup against the Saudi government. “Further Information on Anti-Subversive Measures by Saudi Government,” Robert A. Stein, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, July 26, 1955, 786A.52/7-2655, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Radical political groups from the Kingdom and abroad fought against the Saudi government. “Saudi Government Combats Subversion,” Alfred le S. Jenkins, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, May 31, 1955, 786A.52/5-3155, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

92 “ARAMCO Labor Demonstrations Against New Fences Around Camps,” Grant V. McClanahan, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, January 14, 1956, 886A.2553/1-1456, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

stopped the project, yet not without demanding a statement from al-ʿUtayshan as to the involvement of the Labor Department in the disorder.⁹³

2.2 *Resurging Imperialism*

In April 1956, the American consul noted the inability of Aramco and the Saudi authorities to effectively deal with “mounting labor problems.”⁹⁴ In May, members of the *Taliʿa* again petitioned the king, demanding the right to establish elected workers’ committees and the dismissal of all foreign and especially Indian personnel.⁹⁵ The Saudi government started a formal investigation of the workers’ grievances during which ʿAbdullah al-Hashim acted as the workers’ representative.⁹⁶ In a third petition, the workers approached the king to stop military cooperation with the United States and to place the Dhahran airfield under joint Arab control. According to al-ʿAwwami, the content of the anti-airfield petition had threatened to split the workers into those who supported the idea as a means to appeal to the nationalist and Pan-Arab tendencies of the king, and those who opposed it because it was not related to the labor struggle and reached into the realm of national politics. Ultimately, it was decided that twelve members of the *Taliʿa* would take responsibility for the petition by signing it. Probably most or all of them were Qatifis.⁹⁷

The reaction of the government to the petition was all but favorable. As al-ʿAwwami pointed out, the petitions had raised suspicion among the Saudi authorities who felt that they were no longer merely facing a labor movement.⁹⁸ Involvement by Qatifi activists in the petitioning appeared as a special threat. The political activities by some young Qatifis were known to the local authorities and equivocally dubbed “communist” in British and US sources – a common denominator used for secular political activism in the kingdom. The Saudi

93 “ARAMCO Labor Demonstrations Against New Fences Around Camps,” Grant V. McClanahan, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, January 14, 1956, 886A.2553/1-1456; and Memorandum to File, T.C. Barger, Arabian American Oil Company, to J.T. Duce, New York, January 30, 1956 (January 21, 1956), 886A.06/1-3056 CS/HHH, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

94 “King Saud Enunciates Policy of Cooperation with ARAMCO; Labor Problems Discussed,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, April 17, 1956, 786A.11/4-1756, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

95 “Disturbances in the Eastern Province,” British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, June 25, 1956, FOR ES 1015/16; “Incident at Dhahran,” Lord Selkirk to Eastern Department, June 19, 1956, FOR ES 1015/22.

96 Al-ʿAwwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 245–46; Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom*, 177–78.

97 Al-ʿAwwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 249–50.

98 Al-ʿAwwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 251.

authorities apparently adopted these ideas. During the 1953 demonstration in Dammam, the Saudi chief of security had assaulted the demonstrators with anti-communist defamations, putting their public disobedience against the state at par with being communists.⁹⁹ Whereas the labor struggle at Aramco was a cross-sectarian movement, it is certainly true that Qatifis formed a particular self-assertive group of Saudi activists in the oil province.¹⁰⁰

While American authorities were concerned with an alleged involvement of “communist” agitators from Qatif, the British administration in Bahrain interpreted the unrest as sectarian and kept boasting that the local Shi‘a, whom the British regarded as “Shia of Bahraini extraction,” would ultimately turn against their Sunni rulers and appeal to Great Britain for protection. This deep ingrained British belief guided as well Britain’s policy during Bahrain’s constitutional movement. During the movement, British imperial policy in Bahrain anticipated that “... the Shi‘as in turning against the Ruler [of Bahrain] turned to us for protection ... The need for a British judicial adviser has been accepted by the Ruler and will no doubt gratify the Shi‘as when announced.”¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, the Iranian journal “Tehran-Mosavvar” interpreted the events in the light of the Anglo-American struggle for influence in the Arabian Gulf, hinting that “... the question of the Bahrain Islands is being pushed by Britain in an attempt to weaken US influence.”¹⁰² Likely drawing from local sources, al-Hassan believes that the Saudi petitions of 1956 had been motivated by a connection of the Qatifi progressives with activists in Bahrain.¹⁰³ Possibly overtaking their influence over al-Ahsa’s Shi‘i communities, British agents after the petitioning of 1956 insisted that parts of the population of Qatif had expressed the view that “they would be better off under British protection than under Saudi Arabian rule.”¹⁰⁴ This complex situation likely fed the fears of the Saudi government concerning a growing politicization of the local communities and especially of those in Qatif.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the US administration in

99 “Fi Mawqib al-Zaman.”

100 See Matthiesen, “Migration,” 480.

101 “Alleged Trouble in Saudi Arabia,” Telegram no. 508, Sir B. Burrows, Bahrain, to Eastern Department, June 2, 1956, FOR ES 1015/10; Minutes on Situation in Bahrain, C.T.E. Ewart-Briggs, Foreign Office, July 6, 1954, FOR EA 10110/8.

102 “Anglo-American Struggle for Influence in Bahrain Islands,” Summary by Joint Press Reading Services, British Embassy, Moscow, to Eastern Department, February 1, 1955 (February 11, 1955), FOR EA 1016/3.

103 Al-Hassan, *Al-Shi‘a*, vol.2, 299.

104 “Alleged Trouble in Saudi Arabia,” Telegram no. 508, Sir B. Burrows, Bahrain, to Eastern Department, June 2, 1956, FOR ES 1015/10.

105 Relations between Saudi rulers and the people of Qatif were burdened not least because in 1913 Qatifi notables had petitioned the British political resident in Bahrain for British help, asking them for political protection. Buchan, “Secular and Religious Opposition,”

Dhahran could not easily brush off such repeated insinuations and became concerned about internal security in the oil province. The American consul in Dhahran inquired with the local emir about the petitions and a possible communist threat. The petitioners were arrested. However, when nothing substantial could be found against the men, they were released with the serious advice to refrain from meddling in political matters in the future.¹⁰⁶

In early June 1956, King Sa'ud arrived in the Eastern Province for his annual visit, which happened at a time when both regional and labor politics were practically boiling. During the heyday of the British-Saudi dispute over territorial rights in the Buraimi oasis, Britain feared that popular opinion al-Ahsa' would turn against British political involvement in Bahrain and the Trucial Coast and further impede on British attempts to safeguard the empire's fortunes in the Middle East.¹⁰⁷ The ongoing territorial conflict between Great Britain and Saudi Arabia contributed to the charged political atmosphere in the Saudi oil province. British observers anxiously noticed the display of anti-British sentiments in the streets of the local towns. In a sourly report to London, the British resident in Bahrain remarked on the fact that a street vendor in al-Khobar had found a source of great delight for the king and the local youth by turning his vending vehicle into a mock-up armored car topped with a dummy gun and lit with colored bulbs which showed the slogans "al-Khobar, city of sacrifice" on one side and "On to Buraimi" on the other.¹⁰⁸ While the British fretted about displays of Saudi patriotism and anti-British frolics, relations between Aramco and its Saudi employees became increasingly strained. Labor activists awaited their next opportunity to move against the company which presented itself when Aramco decided to source out its bus services to sub-contractors and the Labor Office in Dhahran announced that Aramco consequently had to lay off two thousand of their own Saudi bus drivers.¹⁰⁹ In addition, Qatif had witnessed highly contested municipal elections in May 1956 during which young

118; Steinberg, "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia," 245. Again, in 1930, after the defeat of the Nimr revolt, some Qatifi notables asked the British in Bahrain to erect a protectorate in Qatif. In both cases, demands for British protection were strongly disputed among Qatif's notables. Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 263. See also chapter 3 in this book.

106 "Trouble in Qatif," Sir B. Burrows, Bahrain, to Eastern Department, June 2, 1956, FOR ES 1015/10; Ḥamūd, "Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-'Ummāl," 57–62.

107 FOR ES 1015/4, Confidential No. 18, February 28, 1956.

108 "Political Situation in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (al-Hasa)," Enclosure "Commercial Secretary's Impressions of the political Situation in the Eastern Province (al-Hasa) of Saudi Arabia," M. Phillips, British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, February 28, 1956, FOR ES 1015/10.

109 "Disturbances in the Eastern Province," British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, June 25, 1956, FOR ES 1015/16.

local activists had fought a popular campaign that apparently had received widespread support. The young Qatifi modernists used the elections as a platform to publicly attack corrupt state officials and to promote secular nationalist and Pan-Arab ideology. Among the political campaigners of Qatif were as well many Aramco workers and outside supporters of the labor movement, such as ‘Ali al-‘Awwami.¹¹⁰

Upon the king’s arrival in Dammam, people congregated in the streets and attempted to approach the royal convoy to hand the king petitions.¹¹¹ On the evening of June 9, the king was invited for a dinner hosted by Aramco in Dhahran. The same afternoon, hundreds of Saudi workers had assembled in front of the local Labor Office and eventually marched towards the company main gate, where they gathered to welcome the king on his way to the banquet.¹¹² Upon arrival of the royal convoy several groups amongst the demonstrators began to shout anti-American and anti-imperialist slogans.¹¹³ During the banquet, thousands of demonstrators gathered in front of the company gate and when the king left Dhahran, he was confronted with banners that read “*Mazlumin*” (“we have been wronged”) and “*Nurid huquqana*” (“We want our rights”).¹¹⁴ After the king had left Dhahran, the local security forces started to disperse the crowd by force, leaving many demonstrators wounded and possibly some dead.¹¹⁵ Following the demonstration in Dhahran, the Saudi government decided to stop any lenience towards the labor movement and banned all forms of organized labor struggle. The emir Bin Jiluwi was entitled to take harsh action against troublemakers.¹¹⁶ The opportunity to put an end

110 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 173–98; Matthiesen, “Center-Periphery Relations,” 10–11.

111 Ḥamūd, “Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-‘Ummāl,” 62–63.

112 “Organized Demonstrators Disturb King Saud on Way to Baquet at ARAMCO,” Grant V. McClanahan, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 13, 1956, 786A.11/6-1356, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

113 Ḥamūd, “Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-‘Ummāl,” 62.

114 “Organized Demonstrators Disturb King Saud on Way to Baquet at ARAMCO,” Grant V. McClanahan, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 13, 1956, 786A.11/6-1356; and “Further Information on ARAMCO Labor Unrest and Government Action, June 9–21,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 14, 1956, NARA 886A.062/7-1456, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 253.

115 “Incident in Dhahran,” Lord Selkirk to Eastern Department, June 19, 1956, FOR ES 1015/22; Hamud, ‘Sharikat Aramku wa-l-‘Amal,’ 63.

116 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 256; “Transmitting Text of Labor Department Proclamation,” Theodore A. Wahl, June 30, 1956, Enclosure 1, 886A.062/6-3056, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

to the disorderly events provided itself in mid-June, when a group of Saudi general workers in Ra's Tanura violently resented their refused entrance into an Aramco movie theater.¹¹⁷ Access to Aramco's movie theaters, originally intended for the recreation of senior and intermediate staff, had been a source of conflict since film screenings had been introduced in labor camps in 1937. By the mid-1950s the company had reached the point of view that the cinema privilege, due to limited capacities and strict government restrictions, could be extended only to non-Muslim staff and – as exception of the rule – to high-ranking officials of the Saudi Arabian government. In order to control entrance to company movie theatres, the company had started issuing permanent tickets that were alternately called “courtesy cards,” “identification cards” or “cinema control cards” and whose main purpose was to prevent access to company theatres by lower staff ranks and non-employees.¹¹⁸ In the late evening of June 14, after they had been hindered by company security from entering the company movie theatre, the workers forced their way into intermediate camp, attacking Saudi police and company security with stones and wooden clubs.¹¹⁹ Shortly afterwards, the emir's security men forcefully broke up the unrest and a number of the rioters were arrested. The following day, the men were publicly flogged. The emir was reported to have executed the beatings himself, exhibiting great violence. Several men died from the severe punishment.¹²⁰ American and British sources reported that the group of beaten men were Shi'a from Qatif. According to US documents they had been mere bystanders during the riot, in the eyes of British officials they were “Shia troublemakers.”¹²¹ The British and American reports that followed the events

117 “Disturbances and Partial Strike by ARAMCO Saudi Workers,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 20, 1956, 886A.062/6-2056, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. On similar attempts to seize exclusive company facilities in Iranian oil town Abadan see Elling, “War of Clubs.”

118 “History of the Cinema Privilege,” [author unknown], March 12, 1957, Box 2, Folder 55, ARD, Chronological Files, January–March 1957, Mulligan Papers.

119 “Disturbances and Partial Strike by ARAMCO Saudi Workers,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 20, 1956, 886A.062/6-2056, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

120 “Further Information on ARAMCO Labor Unrest and Government Action, June 9–21,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 14, 1956, NARA 886A.062/7-1456, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

121 “Further Information on ARAMCO Labor Unrest and Government Action, June 9–21,” Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 14, 1956, NARA 886A.062/7-1456, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia,

do not draw a clear conclusion as to how the unrest was linked to the local population, yet it becomes clear that the US consulate suspected the provincial government of having executed a substitute punishment for the troubles at Ra's Tanura among the people of Qatif.¹²² The Foreign Office in London expressed the hope to use the reports from Qatif in order to sustain British territorial claims to Buraimi. "We should be glad of any stories that can be substantiated of oppressive behavior by the Saudi authorities in dealing with these incidents," cabled the Eastern Department to Jidda, "which we could use at the [United Nations] Security Council to show that the benefits of Saudi rule are limited."¹²³

The only local source on the events is the version told by 'Ali al-'Awwami. He states that the news of the storming of the movie theatre and the subsequent arrests reached him and other activists in Qatif the following day during a farewell luncheon held in the palm groves of the Al Ikhwan, a prominent local family, in honor of a graduating class of High School students. When the party was about to split up, a stranger arrived with the news of the violent events and random arrests. His report was met by outrage and some of the assembled youth immediately wanted to cable their protest to the king. However, the leading activists, al-'Awwami amongst them, were unable to identify the messenger as one of "their supporters among the workers." In fear of being infiltrated and manipulated into protest, they urged their friends to abstain from any action until the rumor could be verified.¹²⁴ It later transpired that the rioters had been brought to an old Ottoman fort in Safwa in the Qatif oasis, where they suffered greatly since their wounds were not treated and they lay on bare earthen floor. The activists from Qatif were able to ease the prisoners' ordeal by organizing mats and food for them, however, they were forbidden to see or speak to the imprisoned men or to learn their names. Yet, not long afterwards, al-'Awwami was approached in the market of Qatif by Nasir al-Sa'id, who claimed that the arrested men were not Qatifis at all, but all except one Shammar tribesmen from Ha'il.¹²⁵ Al-Sa'id planned to approach the emir of Qatif, who himself was

1945-1973, RG 59, NARA; "Disturbances at Dhahran and Qatif," British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, July 24, 1956, FOR ES 1015/24.

122 "Disturbances and Partial Strike by ARAMCO Saudi Workers," Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 20, 1956, 886A.062/6-2056, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

123 Cable by Eastern Department to British Embassy, Jidda, June 28, 1956, part of file no. 562, "Reports Arrests in Qatif & Hofuf Districts of Eastern Province Connected with Three Petitions Sent to King," M. Gault, Bahrain, June 19, 1956, FOR ES 1015/13. Insertion added.

124 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 259-60.

125 The Shammar tribe is "known for its opposition to Saudi hegemony since the eighteenth century." Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 113-14.

a Shammari, for help concerning the release of his people. Yet, his attempt fell flat and shortly afterwards al-Sa'īd fled to Kuwait.¹²⁶ Al-'Awwami concluded that Aramco used the Ra's Tanura riot as the "fuse with which it set fire to the labor movement."¹²⁷ Bin Jiluwi first arrested the labor activists of *al-Talī'a* and afterwards started a region-wide arrest campaign against supporters of the labor movement and against the activists from Qatif.¹²⁸ When local notables appealed to the emir for mercy with the activists, he reprimanded them for being careless in guiding "their children" who had succumbed to bad influence. Bin Jiluwi probably alluded to the roles of the notables as guides and mediators of their communities as much as to their roles as patriarchs of the leading families.¹²⁹

British officials reported local resistance against the emir's forces in Qatif, where armed women tried to prevent the troops from entering the local villages.¹³⁰ Between three and five hundred detainees were brought to Hofuf and imprisoned in the infamous Qasr al-'Abid, among them members of prominent local families such as 'Ali al-'Awwami, 'Abdullah al-Hashim and Ahmad al-'Arfaj, son of a family of Sunni clerics and notables from Hofuf, as well as activists from Ha'il and other parts of the kingdom.¹³¹ On a final note, the unlucky Turki al-'Utayshan was dismissed as Director of the Labor Department. However, as a British report stated, the Qasimi 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mansur, "number two in the Labor Department" and "Aramco's main headache," remained in office.¹³² With the official ban on strikes and demonstrations in place, the labor movement lost its principal weapon. At the same time, the first phase of rapid oil industrialization in the Eastern Province came to an end. The major construction works that had been needed to transform the

126 "Kānat aḥdāth Ra's Tanūra hiya al-fatīl alladhī ash'alat Arāmkū bihā al-nār li-ilqā' al-ḥaraka al-'umāliyya fī atūnihā." Al-'Awwamī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 264–65.

127 Al-'Awwamī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 263.

128 Al-'Awwamī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 263–65; Ḥamūd "Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-'Ummāl," 65–68; "Further Information on ARAMCO Labor Unrest and Government Action, June 9–21," Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 14, 1956, NARA 886A.062/7-1456, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

129 Al-'Awwamī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 266.

130 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī'a*, vol. 2, 299; "Disturbances at Dhahran and Qatif," British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, July 24, 1956, FOR ES 1015/24.

131 Al-'Awwamī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 263–66, 355; Ḥamūd, "Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-'Ummāl," 65–68; "Further Information on ARAMCO Labor Unrest and Government Action, June 9–21," Theodore A. Wahl, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 14, 1956, NARA 886A.062/7-1456, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

132 "Disturbances at Dhahran and Qatif," British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, July 24, 1956, FOR ES 1015/24.

area into a hub for oil production and export and that had brought tens of thousands of Saudis and labor migrants into wage work were now completed. Consequently, especially unskilled labor was increasingly less in demand. In 1961, the strength of the industrial workforce in the Eastern Province was approximately 45,000. About twenty percent of this total were officially registered as unemployed. Especially unskilled Bedouin and peasants had great difficulties in finding jobs and in competing against better trained migrant workers from neighboring countries and South Asia.¹³³

Already in 1959, an American official at the consulate in Dhahran linked the absence of organized labor struggle to “the scarcity of employment in the Eastern Province.”¹³⁴ A singular attempt of bringing workers’ grievances before local courts and improving working conditions for contractor workers and day-laborers in 1960 was fended off by the government. If Aramco gave gifts to its employees, the investigating committee concluded, it was its right to do so. National sub-contractors were only compelled to adhere to Saudi labor regulations and contractor workers were told to trust in the justice and fairness of the government.¹³⁵ Clearly, the contractor workers, whose detrimental work conditions and bad treatment by their employers were not lost to public opinion, were not yet considered an important or influential enough group to enjoy paternalism by the state or influential local actors.¹³⁶ However, their detrimental status – which was shared by other subaltern groups – fed many of the public struggles fought in the oil conurbation in the 1960s as local labor politics became increasingly urbanized.

133 “Labor – SAG Attempts to Find Solution to ‘Unemployment’ in the Eastern Province,” John Everts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, September 5, 1961, 886A.06/9-561, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; Yizraeli, *Politics and Society*, 164.

134 “ARAMCO and the Saudi Labor Office,” Charles S. Kennedy, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 11, 1959, 886A.2553/6-1159, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

135 Wuzāra al-Māliyya wa-l-Iqtisād al-Waṭānī, document no. 73, Rajab 5, 1379H/January 3, 1960, IPA.

136 In 1959, the author ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Muminah in the local weekly newspaper *al-Khalij al-‘Arabī* criticized the “inhumane and irresponsible attitude of [Saudi] contractors towards their workers” in the oil conurbation, who were not eligible for treatment in Aramco hospitals and had no health insurance or safety measures in place. “Extracts from Saudi Weeklies, No. 40,” Local Government Relations, Arabian Affairs Division, September 29, 1959, Box 2 Folder 30, ART, AAD, etc. Media analysis, Mulligan Papers.

Urban Revolution

By the early 1960s, the Saudi economy was primarily based on oil which generated around sixty percent of the gross national product. Besides US Americans and Saudis, especially foreign Arabs were employed in the oil industry. The number of Yemenis in the oil province increased considerably after a coup d'état by revolutionary republicans in North Yemen in 1962 and the subsequent beginning of the North Yemen civil war (1962–1970). Together with Saudi nationals and Palestinians, they dominated the lower job grades. At the same time, the new class of Saudi oil workers and government employees was still small. Two thirds of the Saudi population in the Eastern Province continued to work in agriculture. However, competition by large-scale agricultural businesses and food imports changed traditional land tenure and more and more peasants turned from self-employed landowners into wage workers. The sharp rise in the number of landless peasants in the early 1960s spurred rural migration into the oil conurbation, where rural migrants sought jobs mainly as unskilled contractor workers in the construction business.¹

Labor migration and unemployment fueled a growing social malaise in the Saudi oil polity. In addition, by the end of the 1950s, the Saudi kingdom had tumbled into a phase of political instability. The Suez crisis, the on-going conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and Egypt's and Syria's Pan Arab project which led to the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958–1962) were met by a widespread adoption of popular Arab nationalism and fervent support for Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser by a broad segment of the Saudi population. In September 1956 several thousand people enthusiastically greeted the Egyptian president during his visit in Dammam. Among the fervent masses were also oil workers and others who used the occasion to demonstrate against US imperialism.² Between 1958 and 1962, popular Nasserism, deepening

-
- 1 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 416, 419–20; Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 65–66; According to Abir, “the rapid urbanization of the unskilled rural population ... presented [King] Faysal's government with serious problems of unemployment, inadequate housing and welfare services and rising cost of living in the cities of the Hijaz, the Eastern Province and Riyadh.” Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 51. Insertion added.
 - 2 Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 38; al-Aḥmad, *Sha'b al-Qaṭīf fī l-Qarn al-Ḥādī wa-l-'Ashrīn*, 87. The number of seventy thousand people who greeted Egypt's president in Dammam stated by al-Aḥmad seems exaggerated, given the population numbers of the oil area at that time.

financial crisis and power struggles within the royal family steered the Saudi regime towards a political course of hesitant change in national politics. In 1958, crown prince Faysal was handed executive power in Saudi government which he used to instigate financial reform and infrastructural development. King Sa'ud resisted his factual disempowerment by forming an alliance with liberal forces in the royal family. This led to the so-called Free Princes movement (*al-Harakat al-Amra' al-Ahrar*) (1958–1964) during which progressives like prince Talal b. 'Abd al-'Aziz and the oil minister and co-founder of OPEC, Abdullah al-Turayqi, attempted to steer the kingdom towards the introduction of a constitutional monarchy, basic civil rights and the nationalization of the oil industry.

Sa'ud's inability to reconcile his advances towards nationalist and liberal forces in the society with the unpopular continuation of the political partnership between Saudi Arabia and the United States and his backing away from more profound political reform ultimately led to his political downfall. Faysal's succession on the Saudi throne in 1964 came with an increased repression of liberal and opposition forces in the state and society and broad concessions to traditionalist groups and moderate *'ulama'*. While Faysal forcefully unified modernist and traditionalist forces in the country behind a course of conservative political renewal, internal development and reform initially remained in a pending state. Perhaps most decisively, the unfulfilled promise of a constitution announced by Faysal in 1962 in his "Ten Point Program" left the years long raised hopes of many progressive Saudis unanswered.³ Halted political change, increasing economic despair of the subaltern classes and forceful repression of political opposition concurred with incessant regional conflict. Faysal's reticence to join the Egypt-led Arab coalition against Israel left many Saudis and foreign Arabs in the oil conurbation angered and desperate. The Yemeni civil war and Saudi Arabia's support, alongside with the United States, of the Yemeni royalists against the Egypt-backed republican forces had repercussions as well in the Saudi oil operation area. At Saudi oil installations and in the new and old urban centers of the Saudi oil conurbation the conflict between the two political camps was fought out by means of propaganda, public disorder, terrorism, sabotage and state repression. Fears of sabotage against oil installations were answered by the deployment of additional forces of the Saudi army and National Guard, "both of which became permanent features

3 The three paragraphs are a summary of the following key works on the internal evolution of political events in Saudi Arabia in the mid-twentieth century: Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 336–41; Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 89–109; al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 106–34.

of the human geography of the oil conurbation,” which “contributed to the development of the oil-production area into a high-security military zone.”⁴

1 Ambivalent Urbanities

To understand the gradual unfolding of urban struggle in the Eastern Province, it is necessary to look back at some developments that took place in the Eastern Province parallel to and after the labor unrest of the 1950s. The years that followed the unrest of June 1956 had brought only a seeming quietness to the oil province. Most of the activists and supporters of the labor movement who had been arrested in the summer of 1956 were released in late 1957. During their time of imprisonment, they had altered their perspectives on political struggle, and while labor issues continued to play an important role therein, their political activism leaned now even more towards opposition to the Saudi government. The base of their activities gradually shifted from the labor camps to the province's old and new urban centers. From the second half of the 1950s onwards, the Saudi government and Aramco increased their efforts in keeping Saudi oil workers satisfied, particularly through the expansion of company training and housing projects. Importantly, the new adjustment of Aramco's Home Ownership Program in 1956 meant that a considerable part of Saudi workers who had hitherto lived and worked side by side in the labor camps were now distributed over the emergent oil conurbation. More and more employees either built their family homes in their native towns and villages and newly developed workers' neighborhoods in the oasis districts, or, if they came from other regions of the kingdom, in the new towns Dammam and al-Khobar. According to al-'Awwami, this ultimately deprived the labor movement of its main strategic advantage.⁵

The construction of workers' neighborhoods in the oil towns and old villages from the early 1960s onwards began as well to spur population growth and urbanization in the old oasis districts. As a result, vast agricultural areas were turned into construction land. The ensuing mass cutting of palms and high water consumption by the oil industry and new townsites led to sinking water levels and a decline of the annual harvest.⁶ Attempts by the Saudi government to increase agricultural production mostly benefitted large and middle-sized landholdings, whereas by the 1960s the majority of small farmers – nearly

4 Ghrawi, “A Tamed Urban Revolution,” 117. See also Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 89–109.

5 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 332–34.

6 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 331–32.

seventy percent of the peasants in the country owned small parcels of one hectare or less – had grown permanently indebted to big landowners. Unable to repay loans or mortgages, many were forced to sell their plots to rich merchants, government officials and the nouveaux riches. Often, they became mere sharecroppers who led a precarious existence. Others moved into the oil towns in search of employment. These rural migrants made up a large part of the unemployed jobseekers in the oil province.⁷

Labor migrants squatted at the fringes of the industrial zones and populated the streets of the growing oil towns where they competed for jobs.⁸ In early 1960, one resourceful Saudi businessman attempted to start a local agency to help “bringing unemployed into work.” He was rebuked by the Ministry of Finance which not long afterwards announced that branches of the Labor Office would be opened in all major towns of the Eastern Province to handle the large number of unemployed.⁹ The employment situation was even worsened as Aramco began to systematically cut down the personnel on its payroll. In 1961, a British observer reported that, instead of hiring, the company discharged one Saudi and one expatriate employee per day.¹⁰ At the same time, the spirit of oil modernization and communal development increasingly permeated larger segments of the local society where it amalgamated with fervent nationalism. Saudi activists quickly adapted to the new situation and cast out to establish the rapidly growing oil towns as their new power base. Particularly the well-educated and economically thriving urban elites now became the agents of oil modernization and urbanization. At the same time, an emergent nationalist press and elections for local municipal councils developed into new spaces for popular politics and civic engagement.¹¹ Yet, these phenomena, while “revolutionary” in the sense of bringing about a new urbanity, must also be recognized in their ambivalence. Progressives among local notables, government employees and businessmen used these new platforms to promote their social or political agendas while they also claimed traditional dominance over the local communities. On the other hand, oil-fueled development of the local

7 Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 51; Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 415–16, 419; Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 65–66.

8 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 412–20.

9 Wuzāra al-Māliyya wa-l-Iqtisād al-Waṭani, document no. 5292, Ṣafar 15, 1380H/August 9, 1960, IPA.

10 “Conversation With Mr. Keiter, U.S. Cons. General Dhahran, About Activities Saudi Arabia,” J.P. Tripp, Political Residency, Bahrain, to Arabian Department, July 29, 1961, FOR BS 1015/19.

11 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 145–50; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 66–90; Matthiesen, “Center-Periphery Relations.”

towns, while urgently needed, stirred opposition by subaltern groups such as peasants and urban squatters. Oil development increasingly pitted urban elites against vast segments of the rural and urban subaltern population that did not gain equally from modernization.

1.1 *Notables, Intellectuals and Businessmen – New Actors’ Networks*

The labor struggle of 1953–56 and its violent repression had led to a growing radicalization of the labor movement as well as to a diversification of Saudi political opposition. Already in 1954, Saudi labor activists, nationalists, modernists and intellectuals founded the *Jabhat al-Islah al-Watani* (National Reform Front, NRF) which promoted the nationalization of the Saudi oil industry, the Saudization of Aramco’s workforce, the right to form political parties and labor unions as well as the development of the local communities through peaceful public activism, such as demonstrations and the distribution of political leaflets. Among its founding members were ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Sunayd, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Buhayjan, Salih Sa‘ad al-Zayd and Nasir al-Sa‘id, whose arrests had led to the strike of oil workers in 1953, ‘Ali al-‘Awwami and other young activists from prominent Qatifi families, the nationalists ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bin Mu‘ammar and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mansur, and others.¹² The pronounced inter-sectarian membership of the NRF was probably not a coincidence, as in the same year, Shi‘i and Sunni activists in Bahrain appointed the High Executive Committee which put a decisive emphasis on equal sectarian membership. One noteworthy anecdote illustrates the political links between Bahrain and the Eastern Province: Among the events that started Bahrain’s constitutional movement was a meeting of activists held in a *husayniyya* in the Shi‘i village of Sanabis, the same village where a large number of Qatifi exiles had arrived during the economic crisis that had led to the revolt of Shaykh Muhammad al-Nimr in 1929–’30.¹³

The NRF did not survive the labor unrest of 1956 unscathed. Following the violent events that had unfolded in the summer of 1956, many of its members were arrested. Others left the oil area to Lebanon, Egypt or Warsaw Pact countries.¹⁴ In 1958 the NRF leadership decided to transform the remnants of the movement into the *Jabhat al-Taharrur al-Watani* (National Liberation Front, NLF), which assumed the character of a national association of political activists who followed various leftist political currents. Yet, some members

12 ‘Ali al-Dumaynī, *Zaman al-Sakhin ... Azmina al-Hurriyya* (Dār al-Kunūz, 2004), 27–28; Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 104; Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 234.

13 Al-Mdaires, 25–26; Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi‘a*, vol. 2, 260.

14 Al-Sudairi, “Marx’ Arabian Apostoles,” 448.

like ‘Ali al-‘Awwami refused to be branded with either of the common political ideologies and persisted in calling themselves progressives, modernists, and secular nationalists.¹⁵ During the Free Princes movement the NLF witnessed a period of vibrant political activism and many new members were recruited from all over the country, and in particular in the urban centers of the oil province.¹⁶ Increased repression from 1964 onwards led to a radicalization of parts of the movement. NLF members eventually founded Saudi branches of the outlawed Ba’th and Communist parties and went underground.¹⁷

Assessment of the political importance of the NLF varies greatly. While Abir believes that the organization was “exceptionally dangerous to the regime and a primary target for its security services,” Lackner found the NLF of weak political influence.¹⁸ Resources and scope of the NLF likely remained limited. However, in the early 1960s progressive leftist beliefs and especially Arab nationalism were extremely salient ideals shared by many educated Saudis and high-ranking technocrats such as Bin Mu‘ammar and Abdullah al-Turayqi, who joined King Sa‘uds reformist cabinet in 1960–62. When Faysal took over as King in 1962 and practically ended Sa‘uds political course, the NLF lost its momentum due to Faysal’s strategy to combat internal political opposition by a combination of systematic economic development, the Islamization of internal politics and the application of strict coercion and state violence.¹⁹ In 1962, the NLF developed into an underground organization which became at the same time more radical and splintered. This was partly also a result of the emergence of several other radical leftist organizations in the 1960s.²⁰ The new left-nationalist current in the Eastern Province and the Kingdom at large was further amplified by the presence of large numbers of foreign Arabs in the oil province, particularly Palestinians and Yemenis, who themselves often participated in more or less organized political resurgence and co-operated with what had then developed into a “bewildering variety of opposition groups which professed to flourish in the Saudi Arabia of the mid-1960s.”²¹ Arab

15 Matthiesen, “Migration,” 492–93; al-‘Awwāmi, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 2, 95–96.

16 Al-‘Awwāmi, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 2, 41; Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 35.

17 ‘Abd al-Nabī al-‘Akārī, *Al-Tanzīmāt al-Yasāriyya fī l-Jazīra wa-l-Khalīj al-‘Arabī* (Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, 2003), 39–57; Matthiesen, “Migration,” 492–94.

18 Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 35; Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 104.

19 Al-Sudairi, “Marx’ Arabian Apostoles,” 450–52.

20 Al-Sudairi, “Marx’ Arabian Apostoles,” 453–455.

21 Buchan, “Secular and Religious Opposition,” 114; Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 52.

nationalism and its secular political offshoots Communism, Pan-Arabism and Ba‘thism counted the majority of their members in the Eastern Province, the Hijaz and in the Saudi armed forces.²² The number of people arrested throughout the 1960s and 1970s for alleged membership in Arab nationalist or Ba‘thist groups reached several thousands in the entire Kingdom. This, of course, does say nothing about how many of the arrested really were members of clandestine opposition groups. Actual membership was perhaps not especially large, but still enough to redirect internal politics in the 1960s towards “counter-revolutionary” strategies.²³ Bsheer demonstrated that secular opposition movements in the 1950s and 1960s constituted a “popular political struggle and not simply an intellectual one.”²⁴ Al-Rasheed argued that these movements “threatened the very foundation of Saudi rule and became the impetus for the development of Faysal’s Islamic politics in the early 1960s.” And while it is perhaps true that, due to harsh repression, most opposition groups remained in an “embryonic form,” it was an apparently serious attempt at a coup d’état by Ba‘thist officers in the Saudi armed forces and several militant leftist opposition groups in 1969 that left the central government deeply shaken.²⁵

Sources do also suggest that the NLF possessed a large degree of ideologically likeminded support among educated segments of the Saudi people, who might not have been members of the NLF but were nevertheless associates of some kind. These men and women followed up on their own liberal ideals in their individual spaces of activity. For instance, the first Dean of the College of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, Salih Ambah, was linked to the NLF through the family of his wife, ‘A’isha al-Fasi. Two of al-Fasi’s brothers were originally members of the NLF and later founded the *Jabhat al-Tahrir al-Jazira* (Front for the Liberation of the Peninsula) in the Hijaz.²⁶ Throughout the 1960s, Ambah and al-Fasi promoted liberal reform in the oil conurbation and particularly at the Petroleum College, where Ambah introduced elected student organizations as well as women associations and in general created a spirit of modern community life and education. Former students who attended the college during Ambah’s deanship (1963–1970) remember the college and its student community as comparatively open-minded and egalitarian, where

22 Chalcraft, “Migration and Popular Protest,” 37.

23 Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 276. This estimate corresponds with a rough calculation of the numbers stated in archival sources which are referenced throughout the last part of this chapter.

24 Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 239. See also Matthiesen, “Migration.”

25 Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 55–60.

26 Al-Dumaynī, *Zaman al-Sakhīn*, 28.

male and female students and staff mixed freely during graduation dances and excursions to the old oasis towns.²⁷

The tentatively more open-minded political atmosphere during King Sa‘uds attempt at nationalist leadership in the late 1950s and early 1960s also allowed for a short-lived budding of a nationalist Saudi press through which local activists, government officials and businessmen promoted their political and social agendas. One of the earliest newspapers published in the oil province was the *Fajr al-Jadid* (New Dawn), which was run in 1954. Among the initiators of the *Fajr al-Jadid* were the labor activists and NLF members ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Sunayd, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mansur and ‘Abd al-Rasul (‘Abdullah) al-Jishi.²⁸ However, shortly after its first appearance, the publication of the politically critical *Fajr al-Jadid* was stopped by the provincial government.²⁹ A more successful newspaper project was the *Akhbar al-Zahran* (Dhahran News) under the chief editor ‘Abd al-Karim al-Juhayman which appeared between 1955 and ‘57.³⁰ Among its writers were roughly the same people who were responsible for the *Fajr al-Jadid*. The *Akhbar al-Zahran* became a major voice for nationalism and modernization in the Eastern Province and had readers as well in neighboring Gulf countries, to where it likely travelled from hand to hand by means of the various work and business networks of its readers. It openly addressed maladministration and corruption in the growing conurbation.³¹ Another Saudi weekly magazine published in the Eastern Province was the *Khalij al-‘Arabi* which appeared until August 1960 and like the *Fajr al-Jadid* and the *Akhbar al-Zahran* reported the social problems connected to oil industrialization, apparently consistently over-stepping what Saudi authorities and the oil company deemed the “bounds of critical propriety.”³²

In these new publications, members of the urban communities, local activists, government officials and businessmen entered into dialog, issued critical articles, wrote letters to the editor and responded to criticism. Among them was the businessman Muhammad ‘Abdullah al-Mana‘ from al-Khobar – the very same man who had once lost his status as sub-contractor to the oil company because of his dubious treatment of Iraqi oil workers. Over a decade

27 Al-Dumaynī, *Zaman al-Sakhin*, 44–46; “Women’s Society in the Eastern Province,” Phebe A. Marr, June 5, 1966, Box 3, Folder 27, ARD, Chronological Files, June–December 1966, Mulligan Papers.

28 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Haraka al-Wataniyya*, vol. 1, 131–34.

29 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Haraka al-Wataniyya*, vol. 1, 132.

30 The Saudi journalist, writer and poet ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Juhaymān (1912–2011).

31 Digest of *Akhbar al-Dhahran*; Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 149–50.

32 Mulligan Papers, Box 2 Folder 24, AAD etc., July–December 1960, ‘AAD Accountability Report, Fourth Quarter 1960,’ December 27, 1960.

later, his articles discussed responsible investment in the development of local industry and urban communities.³³ Al-Mana' came from Hofuf, yet his family was of Najdi origin and counted among the most prominent and wealthy in al-Hasa.³⁴ He owned a number of contractor firms in al-Khobar and maintained an apparently friendly contact with employees of the Labor Department and local activists.³⁵ In 1960, he was an appointed member of the investigating committee that was delegated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to see into contractor workers' demands for paid weekends.³⁶ The committee refused these demands arguing that "if Aramco grants paid weekends, it is Aramco's sole decision to do so" and further stating that contractor firms were not bound to abide by the labor regulations to grant paid weekends. If the Labor Office demanded that all workers be treated equally, the issue should be raised to court level. During the investigations al-Mana' represented the Labor Department in Dammam. 'Ali al-'Awwami had befriended Muhammad al-Mana' already in the early 1950s, when the latter was Aramco sub-contractor in Ra's Tanura. Back then, al-Mana' had expressed his sympathy for the political aims of Qatif's young activists and even suggested that they should coordinate their undertakings with the people of al-Khobar and Dammam to increase the weight of their political demands vis-à-vis the Saudi government.³⁷ Noteworthy, it seems that more than one friendly contact between Shi'i notables and influential Sunni merchants was formed during times of shared work

33 "Our Oil Wealth," Muhammad A. Mana', January 20, 1956, and February 3, 1956, vol. 2, no. 27, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

34 Muḥammad al-Anṣārī, *Tuḥfat al-Mustafid. Bitārīkh al-Aḥsā' fī al-Qadīm wa-l-Jadīd*, vol. 1 (Matabi' al-Riyāḍ, 1960), 74–78.

35 Al-Manā' appears in several articles written by labor activists like 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sunayd as informal source. "Growth of Industrial Consciousness," 'Abd al-'Aziz Abu Sunayd, April 1, 1957, vol. 2, no. 42, Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran.

36 Wuzāra al-Māliyya wa-l-Iqtisād al-Waṭani, document no. 73, Rajab 5, 1379H/January 4, 1960, IPA.

37 Al-'Awwami writes that Qatif's young modernists in 1953 forwarded a petition to the newly inaugurated King Sa'ud asking that the people of Qatif be represented in the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*). The demand was rejected by the King with the remark that no other community in the kingdom had made a similar (and, though in less explicit terms, presumptuous) request. Al-Mana' told al-'Awwami that he admired the political activism of the people of Qatif but that they should have first contacted the people of Dammam and al-Khobar and coordinated with them and sent their request as a request of all the people of the Eastern Province in order to be more effective. Al-'Awwami responded that he doubted that the people of Dammam and al-Khobar would support such demand, as they were not yet localized but still bound to their original regions whereas the people of Qatif were linked to this land since thousands of years. Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 149–50, 226–27.

and life in company towns. For instance, al-ʿAwwami mentions that Hassan al-Jishi, director of the municipality of Qatif between 1962 and 1970, was a friend of the famous Qasimi merchant Sulayman al-ʿUlayan, who had been his roommate when both had started their early work carriers at Aramco.³⁸

Despite a certain ambiguity in their conduct as shrewd businessmen on the one hand, and spokespersons of the nationalist cause on the other, local merchants and businessmen privately often took an outspoken critical attitude towards maladministration and corruption in the emergent oil conurbation and were also heard voicing barely veiled criticism of the extravagance of the royal family and other members of the Saudi government.³⁹ The example of Muhammad al-Manaʿ is an interesting one for several reasons: It shows that members of the local economic and intellectual elites maintained networks that crossed local geographic and confessional boundaries and shared common interests that were voiced in the popular language of Saudi and Arab nationalism. These elites held a significant claim over local leadership and the politics of oil urbanization which was often expressed through the traditional means of religious endowment and charity. Among the most prestigious projects of wealthy businessmen and local notables were the foundation and maintenance of private libraries and schools and the endowment of mosques and hospitals. These private investments traditionally guaranteed the functioning of the urban community in the absence of a strong state. On the other hand, they were an integral part of raising family prestige through connecting a family's name to local culture and learnedness (*thaqafa wa taʿalim*) and charity foundations (*muʿassasat al-khayriyya*).⁴⁰

Oil industrialization further spurred such activities, and while religious endowments and charity continued to play an integral role in fostering of local leadership, private business investment into much needed infrastructure projects was conceived by investors and people along similar lines as “deeds in

38 Al-ʿAwwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 219.

39 British observers interpreted the merchants' attitude (probably wrongly) as sympathy for the British position in Buraimi crisis. “Political Situation in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (al-Hasa),” Enclosure “Commercial Secretary's Impressions of the political Situation in the Eastern Province (al-Hasa) of Saudi Arabia,” M. Phillips, British Embassy, Jidda, to Eastern Department, February 28, 1956, FOR ES 1015/10.

40 Claudia Ghrawi, 2015, “In the Service of the Whole Community? Civic Engagement in Saudi Arabia (1950s–1960s),” *Jadaliyya*, 6 May, accessed July 25, 2017,

the interest of the community.”⁴¹ Interestingly, cultural and educational projects carried out by local political activists under the banner of modernity also referred to these traditional notions of charity. It goes perhaps without saying that, besides fostering local leadership and urban communal life, these investments were also designed to create profit for the investors. Unsurprisingly, they were also an expression of the rivalry that reigned among leading notables. Oil modernity in more than one way bore ambiguous traits, as is again exemplified by al-’Awwami. He discloses one case in which two charitable initiatives started by the young modernists in Qatif for the education of children from poor families ultimately failed because of undue enmity of their sponsors who belonged to rivalling families of notables.⁴² This ambiguity is illustrated as well by the work of municipal councils which in the 1950s and 1960s were elected by the local communities and thus became an important political platform especially for the established elites in the oil province.

1.2 *Local Notables and the Politics of Modernization*

In 1938, the Saudi government had promulgated uniform municipality regulations which established municipal governments in the entire kingdom.⁴³ These regulations institutionalized municipal administration as it had existed in the Hijaz and in al-Ahsa’ under Ottoman rule and again since 1925. The regulations of 1938 provided for the establishment of a committee for each of the quarters of a town, administrative and municipal councils, and a municipal central assembly. These bodies were headed by a director of the municipality (*mudir al-baladiyya*) who was an appointed official and held primary authority in municipal affairs.⁴⁴ Municipal council members were unpaid, had a wide scope of responsibilities and played important roles in urban government.⁴⁵ They considered and made decisions covering all matters connected to the municipality, reviewed the municipal budget, determined taxes and fees and

41 Ghrawi, “Civic Engagement;” Gwenn Okruhlik termed this new form of social investment in Saudi Arabia “private business activism.” Gwenn Okruhlik, “Debating Profits and Political Power: Private Business and Government in Saudi Arabia” (PhD diss, University of Texas, 1992).

42 Al-’Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 153–55.

43 “Preliminary Report on Municipalities in Saudi Arabia,” Arabian Research Division, Local Government Relations Department, May 1956, Box 5, Folder 19, ARD, Local Government Relations Department, William E. Mulligan Papers, Library Booth Family, Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington, DC (hereafter: Mulligan Papers, “Municipalities”), 4. Similar regulations had been in place in Mecca since 1933.

44 Mulligan Papers, “Municipalities,” 17.

45 Mulligan Papers, “Municipalities,” 6.

regulated their collection, and contracted agreements between the town and second parties. Municipal councils also monitored the activities of the director of the municipality and maintained a degree of control over the other bodies of the municipal government.⁴⁶ However, the regulations of 1938 left the parallel structures of municipality and local emirate unresolved. This usually led to competition, contradicting authority and consequently to a limited power of municipal governments vis-à-vis local and provincial emirates.⁴⁷

The 1950s witnessed an increase in the authority and financial leverage of municipal governments.⁴⁸ In April 1955, King Sa'ud issued a royal order "turning over to the municipalities of the kingdom all of the lands within their boundaries," which meant that "huge tracts of real estate became the property of the municipalities, to be disposed of [used or sold] in any manner of their choosing." Consequently, the municipalities gained an immense source of income and leverage which they could invest in modernization projects.⁴⁹ Yet, the new law was also bound to intensify local conflicts over land ownership, since it reinforced the problem to prove private land ownership and most probably interfered with common forms of land usage in the oasis districts. The dimensions of urbanization in al-Hasa and Qatif in the following decade indicate that oil modernization must have had an extremely disruptive effect on the local land regimes: Between 1960 and 1970 Qatif's urban area grew by nearly sixty percent. The figures for Hofuf are even more dramatic, showing that Hofuf's built-up area grew by 115 percent during the same time period.⁵⁰ The new status of municipal governments was further marked by the introduction of elections for municipal councils in 1954. In divergence from the older practice of appointment, half of the council members were now elected by election committees or in some cases through popular votes. Why the Saudi government decided to introduce elections for municipal councils remains unclear, however, the popular opinion is that the decision was a response to widespread petitioning.⁵¹ In July 1954, the nationalist High Executive Committee in

46 Mulligan Papers, "Municipalities," 13–14.

47 Mulligan Papers, "Municipalities," 5.

48 Ghrawi, "Civic Engagement."

49 "Prices Fixed For Land in al-Khobar and its Suburbs," August 19, 1955, vol. 1, no. 17, *Digest of Akhbar al-Dhahran*; Mulligan Papers, "Municipalities," 47. Insertion added.

50 Al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province," 230, 263.

51 Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations," 5; Interview with amateur historian from a prominent local family, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.

Bahrain had equally voiced the demand for democratically elected municipal councils.⁵²

In the old oasis districts and their principal towns Hofuf and Qatif, long-established families and local notables used the elections for confirming and further sustaining their traditional role in urban politics. Many of the young modernists in Qatif won seats in the municipal council and took over offices in urban government, among them 'Ali al-'Awwami.⁵³ In Dammam and al-Khobar, however, mostly merchants and businessmen were elected, reflecting the commercial status and young history of the oil towns as well as the fact that merchants and businessmen in general formed an upward-current in local urban politics.⁵⁴ The Dawasir, who inhabited the area since the 1920s and traditionally held smaller government offices like that of *'umda* and local emir, were also strongly represented in the newly elected councils.⁵⁵

Matthiesen deemed municipal elections in the 1950s and 1960s as one of the earliest instances of Sunni-Shi'i political cooperation and as examples for the secular political activities of a modern and well-educated local youth who "wanted to overcome electioneering based on 'traditional' ties such as family, tribe or sect, and old members of the local political circles who were seen as pious and supporting religious ceremony." He even regards the elections as proof for an "exceptional phase of relative freedom of political debate."⁵⁶ Yet, municipal council elections in the province's old oasis districts did also enforce the traditional supremacy of local notables over urban politics. A critical voice accordingly criticizes the mobilization for municipal council elections by secular modernists of this period as "elitist movement."⁵⁷ This was partly also the result of an indirect election system which allowed for considerable manipulation by the Saudi government. For instance, the Council of Ministers had to approve of each candidate elected in Qatif and made sure that traditional Shi'i arbiters of Saudi rule were represented in the councils.⁵⁸ In al-Hasa, an

52 "Situation in Bahrain," Telegram no. 482, Mr. Burrows, Bahrain, to Eastern Department, July 5, 1954, FOR EA 10110/5.

53 Al-'Awwami, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 187–89.

54 "Dammam Municipal Election, 6 September 1960," Phebe A. Marr, October 24, 1960, Box 3, Folder 2, ARD, Chronological Files, October–November 1960, Mulligan Papers.

55 "Dammam Municipal Election, 6 September 1960," Phebe A. Marr, October 24, 1960, Box 3, Folder 2, ARD, Chronological Files, October–November 1960, Mulligan Papers.

56 Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations," 7–8, 10, 19.

57 Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 111.

58 Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations," 11. Fuccaro found similar obstacles in Bahrain's system for municipal elections, which also stipulated that half of the members of municipal councils had to be elected by popular vote. Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 134.

electoral committee of rich merchants and prominent notables chose council members from a ballot of pre-approved candidates. This was perhaps the reason for the rather subdued local interest in the elections. Only a small fraction of eligible voters in the towns of al-Hasa cast a ballot.⁵⁹ Aramco's labor force became a pillar of support for the political campaign of the young modernists in Qatif.⁶⁰ Noteworthy, the young modernists who succeeded in the municipal elections in Qatif alongside older and more honorable residents came mostly from prominent local families. Their exposure to contemporary secular political ideologies and the societal transformation brought about by oil industrialization that had begun to undermine their traditional position in local society rendered them a new and more political generation of local notables.⁶¹ These young men had access to higher education, maintained well-established contacts to members of the urban political elite to which they belonged, and their voices and opinions were heard among older and more influential councilors who probably also collaborated with the activists in order to dispose of other political rivals.⁶² At the same time, the young councilors perceived themselves as representatives of a modern and progressive generation and challenged the old political ways of the established notables. Most importantly, they fought against corruption in municipal administration, illegal land seizure and infrastructural underdevelopment in their home districts as they found that "the old generation was blind or unwilling to see the problems that left Qatif behind the new towns Dammam and al-Khobar." Yet, while they wanted to end the traditional political quietude practiced by "anxious sheikhs" and fought for the political integrity of municipal government, their election did not entail a real diversification of local power.⁶³

59 "Municipal Elections – Hofuf," Phebe A. Marr, December 19, 1960, Box 3, Folder 4, Chronological Files, December 1960; and "Preliminary Report Baladiya Election Rahima," Phebe A. Marr, May 22, 1960, Box 3, Folder 1, ARD, Chronological Files, May–June 1960, Mulligan Papers; "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 53," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 30 1965, A-229, POL 2 SAUD; and "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 39," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 30, 1966, A-128, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

60 See also Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 186.

61 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-'Amal al-Maṭlabī fī Mīat 'Ām*, 137–38; Matthiesen, "Centre-Periphery Relations," 10.

62 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 184–89.

63 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 174–75. The same was noted by Fuccaro for municipal elections in Bahrain where "the composition of the municipal council revealed a high degree of continuity in urban leadership in the pearl and oil eras," as the

Due to their own family and class backgrounds, the young modernists were not immune to the traditional hazards of local leadership. Al-'Awwami mentions rivalries between *qal'awi* and *barrani* factions of Qatif which repeatedly threatened to harm the political work of the young councilors.⁶⁴ Al-'Awwami, whose family of notables was well-established within the Qal'at al-Qatif, maintained a more neutral stand in this conflict to which oil industrialization added a new spin: The municipality of Qatif had been founded in 1925 or 1926 and was first headed by Khalid Muhammad al-Faraj, who belonged to an influential family of Qatifi notables. In the decades that followed, the position of director of the municipality was routinely occupied by members of Qatif's most prominent urban-based families.⁶⁵ The municipality comprised larger villages like Sayhat and Sawfa as well as the numerous smallish villages in the oasis. Through its supremacy over municipal governments and traditional roles as *quda* at local courts, Qatif's old political establishment administered local everyday matters of oil urbanization including land seizure for modernization and urban expansion into the oasis. In spring 1956, a royal decree broadened the mandate of municipal councils in Saudi Arabia, providing them with the power to prepare ordinances that covered all phases of municipal activities including the improvement of infrastructure and health and sanitary conditions in their administrative districts.⁶⁶ As a consequence, municipal councils were now able to fully carry out projects for urban expansion and modernization on their own authority. This also meant increasing municipal intrusion in land ownership and land tenure, which were the traditional foundations of local leadership. Hence, elections for membership in municipal councils became an important space for political competition among Qatif's urban and rural elites.

In contrast, US officials interpreted municipal council elections in the province's old oasis districts largely as proof of prevailing sectarian divisions in local society. Furthermore, the language used in US reports tended to mask the

electoral system gave an advantage to those candidates "that could best tap into existing patronage-client networks." Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 134.

64 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 191. Also based on 'Awwāmī, this is as well discussed by Matthiesen, "Center-Periphery Relations," 10–12. On Qal'awis and Barranis in Qatif see also chapter 2 in this book.

65 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 173. A British report of 1930 states that Al Jishi, "the newly appointed President [of the Qatif municipality] was found unsuitable for the post and Khalid al Faraj Kuwaiti the former president has been reinstated." "Fortnightly Political Diaries, No. 19," British Agency, Bahrain, October 16, 1930, File 16/5, IOR/R/15/2/1498.

66 Mulligan Papers, "Municipalities," 21.

socially disruptive effects of oil urbanization and their impact on local politics. Elections for Hofuf's municipal council in 1960 illustrate how representation in urban government meant leverage over who gained access to modernization, for instance through connection to the growing network of paved roads or the electric grid. Since such new resources were still scarce, this entailed a large degree of competition and conflicts. Whether these conflicts were fought out between Sunni and Shi'a or between members of the same sect depended on the respective local social geography.⁶⁷ In the Hasa oasis, where Sunnis dominated municipal government and local industry while Shi'a mostly worked in small contractor business or in agriculture, struggles over urban expansion and modernization projects were often fought out along religious lines.⁶⁸ Social and political contempt against those communities with less income who, in the eyes of some councilors, should also have less say in municipal affairs, was more or less openly translated into anti-Shi'a sentiments. Hence, the explicit demand brought forward by Shi'i electioneers and Sunni progressives in Hofuf to stipulate a fixed number of seats for Shi'a in the municipal councils of those districts in which Shi'a formed the majority can be read not only as an attempt to improve representation of Shi'a communities in al-Hasa's municipal council but as well to diversify the economic and class background of municipal council members.⁶⁹ Qatif with its almost entirely Shi'i population was not exempt from such conflicts. On the contrary, municipal activities in Qatif highlighted social inequalities within the local communities. For instance, in 1960, a street widening project in the town of Qatif brought about the dismissal of the entire municipal government. The faction of young modernists among municipal council members had accused the president of the municipality, Hassan al-Jishi, of misappropriation of compensation payments for urban dwellers whose houses had been demolished for the widening of Qatif's main street. Apparently, the municipality had not only failed to pass on compensation money to the dispossessed, but the process had been carried out in such

67 "Municipal Elections – Hofuf," Phebe A. Marr, December 19, 1960, including attachment, Box 3, Folder 4, Chronological Files, December 1960, Mulligan Papers.

68 In June 1962, the provincial government led investigations into grievances of al-Hasa's Shi'i communities who complained that the municipality of Hofuf invested development funds only in Sunni areas. The US consulate in Dhahran determined a continuing antagonism between the two groups "despite government efforts to placate the Shi'a." "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial Coast, No. 7," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 27, 1962, 786A.00/6-2762, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

69 "Municipal Elections – Hofuf," Phebe A. Marr, December 19, 1960, including attachment, Box 3, Folder 4, Chronological Files, December 1960, Mulligan Papers.

a haphazard manner that whole families became homeless literally overnight and were forced to camp out in the local mosques.⁷⁰

Later that same year, lethal violence occurred when oasis villagers opposed modernization projects directed by the Qatif municipality under its new president Ahmad al-Sinbal, member of a prominent family of Shi‘i clergy.⁷¹ The incidents are mentioned in two reports issued by Aramco’s Arabian Research Division and the US consulate in Dhahran. The first report falsely suggests sectarian conflict as reason for the violence and at the same time placates small rural dwellings in the old villages as illegal, thus clearly reproducing the asymmetric distribution of power that marked the process of oil urbanization. It states that “the extension of municipal government into isolated Shia villages in the Qatif oasis and the attempt of the Qatif municipality to take possession of land *legally* owned by the municipality but now occupied by Shiite squatters resulted in demonstrations and bloodshed.”⁷² One of the reported incidents took place in the village of ‘Umm al-Hammam where villagers tried to prevent municipal representatives from Qatif from taking steps to pave a road through the village. In the second case, citizens of Qudaih attempted to thwart a visit by officials from Qatif because they feared that the municipality wanted to deprive them of their land. The incident in Qudaih resulted in one killed and several injured people when police opened fire against the irate villagers. The report further claims that *religious* feelings of the villagers had been “inflamed” by an anti-Shi‘a article in a Riyadh monthly magazine.⁷³ The article in question had been published some time earlier and was followed by individual appeals of Hasawis and a delegation from Qatif to King Sa‘ud to take charge against the anti-Shi‘a polemics. Sa‘ud prompted the resignation of the magazine’s editor and a printed apology, which was interpreted as conciliation of the injured

70 In 1960, the position of the director of the municipality (*mudīru-l-baladīyya*) was renamed into president of the municipality (*ra‘īsu-l-baladīyya*). ‘Abdullah Raḍī al-Shamāsī, “Ta‘aliq wa Iyḍāḥ,” in *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya Sharq al-Sa‘ūdiyya 1373–1393 h/1953–1973 m*, vol. 1, Sayyid ‘Alī al-Sayyid Bāqir al-Awwāmī (Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 2012), 201, 205–7.

71 Ahmad al-Sinbal became president of the Qatif municipality in 1960, after the former director Hassan al-Jishi was dismissed from his position following severe allegations of corruption. Al-Shamāsī, “Ta‘aliq wa Iyḍāḥ,” 206; Sa‘īd al-Sharīf, “Min A‘lām al-Qaṭīf ‘Abr al-Uṣūr – Al-Jiz’ al-Thānī: Al-Qarn al-Thālith ‘Ashar al-Hijrī/Al-Tāsi’ ‘Ashar al-Milādī,” *Majallat al-Mawsim* 9–10 (2005), accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=491> [site discontinued].

72 “Confidential report,” William E. Mulligan, December 27, 1960, Box 2, Folder 24, ART, AAD, Chronological Files, July–December 1960, Mulligan Papers. Italics added.

73 “Confidential report,” William E. Mulligan, December 27, 1960, Box 2, Folder 24, ART, AAD, Chronological Files, July–December 1960, Mulligan Papers. Italics added.

communal feelings of al-Ahsa's Shi'i communities.⁷⁴ A close reading of the reports suggests that the two incidents were not at all connected. The US consul who discussed the incidents at length admitted that "the Consulate General has endeavored to ascertain the most plausible from a plethora of rumors, reports and 'eyewitness' accounts." In fact, his report contains a number of mistakes, such as the assumption that the director of the Qatif municipality was a Sunni. While the consul falsely concluded that the violence and outrage were protests by the local Shi'a against "discrimination and depreciation by the Sunni authorities," a more basic truth shows through the text. According to the report, the conflict between municipal government and the oasis villagers had started when the Qatif municipal council requested that, based on the above mentioned ordinance issued in 1955, the Qatif municipal council be authorized to "take possession of all residential land within the towns and villages of the Oasis for which the owners did not have Shari'ah Court documents or deeds." The report continues that "Sunni villages of the oasis ... were exempted" from the ordinance. It is difficult to find a rational explanation for such an exemption. Furthermore, none of the consulted sources, government regulations or local historiography, provide evidence for such a policy. Hence, it seems relatively safe to assume that also this part of the report is based on incomplete or even wrong information.

At the heart of the problem lay the fact that most of the land in the local villages was not registered. Land tenure was practiced according to common acquiescence, which rooted back to traditional practices of shared cultivation of common land and the universally practiced right to reclaim public waste land which stipulated that a person who plowed hitherto uncultivated land acquired entitlement to ownership.⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, land demarcation by the municipality was resented by the villagers as outside interference in their affairs which was feared to result in "greater burdens in the form of taxes and regulations." The villagers of Qudaih ultimately petitioned the king with a request to stop the municipal council from taking their land and an investigation committee was set up to look into the grievances.⁷⁶ Taking this into

74 "Discrimination in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia Against the Shi'a and Their Increasing Discontent," Walter M. McClelland, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 27, 1960, 886A.413/12-2760 HBS, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

75 Vidal, "Date Culture," 421-22; al-Nuaim, "State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation," 134-35, 137.

76 "Discrimination in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia Against the Shi'a and Their Increasing Discontent," Walter M. McClelland, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 27, 1960, 886A.413/12-2760 HBS, National General Records of

account, the (mis-)interpretation by Aramco's Arabian Research Division of people's anger against the dispossession of their homes and land as "religious strife" appears almost unconceivable in its crudeness. Aramco's prejudiced interpretation of local politics did not always take such extreme forms, but clearly, everything that carried the banner of oil modernization was taken as a welcome development, while opposition by the local population was met with distrust and condemned as communist and/or sectarian in nature.⁷⁷

2 Urban Struggle and Repression

Throughout the politically volatile decade of the 1960s several clandestine political organizations made their appearance in the oil province and the kingdom, many of whose founders had been previously connected to the NLF. Probably in 1958, the Saudi Ba'athist *Munazammat Ahrar al-Jazira al-'Arabiyya* (Organization of Free Men of the Arabian Peninsula) was founded by Aramco workers and members of Qatif's notable families. Quite often, Saudi Ba'athists had studied in Iraq where they had come into touch with the movement. Saudi Shi'a, who traditionally pursued higher education in the neighboring country, were recruited into Ba'athist political organizations and returned to the kingdom where they helped to distribute the political ideas. The Saudi Ba'athist movement quickly developed into a national and decidedly cross-sectarian organization with branches in Riyadh, the Qatif-Dammam-al-Khobar area, al-Hasa, the Northern region and the Hijaz.⁷⁸ There exist different opinions whether or not the Saudi military became a particular stronghold of the Ba'athists. In 1965, the *Jabha al-Dimuqratiyya al-Sha'abiyya fi al-Jazira al-'Arabiyya* (Popular Democratic Front of the Arabian Peninsula) became the right-wing offshoot of the Saudi Ba'athist movement.⁷⁹

the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA; "Local Feeling Toward Baladiyah Government," Phebe A. Marr, August 20, 1960, Box 3, Folder 2, ARD, Chronological Files, July-September 1960, Mulligan Papers. Municipalities did levy taxes and fees according to their financial needs. Taxes were usually collected by municipal employees. However, in replicating older custom, tax farming was often also outsourced to private residents who could bid the municipality for the privilege. Mulligan Papers, "Municipalities," 45-46.

77 "Discrimination in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia Against the Shi'a and Their Increasing Discontent," Walter M. McClelland, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 27, 1960, 886A.413/12-2760 HBS, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

78 Matthiesen, "Migration," 494.

79 Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 105; Matthiesen, "Migration," 496.

While many clandestine party organizations in the 1960s wanted to overthrow the Saudi regime and in general approved of armed struggle for the pursuit of this aim, the most radical and only verifiably militant Saudi underground organization active during the 1960s was the *Itihad al-Ibna' al-Jazira al-Arabiyya* (Union of the Sons of the Arabian Peninsula) which had been founded by the former Aramco worker and labor activist Nasir al-Sa'īd in 1959. The *Itihad* claimed to represent disfranchised Bedouin, peasants and workers from the Eastern Province, the Hijaz, 'Asir, Tihama, Ha'il, Qasim and Riyadh whom it wanted to free from "Saudi tyranny." The organization operated throughout the kingdom, yet the capital Riyadh and the oil industry were key targets of its activities.⁸⁰

Ba'athists, the NLF and other organizations recruited members mainly among better educated oil workers, government employees and students. Particular vibrant spaces for political mobilization were the numerous sports clubs that mushroomed throughout the country and particularly in the oil province. Soccer and other sports had been introduced in al-Ahsa' by Aramco as recreational activities.⁸¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, sports clubs were among the few associational organizations officially permitted to exist in the kingdom. Vidal found that sports clubs in al-Hasa

are organized to allow young men to come together to engage in sport, commonly soccer, but they also serve additional purposes ... The young men of al-Hasa assemble in the clubs – whether a game is scheduled or not – to talk about their common political, religious, social, educational, or economic interests, generally centering around their desire to violate established, sacred social norms: on alcohol, gambling, loose women, political upheaval, organized labor, and the like.⁸²

Al-ʿAwwami recounts a library project that had been initiated by political activists in Qatif but ultimately failed because its organizers adhered to different

80 "The UAR Openly Attempts to Organize Saudi Opposition," [author unknown], April 23, 1962, Box 3, Folder 18, ARD, Chronological Files, May–August 1963, Mulligan Papers; Nāṣir al-Sa'īd, "Ḥaḳā'iq 'an al-Qasr al-Sa'ūdī," *Markaz al-Ḥaramāin li-l-'Ilām al-Islāmī* 49 (1988), accessed April 15, 2014 http://www.almktaba.com/book_ged/book12.html.

81 "Weekly Survey – Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar and Trucial Coast, No. 6," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 20, 1962, 786A.00/6.2062, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; "Labor Conditions in the Arabian American Oil Company," W.J. Handley, March 17, 1948, 850.4, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949, RG 84, NARA.

82 Vidal, "The Oasis of al-Hasa," 393–94.

political ideologies. Members of the “opposing” political organization were hindered at entering the library and in the end, the library did not achieve its goal “to form a national platform for meeting, discussion, and enlightenment.”⁸³ Furthermore, ongoing traditional rivalries between the urban and rural factions of Qal’awis and Barranis were now also carried out by the new means of organization into opposing political parties, which happened for instance around the nucleus of prominent families from the Qal’at-t-Qatif on the one hand, and from the villages of ‘Awwamiyya, Sayhat and Safwa on the other, and ensued in recurrent public confrontations of the hostile factions.⁸⁴ Notably, ideological antagonisms and rivalries between different political organizations acquired shape in physical local space. In Qatif, the rivalry between Ba’thist and Communist organizations was expressed by the opposition of two local sports clubs whose respective members repeatedly provoked each other during sports games or hostile encounters in streets and coffeehouses.⁸⁵ In the times before oil, coffeehouses were found only in the principal oasis towns and served as meeting places for foreign traders and travelers who frequented them for otherwise unattainable socialization and the exchange of news. By the middle of the twentieth century, their function had apparently changed into that of common meeting places for oil workers and locals who jointly listened to radio broadcasts such as the Egyptian Voice of the Arabs and discussed political matters. Sources indicate that they fulfilled this function not only in Qatif, but also in the new oil towns Dammam, Dhahran and al-Khobar.⁸⁶

A considerable degree of political mobilization among the youth took place in the province’s schools and institutes of higher education. Since the early 1960s, the Saudi government noticed students in local towns as a politically active group.⁸⁷ In 1962, leftist students founded the Ba’thist *Tal’ā al-Tullabiyya al-Thawriyya* (Revolutionary Students Vanguard), which had cells as well in in Riyadh and in the Qasim but was particularly active in Dammam until

83 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 1, 161, 167.

84 Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 85.

85 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 2, 248.

86 Parssinen and Talib, “A Traditional Community and Modernization,” 15–16; “Listeners to Voice of the Arabs Arrested,” James A. May, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 18, 1962, 786A.00/7-1869; and “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Trucial States and Persian Gulf, No. 30,” January 25, 1967, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

87 “Weekly Survey – Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar and Trucial Coast, No. 12,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 4, 1962, 786A.00/8.462, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.



FIGURE 15 Coffee shop in Kuwait in 1918, British Library

its members were rounded up during mass arrests in 1964.⁸⁸ Students at the Petroleum College and in the local middle and high schools were recruited into political organizations straight from their classrooms, a strategy that was common as well in other Gulf countries.⁸⁹ In early 1964, political pamphlets that were anti-Aramco and anti-government and carried strong Ba'athist overtones appeared in schools in Qatif, Hofuf and Dammam as well as in Ra's Tanura. On one occasion, local police had to disperse a crowd of students who noisily asked for the payback of study fees they believed had filled the pockets of the minister of education. During the incident, eight students were arrested.⁹⁰

88 Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 82.

89 Ghrawi, "A Tamed Urban Revolution," 118–19. On radical youth organizations in Bahrain see Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 173–86.

90 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 27," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, January 8, 1964, POL DEF; "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 28," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, January 15, 1964, POL 2 SAUD; and "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 21," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 18, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

Hence, by the early 1960s, political mobilization had stopped to evolve exclusively around labor politics at Aramco and municipal council elections. In fact, it had begun to spread throughout the oil conurbation where the emergence of new urban venues added to the ability of contemporary political ideas and movements to gain a foothold within new segments of society. While many political activists were better educated and thus to a certain extent privileged, other urban groups such as labor migrants and day laborers reciprocated the atmosphere of increased political tension and public contention, expressing their own discomfort with uneven oil development and maladministered urban expansion.

2.1 *From Labor to Urban Struggle*

US Americans in the oil province for quite some time tended to underestimate the volatile situation created in two decades of rapid urban growth, industrial development and labor struggles at the oil company. In 1959, the American Consul general in Dhahran believed Aramco's Saudi employees who frequently expressed their "individual discontent" to remain isolated from the local population of the oil area. He claimed that the lack of a "large town proletariat" would prevent any organized action on the side of the Saudi workforce in the province. Moreover, US consulate officials believed that the strict provincial government and large military forces in the area would keep any potential troublemakers in check.⁹¹ However, after the violent repression of the Saudi labor movement in the summer of 1956 and a reformulation of Aramco's housing policies in 1958 which now favored the building of workers' neighborhoods and family housing in the local villages and towns instead of concentrating large numbers of workers in labor camps, the labor movement gradually was absorbed into the politics that evolved around social and economic problems in the emergent oil conurbation as a whole.⁹²

In April 1961, hundreds of workers and unemployed staged recurrent protests in front of the Ministry of Labor in Dammam. The protests were accompanied by a press-campaign waged by the *Khalij al-Arabi* against the director general of the Dammam Labor Department, 'Abdullah Dhubaib, and against Saudi sub-contractor firms in the province.⁹³ One article in particular condemned

91 "Saudi Internal Situation. Talk With W.K. Schwinn, U.S. Consul General in Dhahran," J.F. Walker, July 16, 1959, FOR BS 1015/17.

92 Ghrawi, "A Tamed Urban Revolution," 117.

93 "Labor – SAG Attempts to Find Solution to 'Unemployment' in the Eastern Province," John Evarts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, September 5, 1961, 886A.06/9-561, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; "Report on Broadcasts of the Egyptian Radio Station 'Voice of the

the Saudi Labor and Workmen Regulation which gave the employer the right to lay off workers without reason and which was perceived to have “destroyed the life and homes of many workers and exposed them overnight to hunger.” Another author claimed that mass arbitrary termination of work contracts by Aramco and its sub-contractors “have caused an increase in unemployment, a decrease of wages, and a lowering of living standards.”⁹⁴ The public dispute escalated when Dhubaib ordered the head of security forces in Dammam to put an end to the disorder that repeated itself day after day in front of the ministry. During the forceful intervention of Saudi police and public security against the demonstrators, forty-three protesters were wounded, and one killed. The Saudi government – then characterized by the short-lived rapprochement of King Sa’ud with more liberal forces – took the incident and the criticism voiced by the *Khalij al-Arabi* and the protesters seriously. Due to the sympathy that many high-ranking technocrats felt towards Saudi nationalism, the government gave some leeway to the labor movement. It placed the Labor Department under direct control of the Council of Ministers, dismissed Dhubaib as director and replaced him with the nationalist (and alleged communist) ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mansur. The government also established the new Ministry of Labor, Laborers and Social Affairs in June 1961 with the aim to bring as many unemployed Saudis into work as possible.⁹⁵ In contrast, the US administration in the oil province doubted the legitimacy of the protests and created an image of the unemployed as being

recent arrivals from outlying parts of the Province and other parts of the Kingdom who are not used to a regular work schedule, have a strong sense that certain types of work are demeaning, and are perfectly willing

Arab Nation,’ Media Digest,” Federico S. Vidal, November 14, 1961, Box 3, Folder 10, ARD, Chronological Files, November–December 1961, Mulligan Papers.

94 “Popular Concern Over Labor Unions and Labor Affairs Increasing in Saudi Arabia,” Richard H. Hawkins, Jr., US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, May 16, 1961, 886A.062/5-1661 CJ, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

95 “Labor – SAG Attempts to Find Solution to ‘Unemployment’ in the Eastern Province,” John Evarts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, September 5, 1961, 886A.06/9-561, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; “Report on Broadcasts of the Egyptian Radio Station ‘Voice of the Arab Nation,’ Media Digest,” Federico S. Vidal, November 14, 1961, Box 3, Folder 10, ARD, Chronological Files, November–December 1961; and “Biographical Sketches,” Harry W. Alter, July 13, 1964, Box 1, Folder 69, Arabs Miscellaneous Biographies, 12/17/1962-8/31/1983, Mulligan Papers.

to return home rather than work at a job they do not like, but who would prefer a well-paid position of high prestige which requires no work.⁹⁶

This evaluation of the situation largely disregarded the effects of petro-capitalism and wide-spread poverty in the province. US American civilizing hubris came up regularly in contemporary reports but was seldom displayed in such an overt manner as in the statement that “these [Saudi] people are in a changing culture; they have accepted the Western regard for material things and the Western belief in the possibility of attaining them but have not yet changed their attitudes toward work.” In order to prove this point, the report repeated complaints by landowners in the province who lamented their inability to find Saudi laborers willing to work in their palm groves for a payment of five riyals per day, which was slightly more than one US Dollar.⁹⁷ Apparently, the US administration believed this an appropriate income for the lowest strata of local society – an income, which did not at all suffice to ensure a “tolerable standard of living” for a very large proportion of the province’s inhabitants.⁹⁸

In 1963, government works in the development of the oil area gained momentum and especially unskilled labor for construction and transportation works was suddenly again in high demand. Circumventing its own labor regulations, the government apparently hired day laborers only, whom it could easily release once the work was finished.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, workers in the oil area began to raise their voices against insufficient wages that did not cover the rising prices of food and living in the oil conurbation. In spring 1964, Aramco workers at the oil shipping ports stopped working to underline their demands for overtime payment and thus heralded a new era of labor struggle. Shortly

96 “Labor – SAG Attempts to Find Solution to ‘Unemployment’ in the Eastern Province,” John Evarts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, September 5, 1961, 886A.06/9-561, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Insertion added.

97 “Labor – SAG Attempts to Find Solution to ‘Unemployment’ in the Eastern Province,” John Evarts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, September 5, 1961, 886A.06/9-561, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Insertion added.

98 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 416. An assessment of the actual worth of the daily income of 5 Riyal is difficult. However, in 1965, Aramco granted extra living allowances for its employees to balance rising food prices in the province, ranging between 80 to 100 Riyal per month for intermediate staff and 120–190 Riyal per month for senior staff. “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 49,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 2, 1965, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

99 Majlis Wuzarā’ document no. 4101, Şafar 7, 1383H/June 30, 1963, IPA.

afterwards, the lowest staff levels began a boycott of company cafeterias and dry ration stores.¹⁰⁰ The company management was irritated by the seemingly absurd grievances voiced by the protesters against “unbuttered rice and hard water tea.”¹⁰¹ Yet, more insightful Americans like the Arabist Peter Speers very well understood that the boycott was not grounded in mere dislike of company meals but in more important causes. Speers remembered that Americans used to call lunch for Saudi staff in Aramco’s dining halls “noon day feeding” which in his opinion correlated to a “patronizing” and “contemptuous” mannerism directed against Saudi workers and was part of Aramco’s “typical industrial relations attitude.”¹⁰² It soon appeared to the provincial authorities as if the Labor Department under its new director al-Mansur had played a role in organizing the boycott of Aramco facilities, notably since Saudi authorities regarded the department as a kind of labor union for Aramco workers.¹⁰³ The Saudi government identified several competing Communist, Nasserist and Ba’thist groups behind the organization of the 1964 boycott, including activists from Qatif and alleged “communists” among high ranking government officials and Labor Office employees.¹⁰⁴ Troubled about the increase of political contention in the oil towns, the local authorities began a “witch hunt” against subversive elements among the local communities, workers, and government employees.¹⁰⁵ The first blow dealt out by the local authorities apparently was the arrest of a Qatifi bookseller who had specialized in leftist and Western literature and who under the duress of interrogation by security officers conveyed the names

100 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 47,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 10, 1964, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 48,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 17, 1964, POL 2 SAUD; and “The Aramco Boycott and Arrests Featured in the Beirut Press,” John Everts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 22, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

101 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 47,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 3, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

102 Speers, “Interview,” 505–6.

103 Al-‘Awwāmī, *Al-Haraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 2, 140–41.

104 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 48,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 17, 1964, POL 2 SAUD; and “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 1,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 1, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

105 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 1,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 1, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

of his clients to the interrogators. Subsequently many local activists and NLF members were arrested, among them many Qatifis like 'Ali al-'Awwami but also many non-Qatifis such as the labor activist Salih Sa'ad al-Zayd, and the activist Yusuf al-Shaykh Ya'qub.¹⁰⁶ A second strike was directed against the Dammam Labor Department when 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mansur was arrested together with other higher ranking ministry officials and Aramco employees. Many Saudi activists fled the kingdom and sought exile in Beirut, among them the former labor leader and head of the NLF, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sunayd. They later publicly accused Aramco and the US consulate of having assisted the Saudi Ministry of Interior in concocting the charge of communism against the arrested and of having forwarded significant intelligence to the local security forces.¹⁰⁷

After the arrests of the alleged communists, labor trouble in the province continued. The boycott of Aramco cafeterias lasted more than four months and left the company puzzled about its masterful organization. Subversive leaflets were found in Aramco's intermediate camps and in October 1964 Aramco workers protested again against insufficient bus transportation, causing the American consul to conclude that "the workers resort more and more to mass tactics in their dealing with Aramco."¹⁰⁸ In August 1964 followed a second arrest wave against government officials and merchants in Dammam who were accused of either involvement in or approval of local disorder.¹⁰⁹ In late 1964, the US consulate reported that the new Saudi government under King Faysal worked on a revision of the Saudi labor regulations, but concluded that "although the labor front remains active, entirely new labor regulations are not

106 Al-'Awwāmī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 2, 80–83.

107 The nationwide arrests led as well to the imprisonment of influential figures such as the writer, journalist and Ministry of Finance employee 'Abd al-Karim al-Juhayman, the former director of the Dammam Labor Department 'Abd al-Razaq al-Rayyis, the Ministry of Agriculture employee 'Abid Khazandar and many others. They all were arrested for alleged "communist activities." "Biographical Sketches," Harry W. Alter, July 13, 1964, Box 1, Folder 69, Arabs Miscellaneous Biographies, 12/17/1962-8/31/1983, Mulligan Papers; "The Aramco Boycott and Arrests Featured in the Beirut Press," John Everts Horner, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 22, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, and "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 1," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 1, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

108 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 16," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, October 14, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

109 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 9," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 26, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

likely to be approved in the immediate future.”¹¹⁰ The US consulate’s estimation was proved right as no new labor regulations were issued. Accordingly, the persistent demand for a raise of living allowances which had ranged prominently during the boycott of company cafeterias and dry ration stores in 1964 was repeated in May 1965 and again in June 1966 during workers’ demonstrations in Dhahran and Ra’s Tanura, which were possibly connected to concurrent disturbances in Bahrain.¹¹¹

Meanwhile, the oil towns became theatres of popular struggle. Throughout the years 1964–1966 US diplomats in Dhahran reported an increasing number of incidents such as theft, murder, sexual harassment and brawls in the oil towns. The Saudi authorities apparently reacted to social disorder by staging violent punitive measures such as the mutilation of thieves and the beheading of murderers in the plain view of the public.¹¹² In a double strike against unemployment and urban disorder, National Guard and local police increased their forces in the oil area, recruiting massively from the lowest ranks of urban society which were formed by recently settled Bedouin and the unemployed

110 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 19,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

111 Ghrawi, “A Tamed Urban Revolution,” 118; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 45,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 5, 1965; POL 2 SAUD; and “Political Economic Summary of Saudi Arabia – Policy and Action Recommendations,” Nicholas G. Thatcher, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, June 9, 1965, POL 2–3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

112 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 17,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, October 21, 1964, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 7,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 18, 1965, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 12,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, September 22, 1965, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 23,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 8, 1965, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 39,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 30, 1966, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 45,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 11, 1966, POL 2 SAUD; “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Persian Gulf, No. 47,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 25, 1966, POL 2 SAUD; and “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Persian Gulf, No. 6,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 10, 1966, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

among the urban population.¹¹³ Two reports by the US consulate in Dhahran even suggest that, subsequently to Faysal's succession to the Saudi throne, the *mutawwa'in* (religious police) perceptibly increased their activities in the oil conurbation. The reports claim that, in their pursuit of the upkeep of public morality in the oil towns, offenders were beaten up and jailed without reference to higher authorities. One report quoted a Saudi informant who suggested that the "stepped up public morality committee activity in al-Khobar may be due to the comparatively low level to which 'morals' have sunk in the town."¹¹⁴ However, temporal resurgence of religious police activities was apparently a recurrent phenomenon throughout the first half of the 1960s, as the topic appears as well in an earlier Aramco report of 1961 which notes problems in Aramco's intermediate camps arising from "gambling oases," "liquor cases," the presence of women in the camps and a resulting increase in patrols and attempts to close down facilities at prayer times.¹¹⁵

Reported cases of criminal behavior and violent aggression among unemployed, day laborers and migrant workers illustrate that these groups were the most vulnerable to economic hardship and violent state disciplining. In late 1965, disappointed Saudi job seekers who had unsuccessfully applied for employment with a local Aramco sub-contractor attacked foreign labor migrants in a residential camp for contractor workers. The attackers were sentenced to three separate public lashings of one hundred strokes and one year imprisonment.¹¹⁶ Beside widespread unemployment, lacking access to basic services and malfunctioning urban government were also issues of contention.

113 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 4," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, July 22, 1964, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA. On the different tasks and backgrounds of police and National Guard see "Saudi Police Riot Control Capabilities," Eilts, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, July 20, 1969, POL 23-3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA. See also Niblock, "*The Saudi Arabian Political System*," 88.

114 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 19," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, November 4, 1964, POL 2 SAUD; and "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 45," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 11, 1966, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

115 "ATRCC Meeting," FMB, September 24, 1961, Box 3, Folder 9, Chronological Files, September-October 1961, Mulligan Papers.

116 "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 23," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 8, 1965, POL 2 SAUD; and "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial States, No. 37," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 16, 1966, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

The sanitary situation in large parts of the oil towns al-Khobar and Dammam was dismal. Newly installed sewage systems did not work properly, and foul water pooled in the smaller streets. At the same time, water prices in the towns rose, while most houses still depended on wells. Unsurprisingly, urban residents in 1967 publicly resented the introduction of additional taxes by the municipalities.¹¹⁷ In 1966, three hundred residents of al-Khobar protested the scarcity of land for the building of private houses in the town and the parallel decision of the municipality to make land available for the construction of compounds for contractor workers, which was regarded as a provocation.¹¹⁸

During times of perceptible social malaise in the oil towns and increasing state control and punishment, labor struggle in the oil conurbation persisted. However, it was no longer a movement strictly confined to the oil company and its Saudi employees. New modes of mass contention were at times adopted also by other urban groups and strikes and demonstrations became the common language for expressing widespread discontent. Civil disobedience was practiced by workers as much as by members of the local security forces and subaltern groups. Already in 1964, thousands of Saudi policemen went on work stoppage, demanding a long-promised pay raise. The strike took local authorities and foreign observers by surprise. In March 1967, workers at the Hofuf sand stabilization plant went on strike because they had not received payment for several weeks, probably due to “sheer inefficiency” of the municipality. The incident worried the Saudi government to an extent that the minister of agriculture, who visited al-Hasa at the time, paid the workers from his personal funds.¹¹⁹ The expansion of labor struggle towards Saudi workers outside Aramco and “increasingly palpable social despair [in the oil towns] enhanced the anxiety of the Saudi authorities about civil disorder and the smoldering of unrest in the oil conurbation.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, the involvement of Saudi Arabia in the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors and in the Yemen

117 Majlis al-Wuzarā', document no. 100, Rajab 11, 1387H?/October 14, 1967?; and Majlis al-Wuzarā', document no. 11492, Jumādā al-Thānī 14, 1387H/September 18, 1967, IPA; Ghrawi, “A Tamed Urban Revolution,” 118.

118 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar, and Persian Gulf, No. 47,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, May 25, 1966, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

119 “Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, No. 36,” US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 15, 1967, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Sand stabilization in al-Hasa was carried out to stop the encroachment of the oasis by sand dunes and sandstorms. Al-Jabr, “Agriculture in al-Hasa Oasis,” 225.

120 Ghrawi, “A Tamed Urban Revolution,” 119. Insertion added.

civil war did not only render the Saudi oil industry as a main target for acts of terrorism by radical underground organizations, but it also aroused suspicion by the Saudi authorities against the thousands of Palestinian and Yemeni workers on Saudi oil fields. Following the terrorist bombings of oil installations and government buildings by Nasir al-Sa'īd's *Itihad* in late 1966 and early 1967, workers from Palestine and Yemen were rounded up and detained throughout the area until the prison of al-Khobar was reported to be "full to overflowing with Yemenis."¹²¹

In an era of intensified regional conflict and heightened Pan Arab and anti-imperialist spirit, urban struggle was easily ignited through external events. However, its vehicle and target was the new urban reality that had been spawned by petro-capitalism. The traumatic event of the Six-Day War in June 1967 ultimately brought widespread insurgency to the fore of popular urban politics in the Eastern Province. Between June 5 and June 7, orderly and peaceful demonstrations in which students of the Petroleum College demanded the stoppage of Saudi oil production and a Saudi alliance with the Arab troops were followed by violent protests of oil workers, students and subaltern urban groups at the US consulate and rioting in the US military mission compound and American labor camp in Dhahran. At the same time, thousands of people protested in front of the emirate building in Dammam, looted shops in al-Khobar and roamed affluent neighborhoods in the oil town where they threw rocks against the villas of Saudi merchants and government employees.¹²² What had begun as the public expression of solidarity with the Arab war effort soon turned into a cry of outrage and desperation that mixed with long-nourished feelings by

121 Ghrawi, "A Tamed Urban Revolution," 119–20; "Weekly Summary: Eastern Province, Trucial States and Persian Gulf, No. 30," January 25, 1967, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

122 "The June 1967 Riots," Local Government Relations, July 26, 1967, Box 16, Folder 8, ARD, Chronological Files, July 1967, William E. Mulligan Papers, Library Booth Family, Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington, DC (hereafter: Mulligan Papers, "1967 Riots"); Telegram no. 5059, US Embassy, Jidda, to Secretary of State, June 6, 1967, POL 27 ARAB-ISR; Telegram no. 882, US Embassy, Jidda, to Secretary of State, June 7, 1967, POL 23–8 SAUD; Telegram no. 888, US Consulate, Dhahran, to US Embassy, Jidda, June 7, 1967, POL 23–8 SAUD; "Monthly Review for Saudi Arabia – June, 1967," US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, July 10, 1967, POL 2 SAUD; "Eastern Province Disturbances: A Preliminary Appraisal," Allen, US Consulate, Dhahran, To Department of State, June 21, 1967, POL 23–8 SAUD; "American Businessman Concerned Over Security Situation in Dhahran Area," Allen, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 28, 1967, POL 23–8 SAUD; and "Dissent in the Eastern Province," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 11, 1968, POL 12 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

larger segments of the urban communities of being marginalized and powerless in the face of a repressive state and badly administered oil urbanization. The demonstrations and riots that spread throughout the oil conurbation were not merely anti-American and anti-Israeli reflexes, but “must be read as popular response to dramatic socioeconomic transformations rooted in the oil boom, the violent routines of state authority, and the multiple forms of discrimination” in the oil conurbation.¹²³ They marked the peak of the urban revolution that unfolded during the first three decades of petro-capitalism and urbanization in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province.

2.2 *Taming Urban Disorder and Rebellion*

In the aftermath of the unrest of 1967, it became clear that the Saudi authorities had struggled to prevent even larger unrest from spilling into the towns of Dammam and al-Khobar and to confine the rioters within non-industrial Aramco and US installations in Dhahran. Students at the Petroleum College and Aramco workers had largely participated in the uprising, besides the involvement of migrant workers, the Ba’thist organization *Jabhat al-Dimuqratiyya al-Sha’abiyya fi al-Jazira al-‘Arabiyya*, which had been founded in 1965, and a considerable number of Saudi policemen and soldiers. The riots were followed by the arrest of an estimated one hundred rioters and a massive increase of National Guard troops in and around oil installations, US installations and, most noteworthy, in the streets of al-Khobar and Dammam.¹²⁴

A key measure taken by the government for taming civic strife and political opposition in the oil province was the alleviation of economic hardship for selected groups, and above all for Aramco workers. As a first immediate step for containing urban unrest, the Saudi government made efforts to

123 Ghrawi, “A Tamed Urban Revolution,” 125. Al-Ḥassan writes that protests and demonstrations transpired in various local towns and villages. Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shī’a*, vol. 2, 305.

124 On the involvement of the Ba’thist *Jabhat al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Sha’abiyya fi al-Jazīra al-‘Arabiyya* in the demonstrations see Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 83–84. Nasir al-Sa’īd’s *Itihād al-Ibnā’ al-Jazīra al-‘Arabiyya* did not claim responsibility for the unrest; allegations to this extent made in some of the historiography are wrong. Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era: Regime and Elites, Conflict and Collaboration* (Croom Helm, 1988), 111; Al-Sa’īd, *Tarikh al-Sa’ūd*, 585; Mulligan Papers, “1967 Riots;” “Dissent in the Eastern Province,” Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 11, 1968, POL 12 SAUD; “Arrest of Prominent Local Saudi,” Allen, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 2, 1967, POL 27 ARAB-ISR; Telegram no. 235, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, October 3, 1967, POL 23–8 SAUD; “Security Developments in the Eastern Province,” Allen, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 23, 1967, POL 23 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

stabilize the cost of foodstuff in the conurbation. Lists of food prices were distributed in the oil towns and people were warned not to pay more than the official rates. Grocers who attempted to charge more were threatened with severe penalties.¹²⁵ Shortly afterwards the government provided Aramco with funds for expanding basic services in the towns of Dammam and al-Khobar which before and during the unrest had been centers of subaltern strife. Other parts of the conurbation did not benefit. This related especially to Qatif which for another decade remained outside any plans for development, but also to towns such al-Salama, the former general camp in Dhahran, where poor Saudis and migrant squatters lived a marginalized existence bereft of the prospect to participate in modernization.¹²⁶

In December 1969, the Saudi government finally promulgated the long promised new labor regulations, which fixed some major problems of the labor code of 1947. The new law included so-called "severance payments" which made it less attractive for employers to lay off workers, the requirement that at least three quarters of employed labor must be Saudis and further a broad social insurance system. The formation of labor unions was not foreseen in the new regulations. The law further included an anti-strike clause.¹²⁷ In responding to the new labor law Aramco raised the concern that the new regulations would lead to a general increase of costs in the oil conurbation and would thus have an adverse effect on non-industrial workers which would likely lead to a further widening of the social gap in the local communities.¹²⁸ The oil company and US consulate acknowledged that by the start of the 1970s the local effects of oil modernization had developed into a real danger not only for industrial security but also for internal stability. The fear of "communist" agitation clearly prevailed in these concerns. However, it also became clear that oil

125 "Monthly Review for Saudi Arabia – June, 1967," US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, July 10, 1967, POL 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

126 Parsinnen and Kaizer, "A Traditional Community and Modernization," 17.

127 "Financial and Personnel Implications of New Saudi Labor and Social Insurance Legislation," Eilts, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, April 9, 1970, LAB 2 SAUD; and "Reactions of Arabian American Oil Co. (ARAMCO) and Commonwealth Services International, Inc. to New Saudi Labor and Social Insurance Regulations," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, February 4, 1970, including enclosures 1 and 2, LAB 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

128 "Aramco Views on New Saudi Labor and Social Insurance Legislation," Eilts, LAB 2 SAUD, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, February 2, 1970, including enclosures, LAB 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

urbanization and social transformation had reached a critical phase. An US consular report issued in early 1970 claimed no less than the “awakening” of the “masses.” It went further that a growing subaltern urban population and embryonic “industrial lumpenproletariat” were “increasingly susceptible ... to the same revolutionary Arab doctrines which have more or less affected the ‘opposition’ middle class of the Kingdom.”¹²⁹ Not only acts of sabotage but large-scale unrest were now deemed possible. Already in mid-1969, the US embassy in Jidda had made inquiries about the “riot control capabilities” of the National Guard. The resulting report did not in the first place envisage clandestine groups and organizations as the primary dangers but instead focused on the National Guard’s ability of “breaking up civil disturbances, shedding blood if necessary.”¹³⁰

The measures taken by the Saudi government in response to the threat of civil unrest in the oil conurbation did not only include increased state paternalism towards industrial and government workers, but also fierce repression of any organized opposition that could ignite the urban “masses” for protest. Starting from 1968, the Saudi Ministry of Interior had worked towards setting up a permanent strike force in the Eastern Province which should “deal with riots, strikes, or other disturbances of the public space.”¹³¹ The creation of this special riot police was a response to the fact that during the 1967 riots, police in the Eastern Province had cooperated with the rioters.¹³² Also in 1968, the NLF in the Eastern Province received a severe setback through security round-ups. One year later, following an attempted coup of Ba’thist military officers against the Saudi government, a new wave of political arrests hit the oil

129 “Saudi Labor and Social Insurance Regulations,” Eilts, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, January 12, 1970, including enclosure 1, LAB 2 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA. Abir has argued that until the 1970s the “ever-growing urban ‘proletariat’” was accompanied by a “frustration of the lower class” and “increasing polarization between rich and poor.” Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 73.

130 “Saudi Police Riot Control Capabilities,” Eilts, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, July 20, 1969, POL 23–3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

131 “Eastern Province Security Developments,” Allen, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, April 29, 1968, POL 23 SAUD; and “NEW Security Force for Eastern Province,” Allen, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 14, 1968, POL 23–3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

132 “Saudi Police Riot Control Capabilities,” Eilts, US Embassy, Jidda, to Department of State, July 20, 1969, POL 23–3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

conurbation.¹³³ While in 1967 and 1968 detainees to a large extent were foreign Arabs, students and government officials, the arrests of 1969–'70 overwhelmingly targeted members of the Saudi military and civil officials as well as oil workers and particularly local Shi'a who were suspected of membership in Ba'athist organizations.¹³⁴ In 1970, in the course of mass arrests in the Eastern Province, the Saudi military cordoned off the whole of Qatif and al-Hasa under the pretense of a cholera epidemic. In this "obscure but ominous incident," as the US consulate phrased it in a telegram to Washington, people were strictly forbidden to enter or leave the two districts for the duration of four and six weeks, respectively.¹³⁵

To what level Aramco facilitated the arrests is not entirely clear. Concerns about industrial security among Aramco's managing staff had risen to an unprecedented high level since the riots of 1967 and the oil company repeatedly warned the Saudi Ministry of Interior about the security situation in the local oil towns and nearby industrial sites. In turn, the ministry's investigation unit, the much-feared Mabathith, kept Aramco's labor force under strict surveillance as well as "the Shia of Qatif and al-Hasa" whom US officials now openly called "a potential dissident group."¹³⁶ Saudi intelligence officers routinely presented Aramco with lists of oil workers' names "for screening." Aramco, in return, provided information on its Saudi employees to the Saudi authorities. This way, Aramco was forewarned about potential "troublemakers" amongst its workforce and the Saudi authorities benefitted from the company's vast data on its workforce. The company also compiled separate lists of detained employees for the US consulate in Dhahran. These lists contained names, employee number, profession and workplace of the detainees, circumstances of their arrest,

133 Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, 55–60.

134 Buchan, "Secular and Religious Opposition," 115; "Arrests (Political) in Eastern province (Updated)," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 31, 1971, including enclosure, POL 29 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

135 Lackner, *A House Built on Sand*, 103. The outbreak of an epidemic and strict control of movement is also mentioned in US archival sources. Telegram no. 112, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, September 13, 1970, POL 8 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA; The Gulf Committee London, *Political Prisoners in the Oil States: Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iran* (The Gulf Committee, 1974), 22.

136 Telegram no. 2375, US Embassy, Jidda, to Secretary of State, June 18, 1970, POL 23 SAUD; and "Law Enforcement in the Eastern Province," US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 4, 1973, POL 23–3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

and in some cases a release date.¹³⁷ Interestingly, many names in Aramco's biographic data were listed with the annotation "Qatifi," although places of origin or hometowns were not routinely mentioned. In congruence with the company habit to use a language that disguised sensitive political information, the annotation "Qatifi" can be read as "Shi'a." Surely, if the information in these lists resembled those provided for Saudi intelligence and investigation agencies, the alleged meaning could not be lost to the Saudi authorities. "Several patterns emerge from the data gleaned from Aramco's weekly briefing sheet," reported a US consulate officer in August 1970. "A disproportionate number of those arrested are Qatifi and Shiite. This fact cropped up not only in the biographic information on detainees but from other sources as well."¹³⁸ In those cases in which a detained employee did return to his workplace, the company did make further inquiries about the allegations that had led to the arrest. Company data forwarded to the US consulate in Dhahran shows that in 1970 alone, around seven hundred alleged Ba'athists were arrested in the Eastern province, most of them Shi'a from Qatif.¹³⁹ To one observer at the consulate, the roundups of Qatifis appeared practically random:

There are instances where several family members are arrested, suggesting complicity or, equally possible, suspicion by association ... The anomalous situation of prolonged detention, up to two years, followed by release with a letter of no objection gives cause for doubting the authorities' purpose and competence.¹⁴⁰

137 "Arrests in Eastern Province," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 26, 1970, including enclosure, POL 29 SAUD; and "Arrests (Political) in Eastern province (Updated)," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 31, 1971, including enclosure, POL 29 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA. Lists of arrested persons can be found in the US consular reports collected in the Textual Records Division of the National Archives and Research Association in Maryland, Record Group 59, Box 2585 containing the signatures POL 7 SAUD to POL 15 SAUD 1970-1973.

138 "Arrests in Eastern Province," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, August 26, 1970, including enclosure, POL 29 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

139 Telegram no. 800, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Secretary of State, July 23, 1970, POL 29 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

140 "Arrests (Political), in Eastern Province (Updated)," Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March 8, 1972, POL 29 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945-1973, RG 59, NARA.

In fact, we learn from al-ʿAwwami that very often, mere membership in a local sports club was enough to lead to arrest, and that many detainees were probably innocent of the alleged political subversion.¹⁴¹ The mass arrests of Shiʿa in 1969 and 1970 mark a turning point in the repressive measures taken by the Saudi government against local opposition. Until then, local Shiʿa had not been explicitly singled out for state repression. During the last years of his reign, King Saʿud even had repeatedly, at least in the eyes of Aramco's Government Relations Department, granted partial recognition to the Shiʿi communities in the Eastern Province by paying official visits to their towns.¹⁴² Despite the part played by the Baʿthist *Jabhat al-Dimuqratiyya al-Shaʿabiyya fi al-Jazira al-ʿArabiyya* in the 1967 unrest, larger Shiʿi involvement in the uprising was reckoned unlikely by contemporary US diplomats – an assessment that is shared by present Shiʿi activists. One American report concluded that “Shiʿa support for subversive activities in 1965, '66 and '67 also was slight,” despite their tendency “to adopt communism as the answer to their problems.”¹⁴³ Local Shiʿa were involved in the unrest of 1967 as students of the Petroleum College, as Aramco workers, as members of Baʿthist organizations and as members of disfranchised groups among the local communities. However, they acted as part of a widespread and decidedly cross-sectarian protest, which is further proved by the complete absence of any documented behavior among the protesters and rioters of June 1967 that displayed sectarian identity. Only one incident of Shiʿi protest in February 1967 stands out, in which several religious leaders and municipal council members from al-Hasa and Qatif went to Riyadh to hand a petition to King Faysal in which they demanded independent Shiʿi law courts and the appointment of Shiʿi registrars. One religious leader from Mubarraz reportedly told the king: “We want Shiʿah law courts in your country similar to those for the Sunnis ... Enough injustice has fallen upon the Shiʿahs, because they are not [considered] equal to others.” The man was arrested and the others dismissed with a firm rejection of their demands.¹⁴⁴ The incident reflected

141 Al-ʿAwwāmī, *Al-Haraka al-Waṭaniyya*, vol. 2, 246–47.

142 “Evolution of ARAMCO,” [author unknown], 30 September 1964, Box 6, Folder 19, “Aramco,” Mulligan Papers.

143 Interview with Tawfiq al-Sayf, former member of the *Shiraziyyun*, author and political activist, Qatif, May 16, 2013. “The Shiʿa Community of the Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia,” Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, June 9, 1969, POL 13–3 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

144 “Shiʿah Request to King Faysal,” W.E. Mulligan, March 13, 1967, Box 3, Folder 28, ARD, Chronological Files, January–June 1967, Mulligan Papers.

how traditional and modern venues for political protest often merged. The complaint and the way in which it was addressed certainly were not new, although the issue of a Shi'i registry of land had significantly gained importance over the past decades and by then had come to a boil. Still, the incident appears in no way connected to the unrest that unfolded three months afterwards in the oil towns.

Hence, it remains a matter of speculation why the people of Qatif were specifically targeted in 1969 and 1970. It is reasonable to assume that the oil company was at least partly responsible for stirring the attention of the Saudi intelligence and investigation agencies towards the communities of Qatif, especially as in the 1960s Aramco had begun to interpret local protest against the effects of oil urbanization as "sectarian strife."¹⁴⁵ Keeping this in mind, another explanation gains value which takes into consideration the strong political concessions made to conservative religious forces with regard to culture and education during the reign of King Faysal, and the parallel evocation of a Saudi national identity that was deeply grounded in Sunni Islam.¹⁴⁶ These measures did not only serve to placate the powerful 'ulama', the religious establishment, and to appease conservative elements of the Saudi population. As Bsheer put it, the attention towards religious identity, and the turn towards the politics of sectarianization, were basically rooted in a counter-revolutionary strategy:

As king, [Faysal] therefore sought to generate a homogeneous, Nejd-based and religiously framed "Saudi identity" set against the competing secular populist ideologies that had challenged Al Saud's rule and US dominance in the Middle East during the Cold War. It was a political identity that brought together Wahhabi sectarianism and Al Saud's genealogy. With the support and encouragement of the US government and Aramco, Faisal's regime thereby injected new life into political religion in the 1960s, and he himself became the engine behind, and symbol of, the Islamization of political, cultural and social life in Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁷

Many Saudi 'ulama' did not only "not consider Shiism a proper Islamic doctrine" but openly defamed Shi'a as *rafidah* (rejectionists) and a major threat

¹⁴⁵ See the section "Local notables and the politics of modernization" in this book.

¹⁴⁶ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society*, 185ff, 227–63.

¹⁴⁷ Bsheer, "The Counter-Revolutionary State," 274.

to Islam.¹⁴⁸ Hence, the Islamization of national politics necessarily came at the expense of openly secular groups and the Shi'i minority.¹⁴⁹ The arrests of outspoken liberal and secular Saudis in 1970 were an expression of strengthened religious conservatism. In the Eastern Province, staff and students at the Petroleum College were arrested, the most prominent amongst them college dean Salih Ambah. Subsequently, all secular student and women associations at the college were outlawed. After the stoppage of these extracurricular activities, the college students in the oil province continued to follow up onto different political currents which also included membership in leftist underground organizations. However, many others were drawn into organizations that promoted an Islamic awakening, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or the movement of *Tablighiyun*, who became particularly strong in al-Khobar.¹⁵⁰ While relations between the Saudi government and these organizations were ambiguous, both placed secular liberals, leftists and Saudi Shi'a per definition outside the Saudi *umma* and thus of the Saudi nation as the two were now more or less defined as one and the same.¹⁵¹ The maltreatment of Qatifis likely sealed this exclusion and planted the seeds for a national distrust against both, secular leftist movements and Shi'ism. It can also be understood as a first step towards a state-led mobilization of sectarian identity politics against Saudi Shi'a which aimed at isolating Shi'i members of a widespread opposition from their Sunni compatriots.¹⁵² In this light, the seemingly random arrests of local Shi'a in 1969 and 1970 and the sealing off of al-Hasa and Qatif in 1970 that had caused one US diplomat to doubt "the [Saudi] authorities' purpose and competence" stand out as measures against political opposition in the kingdom. The clearly visible isolation of the two districts and their inhabitants from the rest of the oil conurbation by the Saudi military meant a new level of fighting local opposition, which visibly and palpably separated the two communities

148 Freer, "The Symbiosis of Sectarianism," 90; On the theological convictions and anti-Shi'a writings of Wahhabi 'ulama' see Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam*.

149 Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 62–63.

150 Al-Dumaynī, *Zaman al-Sakhin*, 48–49; On the history of the Saudi Islamic awakening see Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*. The Muslim Brothers have been outlawed in Saudi Arabia in 2014. In the 1970s the organization had strong ideological influence in Saudi religious politics.

151 Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 55–63. According to al-Rasheed, King Faysal's "Islamic rhetoric" had a concrete anti-socialist and anti-secular opposition agenda. Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 134.

152 On sectarianism as power strategy employed by states see Marc Lynch, "The Entrepreneurs of Cynical Sectarianism," *POMEPS Studies* 4 (2013): 3–6, accessed July 21, 2017, <https://pomeps.org/2013/11/14/the-politics-of-sectarianism/>.

from their compatriots. These measures appear as expressions of a fledgling securitization policy against Saudi Shi'a that aimed at fragmenting and fracturing oppositional forces in the Eastern Province and thus as precedents of the sectarianizing strategies to which the Saudi government retreated in later decades to systematically disrupt cross-sectarian opposition and to perpetuate authoritarianism.¹⁵³

153 Freer, "The Symbiosis of Sectarianism," 89. On securitization as an element of sectarianizing strategies in Saudi Arabia see Ric Neo, "Religious Securitisation and Institutionalised Sectarianism in Saudi Arabia," *Critical Studies on Security* 8, no. 3 (2020): 209–214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2020.1795479>.

Fractured Cities

In 1980, one decade after the first publication of Henri Lefebvre's *Urban Revolution*, the German urban planner and architect Horst Reichert who had worked and lived in Dammam throughout the year 1976 concluded that the urbanization process taking place in Saudi Arabia's oil province meant nothing less than an "urbanistic revolution" – by which he referred to the fundamental alteration of local society which incubated a high potential for social conflict:

The relatively few large and middle-sized towns that developed as nodes of industry, administration, and commerce are the places where this social and urbanistic revolution is taking place. They are the pacemakers of conflict-laden and conflicting social and urban developments, as they are the pacemakers of economic growth. In these towns arise speculation on land value, isolated living, squatter housing, and unbearable traffic systems, problems of supply, urbanistic-functional nuisances as well as crude differences in income structure. They are centers of economic progress but also of cultural, religious and especially social conflicts.¹

Reichert, who claims that he had not been directly influenced by Lefebvre's work, was at the same time fascinated and appalled by the urban realities that he encountered during his stay in the Saudi oil conurbation. There, he observed the outcomes of less than four decades of oil urbanization: a stark contrast between wealth and poverty, unharmonized and malfunctioning urban infrastructure, the visible destruction of the local environment and an all-encompassing feeling of physical isolation and remoteness in the midst of a densely populated region.² Yet, these observations largely mirror what Lefebvre had envisioned less than one decade earlier, namely, the atomization and erasure of the urban polity under the aegis of capitalism.

1 Reichert, *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province*, 90. Authorized translation of the German original.

2 Telephone-interview with Horst Reichert, urban planner and architect, February 16, 2022.

1 The Old Polities

In pre-oil times, the old polities of al-Hasa and Qatif had been characterized by subsistence economy, which encouraged the physical organization into principal towns and oasis villages, as well as by the socio-economic dependency of peasant communities on an urban-based class of landowning merchants. The traditional political economy was also marked by the coexistence of settled and (semi-)nomadic communities. As Bedouin and oasis people shared limited resources, this coexistence meant cooperation but also recurrent conflict. A fourth characteristic of the traditional polity was the cohabitation of Shi'i and Sunni communities. The two communities were hardly the homogeneous blocks as which they have been portrayed by colonial officers, corporate agents, Saudi authorities and some academics. Throughout history, al-Ahsa's Sunni and Shi'i communities comprised different schools of religious thought, different economic classes and professions, and a multitude of local and regional networks. They also involved rivalling factions with often conflicting interests and ambitions. In the oasis of al-Hasa, where Shi'a and Sunnis made up almost equal portions of the population, segregation of the two confessional groups existed to a certain degree in the villages, but not in the principal towns. Many, albeit far from all, landowning merchants were Sunnis whose land was cultivated by Shi'i sharecroppers. In Qatif, where no such confessional divisions existed, powerful merchants and clergy uniformly presided over a dependent peasantry.

For centuries, Ottoman and Saudi governments relied on local(-ized) notables who extended economic and religious influence over the local communities. The notables' local power bases were large agricultural landholdings and the area of Islamic jurisprudence. Political struggle in this traditional context erupted around rivalries over local resources or leadership and took the forms of petitioning or armed rebellion. Principal towns served as power base and retreat during Bedouin attacks while the fortified local villages recurrently functioned as hideouts for oppositional factions. Internal political struggle was fought between urban-based notables, who acted as traditional intermediaries between alternating rulers and the local communities, and rural leaders, who buttressed their inferior power position through heightened religious zeal (as in the case of the 1929–1930 revolt which was led by the sheikh Muhammad al-Nimr and emanated from the village of 'Awwamiyya and its interpretation in the light of al-'Awwami's insights into the urban-rural rivalries of Qatifi notables).³ Hence, in the context of this complex local situation, reducing local political unrest to sectarian strife leads to an uncritical reproduction of

³ See chapter 2 in this book.

interpretations by contemporary British agents who followed imperial interests in the area.

The fact that al-Ahsa' constituted an "imperial frontier" added yet another layer to the complex political reality before oil. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ottoman and British empires and a fledgling Saudi state mounted local society in the pursuit of their political claims over al-Ahsa'. Nejd merchants in the principal towns of al-Hasa represented Saudi interests in urban councils, thereby following their own economic and political aspirations, whereas the notables of Qatif alternately leaned onto the Ottoman government or the British political agents in Bahrain in the pursuit of local power, wealth and security. Local tribes were encouraged to raid oasis villages by the Saudi emir of Najd who used deteriorating local security under the Ottoman government as gateway for the Saudi seizure of al-Hasa and Qatif in 1913. Importantly, British imperial agents in Bahrain interpreted the complex political situation in al-Ahsa' according to British ambitions for hegemony over the Persian Gulf which included, but were not limited to, securing British maritime trade and commercial interests of the Indian Raj. In the pursuit of control over the urban commercial entrepôts and ports of al-Ahsa', British imperial policies used the hoax of sectarian strife among local communities whenever Britain needed a reason to interfere in local politics or to impress its political power claims upon their Ottoman and Saudi rivals. Especially Qatif with its large Shi'i population was drawn into the political machinations of British imperial officers who recurrently toyed with the idea to turn Qatif under British protection. Hence, since 1913, the local communities not only suffered from waves of religious discrimination at the hands of Wahhabi tribal factions that had become epitomes of sectarianizing strategies in the pursuit of a Saudi state but also carried on their shoulders the burden of a dubious political loyalty to the new Saudi ruler.

2 A New Urban Reality under the Aegis of Petro-capitalism

The signing of the Saudi oil concession in 1933 and the discovery of commercial quantities of oil in 1938 placed al-Ahsa' at the center of a capitalist enterprise as well as of rivalling imperial interests over oil concessions and territorial boundaries. In Lefebvre's thinking, the submission of urban space under the forces of capitalist production and accumulation of wealth results in "the tremendous concentration (of people, activities, wealth, goods, objects, instruments, means, and thought) of urban reality and the immense explosion, the projection of numerous, disjunct fragments (peripheries, suburbs, vacation homes, satellite towns) into space." Ultimately, this atomization

means the end of meaningful political space and leads to the marginalization of the urban communities, which is mirrored in the physical space created by capitalism: “a shapeless town, a barely urban agglomeration, a conglomerate, a conurbation ...”⁴ Under the aegis of petro-capitalism al-Ahsa’s old oases and their principal towns slowly began to transform while they lost their traditional political and economic importance. Lefebvre’s ideas gain shape in the segregated company towns built by the oil company and cruelly ruled by the infamous emir Bin Jiluwi. In these early spatial manifestations of petro-capitalism, people were gradually severed from the oasis polity and increasingly isolated and controlled by the mechanisms of disciplining and surveillance at the hands of the oil company and the provincial government. In just a few decades, amalgamating state and corporate power structured the Saudi oil conurbation according to their rationales and needs. They created stark socio-economic inequality, expanding militarization and societal fragmentation. Early oil urbanization was only weakly regulated by the fledgling Saudi state and oil company and created zones of underdevelopment that existed for several decades to come. Labor migration changed the traditional social geography of al-Ahsa’ as Saudis of different regional origins, class background and religious affiliation mingled in the industrial core zone of the Saudi oil industry. Early on, the oil company studied the religious affiliation and social background of its Saudi workforce, perceiving religious difference as a potential source of conflict and as a disruptive force. These perceptions played a role in Aramco’s community development plans and influenced the decision that Saudi oil workers should build their family homes in the old towns and villages where religious communities tended to band together due to close knit social and family ties. Aramco’s development policies thus deliberately accentuated and reinforced traditional religious divisions of the local communities. This circumstance was of special importance as the newly emerging urbanizing spaces became enablers of popular politics and social contention.

The process of contentious oil urbanization gained momentum in the first half of the 1940s when the oil company began to lay down the main infrastructures for the extraction, refining, storage, transport and shipping of Saudi oil. During this early phase of oil industrialization, the great need for manual labor for construction works could not be fulfilled by al-Ahsa’s local communities alone but prompted the import of thousands of manual workers from Arab Gulf countries and South Asia. At the construction sites and in the labor camps of al-Ahsa’s oil districts, Saudi and foreign laborers from the lowest job levels

4 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 14.

came into contact with better-educated clerks and artisan workers from the Middle East and Europe and with a privileged class of US American senior level employees. They were confronted with a hierarchical corporate segregation of ethnic groups and nationalities at which Saudis ranged at the lowest level. Dissatisfaction among the different national groups of oil workers with the low standard of accommodation, bad work conditions and barely veiled racial discrimination amalgamated with the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist "zeitgeist" of the era into a high propensity for organized protest.

The oil company reacted to unrest and disorder among the lower work grades by ridding itself of the offenders and routinely deported Iraqi, Pakistani and Italian workers from the oil province. Unskilled labor was cheap and abundant and workmen turnover rates at Aramco were exceptionally high. Saudi oil workers could to a certain extent rely on patronage by the Saudi government, which exerted pressure on the oil company to improve conditions for Saudi Arab workmen. However, not least due to rudimentary Saudi labor regulations that were unfit for governing oil industrialization, state patronage was extended only to those who were in the possession of a formal work contract with the oil company. Accordingly, in the 1940s and 1950s, Aramco began to make excessive use of local sub-contractor firms and of Saudi and South Asian contractor workers for laying down the main oil infrastructures. The thousands of contractor workers in the nascent oil conurbation were practically rightless. Furthermore, they went largely unnoticed by history because they played no role in the Saudi labor movement at Aramco whose appeals were directed as much at the patronage of the Saudi king as at his flirtatious policies regarding popular Arab nationalism. Accordingly, the company used South Asian contractor workers as strike-breakers, demonstrating to the Saudi laborers the limitedness of their bargaining powers.

The Saudi labor struggles garnered ambiguous success. Saudi staff under formal contract with the oil company ultimately developed into a group that greatly profited from state patronage and gradual improvement of living and work conditions, access to services and company training, and a chance to reap benefits from oil modernization. After the nationalization of Aramco was completed in 1980, the allocation of jobs in the oil company became a main tool for selective patronage by the Saudi government.⁵ The fact that the Saudi labor movement at Aramco failed to achieve rights for political participation and organized protest partly resulted in a radicalization of its activists and in a change in their political strategy. Consequently, the local oil towns

5 Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia*, 33.

began to replace the labor camps as venues for political struggle. Between 1951 and 1956, during the heyday of labor struggles, Aramco landed a double blow against the Saudi labor movement. The new possibility for Saudi company employees to receive company loans for building family homes across the oil conurbation was designed to ensure industrial discipline. At the same time, the labor movement was deprived of the labor camps as main mobilization spaces. Consequently, labor struggles now began to seep into the local towns and villages.

By the second half of the 1950s, the large-scale construction works that characterized the early stage of oil industrialization were completed and unskilled labor was suddenly in much less demand. At the same time, oil industrialization had begun to bring about irrevocable changes in the local and national economies which, on the one hand, resulted in a considerable alleviation of living standards and individual comfort for the trained and/or educated and increasingly urbanized segments of the local population. On the other, it caused mass migration of poor rural workers into the oil towns, which added to growing numbers of unemployed day laborers. Unresolved and newly erupting regional conflict led to rising numbers of migrant workers from other Arab countries and especially of Palestinians and Yemenis in the oil towns. Social despair of subaltern rural and urban “classes,” ongoing political agitation by members of nationalist and various leftist political currents among Aramco’s workforce and local government employees, and the spillover of regional conflict into the oil conurbation endangered the security of oil production to an extent that the oil company welcomed the militarization of the oil conurbation and facilitated mass arrests of Arab labor migrants and Saudi activists. Moreover, Aramco and the Saudi government were now aware that they were facing a widespread local upheaval that could easily be ignited into a fully-fledged revolution.

3 How the Urban Revolution Unfolds

Following Lefebvre’s train of thought, the only way to escape from dominant structuration of space and power is to enter an “urban revolution” by which he referred to

the transformations that affect contemporary society, ranging from the period when questions of growth and industrialization predominate ... to the period when the urban problematic becomes predominant, when the search for solutions and modalities unique to urban society are

foremost ... The words “urban revolution” do not in themselves refer to actions that are violent. Nor do they exclude them.⁶

While Lefebvre’s text postulates the need and possibility for political assertiveness of the urban communities, he does not present a concrete plan or model how this can be achieved. However, he is confident that the urban society can overcome the passiveness of being a mere production and consumption force and re-emerge as a political society.⁷ Crucially, oil urbanization in the Eastern Province *has* facilitated the creation of a new urbanity that was characterized by a new (albeit not vast) stratification of urban society, the import of new and parallel persistence of old practices of social contention (demonstrations and strikes on the one hand, petitions and armed battle on the other), and the participation of a wider spectrum of urban actors in the creation of new urban contexts.

Urban(-izing) spaces shaped by petro-capitalism, such as the oil towns and labor camps, provided the enabling context for mobilization and cooperation beyond the confines of confessional affiliation and political radicalization. Through engaging in the process of urbanization rather than merely being subjected to discriminating development, marginalization, and expropriation, local communities and oil workers in the Saudi oil conurbation have put into use and re-created urban spaces on a physical scale, like in the making of Saudi camps into vibrant communities, in the use of company gates in Dhahran or the market place in Hofuf as places for assembly and protest, or in the transformation of streets and sports clubs in Qatif and al-Hasa into venues for political struggle. Especially the shared experience of living and working together in the company towns and industrial sites helped Saudi oil workers to mobilize for joined struggle against their subaltern position. The largely unregulated “Saudi camps” became important strategic spaces where workers and local activists could meet and plan their next steps. At the same time, they provided enough intimacy to hide these activities from the eyes of the company and local authorities. Such appropriations of local space directly translated into claims to bargaining power by the Saudi oil workers. In response to these claims, the oil company and Saudi authorities sought to re-order and fragment local space by establishing a strict corporate hierarchy that was reflected in the design of the oil towns – including improved living conditions for Saudi oil workers – yet also by erecting fences around labor camps and by displaying the disciplining power of the Saudi authorities in front of local mosques and

6 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 5.

7 Lefebvre, *Die Revolution der Städte*, 156.

at the gates and fences of the oil company. The spatial strategies of oil workers during the strike of 1953 demonstrated how links between the labor camps and the old towns and villages supported the labor struggle. In continuation of the dialectic articulation of power, the company attempted to cut these links in the aftermath of the strike. As this proved unsuccessful – illustrated by the events of 1955 and 1956 – the oil company gradually abandoned the idea of labor camps where Saudi workers from all backgrounds would mix together and instead encouraged Saudi oil workers to settle either in the newly built towns and neighborhoods in the oil conurbation or to extend their traditional family homes in the local villages, thereby also accentuating the traditional concentration of Shi'a in the oases of al-Hasa and Qatif. However, depriving the Saudi labor movement of its main mobilization spaces did not appease the oil conurbation, but allowed for the labor struggle to spill over into the old oasis districts and new oil towns. The disobedience practiced by oil workers, villagers and marginalized urban groups in the form of assembly and demonstration, boycott, orchestrated destruction, or the armed defense of spaces and livelihoods in the conurbation were yet other expressions of the dialectic articulation of the trajectories of oil urbanization by local communities, oil company and Saudi authorities.

4 Alliances between Labor and Urban Classes

Lefebvre believed that the urban revolution could be only successful when its radical elements, whom he regards as symptoms rather than proprietors of the urban revolution, were able to coalesce with other social forces that are capable of finding “positive” answers to the urban problematique.⁸ In a similar vein, Lefebvre’s student David Harvey postulates that while the working class is an important element of political struggle, one has to “look at the conditions of the working class in the city as a whole.” To achieve its goals, any labour movement must address urban problems as much as problems of the working place and bring the wider spectrum of the urban community to its side.⁹ Hence, what begins as labor struggle is prone to reach the neighborhoods and street of the industrial city and to trigger the urban revolution.

⁸ Lefebvre, *Die Revolution der Städte*, 155.

⁹ Hiba Bou Akar and Nada Moumtaz, 2013, “On Why Struggles Over Urban Space Matter: An Interview with David Harvey,” *Jadaliyya*, 15 November, accessed January 3, 2015, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15156/on-why-struggles-over-urban-space-matter_an-interv.

The traditional urban-based elites of al-Ahsa' played a decisive role in the Saudi labor movement. Industrialization and state formation under the aegis of petro-capitalism created physical and societal structures that were both, outcome and condition for the exploitation of mineral and human resources and the reallocation of wealth and power in the hands of the oil company and the Saudi state. One of the main historical mechanisms at work was the accumulation of local land under the oil concession as well as in the hands of royal family, leading state officials and rich merchants and businessmen. The re-evaluation of land through its connection to oil exploitation and urbanization and the change from subsistence economy to capitalist modes of production severely intervened in traditional modes of local leadership. In an attempt to reclaim political power, traditional elites entered into the fields of modernization and urban politics. In the process, they formed coalitions with the new social groups that had been created by petro-capitalism, markedly the Saudi labor force and local urban(-izing) subaltern groups. The labor of Saudi oil workers was crucial for building the Saudi oil industry; they were exposed to and susceptible for a multitude of new political ideas and they inhabited the densely developed nodes of oil industrialization, thus developing into a critical political mass. Yet, this potential had yet to be raised, and pre-existing structures of local leadership were crucial for accomplishing this.

Unsurprisingly, many labor leaders and outside supporters of the labor movement came from prominent local families. These young men had access to higher education and could claim leadership over the local communities. Moreover, their families were used to taking over responsibilities in local administration and politics. With the state's willingness to wrench as much welfare for the Saudi oil workers from the oil company as possible and thus to strengthen its paternalist image, it seems reasonable that local leaders would use the same strategy for consolidating their traditional political leverage over the local communities. Following this logic, becoming sponsors of the struggle of the Saudi labor force at Aramco was the most worthwhile direction of political activism, especially when compared to the precarious labor conditions and bleak prospects of Saudi contractor workers, which were not considered in paternalist state politics. The close connection of the labor movement with local elites and municipal councilors is illustrative for the prevailing dominance of urban based notables in local politics.

The significance of the Saudi labor movement which reached its heyday in 1953–1956 cannot be fully grasped without considering the embeddedness of the Saudi oil polity in an imperial oil frontier. The later gained heightened significance during the Buraimi crisis, which was fought out between Britain

and Aramco as surrogate of the Saudi state, and Bahrain's constitutional movement of 1954–1956. These two events and their governance by imperial, corporate and state actors had political repercussions as well in the Saudi oil polity. British political officials in Bahrain interpreted violent confrontation between Saudi oil workers and provincial authorities as sectarian strife and attempted to capitalize on their traditional role as protectors of the Shi'i communities of Bahrain and al-Ahsa' to legitimize claims for British control. Such sectarian interpretations of social contention were also shared by US American observers. Aramco staff and diplomatic officials broke local society down into crude divisions, interpreting unrest and disobedience by Saudi oil workers as sectarian strife. In the following decade, this idea was reiterated whenever conflict erupted among the local communities. However, during the heyday of the Saudi labor movement demands for Shi'i religious emancipation were only randomly voiced and outspoken Shi'i self-assertiveness was virtually absent. Instead, Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism were the pronounced ideologies behind labor struggle and popular politics.

A closer look into urban politics and civic life shows that local leadership and grassroot political and civic activism transcended religious and class divisions and hence were far from being exclusive or even marginal phenomena. Urban elites coordinated their activities and were part of a wide network of acquaintance and business relations which suggests a vital and socially relatively inclusive political activism even during the absence of basic civil rights. Furthermore, the ideological and organizational range of this activism spanned from the public display of Saudi or Arab nationalism to membership in clandestine underground groups and party organizations. Local notables and commercial elites in general claimed leading roles in urban politics, for example through invoking traditional practices of endowment and charity, which in the era of oil urbanization gained the character of family investment in the development of the local communities. This strategy was embraced particularly by the politically aspiring class of businessmen. Similarly, the introduction of elections for municipal councils in 1954 and parallel upvaluation of urban government allowed old and aspiring urban elites to enter municipal representation and thus to foster their claims to local leadership. In the old oasis districts, local notables traditionally dominated local government. They adapted to the new situation that had been brought on by oil industrialization by assuming a major role in organizing and supporting the Saudi labor movement of 1953–1956, but also by actively pursuing influence over urban politics, especially in Qatif. Through becoming the vanguards of modernization and urban expansion, these notables maintained their traditional role as arbiters

of Saudi rule and at the same time fought against corruption and idleness of municipal governments.¹⁰

5 Social Malaise

At the same time, this strategy was also a balancing act since often modernization was met with resistance from subaltern urban dwellers and villagers. In fact, conflicts over access to land and resources and in general over the pace of urbanization and modernization were not in the first place expressions of sectarian discrimination. Much more often, they were symptoms of the ongoing marginalization of the economically poor and socially dependent classes, since municipalities claimed agricultural land for urbanization projects, destroyed livelihoods in the process of freeing urban space for new construction, and introduced new fees and taxes to finance their activities. As such, urban modernization projects, one of the proclaimed fields of the political activism of local notables, became a threat to the economic existence particularly of rural communities and urban squatters. Following the same logic, oil modernization reinforced the old rift between traditionally empowered urban and marginalized rural factions in Qatif. Hence, the political modernity witnessed among Qatif's elites during the 1950s and 1960s did only marginally change the traditional political economy and intra-societal dependencies.

The conflicts that arose around oil urbanization in the old oasis districts were part of a new urban malaise which came into existence in the oil conurbation in general. Labor migration especially of peasants and Bedouin into the oil conurbation put strain on the local labor market as more and more Saudis competed amongst each other and with foreign labor migrants over jobs in the oil industry and construction business. While starting from the early 1960s better educated Aramco and government employees slowly but surely began to feel the windfalls of oil wealth, the lowest ranking Aramco staff levels, contractor workers and day laborers remained in a precarious situation. Their ongoing labor struggle, under the patronage of intellectual elites, government employees and local notables, addressed the increasing hardships of

10 The strategy of old notables to become the new councilors of oil modernization and thus to foster traditional leadership, was not limited to al-Ahsa' but a regional phenomenon. As Fuccaro has argued, old notables in Manama similarly "fostered local leadership through election in municipal councils, taxation and provision of services." Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State*, 133–34.

life in the oil conurbation, which included precarious labor, constant inflation, maladministration, corruption and the continued non-existence of basic services in the greater part of the conurbation. Social malaise also led to rising criminality rates and everyday violence, to which local authorities responded with an overt display of state disciplining power. The emergence of new urban venues for political contention helped the politicization and radicalization especially of urban youth, which were gradually recruited into political underground organizations. Regional conflict ignited popular struggle against the oil company and Saudi government and the oil conurbation developed into a major battlefield. Sparked by the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967, this overall situation of civil disorder and clandestine political strife ultimately culminated in riots and protests throughout the conurbation. The protests against symbols of US presence in Dhahran quickly spilled over into the oil towns Dammam and al-Khobar, where they assumed the character of an uprising of subaltern groups and politicized youth against the prevailing economic and political order.

6 **Sectarianization as Counter-revolution**

The unrest was answered by severe repression and by a visible increase in the controlling and disciplining power of the Saudi state. Intelligence provided by the oil company to the Saudi authorities facilitated the recurrent arrest waves of 1970–1972 and probably played a role in directing attention to the Shi'i communities of Qatif. The measures that were taken in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 riots show that the government recognized economic despair and unregulated urbanization as main causes for the uprising. Yet, while Aramco workers and government employees over the coming decades became privileged groups whose interests were protected by the law and whose material well-being was guaranteed through national plans for development that were issued from 1970 onwards, subaltern urban groups, Shi'a and Sunnis alike, remained neglected. Furthermore, the events of June 1967 alerted the oil company and Saudi government to the increased danger of civic disturbances in the oil conurbation. In its ultimate response to local opposition the Saudi government chose to apply a sectarianizing strategy against the people of Qatif and al-Hasa. The progression from occasional (collective) punishment of small numbers of local Shi'a in the 1950s to the cordoning off of al-Hasa and Qatif and mass arrests of local Shi'a in 1970 shows the beginnings of such a strategy that over time would prove most effective in preventing cross-sectarian

movements on the local and national levels.¹¹ Both, Aramco's ambiguous policies vis-à-vis the religiously heterogeneous local communities which carried imperialist beliefs of a primordial Sunni-Shi'i antagonism and the efforts of the Saudi government under King Faysal (1964–1975) to back up the selective modernization of Saudi society with a recourse to an Islamic national awakening now culminated into a systematic social and political ostracizing of local Shi'i communities. However, it were the stark socio-economic imbalances in the oil conurbation and not religious differences that triggered the partly violent uprising of oil workers, urban youth and subaltern groups in 1967. Importantly, at this point of time, Shi'i sectarian identity and its entrepreneurs had not yet appeared on the grand stage of public politics. Rather, social contention centered on three major poles: labor struggle, the social and economic conflicts that evolved in the context of oil urbanization, and the fostering of local leadership. As argued above, the confessional divide of al-Ahsa's society influenced its traditional social and economic organization. However, at that time, it had not yet assumed the prominent role in structuring the political reality that it has today.

Wahhabi attacks on Shi'i towns and massacres targeting Shi'i communities in the 1790s introduced sectarian strife to the region. These instances of sectarianism were episodic and contextualized in the processes of conquest and state formation under the Al Sa'ud, rather than a primordial socio-cultural condition. After the Saudi annexation of al-Ahsa' in 1913, sectarianizing policies played a role in three clearly confined instances: during the early consolidation of Saudi rule over al-Ahsa' when Ibn Sa'ud utilized Wahhabi discrimination against the Shi'i communities to discourage local opposition, in British imperialist policies in Bahrain which recurrently expanded towards Qatif, and in Aramco's control and surveillance of its Saudi workforce. In fact, oil has helped sectarianizing strategies to gain a permanent place in local and later as well in national politics. In a gradual process, corporate officials, the Saudi government and (at a later point of time) local activists learned to wield religious

11 On the sectarianizing strategies applied by the Saudi state since the 1980s to prevent cross-sectarian opposition movements see Freer, "The Symbiosis of Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Rentierism in the Saudi State," 97–104; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf* and Madawi al-Rasheed. "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution. Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," in *Sectarianization. Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, ed. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Oxford University Press, 2017), 143–58. For the application of sectarianizing strategies in the Gulf at general see Justin J. Gengler, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (Oxford University Press, 2014), 31–142 and al-Shehabi, "Contested Modernity."

affiliation as a tool to meet their ends. Oil allowed the concept of sectarian division – which had first entered the region through British imperialist policies – to become one important and constant element in controlling and disciplining the local communities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The mindset of securitization as element of a sectarianizing strategy was discernible already in the ways in which British agents in the Gulf had sought to increase influence and control over Qatif in pre-oil times. It continued as a powerful concept in influencing the ways in which the oil company regarded local society and in the knowledge production that was involved in urban planning and in the uphold of industrial security. Oil provided the motive and the means for planning the emergent oil conurbation accordingly. Additionally, sectarian discrimination facilitated the expropriation of Shi'i landowners and the turning of land under the oil concession as well as the simultaneous personal enrichment of the Saudi ruling class and leading merchants. In the 1950s, sectarianism was applied to back up British claims to territory and political hegemony in the oil rich Gulf. Ideas of conflict-ridden and unruly Shi'i communities – especially those of Qatif – permeated the ways in which British and ultimately also US diplomats interpreted local unrest in 1956. During that time, Aramco learned from the British example that religious affiliation of its workforce could be used in enforcing industrial discipline but could also be manipulated into a threat against the company's claims to Saudi oil wealth.

Oil was one of the main drivers to clamp down on local protest and to ultimately fragment local communities to secure the flow of income for the company as well as for the Saudi state. Not later than 1970, securitization and sectarianizing strategies visibly began to play a role in governing the communities of al-Ahsa'. The urban unrest that unfolded in the 1960s in the oil conurbation in the way of a cross-sectarian political opposition as well as in the social malaise that caused a considerable extent of strife amongst urban communities made it clear to the oil company as well as to the Saudi government that earlier attempts at appeasing the oil workers through improved conditions in the labor camps and at isolating them from the local communities had proved futile. At the same time, oil revenues had not yet risen to a level that allowed the Saudi state to co-opt larger segments of the local society. The meticulous collection of information by the oil company about its employees helped the Saudi authorities in the roundups of "troublemakers" and probably provided an impetus for the selective roundups of local Shi'a – a strategy that appears as an inverted version of the selective allocation of oil rents in later decades.¹²

12 On the selective allocation of oil rents see Freer, "The Symbiosis of Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Rentierism in the Saudi State," 94–95.

Crucially, in 1970 the Saudi government applied the strategy of securitization of local Shi'a in governing the Eastern Province – expressed in the mass arrests of local Shi'a and in the cordoning off of Qatif and al-Hasa by the Saudi military. This clearly visible framing of the Shi'i communities in the two districts as a threat to the Saudi state, internal security and – in fact – the public health gained a spatial expression through the existence of control posts and military encampments in the area and preceded strategies of religious securitization in the realms of state-sanctioned speech acts and text production by Sunni clerics and other “key socialized practices.”¹³ It formed – and still forms – an important element of the sectarianizing strategies that were increasingly employed by the Saudi state in the late twentieth and the twenty-first centuries and which successfully fragmented political opposition and alienated other segments of Saudi society from their Shi'a compatriots.¹⁴

7 Rural Rebellion

Local leaders in al-Hasa and Qatif did for a long time abstain from sectarian politics. Their influence over popular politics was still largely derived from their traditional roles as large landholders and notables. As such, they claimed leadership in popular politics under the banners of labor rights, modernization and contemporary political currents. According to Matthiesen, their relative abstinence from religion left local notables unprepared to claim precedence over local politics when in the 1970s a new generation of activists proclaimed the Islamic Revolution.¹⁵ Social, economic and political imbalances and inequalities that were most salient in the oil conurbation also became important operating variables in the uprisings that took place in the Eastern Province and especially in Qatif in 1979 and 1980 and from 2011 onwards.

13 Neo, “Religious Securitisation,” 209–14.

14 For instance, following up on the uprisings that evolved from the protests in the Eastern Province and Bahrain in the context of the so-called Arab spring which unfolded in 2011, Matthiesen argued that governments in the Gulf have largely relied on the strategy to play sectarian identities out against each other to tear apart the social fabric and divide the protesters. Matthiesen. *Sectarian Gulf*. Matthiesen also pointed out that sectarianization as securitization did play an important role in preventing post-2011 uprisings in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia from becoming cross-sectarian opposition movements. Toby Matthiesen, “Sectarianization as Securitization. Identity Politics and Counter-Revolution in Bahrain,” in *Sectarianization. Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, ed. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Oxford University Press, 2017), 213–14.

15 Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 90.

However, these events had been ignited by outside events and facilitated by transnational religious movements. Already in 1968, the US consul in Dhahran opined that “perhaps closest to a conclusion one could reasonably draw, based on our limited awareness of the moods of the urban population ..., is that in the foreseeable future it would take some shaking external event in the Arab world to activate civil unrest here.”¹⁶ This prediction became true when the Islamic Revolution that played out in 1979 in Iran reverberated in the Eastern Province, when Qatif and other towns in the province became theatres of violent struggle between protesters and a militant state and when many protesters in al-Hasa and Qatif fervently displayed Shi’i Islamist slogans and symbolism. In the words of Toby Jones, the uprising of 1979 was “as much about oil as religious difference.”¹⁷

Still, one can also understand the events that unfolded in 1979 from a different angle in which the *barran* communities of Qatif finally found a way to express their grievances. As others have noted before, the uprising of 1979 emanated from small cells of activists in the local villages and rural suburbs of Qatif and from there conquered the streets in the old and new urban centers of the Eastern Province. It appears that in the context of the increased repression and isolation which the Shi’i communities of Qatif had witnessed in 1969 and 1970, a new generation of activists now deliberately tapped into a transnational Shi’i movement to mobilize supporters within their own communities against their political and economic marginalization.¹⁸ The local leader of the movement was Hassan al-Saffar, born in 1958 as the son of a small merchant. Al-Saffar had already at a very young age gained popularity in Qatif and the surrounding villages as a preacher during religious ceremonies. Early on he came into contact with the teachings of Muhammad al-Shirazi, which inspired him to take up religious studies in Najaf and Qom and to join the secret political organization

16 “Dissent in the Eastern Province,” Dinsmore, US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, December 11, 1968, POL 12 SAUD, National General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, RG 59, NARA.

17 Jones, *Desert Kingdom*, 182–83.

18 The fact that sectarianizing strategies ultimately lead to sectarianist behavior by the targeted groups has been noted for the events that unfolded in Qatif in 1979 as well as in the context of the so-called Arab spring. Neo, “Religious Securitisation and Institutionalised Sectarianism in Saudi Arabia,” 215–16; and Freer, “The Symbiosis of Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Rentierism in the Saudi State,” 96–97, 99–100. Louër has pointed out the difficulties of viewing the 1979 uprising as either a “pure domestic initiative” or “a project formulated by Iran.” She shows that while “the initial impulse was given from Iran” the local context of cross-ideological opposition movements in Qatif played an important role. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 165.

of the Movement of Vanguard's Missionaries (MVM).¹⁹ During trips back to Saudi Arabia he and his co-activists began to recruit followers in Qatif and al-Ahsa', in particular the children of the village nobility and clerical families and members of the new social middle class that came from Aramco's middle ranks and the Petroleum College.²⁰ Similar to the activists of earlier decades, the so-called *Shiraziyyun* (the followers of al-Shirazi) struggled against corrupt Saudi government and US imperialism in the region. But they also explicitly targeted Qatif's urban-based political establishment.²¹ During the Muharram uprising of 1979 they used the 'Ashura' processions in the local villages to raise their voices in public. Demonstrations erupted also in the *Qal'at al-Qatif*. Leftist groups joined the demonstrations and staged protest marches in Dhahran, Dammam and al-Khobar against the underdevelopment and social despair which were widely visible everywhere in the oil conurbation. Minor unrest and skirmishes were also reported from Abqaiq, Hofuf and Mubarraz. The unrest was dealt with ruthlessly and fatally by the Saudi military.²² In 1980, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Iranian Revolution, demonstrations and strikes were again held in Qatif. After the violent crackdown of the uprising many *Shiraziyyun* fled the country.

In exile, some members of the movement began to re-write the local history of Qatif.²³ Hamza al-Hassan, one of the leading historians of Qatif in the twentieth century who is also among the intellectual leaders of the local uprising that started in 2011, believes that land disputes have played an important role in the Muharram uprising of 1979.²⁴ US documents point into a similar direction, as they repeatedly raise issues such as the destruction of agricultural land, land speculation and – as a related problem – the shortage of affordable housing in the area for the years prior to the uprising.²⁵ As is often argued today, the aftermath of the uprising was marked by a profound spatial transformation of

19 Louër, "Identity Politics," 228–29; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 95–96.

20 Louër, "Identity Politics," 229; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 98–99.

21 On the movement of the *Shiraziyyun* see Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 88–102, 143–46.

22 Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery," 216, 218–19; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 75.

23 Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 161–97; Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis*, 91–113; Madawi al-Rasheed, "The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia," 122–23.

24 Al-Ḥassan, *Al-Shi'a*, vol. 2, 333–34.

25 "Prince Fahd Describes Eastern Province Development Plan in Newspaper Interview," May, 14 1974, [author unknown], US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, 1974DHAHRA00429_b, and "Rumors of Large Scale SAG Expenditures in Eastern Province," [author unknown], US Consulate, Dhahran, to Department of State, March, 28 1979, 1979DHAHRA00527_e, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Saudi Arabia, WikiLeaks (hereafter: WikiLeaks).

Qatif. The Saudi government increased investment into urban infrastructure to quieten local discontent. In 1982, the Qal'a was demolished, allegedly to make room for urban modernization. The historical core of Qatif with its centuries old houses, mosques and market structures was turned into a barren strip of land that henceforth occupied the town center for almost two decades before it was turned into a giant traffic circle and adjacent parking area. Local activists today often remark on the political symbolism of the destruction of old Qatif.²⁶

However, the old town of Qatif was not the only site in the Eastern Province that was destroyed in the aftermath of the uprising of 1979–80. Forgotten by history, al-Salama, back then still commonly referred to as “Dhahran camp” or “Saudi camp” was bulldozed over in January 1981. Al-Salama had been the epicenter of Saudi labor struggle in the 1950s and it had been home to many of the rioters of 1967. It had also played a role in the protests of 1979–80. The community had been poor and largely untouched by oil modernization. By destroying al-Salama, the local authorities and the oil company got rid of what they perceived as a constant “eyesore.”²⁷ The destruction of al-Salama can be read as emblematic for the dismemberment of urban communities in the Saudi oil conurbation. In a similar vein, the uprising of 1979 is remembered today by many Shi'a in the Eastern Province as *al-Nakba* (the disaster) which stigmatized Saudi Shi'a as a group and severed them from the national body, placing them under the constant suspicion of disloyalty and subversion.²⁸ The “Shi'a nature of the uprising,” argued the Saudi political scientist and novelist Turki al-Hamad already in 1985, “prevented the Sunni majority from participating or even sympathizing” and ultimately, this majority “supported the government in crushing it.”²⁹ More recent scholarship has pointed out that the successful Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 gave rise to Shi'i political assertiveness while the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Salafi extremists resulted in varying regime strategies vis-à-vis the Shi'i activists with which the Saudi government sought to “appease the Shia population as a means of counterposing it against the Sunnis” – strategies that involved promises to address local grievances like religious freedom and greater economic opportunities.³⁰ These promises were never delivered on, despite the phase of tentative political reconciliation in the 1990s and early 2000s. What remains is the fact that

26 Al-Khulaitit, “The Mythical Fort.”

27 Parssinen and Talib, “A Traditional Community and Modernization,” 15, 17.

28 Informal conversation with Abdulrasul al-Gheryafi, local historian and activist, Qatif, May 16, 2013.

29 Hamad, “Political Order,” 314.

30 Freer, “The Symbiosis of Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Rentierism in the Saudi State,” 100.



FIGURE 16 Last remains of the Qal'at al-Qatif in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi

after 1979–80 local opposition appeared overwhelmingly within the confines of religious affiliation and that securitization and sectarianizing strategies were successfully used by the Saudi government to prevent the formation of cross-sectarian or cross-regional Saudi protest movements during and after the so-called Arab spring in 2011.³¹

31 See Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf* and Alamer, “Beyond Sectarianism.”

Epilogue

In May 1996, bulldozers appeared at the coast of the Ramis, the large agricultural endowment in the northern part of the Qatif oasis. To the horror of the people of the nearby town of ‘Awwamiyya, they began to bury the coastal mangrove forest, a unique habitat especially for shrimp and fish, under tons of cement. During the huge landfill project that followed, 8,400,000 square meters of coastal mangrove forest and farmland were destroyed, resulting in a property damage of estimated half a million Riyal. The poor local communities, whose economic survival depended largely on the sea and agriculture, early on protested the landfill that threatened to destroy maritime wildlife in the area. Local imams and other clerics initiated a region-wide solidary campaign which aimed at extending a hand to the dispossessed farmers and fishermen and at aiding the reconstruction of destroyed properties in the Ramis. In the course of the protest that followed immediately on the landfill several dozen protesters were arrested. Most of the detainees were young fishermen and land lessees from the area.¹

Until the 1960s, ‘Awwamiyya had counted no more than a few thousand inhabitants. Under the aegis of oil urbanization, the village had expanded beyond its historical core and well into the surrounding oasis to make place for its growing number of inhabitants. However, there were limits to ‘Awwamiyya’s urban growth, which was restricted to one side by oil pipelines on land under the Aramco reserve and to the other by the vast agricultural endowment, the Ramis.² At some point before the start of the landfill works of 1996, a group identifying themselves as the self-proclaimed legal heirs of a Bin Sulayman appeared in the public, claiming ownership of the Ramis maritime strip. They provided proof of their claims in the form of a document issued by the customary court in Qatif in 1948 or 1949, when the original dispute over the Ramis had started. The people of ‘Awwamiyya early on resented these claims, since their rights to the land dated back to the nineteenth century. Still, the heirs

-
- 1 User “haier,” “Qaḍīyyat Arḍ al-Rāmīs wa-Sāḥīl Baḥr al-‘Awwamiyya Sharq al-Su‘ūdiyya fī ‘Uyūn Dawliyya,” *Al-Mawḥid al-‘Arabī* (blog), September 25, 2002, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://quarab.com/vb/threads/qdi-rd-alrams-usaxhl-bxhr-alyuami-shrq-alsyudi-fi-yiun-duli.20288/>; ‘Abbās al-Zayn, 2017, “Quwwāt Āl Su‘ūd Tataḥaḍḍar li-Tadmīr al-Rāmīs ba’d al-Musawwara,” *Markaz al-Ḥaramayn li-l-Ilām al-Islāmī* (website), 19 August, accessed 21 October 2019, <http://alhrmain.com/index.php/news/54412>; “Between Oil Wells and the Sea: A Politician Shows Off His District,” G. Foeller, US Embassy, Riyadh, to Secretary of State, May 22, 2006, 06RIYADH3974, WikiLeaks.
 - 2 Al-Ibrāhīm, “Waḳf al-Rāmīs;” Zayna, “Al-Zaḥf al-‘Umrānī Yuhadid Arḍ al-Rāmīs al-Zirā’iyya.”



FIGURE 17 The Ramis in 2013, Claudia Ghrawi

of Bin Sulayman, backed by the Shari‘a court in Riyadh, partly sold and partly leased the land to Aramco, which wanted to develop the sea strip into a residential project for its employees. During the coming one and a half decades, the landfill project became an issue of contentious struggle between the people of ‘Awwamiyya, local community leaders, Aramco, real estate investors and high-ranking members of the Royal family. In the early 2000s, the newly developed yet still vacant land was released by Aramco from oil concession rights and put up for auction by two real estate companies. Thousands of local protesters immediately demanded legal investigation into the ownership of the land. The case was taken to the Shari‘a court in Dammam and it was ruled that Aramco had no right to release the land for sale since according to Shari‘a law, the land belonged to the people of ‘Awwamiyya. Yet, Aramco and the benefiting real estate companies succeeded in sidestepping the law and overruled both the court and the local committee of notables which had managed the endowment for decades. New protests were triggered when in the late 2010s another part of the coast was bulldozed over.³ In 2012, a consortium of real

3 User “haier.” “Qaḍīyyat Arḍ al-Rāmīs”; al-Zayn, “Quwwāt Āl Su‘ūd Tataḥaḍḍar li-Tadmīr al-Rāmīs ba’d al-Musawwara;” “Between Oil Wells and the Sea: A Politician Shows Off His

estate developers signed a deal at the worth of two million Riyal for purchasing the Ramis maritime strip. The investors were planning to sell out fully developed plots of land for the construction of luxury homes that would offer panoramic views of the Gulf over a length of four kilometers.⁴

Under the impact of the so-called Arab Spring that began in 2011, the outrage against the expropriation of the people of 'Awwamiyya ultimately realigned itself around 'Awwamiyya's charismatic imam Nimr al-Nimr (1959–2016). In the following years, the area developed into a fatal battle ground between the local people and the Saudi military. The area was cordoned off by the Saudi military in 2012, and passage from and to Qatif required passing through several military checkpoints. In May 2017, the Saudi government began with the demolition of the old town of 'Awwamiyya, which had assumed the role of political center of the contemporary unrest. The destruction of 'Awwamiyya's urban core was met with a local outcry against the systematic destruction of Shi'i culture and heritage.⁵

The strategy to derive local opposition movements of their spaces for mobilization and to keep them isolated from their compatriots is not new in the contentious history of the Saudi oil polity. Other towns have been eradicated from local maps before, as happened in the destruction of the Qal'at al-Qatif and the much less known demolition of al-Salama, the former Saudi camp in Dhahran, after the uprising of 1979–80.⁶ The latest uprisings in the Saudi oil conurbation between 2011 and 2020 carried Saudi Arabia's urban revolution into the twenty-first century and hence into a time in which global neoliberalism has undone the last bounds on capitalist expansion and in which the rising global demand for natural resources and fields for investment is confronted with the unsettling realization that natural resources such as oil and land are limited and rapidly depleting. Whether such an interpretation holds value and whether the local communities find a counter strategy that will aid the urban revolution or end it, has yet to be seen. However, their isolation from the rest of the Saudi oil polity, which has been excogitated and repeatedly formulated by British and US American imperial and oil agents throughout the twentieth century and

District," G. Foeller, US Embassy, Riyadh, to Secretary of State, May 22, 2006, 06RIYADH3974, WikiLeaks.

4 Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf, 2012, "Al-Qaṭīf: Taḥāluf 'Iqārī Yubrim Ṣafqat al-Rāmīs bi-Milyārayn Riyāl," *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf*, 29 March, accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=article&id=2297> [site discontinued].

5 Aya Batrawy, 2017, "Saudi Demolition of Historic Shiite Homes Stokes Violence," *The Associated Press* (website), 27 June, accessed June 27, 2017, <https://apnews.com/article/e49d78cdcab64fd28606f20ac1bc029b>.

6 Khulaitit, "The Mythical Fort."

forcefully pursued by the Saudi state since 1970 has put the people of Qatif in an extremely difficult position. Their absolute isolation was expressed in most poignant terms by a Saudi acquaintance in 2013, not long after Qatif had been cordoned off by the Saudi military in the face of the latest political unrest. During a car drive along the heavily developed coast of Dammam, the man, member of an old and decidedly upper-class family who lives in an affluent neighborhood of Dammam, pointed in the general direction of Qatif proclaiming “We never go there. Over there, there is only trouble.”⁷

7 Informal conversations with a local resident and acquaintance, Dhahran, May 18, 2013, and Dammam, May 19, 2013. See also Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 91.

Appendix

There exists almost no reliable data on population numbers for the Eastern Province for the time under consideration, with two exceptions: Aramco survey data collected in company towns and Saudi census data from the year 1962/63. However, Aramco survey data only includes Aramco employees living in the company towns. It does not include informal residents, such as squatters who lived at the fringes of company towns or job seekers who shared dormitory space with relatives or friends. Hence, actual population numbers in the company towns were likely considerably higher than suggested by the data. Furthermore, population numbers may include or may not include areas that surround a settlement. Hence, numbers may vary considerably or seem inconsistent. In addition, population numbers stated by al-Shuaiby are often estimates based on aerial photographs.

The towns highlighted in light grey were chosen by Aramco for the Home Ownership Program (HOP) in 1951. The towns highlighted in dark grey were included in the HOP in 1956.

TABLE 1 Overview of population growth for selected towns and areas in the emergent oil conurbation

Year	Early 20th century	1930	1934	1935	1950	1951	1954	1956	1958	1959	1962/63	1970
<i>Area/Town</i>												
Al-Hasa Oasis	67,000				20,000– 30,000	158,000 (Vidal, 1955)			30,000		136,160	
Al-Qatif Oasis	26,000										78,068	
Hofuf	25,000			50,000		55,000 or 60,000; (Vidal, 1955)					51,387	78,000
Mubarraz	8,500					28,000 (Vidal, 1955)					25,395	
Qatif Town	10,000		6,000		8,000				11,000		12,690	15,000
Sayhat	600 houses										7,656	
Safwa	350 houses										7,712	
Dhahran			a few hundred				12,444			9,416	7,345	
Dammam				1,350				12,000			35,408	43,000

TABLE 1 Overview of population growth for selected towns and areas (cont.)

Year	Early 20th century	1930	1934	1935	1950	1951	1954	1956	1958	1959	1962/63	1970
Al-Khobar		75			13,000						23,492	38,000
Ra's Tanura							6,643			5,521		
Al-Rahima											10,365	
Madinat Abqaiq							6,649			5,344	8,719	

Sources: Lorimer, 1908 (John G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Oman, and Central Arabia*. Vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical (Superintendent Government Printing, 1908), Qatar Digital Library. Accessed May 12, 2016. http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023515711.0x000000d). Al-Shuaiby, 1976 (Abdulla M. al-Shuaiby, "The Development of the Eastern Province with Particular Reference to Urban Settlement and Evolution in Eastern Saudi Arabia" (PhD diss., Durham University, 1976), 254–62, <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1972/>). Additional estimates for al-Hasa made by Vidal in 1955 (Federico Vidal, *The Oasis of al-Hasa* (Arabian American Oil Company, 1955)) appear in brackets.

Bibliography

Internet Sources

- Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State. "The Red Line Agreement" (website). Accessed November 5, 2021. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/red-line>.
- WikiLeaks, Public Library of US Diplomacy (website). <https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/about/>.
- Qatar Digital Library (website). <https://www.qdl.qa/en>.
- Zayn, 'Abbās al-. "Quwwāt Āl Su'ūd Tataḥaḍḍar li-Tadmīr al-Rāmīs ba'd al-Musawwara," *Markaz al-Ḥaramayn li-l-Ilām al-Islāmī* (website), August 19, 2017. Accessed 21 October 2019, <http://alhrmain.com/index.php/news/54412>.

Interviews and Informal Conversations

- Those interviewees who appear without names have asked for anonymity. Names of all interviewees and detailed interview protocols are in the possession of the author.
- E-mail correspondence with Ali al-Ahmed, November 27, 2011.
- Telephone-interview with Ali al-Ahmed, Washington, DC, June 2, 2012.
- Telephone-interview with Jim Mandaville, former Aramco employee, Arabian Affairs Division, March 28, 2013.
- Informal conversation with a businessman from Dammam, Dammam, May 11, 2013.
- Interview with Saudi businessman and former Aramco trainee, Dammam, May 8, 2013.
- Interview with a former Aramco lawyer, al-Khobar, May 9, 2013.
- Interview with amateur historian, al-Khobar, May 11, 2013.
- Interview with Jafar al-Shayyeb, Qatif municipal council member and former member of the Shiraziyyun, Dammam, May 12, 2013.
- Interview with former Aramco employee, Dhahran, May 14, 2013.
- Interview with the granddaughter of a big merchant from al-Ahsa', Dammam, May 15, 2013.
- Informal conversation with Abdulrasul al-Gheryafi, local historian and activist, Qatif, May 16, 2013.
- Interview with Tawfiq al-Sayf, former member of the Shiraziyyun, author and political activist, Qatif, May 16, 2013.
- Interview with former labor activist at Aramco, Dhahran, May 17, 2013.
- Interview with businessman and son of a former Aramco sub-contractor, al-Khobar, May 18, 2013.
- Interview with former labor activist at Aramco, Dhahran, May 18, 2013.

- Interview with former Aramco vice-president, Dhahran, May 18, 2013.
- Interview with a member of a prominent family from al-Hasa, Dammam, May 19, 2013.
- Interview with amateur historian from a prominent local family, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.
- Interview with son of a former Aramco employee from Safwa, al-Khobar, May 19, 2013.
- Informal conversations with a local resident and acquaintance, Dhahran, May 18, 2013, and Dammam, May 19, 2013.
- Telephone-interview with Horst Reichert, urban planner and architect, February 16, 2022.

Archival Sources

- British Library, London, India Office Records (IOR): *R/15/1/341, R/15/2/330, R/15/2/1498, R/15/2/31, R/15/2/58, R/15/6/31, R/15/1/745, L/PS/10/134/2, L/PS/12/2115, L/PS/18/B340.*
- Georgetown University, Washington DC, Library Booth Family, Center for Special Collections: *William E. Mulligan Papers.*
- Institute of Public Administration, Dammam, Documentation Center, (IPA): (documents issued by) *Majlis al-Shūrā, Majlis al-Wuzarā', Wuzāra al-Māliyya, Wuzāra al-Māliyya wa-l-Iqtisād al-Waṭanī.*
- National Archives and Research Association, Maryland, (NARA): General Records of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1945–1973, Record Group 59, 786A., 886A., 890F., *POL 2 1964–1966, POL DEF 1964–1966, POL 2 SAUD, POL 12 SAUD, POL 18 SAUD, POL 23 SAUD, POL 29 SAUD, LAB 2 SAUD* and Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Saudi Arabia, 1944–1949; Record Group 84, *125., 550., 800., 804., 850., 863., 890F.*
- National Archives, Kew, Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records from 1782 – (FOR): *BS 1015, BS 1017, EA 10110, EA 1016, ES 1015, ES 1193, ES 1538.*
- Stanford University, P.T. Hoover Institution: Arabian American Oil Company, Government Relations Dept., Arabian Research Division, “Digest of selected items from Akhbār al-Dhahran, Dammam fortnightly, 28 September 1955–29 April 1957.”
- University of Utah, J. Willard Marriot Library, Special Collections: Thomas F. O’Dea, “Social Change in Saudi Arabia: Problems and Prospects,” unpublished report (Special Study Group, Feb.–Aug. 1963).

Literature

- Abir, Mordechai. *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis.* Routledge, 1993.
- Abir, Mordechai. *Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era: Regime and Elites, Conflict and Collaboration.* Croom Helm, 1988.

- Aborisade, Femi. "Petro-Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Labour and Community Mobilization in Nigeria." *LABOUR, Capital and Society* 43, no. 1 (2010): 31–62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43158363>.
- Aboukorin, Antar A. and Faez S. Al-Shihri. "Rapid Urbanization and Sustainability in Saudi Arabia: The Case of Dammam Metropolitan Area." *Journal of Sustainable Development* 8, no. 9 (2015): 52–65. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v8n9p52>.
- Aḥmad, 'Alī, al-. *Sha'b al-Qaṭīf fī al-Qarn al-Ḥādī wa-l-'Ashrīn: Dirāsa Taḥlīliyya li-Ḥādīr wa-Mustaqbal al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī al-Shī'ī fī al-Alfiyya al-Thālītha*. Dār al-'Arab, 2007.
- Aḥmarī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abdullah Tāmir. *Dawr Sharikat al-Zayt al-'Arabīyya al-Amrīkiyya (Arāmīkū) fī Tanmiyat al-Mintaqa al-Sharqīyya al-'Arabīyya al-Sa'ūdīyya, 1363–1384h, 1944–1964m: Dirāsa fī Tārīkh al-Tanmiyya*. Aḥmarī 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abdullah Tāmir, 2007.
- Ajmi, Nassir. *Legacy of a Lifetime*. North Star Publishing, 1995.
- 'Akārī, 'Abd al-Nabī al-. *Al-Tanzimāt al-Yasārīyya fī 'l-Jazīra wa-l-Khalīj al-'Arabī*. Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, 2003.
- Alamer, Sultan. "Beyond Sectarianism and Ideology. Regionalism and Collective Political Action in Saudi Arabia." In *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Al-Hassan, Hamzah. "The Role of Religion in Building National Identity (Case Study: Saudi Arabia)." PhD diss., University of Westminster, 2006.
- Alissa, Reem. "The Oil Town of Ahmadi Since 1946. From Colonial Town to Nostalgic City." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2072712>.
- Alsayer, Dalal M. "Paternal Partnerships: How Aramco Transformed Saudi Environments, Bodies, Minds, and Homes, c. 1930–1970s." *Planning Perspectives* 40, no. 1 (2024): 117–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2024.2371947>.
- Al-Shaykh, 'Abdullah J. *Arāmīkū, al-Naḥḥ wa 'l-Isti'mār*. Dār al-Jazīra, 1985.
- Al-Shaykh, Tawfīq. *Al-Bitrūl wa-l-Siyāsa fī 'l-Mamlaka al-'Arabīyya al-Sa'ūdīyya*. Dār al-Ṣafā wa-l-Tawzī', 1988.
- Alwazzan, Faisal A. "Politics, Economy and Religion in a Near Eastern Periphery: The Region of Baḥrayn in East Arabia c. 1050–c. 1400 CE." Phd-thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2015. <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/31021>.
- Anderson, Irvine. *Aramco, the United States, and Saudi America: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy 1933–1950*. Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Anṣārī, Muḥammad al-. *Tuḥfat al-Mustafīd bi-Tārīkh al-Aḥsā' fī 'l-Qadīm wa-l-Jadīd*. 2 volumes. Maṭābi' al-Riyāḍ, 1960.
- Anscombe, Frederick. "An Anational Society: Eastern Arabia in the Ottoman Period." In *Transnational Connections in the Arab Gulf*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed. Routledge, 2015.

- Anscombe, Frederick. *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*. Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Appel, Hannah, Arthur Mason and Michael Watts. "Oil Talk," in *Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas*, edited by Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason and Michael Watts. Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Arabian American Oil Company. *Aramco Handbook: Oil and the Middle East*. Zonen-Haarlem: Arabian American Oil Company, 1968.
- Arab Support Committee. *Struggle, Oppression and Counter-Revolution in Saudi Arabia, Translated from the Original Arabic Articles Appearing In the 1972 Issues of Al-Jazeera Al-Jadeedah, The Political Organ of the People's Democratic Party of Al-Jazeera*. Berkeley, CA: Arab Support Committee, ca. 1972.
- Arnold, Jose. *Golden Swords and Pots and Pans*. Victor Gollanz Limited, 1964.
- ‘Aṭṭar, ‘Adnān, ed. *Al-Ḥarakat al-Taḥarruriyya fī al-Hijaz wa-l-Najd 1901–1973*. Bayrūt: Ma‘tuq Ikhwān, 1973.
- ‘Awwāmī, Sayyid ‘Alī al-Sayyid Bāqir, al-. *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya Sharq al-Sa‘ūdiyya 1373–1393 h/1953–1973 m*. 2 vols. Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li-l-Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 2012.
- Aytekin, E. Attila. "Agrarian Relations, Property and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire." *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 6 (2009): 935–951. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200903268694>.
- Ayubi, Nazih. *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris, 1995.
- Basrawi, Fadia. *Brownies and Kalashnikovs: A Saudi Woman's Memoir of American Arabia and Wartime Beirut*. South Street Press, 2009.
- Batrawy, Aya. "Saudi Demolition of Historic Shiite Homes Stokes Violence," *The Associated Press* (website), 27 June. Accessed March 9, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/e49d78cdcab64fd28606f20ac1bc029b>.
- Beblawi, Hazem. "The Rentier State in the Arab World." In *The Arab State*, edited by Giacomo Luciani, University of California Press, 1990.
- Bet-Shlimon, Arabella. *City of Black Gold. Oil, Ethnicity, and the Making of Modern Kirkuk*. Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Bet-Shlimon, Arabella. "The Politics and Ideology of Urban Development in Iraq's Oil City: Kirkuk, 1946–58." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 26–40. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2072703>.
- Bini, Elisabetta. "Oil Workers, Trade Unions and the Emergence of Oil Nationalism in Libya, 1956–1969." *EUI Working Papers MWP* 27. European University Institute, 2012. <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/24176>.
- Bird, Kai. *Crossing Mandelbaum Gate: Coming of Age Between the Arabs and Israelis (1956–1978)*. Simon & Schuster, 2010.
- Bodrookas, Alex and Arang Keshavarzian, "The Forever Frontier of Urbanism: Histori-cizing Persian Gulf Cities." *International Journal of Urban Regional Research* 43, no. 1 (2018): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12664>.

- Bose, Sugata. *A Hundred Horizons. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*. Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Bou Akar, Hiba and Nada Moumtaz. 2013. "On Why Struggles over Urban Space Matter: An Interview with David Harvey." *Jadaliyya*, 15 November. Accessed January 3, 2015. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15156/on-why-struggles-over-urban-space-matter_an-interv.
- Bowen, Dawn S. "In the Shadow of the Refinery: An American Oil Company Town on the Caribbean Island of Aruba." *Journal of Cultural Geography* 36, no. 1 (2019): 49–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2018.1502398>.
- Brenner, Neil, Marcuse, Peter and Margit Mayer (eds.). *Cities for People, Not for Profit. Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. Routledge, 2012.
- Bsheer, Rosie. "A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia." *Past & Present* 238, no. 1 (2018): 233–277. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx057>.
- Bsheer, Rosie. *Archive Wars. The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia*. Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Buchan, James. "Secular and Religious Opposition in Saudi Arabia." In *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, edited by Tim Niblock. Croom Helm, 1982.
- Burchardt, Hermann. "Ost-Arabien von Basra bis Maskat auf Grund eigener Reisen." *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (1906): 305–22.
- Burke, Edmond III. "Towards a History of Urban Collective Action in the Middle East: Continuities and Change 1750–1980." In *État, Ville et Mouvements Sociaux au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient: Urban Crisis and Social Movements in the Middle East, Actes du Colloque C.N.R.S.-E.S.R.C., Paris 23–27 Mai 1986, Proceedings of the C.N.R.S.-E.S.R.C. Symposium Paris, May 23–27th, 1986*, edited by Kenneth Brown, Bernard Hourcade, Michèle Joulé, Claude Liauzu, Peter Sluglett and Sami Zubaida. Editions L'Harmattan, 1989.
- Butler, Chris. *Henri Lefebvre. Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City*. Routledge, 2012.
- Cammatt, Melanie C. et al. *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 4th edition. Routledge, 2018.
- Carapico, Sheila. *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Carter, Robert A., *Sea of Pearls. Arabia, Persia and the Industry that Shaped the Gulf*. Arabian Publishing Ltd./Alfardan, 2012.
- Chalcraft, John. "Migration and Popular Protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79, no. 1 (2011): 28–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S014754791000030X>.
- Chalcraft, John. *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Chaudhry, Kiren A. *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy. Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Cheesman, Robert E. *In Unknown Arabia*. London: Macmillan, 1926.
- Cheney, Michael S. *Big Oil Man From Arabia*. Ballantine Books, 1958.
- Clark, Arthur P., Muhammad A. Tahlawi and William Facey. *A Land Transformed: The Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Aramco*. Aramco Services, 2006.
- Cole, Juan R. "Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shi'ism in Eastern Arabia, 1300–1800." *IJMES* 19, no. 2 (1987): 177–204. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800031834>.
- Coronil, Fernando. *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Dabashi, Hamid. *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Davis, Eric. "Theorizing Statecraft and Social Change in Arab Oil-Producing Countries." In *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil Historical Memory, and Popular Culture*, edited by Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides, Florida International University Press, 1991.
- Denoeux, Guilain. *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon*. State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Determann, Jörg Matthias. *Historiography in Saudi Arabia. Globalization and the State in the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris, 2014.
- Dickson, Harold R. *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*. Allen & Unwin, 1956.
- Dumaynī, 'Alī, al-. *Zaman al-Sakhin ... Azmina al-Ḥurriyya*. Dār al-Kunūz, 2004.
- Ehsani, Kaveh. "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman." *International Review of Social History* 48, no. 3 (2003): 361–99. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859003001123>.
- Ehsani, Kaveh. *The Social History of Labour in the Iranian Oil Industry: the built Environment and the Making of the Working Class (1908–1941)*. PhD-thesis, Leiden University, 2014. <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28983>.
- Elawy, Ibrahim S. Al-Abdullah, al-. "The Influence of Oil Upon Settlement in al-Hasa Oasis, Saudi Arabia." PhD diss., University of Durham, 1976. <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1855/1/1855.pdf>.
- Elling, Rasmus C. "On Lines And Fences: Labour, Community and Violence in an Oil City." In *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition From Empire to Nation State*, edited by Ulrike Freitag et al., Berghahn, 2015.
- Elling, Rasmus C. "War of Clubs: Struggle for Space in Abadan and the 1946 Oil Strike." In *Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Nelida Fuccaro, Stanford University Press, 2016.

- Enazy, Askar H. -al. *The Creation of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914–1927*. Routledge, 2010.
- Fahd, Khalifa. *Jaḥīm al-Ḥukm al-Saʿūdī wa-Nīrān al-Wahhābiyya*. Al-Ṣafā lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1991.
- Fandy, Mamoun. “From Confrontation to Creative Resitance: The Shia’s Oppositional Discourse in Saudi Arabia.” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 9 (1996): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10669929608720089>.
- Fandy, Mamoun. *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*. MacMillan, 1999.
- Ferguson, James. “Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Afrika.” *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 377–382. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3567023>.
- Field, Michael. *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States*. Overlook Press, 1985.
- Fox, Richard G. *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present*. School of American Research Press, 1991.
- Freer, Courtney. “The Symbiosis of Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Rentierism in the Saudi State.” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2019): 88–108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12287>.
- Freitag, Ulrike. *A History of Jeddah. The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Freitag, Ulrike and Achim von Oppen (eds.). *Translocality: The Study of Globalizing Processes from a Southern Perspective*. Brill, 2010.
- Fuccaro, Nelida. “Arab Oil Towns as Petro-Histories.” In *Oil Spaces. Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*, edited by Carola Hein. Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367816049>.
- Fuccaro, Nelida. “Between Imara, Empire and Oil: Saudis in the Frontier Society of the Persian Gulf.” In *Kingdom Without Borders. Saudi Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed. Hurst & Company, 2008.
- Fuccaro, Nelida. “Introduction: Histories of Oil and Urban Modernity in the Middle East.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2020327>.
- Fuccaro, Nelida. “Knowledge at the Service of the British Empire. The Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia.” In *Borders and the Changing Boundaries of Knowledge*, edited by Inga Brandell, Maria Carlson and Önver Cetrez (Swedish Research Institute, 2015).
- Fuccaro, Nelida. “Reading Oil as Violence: Kirkuk and Its Oil Conurbation, 1927–58.” In *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, edited by Ulrike Freitag et al., 222–242. New York: Berghahn, 2015.
- Fuccaro, Nelida. *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama Since 1800*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

- Fuccaro, Nelida. "Preface: Urban Studies in the Arabian Peninsula: 6 Thoughts on the Field." *Arabian Humanities* 2 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.2530>.
- Fuccaro, Nelida. "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain: Consumerism, Leisure, and Public Communication in Manama and the Oil Camps, 1932–1960s," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2072721>.
- Gengler, Justin J. "Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf." In *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, edited by Lawrence G. Potter. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Gharīb, Khālid b. Jābir. *Kitāb Miṭṭaqat al-Aḥsā' 'Abra Aṭwār al-Tārikh*. Dār al-Waṭāniyya al-Jaḍida al-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1986.
- Ghrawi, Claudia. "A Tamed Urban Revolution: Saudi Arabia's Oil Conurbation and the 1967 Riots." In *Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Nelida Fuccaro. Stanford University Press, 2016.
- Ghrawi, Claudia. 2015. "In the Service of the Whole Community? Civic Engagement in Saudi Arabia (1950s–1960s)." *Jadaliyya*, May 6. Accessed July 25, 2017, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21479/in-the-service-of-the-whole-community-civic-engage>.
- Ghrawi, Claudia. "Structural and Physical Violence in Saudi Arabian Oil Towns, 1953–56." In *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition From Empire to Nation State*, edited by Ulrike Freitag et al. Berghahn, 2015.
- Goldberg, Jacob. "The Shi'i Minority in Saudi Arabia." In *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, edited by Juan Ricardo and Nikki R. Keddie. Yale University Press, 1986.
- Haddad, Fanar. "'Sectarianism' and its Discontents in the Study of the Middle East." *Middle East Journal* 71, no. 3 (2017): 363–382. <https://doi.org/10.3751/71.3.12>.
- Halliday, Frank. *Arabia Without Sultans*. Penguin, 1979.
- Hamad, Turki, al-. *Adama. A Novel*. Translated by Robin Bray. Saqi Books, 2003.
- Hamad, Turki, al-. "Political Order in Changing Societies: Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context." PhD diss., University of California, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.25549/usctheses-c36-375624>.
- Ḥamūd, 'Abd al-Karīm. "Sharikat Arāmkū wa-l-'Ummāl: al-Thawrat al-'Ummāl." In *Al-Haraka al-Taḥarruriyya fī al-Hijaz wa Najd 1901–1973*, edited by Adnān 'Aṭṭar. Ma'tuq Ikhwān, 1973.
- Harrison, Ann M. *A Tool in His Hand*. Friendship Press, 1958.
- Harrison, Faye V. *Decolonizing Anthropology. Moving Forward Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Association of Black Anthropologists/American Anthropological Association, 1991.
- Harrison, Paul. W. *The Arab at Home*. Cromwell, 1924.
- Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Verso, 2013.

- Ḥassan, Ḥamza, al-. *Al-ʿAmal al-Maṭlabī fī Miṣrat ʿĀm: Tajrūbat ʿAmal Wujahāʾ al-Shiʿa fī al-Saʿūdīyya*. Dār al-Multaqā, 2010.
- Ḥassan, Ḥamza, al-. *Al-Shiʿa fī al-Mamlaka al-ʿArabīyya al-Saʿūdīyya*. 2 vols. Mūʿassasāt al-Baqīʿ li-l-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 1993.
- Hashemi, Nader and Danny Postel. "Introduction: The Sectarianization Thesis." In *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel. Hurst&Company, 2017.
- Haṭlānī, Ibrāhīm al-. *Al-Shiʿa al-Saʿūdīyyūn. Qarāʾa Tārīkhīyya wa Sīyāsīyya li-Namādhij Maṭlabīyya*. Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 2009.
- Hathloul, Saleh A. al- and Saleh Anis-ur-Rahmaan. "The Evolution of Urban and Regional Planning in Saudi Arabia." *Ekistics* 52, no. 312 (1985): 206–212. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43620712>.
- Heghammer, Thomas and Stéphane Lacroix. "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi Revisited," *IJMES* 39, no. 1 (2007): 103–22. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743807002553>.
- Hein, Carola. "Space, Time, and Oil. The Global Petroleumscape." In *Oil Spaces. Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*, edited by Carola Hein. Routledge, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367816049>.
- Hertog, Steffen. *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*. Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Hicke, Carol. *American Perspectives of Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Producing Company, 1930s to 1980s: Oral History Transcript*. University of California, 1995.
- Hirz, Muḥammad ʿAlī al-. "Al-Qabāʾil wa-l-Usar al-Aḥsāʾīyya al-Muhājira ilā al-ʿIrāq," *Majallat al-Wāḥa* 34 (2011), <https://web.archive.org/web/20210619063608/http://www.alwahamag.com/?act=artc&id=1345>.
- Huber, Matthew T. *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom and the Forces of Capital*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Humaidan, Saleh H., "Policies and Management Guidelines for Optimum Resource Utilization at al-Hasa Irrigation and Drainage Project, Saudi Arabia." PhD diss., Oklahoma City, State University, 1980.
- Ibrahim, Fouad. *The Shiʿis of Saudi Arabia*. Saqī, 2006.
- Ibrāhīm, Nabīh, al-. "Waḳf al-Rāmīs: Al-Namūdhaj Yuḥtadhā fī al-Awqāf al-Ijtimāʾīyya." *Wāḥat al-Qatīf* 9 (2004). Accessed July 14, 2017. <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=145> [site discontinued].
- International Crisis Group. *Scramble for the Congo*. ICG, 2000.
- International Crisis Group. *God, Oil and Country*. ICG, 2002.
- Ismail, Raihan. *Saudi Clerics and Shiʿa Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Jabr, Mohammed A. al-. "Agriculture in al-Hasa Oasis, Saudi Arabia: A Review of Development." PhD diss., Durham University, 1984. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7146/>.

- Jones, Toby C. "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery: Modernity, Marginalization, and the Shi'a Uprising of 1979." *IJMES* 38, no. 2 (2006): 213–33. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743806412320>.
- Jones, Toby C. *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia*. Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Jreisat, Jamil E. *Politics Without Process: Administrative Development in the Arab World*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997.
- Jungers, Frank. *The Caravan Goes On. How Aramco and Saudi Arabia Grew Up Together*. Medina Publishing, 2013.
- Kechichian, Joseph A. *Succession in Saudi Arabia*. Palgrave, 2001.
- Kelly, John B. *Desert Dispute: The Diplomacy of Boundary-Making in South-East Asia*. edited by Saul B. Kelly. 3 vols. Gerlach Press, 2020.
- Khulaitit, Walaa, al-. "The Mythical Fort: The Role of Myth in the Construction of Shia Identity in Qatif, Saudi Arabia." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 24, no. 1 (2012): 25–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41945760>.
- Khunayzī, 'Abd al-Muhsin b. al-Shaykh 'Alī, al-. "Aḏwā' 'Alā Malaf (Waḳ'at al-Sharba)" *Majallat-l-Wāḥa* 3 (2007). Accessed February 22, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210419193401/http://www.alwahamag.com/?act=artc&id=91>.
- Khūwayṭir, 'Uthmān Ḥ al-. *Risālat Ilā 'Aḥfādī*. Dār al-Kifāḥ li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2008 o. 2009.
- Kostiner, Joseph. *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916–1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Krimly, Rayed K. "The Political Economy of Rentier States. A Case Study of Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era 1950–1990." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1993. ProQuest.
- Kuklick, Henrika. *The Savage Within. The Social History of British Anthropology 1885–1945*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Lackner, Helen. *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*. Ithaca Press, 1979.
- Lacroix, Stéphane. *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*. Translated by George Holoch. Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Lawless, Richard I. and Ian J. Seccombe. "Travailleurs Migrants et Débuts de l'Industrie Pétrolière Dans le Golfe Arabe, 1930–1950." *Maghreb-Mashrek* 112, no. 2 (1986): 22–42.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *La Production de l'Espace*. Anthropos, 1974.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Die Revolution der Städte*. Translated by Ulrike Roeckl. List, 1972.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Urban Revolution*. Translated by Robert Bononno. Minnesota University Press, 2003.
- Lewis, Diane. "Anthropology and Colonialism." *Current Anthropology* 14, no. 5 (1973): 581–602, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2741037>.

- Lorimer, John G. and Lockington Birdwood. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*. Vol. 1, Historical. Reprint. Farnborough Gregg, 1970.
- Lorimer, John G. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia*. Vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical. Superintendent Government Printing, 1908. Qatar Digital Library. Accessed May 12, 2016. http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023515711.0x00000d.
- Louër, Laurence. "Shi'i Identity Politics in Saudi Arabia." In *Religious Minorities in the Middle East. Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation*, edited by Anh N. Longva and Anne S. Roald. Brill, 2012.
- Louër, Laurence. *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*. Columbia University Press, 2008.
- Luciani, Giacomo. "The Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State and Democratization." In *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, edited by Ghassan Salamé. I.B. Tauris, 1994.
- Lynch, Marc. "The Entrepreneurs of Cynical Sectarianism." *POMEPS Studies* 4 (2013): 3–6. Accessed July 21, 2017. <https://pomeps.org/2013/11/14/the-politics-of-sectarianism/>.
- Makdisi, Ussama. 2017. "The Mythology of the Sectarian Middle East," *Papers of the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy*, 13 February, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/mythology-sectarian-middle-east>.
- Makdisi, Ussama. *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. University of California Press, 2000.
- Mandaville, Jon E. "The Ottoman Province of al-Hasā in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 3 (1970): 486–513. <https://doi.org/10.2307/597091>.
- Matthiesen, Toby. "Center-Periphery Relations and the Emergence of a Public Sphere in Saudi Arabia: The Municipal Elections in the Eastern Province, 1954–1960." *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2014): 320–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.947242>.
- Matthiesen, Toby. "Migration, Minorities, and Radical Networks: Labour Movements and Opposition Groups in Saudi Arabia, 1950–1975." *International Review of Social History* 59, no. 3 (2014): 473–504. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859014000455>.
- Matthiesen, Toby. "Saudi Arabia and the Cold War." In *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed. Hurst & Co, 2018.
- Matthiesen, Toby. "Sectarianization As Securitization. Identity Politics and Counter-Revolution in Bahrain." In *Sectarianization. Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Matthiesen, Toby. *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*. Stanford University Press, 2013.

- Matthiesen, Toby. "Shi'i Historians in a Wahhabi State: Identity Entrepreneurs and the Politics of Local Historiography in Saudi Arabia." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743814001433>.
- Matthiesen, Toby. *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- McMurray, Scott. *Energy to the World: The Story of Saudi Aramco*. 2 volumes. Aramco Services Company, 2011.
- Ménoret, Pascal. *Royaume d'Asphalte: Jeunesse Saoudienne en Révolte*. Éditions La Découverte, 2016.
- Ménoret, Pascal. *The Saudi Enigma* (Zed Books, 2005).
- Mdaires, Falah al-. "Shi'ism and Political Protest in Bahrain." *DOMES* 11, no. 1 (2002): 20–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-3606.2002.tb00440.x>.
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Carbon Democracy. Political Power in the Age of Oil*. Verso, 2011.
- Mubarak, Faisal A. al-. "Oil, Urban Development and Planning in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia: The Case of the Arab American Oil Company in the 1930s–1970s." *King Saud University Journal of Architecture and Planning* 11 (1999): 31–51.
- Muslim, Muḥammad S. al-. *Sāḥil al-Dhahab al-Aswad: Dirāsa Tārīkhīyya Insāniyya li-l-Minṭaqat al-Khalīj al-'Arabī*. Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayat, 1960.
- Naim, Mashary A. "The Dynamics of a Traditional Arab Town: the Case of Hofūf, Saudi Arabia." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies: Papers from the thirty-seventh meeting of the Seminar of Arabian Studies held in London, 17–19 July 2003*, 34 (2004): 193–207. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41223817>.
- Nakash, Yitzhak. *Reaching for Power. The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton University Press, 2006).
- Nakib, Farah, al-. *Kuwait Transformed. A History of Oil and Urban Life*. Stanford University Press, 2016.
- Nazir, Khalid, al-. 2017. "Al-Sayyid Ibrahim b. Sayyid Muḥammad al-Hāshim." *Al-Riyāḍ*, May 23. Accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.alriyadh.com/296171>.
- Nazir, Khalid, al-. 2017. "Min Nawādir al-Wathā'iq ... Min Risā'il al-Malik 'Abd al-'Azīz ilā Rijalat-l-Aḥsā': Al-Saīd Ibrahim b. al-Saīd Muḥammad al-Hāshim." *Al-Riyāḍ*, May 30. Accessed May 23, 2022, <http://ads.alriyadh.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>
- Neo, Ric. "Religious Securitisation and Institutionalised Sectarianism in Saudi Arabia." *Critical Studies on Security* 8, no. 3 (2020): 203–222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2020.1795479>.
- Niblock, Tim. "Social Structure and the Development of the Saudi Arabian Political System." In *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, edited by Tim Niblock, 75–105. Croom Helm, 1982.
- Nicholls, Walter J. "The Urban Question Revisited: The Importance of Cities for Social Movements." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 4 (2008): 841–859. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00820.x>.

- Niebuhr, Carsten. *Beschreibung von Arabien. Aus Eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande Selbst Gesammelten Nachrichten*. Breitkopf und Sohn, 1772.
- Nimr, Muḥammad, al-. "Qudāt al-Qaṭīf fi Dhākira Naṣrallāh." *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf* 21 (2006). Accessed December 13, 2016. <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=1224&print=1> [site discontinued].
- Nimr, Muṣīr, al-. "Inṭilāq Mazād 'Dānat al-Rāmis' bi-Bay'a Awwal Qit'a bi 1530 Riyāl li-l-Mitr," *Al-Riyād* (Dhū al-Ḥijja 19, 2015), accessed July 23, 2017, <http://www.alriyadh.com/1111124>.
- Nuaim, Mishary A., al-. "State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation: The Dialectics of Two Modes of Production and the Role of the Merchant Class, Saudi Arabia, 1902–1932." PhD diss., University of California, 1987. ProQuest.
- Okruhlik, Gwenn. "Debating Profits and Political Power. Private Business and Government in Saudi Arabia." PhD diss., University of Texas, 1992.
- Okruhlik, Gwenn. "Excluded Essentials: The Politics of Ethnicity, Oil, and Citizenship in Saudi Arabia." In *The Global Color Line: Racial and Ethnic Inequality and Struggle from a Global Perspective*, edited by Pinar Batur and Joe R. Feagin. Jai Press, 1999.
- Pakka, Kyle L. *The Energy Within: A Photo History of the People of Saudi Aramco*. Saudi Aramco Oil Company, 2006.
- Parssinen, Jon and Kaizir Talib. "A Traditional Community and Modernization: Saudi Camp, Dhahran." *Journal of Architectural Education* 35, no. 2 (1982): 14–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.1982.10758293>.
- Parssinen, Jon and Kaizir Talib. "The Development of Dhahran (Saudi Camp) as a Community." In *The Arab City: Its Character and Islamic Cultural Heritage*, edited by Ismail Serageldin and Samir El-Sadek. Arab Urban Development Institute/Arab Towns Organization, 1982.
- Philby, St. John. "Across Arabia: From the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea," *The Geographical Journal* 56, no. 6 (1920): 446–463. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1780467>.
- Philby, St. John. *Saudi Arabia*. Ernest Benn Limited, 1955.
- Philipp, Hans-Jürgen. *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Oase al-Hasa (Saudi-Arabien), Band 1: Historischer Verlauf und Traditionelles Bild*. Sozialökonomische Schriften zur Agrarentwicklung 23. ssip-Schriften Breitenbach, 1976.
- Pledge, Thomas A., Dialdin, Ali M. and Muhammad A. Tahlawi. *Saudi Aramco and Its People: A History of Training*. Saudi Arabian Oil Company, 1998.
- Potter, Lawrence G. "Introduction." In *The Persian People in Modern Times. People, Ports and History*, edited by Lawrence G. Potter. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Potter, Lawrence G. *Society in the Persian Gulf: Before and After Oil*. Georgetown University Qatar Occasional Paper 18. Center for International and Regional Studies, 2017.
- Potts, D.T. "The Archaeology and Early History of the Persian Gulf." In *The Persian Gulf in History*, edited by Lawrence G. Potter. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230618459_2.

- Qarīnī, Muḥammad b. Mūsā, al-. *Al-Idāra al-'Uthmāniyya fī al-Mutasarrifiyya al-Aḥsā: 1288–1331 h./1871–1913 m.* Dārat-l-Malik 'Abd al-'Azīz, 2006.
- Qash'amī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Razāq, al-, (ed.). *Al-Kitāb al-Sa'ūdīyūn fī Majala Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn, 1369–1373h.* Dār Mafrudāt li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2010.
- Qa'ūd, Ṣāliḥ M., al-. *Ra's Tanūra*, Hadha Balādnā 28. Wakālat Shū'ūn al-Shabāb al-Idāra al-'Āma li-l-Nashātāt al-Thaqāfiyya, 1991.
- Ramos, Stephen J. "Mapping the Persian Gulf Petroleumscape. The Production of Territory, Territoriality and Sovereignty." In *Oil Spaces. Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*, edited by Carola Hein. Routledge, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367816049>.
- Rasheed, Madawi, al-. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Rasheed, Madawi, al-. "Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London." In *Transnational Connections in the Arab Gulf*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed. Routledge, 2005.
- Rasheed, Madawi, al-. "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution. Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring." In *Sectarianization. Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Rasheed, Madawi, al-. "The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia: A Minority in Search of Cultural Authenticity." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (2007): 121–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530199808705657>.
- Raymond, André. "Urban Networks and Popular Movements in Cairo and Aleppo (End of the 18th–Beginning of the 19th Centuries)." In *The Proceedings of the International Conference of Urbanism and Islam (ICUIT), October 22–28*, vol. 2, edited by Research Project 'Urbanism and Islam.' Middle Eastern Culture Center, 1989.
- Reichert, Horst. *Die Verstädterung der Eastern Province von Saudi-Arabien und Ihre Konsequenzen Für die Regional- und Stadtentwicklung*. Schriftenreihe des Städtebaulichen Instituts der Universität Stuttgart 10. Karl Krämer, 1980.
- Rizk Khoury, Dina. "Violence and Spatial Politics Between the Local and Imperial: Baghdad, 1778–1810." In *The Spaces of the Modern City. Imaginaries, Politics, and Every Day Life*, edited by Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Sa'īd, Nāṣir, al-. "Ḥaqā'iq 'An al-Qasr al-Sa'ūdī." *Markaz al-Ḥaramāin li-l-'Ilām al-Islāmī* 49 (1988). Accessed April 15, 2014. http://www.almktaba.com/book_ged/book12.html.
- Sa'īd, Nāṣir, al-. *Tārīkh Āl Sa'ūd*. Manshūrāt Ittīḥād Sha'b al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya, ca. 1979.
- Said Zahlan, Rosemarie. *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates. A Political and Social History of the Trucial States*. Routledge, 1978.
- Salamé, Ghassan. "Political Power and the Saudi State." In *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, edited by Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury and Mary C. Wilson, University of California Press, 1993.

- Satpayev, Dossym and Tolganay Umbetaliyeva. "The Protests in Zhanaozen and the Kazakh Oil Sector: Conflicting Interests in a Rentier State." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 122–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2015.03.005>.
- Sawyer, Suzana. "Fictions of Sovereignty: Of Prosthetic Petro-Capitalism, Neoliberal States, and Phantom-Like Citizens in Ecuador." *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (2001): 156–197. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlca.2001.6.1.156>.
- Sawyer, Suzana. *The Small Matter of Suing Chevron*. Duke University Press, 2022.
- Schölch, Alexander. "Zum Problem Eines Außereuropäischen Feudalismus: Bauern, Lokalherren und Händler im Libanon und in Palästina in Osmanischer Zeit." *Peripherie* 5, no. 6 (1981): 107–121.
- Secombe, Ian and Richard Lawless. "Duty Shaikhs, Subcontractors and Recruiting Agents: The Impact of the International Oil Industry on Recruitment and Employment in the Persian/Arabian Gulf." *Orient* 27, no. 2 (1986): 252–270.
- Secombe, Ian and Richard Lawless. *Work Camps and Company Towns: Settlement Patterns and the Gulf Oil Industry*. Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1987.
- Sewell, William H., Jr. "Space in Contentious Politics." In *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone and Doug McAdam. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Shamāsī, 'Abdullah Raḍī, al-. "Ta'ālīq wa Iyḍāḥ," In *Al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya Sharq al-Sa'ūdiyya 1373–1393 h/1953–1973 m*, vol. 1, Sayyid 'Alī al-Sayyid Bāqir al-'Awwāmī, 201–208. Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li-l-Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 2012.
- Shamasi, Shams M., al-. "Socio-Cultural and Climatic Architectural Strategies for a Sustainable Domestic and Neighborhood Environment in Qatif, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia." PhD. diss., University of Western Australia, 2015.
- Sharīf, Sa'īd, al-. "Min A'lām al-Qaṭīf 'Abr al-'Uṣūr – Al-Jiz' al-Thānī: Al-Qarn al-Thālith 'Ashar al-Hijrī/Al-Tāsi' 'Ashar al-Milādī." *Majallat al-Mawsim* 9–10 (2005). Accessed June 8, 2017. <http://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=491> [site discontinued].
- Shaw, John A. and David E. Long. *Saudi Arabian Modernization: The Impact of Change on Stability*. Georgetown University, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1982.
- Shaykh, 'Abdullah J. al-. *Arāmkū, al-Naḥf wa-l-Isti'mār*. Dār al-Jazīra, 1985.
- Shehabi, Omar H. al-. "Contested Modernity: Divided Rule and the Birth of Sectarianism, Nationalism, and Absolutism in Bahrain." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 333–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1185937>.
- Shehabi, Omar H. al-. 2012. "Political Movements in Bahrain: Past, Present, and Future." *Jadaliyya*, 14 February. Accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25261>.
- Sheppard, Eric, Vinay Gidwani, Michael Goldman, Helga Leitner, Ananya Roy, and Anant Maringanti, "Introduction. Urban Revolutions in the Global Age of Urbanism." In *Urban Studies* 52, no. 11 (2015): 1947–1961. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980155590>.

- Shiber, Saba G. "Report on City Growth in the Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia." In *Recent Arab City Growth – Al-Numū al-Ḥāqir lil-Madīna al-‘Arabīyya: Being Primarily an Arranged Selection of the Writer’s Articles Appearing in the Kuwait and Lebanese Press During 1959–1967*. Kuwait Government, 1967.
- Shuaiby, Abdulla M., al-. "The Development of the Eastern Province with Particular Reference to Urban Settlement and Evolution in Eastern Saudi Arabia." PhD diss., Durham University, 1976. <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1972/>.
- Shurafā', Muḥamad ‘Alī Ṣāliḥ, al-. *Al-Ḥayā al-Iqtisādīyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya min al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabīya al-Sa‘ūdīyya*. 2 vols. Muḥammad ‘Alī Shurafā', 1994.
- Simpson, Michael. "Fossil Urbanism: Fossil Fuel Flows, Settler Colonial Circulations, and the Production of Carbon Cities." *Urban Geography* 43, no. 1 (2022): 101–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1840206>.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Verso, 1989.
- Special correspondent. 1961. "The Awakening Saudis." *The Economist*, June 10.
- Speers, Peter C. Interview by Carol Hicke, *American Perspectives of Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Producing Company, 1930s to 1980s: Oral History Transcript*. University of California, 1995.
- Steinberg, Guido. "The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (al-Aḥsā'), 1913–1953." In *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, edited by Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende. Brill, 2001.
- Subay'ī, ‘Abdullah N. al-. *Al-Ḥayā al-‘Ilmiyya wa-l-Thaqāfiyya wa-l-Fikriyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya 1350–1380 h./1930–1960 m: Dirāsa fī al-Tarīkh al-Ijtimā'ī*. Tawzī' Dār al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1987.
- Subay'ī, ‘Abdullah N. al-. *Iktishāf al-Naḥḥ wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Ijtimā'īyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya, 1352–1380 h./1933–1960 m.: Dirāsa fī al-Tarīkh al-Ijtimā'ī*. Tawzī' Dār al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1987.
- Subay'ī, ‘Abdullah N. al-. *Iktishāf al-Naḥḥ wa-Atharuhu ‘Alā al-Ḥaya al-Iqtisādīyya fī al-Minṭaqa al-Sharqīyya, 1352–1380 h./1933–1960 m.: Dirāsa fī al-Tarīkh al-Iqtisādī*. Tawzī' Dār al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1987.
- Subay'ī, ‘Abdullah N. al-. *Al-Quḍā' wa-l-'Awqāf fī al-Aḥsā' wa-l-Qaṭīf wa Qaṭar Athnā' al-Ḥukum al-'Uthmānī al-Thānī, 1288–1331h/1871–1913m (Dirāsa Wathā'iyya)*. Maktaba al-Malik Faḥd al-Waṭaniyya, 1999.
- Sudairi, Mohammed T. al-. "Marx's Arabian Apostles: The Rise and Fall of the Saudi Communist Movement." *Middle East Journal* 73, no. 3 (2019): 438–457. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3751/73.3.15>.
- Suwaydān, Mahdī M. al-. 2004. "Dhakariyyāt min Mādī al-Qaṭīf." *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf*, 4 November. Accessed October 21, 2019. <http://www.qatifoasis.com/index.php?act=artc&id=399&hl=%C7%E1%D1%C7%E3%D3> [site discontinued].
- The Gulf Committee London. *Political Prisoners in the Oil States: Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iran*. The Gulf Committee, 1974.

- Tonkiss, Fran. *Space, the City and Social Theory*. Polity Press, 2005.
- Torres, Suzana B. and Marcelo J. Borges. "Labor Resistance and Accommodation among Immigrant Workers in the Oil Company Towns of Patagonia, Argentina." In *Company Towns: Labor, Space and Power Relations Across Time and Continents*, edited by Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Totten, Don E. *Erdöl in Sa'udi-Arabien*. Keyserische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959.
- Tracy, William. "Pink Gold," *Saudi Aramco World* 17, no. 5 (1960). <http://archive.aramco-world.com/issue/196605/pink.gold.htm>.
- Twitchell, Karl S. *Saudi Arabia: With an Account of the Development of Its Resources*. 3rd edition. Greenwood, 1969.
- User "haier." "Qaḍīyyat Arḍ al-Rāmis wa-Sāḥil Baḥr al-'Awwamiyya Sharq al-Su'ūdiyya fī 'Uyūn Dawliyya," *Al-Mawḥid al-'Arabī* (blog), September 25, 2002. Accessed October 9, 2017, <http://4uarab.com/vb/threads/qdi-rd-alrams-usaxhl-bxhr-alyuami-shrq-alsyudi-fi-yiun-duli.20288/>.
- Vassiliev, Alexei. *The History of Saudi Arabia*. Saqi, 2000.
- Vidal, Federico. "Al-Ḥasā," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 3rd edition. Volume 3. Brill, 1986.
- Vidal, Federico. "Date Culture in the Oasis of al-Hasa." *Middle East Journal* 8, no. 4 (1954): 417–428. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4322638>.
- Vidal, Federico. *The Oasis of al-Hasa* (Arabian American Oil Company, 1955).
- Vidal, Federico. "The Oasis of al-Hasa." PhD diss., Harvard University, 1964. Microfilm.
- Vitalis, Robert. "Aramco World: Business and Culture on the Arabian Oil Frontier." In *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Vitalis, Robert. *America's Kingdom. Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*. Updated ed. Verso, 2009.
- Vitalis, Robert. "Black Gold, White Crude: Race and the Making of the World Oil Frontier." In *The United States and the Middle East: Diplomatic and Economic Relations in Historical Perspective*, edited by Abbas Amanat. Yale Center For International and Area Studies Council on Middle East, 2000.
- Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf. 2012. "Al-Qaṭīf: Taḥāluf 'Iqāri Yubrim Ṣafqat al-Rāmis bi-Milyārayn Riyāl." *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf* (website) 29 March. Accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=2297> [site discontinued].
- Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf. "Al-Usar al-'Ulmiyya fī al-Qaṭīf." *Majallat al-Mawsim* 19, no. 3 (2004). Accessed December 13, 2016. <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=6&print=1> [site discontinued].
- Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf. 2009. "Waḳ'at al-Sharba wa Ḥiṣār al-Qaṭīf 'Ām 1909m" *Wāḥat al-Qaṭīf* (website) 2 January. Accessed December 13, 2016. <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=34> [site discontinued].
- Watts, Michael. "Antinomies of Community: Some Thoughts on Geography, Resources and Empire." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, no. 2 (2004): 195–216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-2754.2004.00125.x>.

- Watts, Michael. *Human Rights. Violence and the Oil Complex*. The United States Institute of Peace, 2004.
- Watts, Michael. "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity." In *Violent Environments*, edited by Nancy L. Peluso and Michael Watts. Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Watts, Michael. "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria." *Geopolitics* 9, no. 1 (2010): 50–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040412331307832>.
- Watts, Michael. "The Rule of Oil: Petro-Politics and the Anatomy of an Insurgency." *Journal of African Development* 11, no. 2 (2009): 27–56. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jafri-deve.11.2.0027>.
- Yizraeli, Sarah. *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia. The Crucial Years of Development, 1960–1982*. Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Zayn, 'Abbās al-. 2017. "Quwwāt Āl Su'ūd Tataḥaḍḍar li-Tadmīr al-Rāmis ba'd al-Musawwara." *Markaz al-Ḥaramayn li-l-Ilām al-Islāmī* (website), 19 August. Accessed October 21, 2019, <http://alhramain.com/index.php/news/54412>.
- Zayna, 'Alī. 2005. "Al-Zaḥf al-'Umrānī Yuhadid Arḍ al-Rāmis al-Zirā'iyya," *Majalla al-Uṣbū'iyya* (website), 6 February. Accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.qatifoasis.com/?act=artc&id=508> [site discontinued].
- Zubaida, Sami. "Urban Social Movements, 1750–1950." In *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750–1950*, edited by Peter Sluglett. Syracuse University Press, 2008.
- Zwemer, Samuel M. *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam*. Fleming, 1900.

Index

- Abqaiq 14, 82, 96, 111. *See also* Ghawar oil field; Company towns
- Abu Khamsin 53*n*77, 64, 114*m*62
- Agriculture
- Agricultural reform 157–58
 - Animal husbandry 43, 51
 - Crops 43
 - Decline 99–101, 107, 109, 155, 157–58
 - Irrigation 43, 50, 54
 - Land cultivation 43, 49, 54, 172
 - Land lease system 60, 64, 103–4
 - Land tenure 49, 54, 56, 59–60, 103–4, 155, 169, 172
 - Peasants 82–83, 99, 111–12, 154–55, 158–59, 174, 179, 196, 205
 - Self-employed farmers 49, 60, 104, 107, 155, 157–58, 170
 - Sharecropping 59, 99, 157
- Ahsa', al-
- During Ottoman rule. *See* Ottoman government in al-Ahsa'
 - During the First Saudi State 38
 - During the Second Saudi State 39
 - Governorate (until 1952) *m*1, 55, 61–66, 78–80, 87
 - Historical region 34*n*2, 34–35, 41
 - Saudi annexation (in 1913) 31, 38, 40, 61–66, 68, 71, 207
- Al 'Ajaji 46, 62, 64, 137–38
- Al 'Arfaj 54, 153
- Al 'Awwami 59, 138
- Al Faraj 54, 57–59, 108, 134, 169
- Al Jishi 54, 62*m*117, 164, 170
- Al Khalifa 65, 86
- Al Mansur 54–55
- Al Nimr 59
- Al Rashid 137
- Al Sa'ud 19, 38–39, 74, 137, 192
- Al Sa'ud, 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 'Abd al-Rahmān. *See* Ibn Sa'ud
- Al Sa'ud, Faysal b. 'Abd al-'Aziz 20, 156–57, 160, 181, 183, 191–92, 207
- Al Sa'ud, Sa'ud b. 'Abd al-'Aziz 137, 141–42, 147, 149, 156, 160, 162, 163*n*37, 166, 171, 178, 191
- Al-Mintaqa al-Sharqiyya. *See* Eastern Province
- Al-Salama. *See* Dhahran – Saudi camp
- Ambah, Salih 161–62, 193
- American University Beirut (AUB) 135
- Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) 78–79, 92
- 'Anik 52
- Arab Gulf
- Governments 209*m*14
 - Cities 11, 15, 15*n*44, 66, 112
 - Countries 8, 37, 37*n*9, 123*m*1, 124, 162, 176, 198, 209*m*14
 - Societies 7, 10–13, 16, 35, 68–69, 124, 176. *See also* Hybrid societies
- Arab nationalism 23–24, 74*m*175, 134, 144, 147, 155–56, 158, 160–61, 164, 178, 199, 204
- Arab Spring 209*m*14, 213, 216, 210*m*14
- Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco)
- Ahya'ummaliyya. *See* Aramco neighborhoods
 - Aramco neighborhoods 96, 101–103, 157, 177
- Benevolence. *See* Philanthropy
- Cafeterias 179–82
- Classification of employees 91–92, 96, 201
- Color-blindness 5
- Communication committees 141–42
- Company buses 127, 136, 141, 145, 181
- Company management 75, 92, 133–35, 141, 180, 189, 207
- Company planning 16, 76–77, 82, 85, 87, 95, 113, 198, 208
- Company training 92, 98, 112, 128, 130, 135, 157
- Corporate control 1, 92, 98, 118–19, 151, 198, 207–8
- Corporate historiography 7, 21
- Dry ration stores 133, 180, 182
- Enlightened self-interest. *See* Philanthropy
- Family housing 85, 93–94, 96–97, 100
- Government Relations Division 118, 121, 191

- Arabian American Oil Company (*cont.*)
- Identification Division 120, 151
 - Industrial security 76–77, 91, 96, 113, 117, 120–21, 187, 189, 200, 208
 - Intelligence, provision of 181, 189–90, 192, 206, 208. *See also* Surveillance of oil workers
 - Mythmaking 9, 20–21, 83, 88
 - Nationalization 7, 156, 159, 199
 - Oil concession 64, 79–80, 79*n*5, 87, 103–6, 197, 203, 208, 215. *See also* Standard Oil of California (SOCAL)
 - Oil exploration 19, 76, 81, 83, 85–86, 111. *See also* Standard Oil of California (SOCAL)
 - Oil production 81, 104, 138–39, 142, 185, 200, 208
 - Oil prospecting 78–79. *See also* Eastern and General Syndicate; Standard Oil of California (SOCAL)
 - Oil reserve 104, 214
 - Philanthropy 20–21, 23, 82, 128, 128*m*9
 - Provision of basic services 82, 88–89, 95, 103, 105, 183–84, 187
 - Research Division 28–29, 76–77, 94, 114, 118–20, 123*n*2, 171, 173
 - Social engineering 2, 10, 12, 77, 98, 200
 - Staff ranking. *See* Classification of employees
 - State within the state 21–22, 82, 116, 118, 120–21
 - Surveillance of oil workers 77, 110–13, 118–20, 130, 181, 189–90, 198, 207–8
 - US American employees 85, 88, 91, 155, 199
 - Workers' committee 134–38, 142, 144, 147
 - Workers' grievances 127, 133–35, 180
- Arabian Peninsula 20–21, 24*n*76, 37–39, 59, 62, 67, 70, 78, 137, 173–74
- Arab-Israeli war (of 1948) 115, 134
- Arab-Israeli war (of 1967) 156, 184–86, 206
- Artisans 43, 52, 125–26, 199
- 'Ashura' 124, 211
- Assertiveness of local communities 59, 74, 201, 212
- Authoritarianism 8, 10, 26, 194
- 'Awwami, Sayyid 'Ali al-Sayyid Baqir al- 26, 30, 72–73, 153, 159–60, 163, 167, 181
- 'Awwami, Shaykh Salman al- 57–59
- 'Awwamiyya, al- 57, 72, 134–35, 175, 214–16
- Baharna 35, 37*n*9
- Bahrain
- Constitutional movement 124, 143, 148, 159, 204
 - Economic links to al-Ahsa' 43, 47, 61, 65–67, 69, 80, 125
 - High Executive Committee 159, 166–67
 - Migration between Bahrain and al-Ahsa' 71–72, 80, 82, 84, 84*n*29, 86, 125
 - Oil industry 79, 92, 124–25, 139
 - Political links to al-Ahsa' 34–36, 38, 47, 69, 134–35, 148, 159, 181
 - Uprising (in 2011) 209*m*14
- Bahrain Oil Company (BAPCO) 79, 90, 124–25
- Bahrainis in al-Ahsa' 67, 69–70, 89
- Baladiyya affair (in 1923) 69
- Bani Khalid 37–39, 44, 52
- Barasti 85, 87, 94, 102
- Barrani 72–73, 72*m*168, 73*m*170, 169, 175, 210
- Ba'thism 160–61, 173, 175–76, 180, 186, 188, 190
- Bechtel 88
- Bedouin 41, 50, 56, 63, 69–70, 72–73, 93–94, 99–100, 102, 108, 110–13, 116, 118, 154, 174, 182–83, 195–96, 205
- Bedouin encampment 82–83, 85–86, 93–94, 102, 117. *See also* Thuqba, al-
- Bin Faris 54
- Bombay 66, 126*m*13
- Brokerage 61, 111
- Buhayjan, 'Abd al-Rahman al- 135, 144, 159
- Buraimi dispute 123–24, 123*n*2, 142–43, 152, 164*n*39, 203
- Businessmen 115, 118, 127, 159, 162, 164, 167, 204
- California Standard Oil Company (CASOC) 80, 83–84, 92
- Central Arabia 40, 44, 47, 56, 60, 67, 89, 109–10
- Centralized state 61–62, 64, 120
- Charity 57, 164–65, 204
- Cities as laboratories of change 6, 11–12

- Civil servants 88, 110
- Civilizing Mission 21, 179
- Coffeehouses 95, 117, 175–76
- Cohabitation 20, 74, 75*n*181, 98, 109, 113–14, 114*n*162, 195
- Colonialism 21, 76, 92, 113
- Communism 145, 147–49, 160–61, 173, 175, 180–81, 187, 191
- Company towns. *See also* Dhahran; Ra's Tanura; Abqaiq
- American camps 85, 91–92, 122, 185, 206
 - Enabling spaces 11–12, 17, 142, 198, 201
 - Family housing 85
 - Fencing 91, 122, 142, 146, 201
 - General camps. *See* Saudi camps
 - Intermediate camps 91, 151, 181, 183
 - Isolation 142, 145–46, 195, 198, 208, 210, 216–17
 - Labor camps 18, 26–27, 76–77, 83, 85, 90–98, 113, 123, 130, 135, 140, 151, 157, 177, 208. *See also* Saudi camps; Intermediate camps; American camps
 - Labor conditions 90–91, 96, 125–28, 130, 132, 141, 199
 - Planning 87
 - Saudi camps 93, 117, 122, 142, 146, 201
 - Segregation 11–12, 26, 91–92, 98, 113–14, 198–99
 - Suburban life and consumerism 12
- Conflict, causes for 3–4, 12, 16, 54, 61, 72, 74, 105, 166, 170, 172, 195–96, 205, 207, 210
- Construction business
- Construction works in the oil area 86, 88, 99, 106, 108, 111, 130, 153–54, 179, 198, 200
 - International construction firms 88–89. *See also* Bechtel; Doxiades
 - Local entrepreneurs 88, 88*n*47, 99–101
- Contractor business
- Contractor workers 93–95, 99–100, 115, 125, 129–32, 139–41, 139*n*65, 154–55, 154*n*36, 163, 199, 203, 205
 - Contractor workers' camps 115, 126–27, 140–41, 183–84
 - Contractor's Workmen' Compensation Fund 131–32
 - Sub-contractors 86, 88, 93, 99–101, 115, 125–27, 130–31, 140, 154, 154*n*36, 162, 170, 177–78, 183, 199
- Control
- Force as mode of rule 2, 10–11, 24, 116–18, 122, 136, 150–51, 178, 184, 188, 198, 211
 - Policing 16, 85, 117, 120–21, 136, 178, 183
 - Public displays of punishment 122, 151–52, 182–83, 206
 - Surveillance by Saudi authorities 2, 16, 19, 77, 130, 181
 - Urban Planning 2, 10, 19, 85–86, 92
 - Over the local communities 110, 116–22, 198, 208
- Corruption 18, 65, 162, 164, 168, 170, 176, 205–6, 211
- Cosmopolitanism 42, 109, 112
- Counter-revolution 22, 161, 192
- Critical Press 17*n*51, 126, 135, 158, 162, 177–78
- Cultural determinism 8–9, 27
- Customary court 53, 55–56, 63–64, 70–71, 105, 120, 169, 214
- Customs 55, 63
- Dammam
- Administrative capital 14, 83, 87
 - Dammam Dome 81
 - Dammam Metropolitan Area (DMA) 14, 101
 - Emirate building 137, 185
 - Municipal council 167
 - Neighborhoods 88–90, 97–98
 - Pre-oil history 43, 67, 81, 86
 - Unrest (in 1967) 185–88, 206, 210, 212, 215
 - Seaport 84, 86
 - Urban planning 87–90
 - Urbanization 82, 86–90, 97–98, 100, 106, 109, 157
- Darin 43, 52, 72
- Date culture 41–43, 51–52, 59–60, 80
- Dawasir 86, 106, 167
- Day laborers 44, 93–94, 108, 115, 130, 132, 177, 179, 183, 200, 205
- Debt 60–61, 111, 159
- Deportation 125, 127, 146, 199
- Dhahran 14. *See also* Company towns
- Airfield 81, 84–85, 114, 130, 147
 - Community development 87, 91–93, 95–98, 113
 - Company gates 122*m* 150, 201
 - Company headquarters 81, 83–84, 150

- Dhahran (*cont.*)
- Demonstrations (in 1956) 150–51, 176, 182
 - Riot (in 1967) 32, 185–88, 191–92, 206–7, 212
 - Saudi camp 91, 95–96, 185, 187, 212, 216
 - US General Consulate 81, 84, 116, 122, 185, 206
- Dhubaib, 'Abdullah 177–78
- Dir'iyya (emirate) 38–39
- Disciplining power of the state 115, 122, 141, 183, 188, 198, 201, 206, 208, 211
- Discrimination
- Racist 18, 91–92, 180, 186, 199
 - Religious 25, 35, 70, 74–76, 74*m*73, 75*m*81, 100, 103, 105, 105*m*123, 109–10, 170–72, 191–93, 197, 205, 207–8
 - Political 20, 103
 - Structural 20, 186
- Diseases
- Cholera 189
 - Malaria 50, 128
 - Smallpox 128
 - Typhoid fever 91
 - Trachoma 111, 128
- Doxiades 88
- Drought 40, 61, 80
- Dubai 87, 124
- Eastern and General Syndicate 79
- Eastern Arabia 34*n*2, 42–43, 45, 79–80, 109, 119
- Eastern Province (governorate) 1*m*1, 13–14, 77, 82–83, 87
- Ecuador 4
- Egypt
- As part of the Ottoman Empire 39
 - Mandate kingdom 81
 - Regional role 123–125, 155–57
 - Revolution (of 1952) 134
 - Suez crisis 155
- Elawy, 'Abdullah al- 49–50
- Electricity supply 89, 103, 170
- Emigration 61, 63, 71, 80
- Endowments 56–59, 63–65, 104, 107, 134, 164, 204, 214
- Environmental destruction 26, 99, 157, 195, 211, 214–15
- Exceptionalism 3, 16
- Fariq (pl. *furuq*) 46–48, 46*n*57, 52, 62, 89
- Fasi, 'A'isha al- 161
- Feudalism 61*m*11
- Fishing 52, 56, 214
- Foreign Arabs 91, 114, 120, 134, 146, 154, 155, 160, 189, 198
- Fragmenting society 2, 194, 197, 198, 201, 208–9, 212, 216–17
- Free Princes movement 156, 160
- Freshwater system 89, 103, 184
- Frontier 34, 66, 67*m*142, 123, 141–54, 123, 203
- Gardens 45, 49, 51, 55, 64, 103, 107, 152, 179
- Ghawar oil field 76–77, 76*m*83, 93, 108
- Ghosaibi, al- 40, 62, 64–66, 64*m*129, 86, 100, 105, 140
- Global petroleumscape 3, 5, 17
- Golden Triangle 14, 99
- Grand Mosque in Mecca, seizure (in 1979) 24, 26, 212
- Ha'il 137, 152–53, 174
- Hajj. *See* Pilgrimage
- Harrison, Paul W. 60
- Hasa, al- (oasis)
- Decline 35, 99–103, 198
 - Economy 43–44, 49, 99–103, 196
 - Immigration 41, 101
 - Major towns 14, 39, 41–44, 50, 101, 111. *See also* Hofuf; Mubarraz
 - Municipal council elections 168, 170
 - Pre-oil history 53, 56, 59–62, 65, 71, 74, 80–81
 - Religious heterogeneity 42, 101
 - Social geography 41, 49–50, 110–11
 - Urbanization 14, 77, 82, 87, 96, 100–102, 107, 157, 166, 170
 - Villages 39, 41, 43, 49–52, 63, 101, 106–7, 144
- Hashim, 'Abdullah al- 144, 147, 153
- Hassan, Hamza al- 211
- Hawza 'ulmiyya 59
- Health services
- Aramco hospitals 93–94, 119, 127–30, 154*m*36
 - Anti-disease campaigns 91, 128
 - Private hospitals 164
- Hijaz 88, 160, 173–74
- Hinge Urbanism 15, 17

- Historiography
 Shi'i activist writers 24–25, 29, 105,
 109–10, 211
 Of Arab Gulf states 13–14
 Modernization literature. *See*
 Development literature
 Unification literature 8
 Development literature 8, 11, 20, 79, 83
 Saudi Arabian 2–3, 7, 19–20
 Anglophone 2, 22–23
 Local historiography 8–9, 19, 24–26,
 30, 75
- Hofuf
 Capture (in 1913) 40, 197
 Modernization 102, 170, 170n68
 Najdi immigrants 40, 45–46, 61–62, 163,
 197
 Neighborhoods 44–46, 102
 Pre-oil history 44–46, 54, 61
 Religious groups 42, 46
 Saudi representative 40
 Urban expansion 45–46, 101–102, 166
 Municipality 102, 184
- Holmes, Frank 78–79
- Home Ownership Program 96–98, 101,
 106–7, 113–14, 157, 177, 198, 200, 202
- Husayniyya 53, 72, 74, 138, 159
- Hybrid societies 10, 13
- Ibn Sa'ud 40, 62–77, 65n135, 138
- Identity formation 13, 40, 42–43, 74–75,
 89–90
- Identity politics 13, 24–25, 27, 35–37, 66,
 163n37, 207
- Ikhwan 68, 70–71, 93. *See also* Wahhabis;
 Wahhabism
- Ikhwan rebellion 71–74, 78
- Iltizam. *See* Taxation
- Imperial frontier 67, 67n142, 197, 203
- Imperialism
 Anti-imperialist movements 123–24,
 134, 144, 150, 155, 185, 199, 204, 211
 British imperialism 5, 9–10, 18, 41,
 65–70, 75, 78–79, 81, 92, 123–25, 148,
 196, 207–8
 British protection 65–69, 80–81, 148, 204
 British protectorates in the Persian
 Gulf 68–71, 197, 208
 British representative in al-Ahsa' 67,
 68n144
 Capitalist imperialism 26, 77–78, 80–81,
 207
 Interference in local governance 18–19,
 74, 74n175
 US American imperialism 9–10, 18, 75,
 77–78, 81–82, 123–24, 192
- Indian trading colony in Qatif 42, 67
- Indians 114, 125–26, 130, 139, 147
- Industrial compensation
 payments 128–129, 131–132. *See also*
 Construction business – Contractor's
 Workmen' Compensation Fund
- Inflation 132
- Informal housing 90–95, 130, 158, 171, 187,
 195
- Infrastructural urbanism 15, 17
- Intermediaries 56, 167, 196. *See also* Local
 elites
- Internal politics 147, 155–57, 187
- Iran 78, 81, 134, 148, 210
- Iraq 13, 21, 24, 35, 37, 64n128, 69n148, 78–79,
 81, 104n120, 125–27, 130, 134, 173
- Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) 79, 92
- Iraqis oil workers in al-Ahsa' 126–27, 130,
 162, 199
- Islamic Revolution 209–10, 212
- Islamization of internal politics 1, 22, 24,
 160–61, 192–93, 207
- Israel 115, 155–56, 184, 186, 206
- Italians 114, 126, 199
- Ja'afari court 64. *See also* Customary court
- Jawan 105
- Jihad-tax 63. *See also* Taxation
- Jiluwi, Abdullah b. 61–62, 64, 66, 71, 115
- Jiluwi, Sa'ud b. 115–16, 121–22, 136, 140–41,
 150–51, 153, 198
- Jishi, 'Abd al-Rasul al- 145, 162
- Jubail 14, 43, 63, 80–81
- Judiciary 37, 53, 55–56, 63–64
- Juhayman, 'Abd al-Karim al- 162, 162n30
- Jum'a, 'Abdul Husayn b. 65–66
- Jum'a, Mansur b. 55, 65
- Jungers, Frank 75
- Jurisprudence 38, 120, 191, 196

- Kazakhstan 4
- Khawi (pl. Khawiyya) 117, 139
- Khobar, al-
 Commercial center 83
 Municipal council 167
 Neighborhoods 88–90, 97–98, 185
 Port 14, 84, 86
 Pre-oil history 43, 86
 Riot (in 1967) 185–88, 206, 212
 Urban Planning 87–90
 Urbanization 86–90, 93, 97–98, 106, 157
- Khunayzi, al- 57–59
- Kuwait 124–25, 153
- Labor
 Labor Department. *See* Labor Office
 Labor Exploitation 25, 38
 Labor migrants 20, 90, 100, 106, 108–10, 112, 115, 127, 139, 154–55, 158, 177, 183, 186, 198, 200, 205
 Labor Movement 12, 17, 23–24, 26, 90, 123–54, 157, 159, 177–82, 184, 199–200, 202–3, 205, 207, 212
 Labor Office 128, 134–35, 140–41, 143–47, 150, 153, 158, 163, 177–78, 180–81
 Labor protest. *See* Labor movement
 Labor recruitment 110–12, 111n147, 129, 158
 Labor struggle. *See* Labor movement
 Labor Union 17, 23, 124, 135, 141, 159, 180, 187
 Precarious labor 18, 128–33, 203, 205–6
 Saudi Labor law 128–32, 140, 154, 163, 177–79, 181–82, 187, 199
 Skilled labor 125, 199
 Strike of Saudi oil workers (in 1945) 127–30
 Strike of Saudi oil workers (in 1953) 133–41, 144, 202
 Strikes of Saudi oil workers (in 1964) 179–81
 Unemployment in the oil province 154–55, 158, 177–79, 182–83, 200
 Unskilled labor 125, 154–55, 179, 198–99
 Wage labor 49
- Land. *See also* Arabian American Oil Company – Oil concession
- Accumulation 54, 203, 208
- Amlak al-saniyya 49, 54–55, 64
- ʿAradi-l-amiriyya, al-. *See* Land-use system
- Expropriation 18, 64–66, 103–8, 155, 168–69, 171–73, 208, 211, 216. *See also* Arabian American Oil Company – Oil concession
- Land ownership 44, 49, 52, 54, 60, 64, 87, 103–6, 166, 169, 171–72, 205, 214–15
- Land registration 54, 57, 59, 64, 104–5, 105n123, 108, 166, 172, 191–92
- Land speculation 59, 65, 106–8, 195, 211
- Landholding system 37–38, 44, 49, 55–57, 64, 196
- Land-use-system 87, 97, 106, 166
- Miri. *See* State land
- Municipal land 166
- Occupancy 87
- State land 54, 65, 106, 184
- Land-Lease Program 81, 184. *See also* US military mission
- Leaflets 143, 159, 181
- Lebanon 159, 181, 134–35, 144n85
- Lefebvre, Henri 15, 195, 197–98, 202
- Literary clubs 17
- Libraries 164, 174–75
- Local elites
 Intellectual elites 23, 23n68, 124, 144, 159, 161, 164, 205, 211
 Local ‘ulama’ 13, 55–59
 Localized power 13–14, 37, 39, 53–57, 63, 65–66, 107, 196–97
 Merchant-‘ulama’ 13, 37, 39, 55
 Merchants 43–44, 59–60, 62, 67, 86, 88–89, 99, 103–4, 112, 118, 137–38, 140, 164, 167, 181, 185, 195. *See also* Merchant-‘ulama’
- Modernists 19, 30, 159–60, 165, 167–70, 204–5
- Notable families 40, 53–59, 64–65, 72–73, 108, 112, 134, 137–38, 144, 152–53, 163–65, 167, 169, 171, 203
- Notables 18, 30, 37, 49, 53–61, 66, 69, 72–73, 112–13, 144, 153, 159–65, 168, 195, 204–5, 215
- Secular elites. *See* Modernists
- Traditional leadership 17, 72, 158, 164–69, 203–5, 205n10, 207, 209

- Local elites (*cont.*)
 Urban elites 17, 27, 30, 44, 46, 49, 62, 73,
 82–83, 99, 112, 115, 125, 158–59, 167–68,
 203–4, 211
 Village sheikhs 56, 72, 117–18, 120, 211.
See also 'Umda
- Local emirs 117–18, 121, 136–38, 166–67
- Lorimer, John 41
- Madhhab (pl. madhahib)
 Akhbari 42, 42*n*37
 Hanafi 38, 42, 55, 109*n*139
 Hanbali 55, 109, 109*n*139
 Maliki 42, 63, 109*n*139
 Shafi'i 42, 109*n*139
 Shaykhi 42
 Usuli 42, 42*n*37
 Ja'afari 64
- Maladministration 162, 164, 177, 183–84,
 186, 206
- Malaise, urban 27, 109, 155, 184, 200, 205–6,
 208
- Mana', Muhammad 'Abdullah al- 126–27,
 162–64, 163*n*37
- Manama 66
- Mandate system 21, 81
- Mansur b. Jum'a 54
- Mansur, 'Abd al-Rahman al- 145, 145*n*86,
 153, 159, 162, 178, 180–81
- Manufacture 43–44, 100, 109
- Marginalization 186–87, 198, 205, 210
- Melting pot 19–20, 42
- Merchant economy. *See also* Pearling
 industry
 Economic dependency 18, 37–38, 59–61,
 61*n*11, 140, 195, 205
 Economic system 43
- Mesopotamia 68, 78
- Middle class 88–89, 115, 155, 188, 200, 205,
 210
- Militarization 156–57, 186, 198, 200, 210
- Ministry of Finance 78, 88, 104, 128,
 129–130, 134–135, 158
- Movie theaters 91, 151. *See also* Ra's Tanura
 – Cinema riot
- Mu'ammar, 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 143–45, 159–60
- Mubarraz
 Pre-oil history 44, 64–65
 Religious groups 42
- Mufti 56
- Mujtahid 59, 64, 64*n*128
- Mukhdar. *See* 'Umda
- Municipalities
 Establishment 86–88, 95
 Administrative councils 44, 54, 62
 Majlis al-baladiyya. *See* Municipal
 councils
 Majlis al-idara. *See* Administrative
 councils
 Municipal government 62, 62*n*117,
 165–66, 203–5
 Municipal councils 17, 44, 54, 100, 158,
 165–66, 169, 204
 Municipal council elections 165–69,
 204
- Mutasarrif 44, 53, 126
- Mutawwa'in. *See* Religious police
- Na'athil 44
- Najd 38, 44, 53, 67, 80
- Najdi tribes 69, 86
- Nasser, Gamal Abdel 155
- Nasserism 155–56, 180
- National Liberation Front (NLF) 159–61,
 173, 181, 188
- National Reform Front (NRF) 159
- Networks
 Translocal 13, 13*n*41, 34, 37, 47, 89–90,
 112–13, 137
 Transnational 12, 22, 24, 125, 162, 173,
 210
- Nigeria 3
- Nimr rebellion (1929–1930) 72–74, 159
- Nimr, Muhammad al- 72, 159
- Nimr, Nimr al- 216
- Nomadism 13
- Notables. *See* Local elites
- Oil
 Commodity 4–6, 17
 Oil boom 1, 20, 107, 109–10, 186
 Oil conurbation 6, 14–19, 28, 82, 98, 108,
 123, 132–33, 137, 141–43, 155–57, 161,
 164, 177, 179, 183–84, 187, 193, 195, 198,
 194–202, 205–9, 211–12, 216, 220
 Oil development 6, 12, 19, 79, 82–86, 90,
 158–59, 177
 Oil frontier 34, 123, 203

- Oil (*cont.*)
- Oil industrialization 15–16, 83–84, 129, 132, 142, 153, 164, 168–69, 198
 - Oil modernity 1, 3, 9, 12, 17, 19, 27, 83, 93, 118, 165, 205
 - Oil modernization 158–59, 166, 173, 187, 199, 205, 207, 212
 - Oil polity 15, 18, 37, 155, 203–4, 216
 - Oil towns 83, 86–90, 92, 99–101, 117, 123, 182
 - Petro-capitalism 2*n*3, 9, 19, 83, 114, 179, 185, 198, 200, 203
 - Rentier state-theory 5, 7–8
 - Saudi oil workers 14, 76–77, 85, 88, 94*n*76, 98, 110–14, 118, 127, 129–35, 141, 144, 151, 155, 174, 177, 180, 186, 188–89, 205–6
 - Transformative power 1, 5, 6, 9–10, 16–17, 19
- Oil urbanization 3–4, 15, 17, 59, 65, 72, 77, 82–122, 158, 164, 169–73, 177, 185, 187–88, 195, 198, 205, 214. *See also* Hinge urbanism; Infrastructural urbanism; Global petroleumscape
- Oman 123
- Opposition
- Arrests 1, 136, 138, 145, 149, 151–53, 159, 161, 175–76, 180–81, 185–86, 188–91, 206, 209, 214
 - Co-optation 1, 199, 206, 208
 - Grassroot opposition 2, 6, 27, 204. *See also* Popular contention
 - Insurrection 38
 - Islamist opposition 22
 - Leftist opposition 22–23, 26, 134, 159–61, 168, 192–93, 200, 211. *See also* Opposition movements
 - Local opposition 14, 25, 28, 74, 107–8, 139, 147, 151–53, 173, 207–8, 210*n*14, 216
 - Opposition Movements 1, 12, 17, 23–24, 147, 157, 159–62, 173–75
 - Political opposition. *See* Opposition movements
 - Radicalization 159–60, 199, 201, 206
 - Repression 35, 141–42, 156, 160–61, 177, 186, 188, 193, 206
 - Secular opposition. *See* Leftist opposition
 - Shi'i opposition 24, 27, 191, 207–13
- Ottoman Empire 39, 56, 66–67, 78
- Ottoman government in al-Ahsa' 37–40, 44–47, 52–57, 62, 66–68, 70, 78, 144, 165, 197
- Ottoman reforms 53–54
- Pakistanis 114, 125–26, 130, 199
- Palestinians 114–15, 127, 134, 155, 160, 185, 200
- Pan Arabism 23–24, 123–124, 147, 161, 185
- Patronage 15, 42, 59, 128, 138, 140, 199, 205
- Pearling industry
- Decline 62, 71, 80, 87, 111
 - Pearl trade 37, 43, 65–66, 87
 - Pearling as occupation 41–42, 52, 59–61, 63, 70, 86, 111
- Persians 38, 67, 69
- Personalized rule 117, 120
- Petroleum College 95, 161–62, 176, 185–86, 191, 193, 211
- Pilgrimage 68, 79, 88
- Piracy 41–42, 52, 67
- Police force 117, 120, 151, 171, 182, 184, 186, 188
- Politicization 123–25, 123*n*2, 134, 141–54, 158, 168, 206
- Popular contention. *See also* Popular politics
- Actors 18–19, 123–24, 140, 151–54, 184, 200
 - Boycott 145–46, 180
 - Brawl 18, 137, 175, 182
 - Criminality 182–83, 206
 - Demonstration 18, 146–47, 150–51, 155, 159, 171, 184–85, 211
 - Disobedience 130, 136–38, 148, 184
 - Disorder 137, 146, 156, 177, 181–82, 184, 206
 - Insubordination. *See* Disobedience
 - Insurgency 185
 - Looting 185
 - Mobilization 42*n*37, 74–75, 107, 123, 134–41, 157, 167, 175–77, 200–201, 210, 216
 - Petitioning 18, 72–73, 106, 124, 126–27, 135, 137, 145, 147–50, 166, 172, 191, 195
 - Protest 40, 42*n*37, 96, 124, 137, 152, 177–78, 181, 185, 206, 211, 214
 - Rebellion 14, 23, 72, 137, 144, 196
 - Revolt. *See* Rebellion
 - Rioting 18, 117, 151, 185–86, 206
 - Sabotage 135, 139, 143, 156, 188

- Popular contention (*cont.*)
- Strikes 125–28, 136–41, 179, 184, 211
 - Terrorism 156, 185
 - Tumult. *See* Brawl
 - Urban venues for popular contention 17, 158, 174–77, 200–201, 206
 - Vandalism 146
- Popular politics 18*n*52, 25*n*78, 27, 123–54, 158. *See also* Popular contention
- Poverty 115, 133, 179, 186, 195, 205–7, 211–12
- Primordialism 5, 9, 74–76, 74*n*76, 119, 207
- Privy council 62
- Provincial government 84–85, 106, 116–22, 136–37, 166, 177, 198, 207
- Pumping station. *See* Trans Arabian Pipeline (Tapline)
- Qada' (pl. aqdiyya) 53
- Qadi (pl. quda) 55–59, 63–65, 85, 145, 169
- Qa'im maqam 53, 61
- Qal'awi 72–73, 72*n*168, 73*n*170, 169, 175
- Qaramite state 35
- Qasim 61, 135, 137, 145, 164, 174–75
- Qasr al-'Abid 44, 153
- Qatif (oasis)
- Decline in local importance 86–87, 99–103, 198
 - Economy 43, 66, 87, 99–103, 196
 - Pre-oil history 53, 57–61, 65–67, 71–74, 80, 86, 208
 - Protest (in 1996) 214–15
 - Siege (in 1908) 69–70
 - Social geography 41–42, 52
 - Suburbs. *See* Villages
 - Uprising (of 2011–2020) 209*n*14, 209, 211
 - Uprising (of 1979/1980) 24, 26, 209–13, 210*n*14, 211–12, 216
 - Urbanization 14, 96, 101, 106–7, 110, 114, 157, 166, 169–70, 214
 - Villages 41, 47–49, 52, 54, 57, 169, 171–73, 210
- Qatif (town)
- Capture (in 1913) 40, 63, 65–66, 197
 - Modernization 102–3, 169–71
 - Municipal council 167, 169, 172
 - Municipality 108, 170–72
 - Neighborhoods 47–48
 - Pre-oil history 47, 54–55, 65–66
 - Qal'at al-Qatif 41, 47, 53, 72–73, 102–3, 138, 169, 175, 211, 212, 216
 - Urban expansion 107–8, 166, 169
 - Qatif port 47, 55, 63, 67, 84
 - Qatif treaty (of 1915) 68
 - Qatifi activists 148, 152–53, 157, 159, 163, 163*n*37, 165, 167–70, 174–75, 180. *See also* Local elites – Modernists; Local elites – Traditional leadership
 - Qatifi pleas for British protection 65–66, 71–72, 148*n*105, 197
 - Qudaih 171–72
 - Racism 91–92, 92*n*68
 - Radio broadcasts 134, 140, 175
 - Rahima (landed property) 105–6
 - Rahima (municipality). *See* Ra's Tanura – Saudi camp
 - Railroad 84, 130
 - Ramis, al- 57–59, 107–8, 134, 214–16
 - Ra's Tanura. *See also* Company towns
 - Cinema riot (of 1956) 151–54, 157
 - Refinery 14, 83–84, 111, 114, 125
 - Saudi camp 14, 91, 97
 - Rayyis, 'Abd al-Rassak al- 140
 - Real estate projects 215–16
 - Red Line Agreement 78–79
 - Regional conflict 18, 27, 78, 115, 123, 142–43, 147–57, 184–86, 200, 203–4, 206
 - Reichert, Horst 83, 83*n*25, 195
 - Religious affiliation 41, 46, 113–14, 118–19, 124, 198, 207–8, 212–13
 - Religious freedom 39–40, 55, 70–71, 74, 212
 - Religious leadership 55
 - Religious police 183
 - Research interest 27, 76–77
 - Resistance. *See* Opposition
 - Resource extraction 21, 26, 99, 104
 - Revolutionary Students Vanguard 175–76
 - Rif'a 44, 64–65
 - Riyadh 20*n*59, 23, 28, 82, 84, 88, 110, 112, 173–75
 - Rural migrants 155, 158, 200, 205
 - Safavid administration in Bahrain 38
 - Saffar, Hassan al- 210
 - Safwa 80, 97, 101–3, 105, 152, 169, 175
 - Sa'id, Nasir al- 135–37, 152–54, 159, 174, 185, 186*n*124

- Salihiyya 45–46
 Salinization 35, 43, 50–51
 Sanabis 71, 80, 159
 Sanitation 62
 Sanjak 53
 Saudi government
 Consultative Council 106, 163*n*37
 Council of Ministers 167, 178
 Development of local
 communities 84–88, 90, 94–95, 100, 179
 Government officials 103–4, 155, 162, 174, 178, 180–81, 185, 189, 205–6
 Majlis al-Shura. *See* Consultative Council
 Paternalism 75, 96, 118, 154, 188, 123–24, 127–28, 141, 154, 188, 199, 203
 Policies in the oil area 104–5, 109–10, 120–24, 141, 146, 172, 175, 207, 209, 212
 Political reforms 156–57, 160
 Regulations 106, 126–28, 151
 Religious conservatism 156, 192–93
 Saudi military
 Abortive coup d'état (in 1969) 161, 188
 Cordoning off of local towns 189, 193, 206, 209, 216–17
 Mujahidin 146
 Riot control force in the Eastern Province 188
 Saudi air force 85, 136
 Saudi irregular forces. *See* Mujahidin
 Saudi National Guard 93, 138, 156–57, 182, 186, 188
 Saudi soldiers 117, 136, 173, 186, 188
 Stationing of the Saudi military forces in the oil area 117, 136, 139, 142–43, 146, 156–57, 177, 186, 209, 216
 Sayhat 80, 94, 97, 101–3, 169, 175
 Schools. *See* Students
 Second World War 81, 90
 Sectarianism
 As analytical concept 74–75, 74*n*175
 Cross-sectarian movements 148, 173, 191, 194, 206–8, 207*n*11, 209*n*14, 213
 Sectarian divide 27–28, 41–42, 46, 50, 52, 75, 77, 115, 118–19, 164, 169–73, 196, 207–8
 Sectarian identity 9, 191–93, 207, 210
 Sectarian interpretations 18, 25, 69–70, 75–76, 113–14, 119, 123, 148, 169–73, 170*n*69, 190, 192, 196–98, 204, 208
 Sectarian relations 113–14, 114*n*62, 163–64, 167, 193
 Sectarian strategies 69, 197, 207, 209, 210, 210*n*14
 Sectarian strife 18, 25, 27, 69–71, 74, 124, 192, 196–97, 204, 207
 Sectarianization 19, 74–75, 74*n*176, 192–94, 206–9, 209*n*14, 210, 210*n*18, 212–13
 Securitization 194, 208–9, 209*n*14, 212–13
 Sedentarization 41, 50, 52
 Sedentary culture 13, 34
 Segregation
 Company towns 26, 113–14, 142, 198–99
 Traditional settlements 46, 46*n*56, 50, 52–53, 113–14, 196
 Sewage 89, 103, 184
 Shammar, al- 137, 152–53
 Shanty towns 83, 85, 93–95, 106, 115
 Shari'a court 53, 55, 104–6, 215
 Shi'ism
 Exclusion of Saudi Shi'a 193–4, 207
 Historical roots 13, 35
 Shi'i minority 35, 37*n*9, 42, 50, 63–65, 70–71, 74, 100, 103, 109–10, 114, 119, 189–94, 212
 Shi'i peasants 49–50, 99, 214
 Shirazi, Muhammad al- 210
 Shiraziyyun 211
 Six-Day War. *See* Arab-Israeli war (of 1967)
 Slaves 44, 44*n*44
 Social mobility 92, 98–100, 113, 205
 Socio-spatial geography 28, 40–46, 49–50, 52, 82–83, 108–15, 140, 164, 170, 196, 198, 202
 Solidification of Saudi rule 62, 117
 Sources
 Archival 26–30
 Autobiographies 23*n*68, 29–30
 Corporate 28–30
 Imperial 28, 69–70
 Interviews 28–29
 Local newspapers 29
 Memoirs 28–30
 Ottoman 42

- Sources (*cont.*)
- Pamphlets 23*n*68, 29
 - Source criticism 29–30, 50, 50*n*67, 76–77, 110–11, 110*n*145
 - South Asians 91, 114–15, 120, 139, 139*n*65, 154, 198–99
 - Spatial strategies 201–2
 - Speers, Peter 180
 - Sports clubs 17, 174–75, 191, 201
 - Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) 79–81
 - State building. *See* State consolidation
 - State consolidation 22–23, 65, 70–71, 82
 - State formation under the Al Sa'ud 14, 17, 19, 35–37, 66, 70, 74–75, 78–81, 197, 207
 - Stratification of society 201
 - Street widening 62
 - Students 174–76, 185–86, 189, 191
 - Subaltern
 - Class 15, 18, 27, 115, 125, 154–56, 158–59, 179, 182–83, 200, 206
 - Unrest 18, 22–23, 158–59, 177, 182–88, 200, 205–6
 - Sulayman, Abdullah 78–79
 - Sunayd, 'Abd al-'Aziz al- 134, 144, 159, 162, 181
 - Sunnism
 - Historical roots 13
 - Sunni tribes 41–42
 - Sunni villages 41–42, 50–52, 72, 101, 101*n*06, 111, 172
 - Suwaylim, Muhammad b. 61, 72–73
 - Tali'a, al- 144–47, 153
 - Tapu system 54
 - Tarut 41, 43, 52, 61, 100
 - Taxation
 - Anti-taxation struggles 40, 63, 72–73, 80, 116, 184
 - Census 40
 - Iltizam. *See* Tax farming
 - Tax collection 39, 56, 62–63, 102, 116
 - Tax farming 39, 55, 173*n*76, 172*n*76
 - Thuqba, al- 93, 95
 - Trade 43–44, 51, 66–68, 86, 109, 113
 - Trans Arabian Pipeline (Tapline) 14–15, 111–12, 130
 - Tribal date groves 52, 70
 - Tribal settlements 14
 - Trucial Coast 67–68, 68*n*146, 149
 - Turayqi, Abdullah al- 156, 160
 - Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) 78
 - Twitchell, Karl 20
 - 'Ulayan, Sulayman al- 144, 164
 - 'Umda 56, 61–62, 118, 167. *See also* Local elites
 - 'Umm al-Sahik 52, 72
 - 'Unayza 56, 112
 - Underdevelopment 18, 26–27, 28*n*89, 75, 82–83, 110, 142, 168, 187, 198, 207, 211
 - Union of the Sons of the Arabian Peninsula 174, 185, 186*n*124
 - United Arab Republic (UAR) 140, 155
 - University of Petroleum and Minerals 95–97
 - 'Uqair port 40, 44, 51, 55, 67, 84
 - Urban governance 16, 39
 - Urban modernization projects 62, 166, 169, 203–5
 - Urban Revolution 14–28, 154, 158, 177, 182, 185–88, 195, 197–98, 200–206, 208, 216
 - Urban squatting. *See* Informal housing
 - Urban-rural rivalry 18, 72–73, 169, 175, 196. *See also* Qal'awi; Barrani
 - Urban-rural ties 40, 43, 49, 88, 196
 - US military mission 81, 84–85, 147, 185, 142, 185
 - 'Utayshan, Turki al- 145–47, 153
 - Vidal, Federico S. 28–29, 75–77
 - Vilayet 53
 - Violence. *See also* Control – Force as mode of rule
 - As element of oil urbanization 3–4, 10–11, 18, 26, 98, 117–18, 154, 171, 182–86, 201, 206
 - At the hands of the Ikhwan. *See* Sectarian strife
 - State violence 160, 178, 182, 186, 188, 210–11, 216
 - Wage work 107, 110, 154–55
 - Wahhab, Muhammad b. 'Abd al- 38
 - Wahhabis in al-Ahsa' 42, 63, 70–71, 75, 197, 207
 - Wahhabism 35, 38, 68*n*146, 68–72, 192
 - Waqf (pl. awqaf). *See* Endowments
 - World financial crisis (1929–1930) 62, 71, 79

Yemen 155–56, 184–85
Yemenis 90, 155, 160, 185, 200
Youth 175, 206

Zakat 63, 116. *See also* Taxation
Zayd, Salih Sa'ad al- 134, 144, 159, 181

This book discusses popular contention in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province (until 1952 the governorate of al-Ahsa') under the aegis of petro-capitalism. The notion of urban revolution takes on a double meaning, namely the rapid urbanisation which broke with the region's urban past and destroyed the oasis environment and merchant economy, and the types of resistance and rebellious fervour that were triggered by the concentration of labour and industrial production in the new urban centres. The book uses archival sources from the United States, Great Britain, and Saudi Arabia as well as accounts of Saudi oil workers, activists, and other contemporaries.

CLAUDIA GHRAWI is an independent researcher who has worked at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin (2011–2021). She studied history in Potsdam and Berlin and is co-editor of *Claiming and Making Muslim Worlds: Religion and Society in the Context of the Global* (De Gruyter 2021).

ISSN: 1385-3376
brill.com/seps

