

**Migratory Pipelines:
Labor and Oil in the Arabian Sea**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology and History)
in the University of Michigan
2015

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DEDICATION

For Evelyn

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many people for their support, friendship, and critical input while I worked on this project. I was privileged to be supervised at the University of Michigan by a supportive committee who were crucial to my intellectual development. I am thankful to my committee for their guidance, time, and energy – they are exemplary scholars who provide much inspiration and motivation. I thank David William Cohen for his mentorship, close readings, and discussions regarding the power and politics of knowledge. I thank Juan Cole for his support and suggestions, and his encouragement to think about the Middle East and South Asia together was integral to this dissertation. I thank my co-chairs, Matthew Hull and Farina Mir, for their guidance, readings of multiple drafts, and patient insights. Matthew Hull's efforts and time in helping me clarify my ideas was invaluable to this dissertation and my academic development overall. Farina Mir's detailed feedback and encouragement to think about larger historiographic arguments greatly strengthened this dissertation and I will carry her insights to my future projects. In addition to my committee, faculty at both the University of Chicago and the University of Michigan helped me develop and frame this project through courses, guided readings, and conversations. In particular, I'd like to thank Dipesh Chakrabarty, Fernando Coronil, Geoff Eley, Paul Johnson, John Kelly, Conrad Kottak, Alaina Lemon, Claudio Lomnitz, Barbara Metcalf, Eric Mueggler, Stephan Palmie, Andrew Shryock, and Julie Skurski. I thank Bali Sahotra for planting an idea that, after almost a decade and some surprising twists,

eventually bloomed into the research topic for this dissertation. I also thank Diana Denney and Kathleen King who have provided so much support for me at the University of Michigan; they have gone above and beyond their job description and enriched my education in countless ways.

Over the course of my research and writing, I was provided generous support from the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award and, at the University of Michigan, the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History, the Center for South Asian Studies, the Rackham Graduate School, and the Ross School of Business. I'd like to thank the libraries that were so integral to my research. In particular, I thank the staff at the National Archives of India, the Maharashtra State Archives, and the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi for all of their help and support. I also thank the institutions that gave me a home base outside of the United States. In India, Aligarh Muslim University was an excellent host, and Ali R. Fatihi provided valuable guidance. In the UAE, the Dubai School of Government provided me with institutional affiliation that included a lively community of scholars, and the staff helped me easily negotiate bureaucratic spaces.

Solid foundations in multiple languages were central to this project. I thank Maxim Romanov for his private instruction in Arabic, and I thank the Arabic teachers at the Center for Maghrib Studies in Tunis, Tunisia, for their tutelage. I am thankful for my Urdu teachers in the United States and Lucknow, India, including Fahmida Bano, Fauzia Farooqui, Wafadar Hussain, Sheba Iftikhar, Ahtesham Khan, Zeba Parveen, and Ajay Shukla. These teachers not only taught me Urdu, but also helped foster a love of the language. Syed Ali's excellent instruction in Urdu at the University of Michigan and his patience and encouragement helped refine my language skills - I am heavily indebted to him not only for language instruction, but for academic support in a myriad of ways.

My many friends and interlocutors in both India and the UAE, including Ram, Mr. Pandeya, Mr. Anthony, Rani, Alex, Mr. Kaur, Shabana, Asma, Yogesh, Mr. Ramchandra, Padma, Mr. Hussain, Mr. Shah, and so many others. I wish I were able to thank you without a pseudonym, and I hope you find this text insightful and informative. I thank the Indian associations in the UAE who welcomed me to their events and whose members invited me to their homes as though I was family. I would never have gotten my project started without the help of some NGOs based in Mumbai, and I am indebted to the kindness the workers at these NGOs for introducing me to migrants and recruiting agents. I also thank the recruiting agents who gave me access to their businesses, the companies that allowed me to interrupt their daily activities, and government workers who shared their daily work. I appreciate all for your openness, your help throughout the process, and most of all your friendship; and I hope my deep respect for you comes through in this work.

My friends, colleagues, and comrades in the USA, India, and the UAE who have read drafts, commented, and listened to me brainstorm have contributed in countless ways to this work. In particular, I'd like to thank Danna Agmon, Daniel Birchok, Robert Chidester, Heloise Finch, Emanuela Grama, Federico Helfgott Seier, Azfar Moin, Janam Mukherjee, Latika Neelakantan, Rajanpreet Nigam, Neha Paliwal, Esteban Rozo, Behzad Sarmadi, and Stephen Sparks. Members of the anthropology and history workshop at the University of Michigan read an early version of the "Of Mangoes and Men" chapter and their comments and close reading improved not only the chapter, but the dissertation as a whole. A special thanks to Purvi Mehta and Rebecca Grapevine for their generousness with their friendship throughout graduate school and their insightful and thought-provoking feedback on this dissertation. I thank Hoda Bandeh-Ahmadi, David Boyk, and Jordan Kraemer for their close readings, camaraderie, technological

assistance, and engagement with the ideas of this dissertation. I thank Katherine Hendy and Elizabeth Kelley for beautifully encompassing the roles of critical readers and close friends as we wrote together. Finally, I owe a special debt to Alexandre Beliaev for his constant engagement and critique of my work – this dissertation’s strengths are greatly indebted to him.

My friends and family have been a source of constant strength, and I am lucky to have such an amazing extended network. My special thanks to John McIntire, Carol McIntire, Karen McIntire, Tom Dodson, Gail Golem, Jim Golem, Melinda Benton, Elizabeth Golem, Julia Golem, Genevieve Padgett, Grace Holden, Dante Rance, Peter Glamb, Shannon Walker, Lilly Gallay, Charley Gallay, and David Oliver. My mother, Alice Wright, has been a great role model and I am thankful. My sister, Paula Wright Oliver, offered invaluable advice on the mechanics of writing, helped me find my writing style, and, most importantly, is a dear friend. My father, Jim Wright, unfortunately did not live to see the entire dissertation, but he enthusiastically read each chapter while he was alive, and he always had a unique perspective on my research and writing. I hope the finished product meets his high expectations. While writing this dissertation, I have benefited from William Benton’s companionship; I thank you, William, this dissertation would be much poorer if it were not for our lively debates and your critical insights. Finally, I thank Evelyn for bringing so much light to my life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADIPEC	Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference
ADMA	Abu Dhabi Marine Areas Ltd.
ADMA or ADMA-OPCO	Abu Dhabi Marine Operating Company
ADNOC	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
ADPC	Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company
AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company [previously APOC]
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APOC	Anglo-Persian Oil Company [later AIOC]
BAPCO	Bahrain Petroleum Company
BP	British Petroleum
CBI	Criminal Bureau of Investigation [India]
ECR	Emigration Check Required
FSA	Foreign Service Agreement
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council, formally the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf
Gulf	Gulf Oil Corporation of Pennsylvania
INR	currency: Indian rupees
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company

KOC	Kuwait Oil Company
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs [India]
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
MOIA	Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PIO	Person of Indian Origin
POE	Protector of Emigrants
QPC	Qatar Petroleum Company
RA	Recruiting Agent
SoCal	Standard Oil of California
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts
UAA	United Arab Agencies
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USD	currency: United States dollars

INTRODUCTION

In June 1932, workers at the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) discovered oil in Bahrain, at what is today known as the Awali oilfield [Map 1: The Arabian Sea].¹ The discovery of oil at Awali was the first time oil was found in one of the countries of the Arabic-speaking Gulf. This find by BAPCO, a Canadian subsidiary of the American-owned Standard Oil of California (SoCal), came seven years after the Sheikh of Bahrain granted the first oil concession. It also came days after SoCal sold half of its shares of BAPCO to Texaco, another American oil company. Today, forty percent of the world's proven oil reserves are located in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf and almost one quarter of the oil consumed annually comes from Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.² The consequences of oil production in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf have impacted politics, social life, and economics in the Gulf, and continue to have reverberations throughout the Arabian Sea and, indeed, the world.

¹ Today, all of Bahrain's proven oil reserves, 125 million barrels, are located in the Awali field, although there is the potential for offshore oil production. See: Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy.

² International Energy Statistics, U.S. Energy Information Administration. <http://www.eia.gov/countries/data.cfm>. Last visited 2/28/15. Together, these countries are also referred to as the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, originally and still colloquially referred to as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Established in 1981, the GCC is an economic and political alliance based on shared political and cultural identities.



Map 1: The Arabian Sea

Almost six years after oil was discovered in Bahrain, the workers at the Awali oilfield held their first organized strikes.³ The fact that workers went on strike in order to agitate for better working conditions is not surprising. What is surprising is that these strikes involved a coalition of workers that included Bahrainis, other Arab workers, and Indians. After Bahrainis, British Indians were the largest nationality working at BAPCO. The 352 British Indians at BAPCO comprised thirteen percent of BAPCO’s workforce and outnumbered all Americans, Canadians, and British workers combined.⁴ These Indians in Bahrain were just a few of the

³ Jane Kinninmont, “Bahrain,” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 35.
⁴ Annual Report of the Bahrain Petroleum Co. Ltd 1940. National Archives of India, External Affairs, Near East Branch, 1941. F 360-N/41.

increasing numbers of Indians working in the Gulf, and by 1950, approximately fifteen thousand Indians worked in oil and related industries in the Arabic-speaking Gulf.⁵

Even more surprising is that worker strikes to effect change in their working conditions today are extremely rare. In Dubai on March 10, 2015, a few hundred South Asian construction workers took to the streets to protest their working conditions [Image 1: South Asian Workers Strike in Dubai, UAE]. Within hours, the Dubai police issued a statement that the workers had returned to work. Who are these Indians working in the Gulf oilfields? And how do their stories today connect with those of the past? What impact have laborers past and present had on the production of oil in the Gulf?

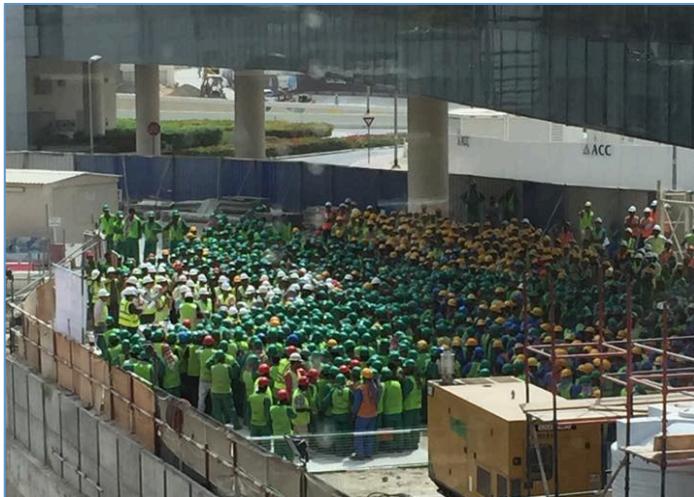


Image 1: South Asian Workers Strike in Dubai, UAE, March 10, 2015 (Photo Credit: Matthew Spurgeon)

Beginning in the 1940s, this dissertation uses ethnographic and archival materials in order to examine the ways in which oil and the staffing of oil projects helped to develop networks between India and the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf. Some of these networks are new and fostered by the growing oil industry, while other

networks built upon earlier relations of trade, imperialism, and cultural exchange that have moved through the Indian Ocean for millennia. I examine how actors formed associations, the tools actors use to form these associations, and the effects of these associations on governance, citizenship, families, and economies of the Arabic-speaking Gulf and India. I explore the

⁵ I J Secombe and R I Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” *International Migration Review* 20, no. 3 (August 1986), pp. 564-565.

migration of Indians to work in the oilfields of the Gulf in order to understand how migrants, bureaucrats, oil company managers, and recruiting agents use networks to facilitate and, at times, impede migration. What emerges is a view of oil that draws on and reconfigures the scales of analysis.

In this dissertation, I view the circulation of labor and oil in the Indian Ocean. The production of oil was and continues to be shaped by preexisting forms of politics and social relations. Oil drew upon these preexisting forms, but also reconfigured them into a phenomenon that is particular to the Arabian Sea. Often when we think of oil, we think of it as a national or regional phenomenon: the Middle East has a wealth of oil, but no labor to extract it, while South Asia has an excess of laborers and little wealth. In contrast to this perspective, I argue that the production of oil does not fall neatly into the bounded units of nations or regions. Rather, oil and labor create their own scale that is informed by two things: colonialism/imperialism and exchange in the Arabian Sea. It is this place, constructed through movement and networks, that I consider in the following dissertation. This view elucidates how oil company managers, government bureaucrats, recruiting agents, laborers, and the materiality of oil create networked pipelines that span the Arabian Sea.

Networked Pipelines

Oil production in the Persian Gulf is not simply global, regional, or local. Rather, circulations of men and oil create a certain kind of place in the Arabian Sea, a place that is shaped by the movement itself.⁶ Scholars have followed the tendrils of oil that spread from the Middle East to Europe and North America in order to understand such interactions as those

⁶ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 31.

between oil and democracy and oil and imperialism.⁷ The international and fluid qualities of oil and its production are key elements to its examination. Amitav Ghosh characterizes oil as occupying “a space that is no place at all, a world that is intrinsically displaced, heterogeneous, and international.”⁸ Oil circulates. It is not consumed in the place of its production. Multiple, disparate actors are involved in its production and circulation, and transnational institutions and actors often direct the path of these processes.

Timothy Mitchell traces the relationships, or associations, related to oil and examines how carbon helps produce differing types of agency and the relationship of these types of agencies with democratic practices and institutions. Central to his exploration are the connections and alliances developed during carbon’s transformation from material in the ground to energy. Mitchell follows these interconnections by “tracing how these connections are built, the vulnerabilities and opportunities they create, and the narrow points of passage where control is particularly effective.”⁹ Like Mitchell, I also trace the connections of oil, but I start from a different place. Considering oil production from the perspective of labor circulations, I look at the staffing of oil projects. In particular, I examine how workers, managers at oil companies, recruiting agents, and government bureaucrats form networks that give shape to oil production in the Arabian Sea.

In this dissertation, I attend to the fluid and viscous aspects of oil that facilitate its transnational and transregional movement, but I do so through a focus on the specificity of oil production in the Arabian Sea. I trace imperial and trade networks to show this specificity of oil

⁷ See, for example, Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (New York: Verso, 2011); Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, (New York: Verso, 2009).

⁸ Amitav Ghosh, “Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel,” in *The Imam & the Indian*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002): 75–89.

⁹ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, p. 7.

production. This specificity illuminates the role of laborers in oil production. I argue the production of oil and the circulation of labor in the Arabian Sea impact the culture and politics of South Asia and the countries of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf. In turn, the practices and networks located in the Arabian Sea give oil production its specific character. In order to understand how laborers impact oil production and how oil impacts states and communities, I explore the apparatuses that facilitate the migration of men to work in the oil industry in the Gulf. In particular, I look at how the apparatuses used to move labor are developed through relationships, or associations, between workers, managers, and government bureaucrats. This middle view of migration looks closely at oil's extraction and refinement in order to see how oil runs along channels already excavated through trade, empire, or religion. I examine the ways in which oil becomes a particularly situated phenomenon, and reimagine how we might understand the dynamics of regions, national borders, and global flows.

This analysis of oil production relies on how actors involved develop associations and choose paths for migration. With this in mind, scale is constructed as actors enter into networks and circulate. In his work on the Hydrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean, Engseng Ho explores how the Indian Ocean as a region is formed by the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Ho follows the movements of goods and people. These circulating actors may travel on the same ships in the Indian Ocean, but they are imbricated in “social geographies of different shapes.” Different social geographies, and the hierarchies contained within them, allowed for actors to begin from multiple starting points and end in a multitude of destinations.¹⁰ My exploration of oil as a regional phenomenon is also reliant on historical affiliations and circulations. I explore how social associations were central to the development of the oil industry, how they changed over time, and their current importance in the oil industry. I examine how people and goods move

¹⁰ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, pp. 121-122.

through villages, government offices, and oilfields. To do this, I follow the associations constructed by workers, managers, and government bureaucrats in order to understand how oil is developed in the Arabian Sea and the relationships that structure oil production.

I explore the relationships actors use to shape and delineate scales through the analytic of networks. This approach differs from studies of labor migration that focus on push/pull factors or sending/receiving countries. Instead, my approach destabilizes both a focus on the individual and on the nation-state in favor of examining transnational networks that are composed of differing actors.¹¹ This approach addresses the central questions of how to understand the multiple actors that shape regional oil production.¹² In this examination, the order of oil production in the Arabian Sea is brought into being by the networks developed by actors.

Recently, networks have been most commonly associated with Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law. This analytic of networks is useful in questioning assumptions about the

¹¹ Attention to the networks that shape transnational labor migration helps destabilize the central role of the nation-state in studies of labor. A focus on transnational migration illuminates how laborers build solidarities and how laborers working outside national borders inform the policies of the nation-state. Much like studies that highlight the histories of colonialism and new nations through examining the movements of goods and people on the Indian Ocean, I argue that the migration of Indians to the oilfields of the Gulf shaped the postcolonial history of India. Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009); Thomas R Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹² This engagement with networks differs from earlier anthropological engagement with social networks that used networks to get out of the bounded nature of communities. That use of networks, by J Clyde Mitchell, Jeremy Boissevain, and J A Barnes, among others, took Max Gluckman's attention to situations and importantly tried to attend to both individual agency and structural forces. Unlike the metaphorical use of networks by Radcliffe-Brown, the use of networks in this case was analytical. As such, networks are understood to explain relationships within groups and between groups, but are not subsumed to structural forces. Networks, then, allowed researchers to explain the interactions they observed. In addition, use of networks, Mitchell argued, would help anthropologists overcome the community boundedness of their research. See, for example, J Clyde Mitchell, "The Concept and Use of Social Networks," in *Social Networks in Urban Situations*, ed. J Clyde Mitchell, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 1–50; Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators, and Coalitions*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), pp. 4-5; Bruce Kapferer, "Situations, Crisis, and the Anthropology of the Concrete: The Contribution of Max Gluckman," in *The Manchester School: Practice and Ethnographic Praxis in Anthropology*, ed. T M S Evens and Don Handelman, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), p. 145.

concreteness of scales and the boundedness of communities. Latour critiques the idea of the social, because it “designates a stable state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomena.”¹³ Instead of assuming that society is homogenous, Latour suggests that society should be analyzed as “associations between heterogeneous elements.” These elements should be diverse and inclusive, and we should not assume any “hidden social force” in order to explain society.¹⁴ Similar to how Callon and Law examine the building of an airplane and follow the networks that are built and the differing scales arising from these networks, I trace the process of supplying labor for the oil industry.¹⁵ In doing so, I “follow the actors” and trace the associations these actors develop.¹⁶

These scholars’ approach to networks is attentive to the process by which social associations are formed. Timothy Mitchell’s use of networks in *Rule of Experts* offers a model for scholars attempting to consider diverse actors in historical examinations. In his own work, Mitchell looks at families, colonial administrations, mosquitoes, and laborers in order to understand what kinds of hybrid agencies, or uneasy alliances, shape “the development and expansion of capitalism.”¹⁷ This analytic allows us to understand how diverse agents come together to give shape to oil production and how their practices produce different forms of scale.

¹³ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies)*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁴ Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies)*.

¹⁵ John Law and Michel Callon, “The Life and Death of an Aircraft: a Network Analysis of Technical Change,” in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E Bijker and John Law, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992): 21–52.

¹⁶ Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies)*.

¹⁷ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 53.

Importantly, a network does not have an implicit hierarchy or set relations, so it allows us to see how laborers shape transnational institutions.

The use of networks as an analytic illuminates the particular qualities of oil production in the Arabian Sea. Oil is a global commodity and undoubtedly a key aspect of contemporary international politics and geopolitical order. The analysis of oil presented here suggests that oil production developed with factors specific to the Arabian Sea that built upon earlier histories of trade, imperialism, and localized affinities. I follow social associations developed by the actors involved in labor migration to the oilfields in order to understand oil as a phenomenon emerging out of a set of relations. I argue the specificity of oil in the Arabian Sea has influenced regimes of citizenship, politics, and family life in India and the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf. Given that oil production in the Gulf emerged as a key economic activity in conjunction with the fall of the British Empire, explorations of its impact on the nascent Indian nation and the governments of the Gulf States also shed important light on the role of international, non-state actors in postcolonial nations.

In turn, oil production and circulation were shaped by practices and affiliations fostered by participants in the oil industry. Attention to how oil projects were, and continue to be staffed, shows that trade apparatuses that were used to move goods throughout the Indian Ocean, along with the colonial processes to oversee indentured labor, are now used to supply labor for oil companies. Furthermore, labor is not necessarily dependent on the needs of an industry; by exploring the localized affiliations that workers develop, I show that who travels to work on oil projects is dependent upon the social associations developed by workers. In order to understand these networks, I will consider the history of oil and imperialism in the Persian Gulf and then I will turn to the role of contemporary migration.

Oil Companies and British Imperialism in the Gulf

While the discovery of oil in the Arabic-speaking Gulf had long-term implications, oil development did not begin in the large quantities present today with the discovery of the Awali oilfield in Bahrain. The British government had been interested in oil production in the Persian Gulf since the beginning of the twentieth century, but most of their attention was focused on Persia. In 1901, William D'Arcy, an Englishman who amassed a substantial fortune in the mining industry, acquired oil concessions in Persia. In 1908, oil was discovered at Masjid-i-Sulaiman in southwest Persia, and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was founded the following year. This company held an oil concession for all of Persia with the exception of the five most northern provinces, where Russia controlled oil production. Following D'Arcy's discovery of oil and the formation of APOC, the British government acquired fifty-one percent of the shares of APOC in 1914. Unlike other administrative areas of the Gulf, which were overseen by the Bombay Presidency in India, the Foreign Office in London was charged with oversight of the Persian oilfields. During the first decades of the twentieth century, new uses for oil made the Gulf an area of great importance to the British government. In particular, Winston Churchill's decision in 1911 to use oil to power the British navy not only revitalized the British navy, but also increased Britain's dependence on oil.¹⁸ The British government's controlling interest in APOC allowed the government to secure oil production as it moved towards increasing use of oil in the military and other industries.

Hoping to maintain and extend Britain's control of Persian Gulf oil, the British government obtained oil concessions with the rulers of the Gulf countries. These concessions specified that if oil was found within their territories, the rulers would not give concessions to

¹⁸ Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, p. 83.

foreigners except those approved by the British government.¹⁹ The first of these treaties was signed with the Sheikh of Kuwait in 1913. Sheikhs, or rulers, of the Gulf signed similar treaties with the British throughout the following decade. The Sheikh of Bahrain signed in 1914, Sheikh of Qatar in 1916, the Sheikhs of the Trucial States (contemporary United Arab Emirates or UAE) in 1922, and the Sheikh of Muscat in 1923.²⁰ Lord Curzon, the former viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, spearheaded these treaties in an effort to gain control over Middle Eastern oil for Great Britain and provide a buffer between the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and British India.

These oil concessions built upon earlier treaties signed between the Gulf rulers and the British. The British pursued these earlier treaties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a means to provide a “buffer zone” between British India and the Ottoman Empire.²¹ With this end in mind, the British signed treaties in 1880 and 1883 with the Sheikh of Bahrain, in 1892 with the sheikhs of the Trucial Coast, in 1899 with the Sheikh of Kuwait, and in 1916 with the Sheikh of Qatar. These treaties prohibited the sheikhs from establishing any contact with foreign powers without British permission and also required the rulers to end all hostilities at sea. In return, the British government recognized the sheikhs’ independence and promised to protect them if attacked. These treaties bolstered the rulers’ internal authority, while relying on government structures already in play in the Gulf. With this type of administration, the British Empire in the Arabic-speaking Gulf was, as historian James Onley argues, largely indigenous. Administratively, the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf was overseen from the Bombay Presidency

¹⁹ Letter from Shaikh Khaled bin Ahmad, Sharjah, to Political Resident, Persian Gulf, Bushire. 19 Jamada ath-Thaniya 1340 (17 February 1922). British Library, 189-S Of/922, RE(7), 773.

²⁰ The exception in the Gulf to these treaties was Saudi Arabia, a country not under the purview of the British protectorate.

²¹ Frederick F Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 44–62; James Onley, “The Raj Reconsidered: British India’s Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence in Asia and Africa,” *Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (March 2009): 44–62; James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

in India. The benefits of the Trucial system were not limited to protecting India, and the system also secured British trade routes.²² These treaties gave the British an advantage when the Gulf rose to prominence for its potential oil reserves.

Of course, the British were not the only ones interested in developing the Gulf's oilfields. In addition to Russia's influence in Persia, American companies were also vying to develop oil projects in the Gulf. In the 1920s, two American companies gained oil concessions in the Gulf. Profiting from the fact that they, unlike many of the other oil companies in the Middle East, had not signed the Red Line Agreement, Gulf Oil Corporation of Pennsylvania (Gulf) and the Standard Oil Company of California (SoCal) were able to negotiate concessions in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.²³ In Kuwait, in 1934, joint concessions were negotiated by APOC and Gulf. The British administration in the Persian Gulf had differing opinions on the fact that American companies held oil concessions in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. On one hand, the British saw the benefits of increased revenue in the Gulf, and this was one reason BAPCO was allowed to search for oil in 1932. On the other hand, the British wanted to stop Americans from moving farther south into the Gulf. As a result, in 1930, APOC, an oil company majority owned by the British government, signed an agreement with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) obtaining permission to explore Qatar. To prevent additional American involvement in the Gulf, the British administration in the Gulf advised rulers in the Gulf to give concessions to British, instead of

²² Hassan Mohammad Abdulla Saleh, "Labor, Nationalism and Imperialism in Eastern Arabia: Britain, the Shaikhs and the Gulf Oil Workers in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, 1932-1956" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1991), p. 3; Onley, "The Raj Reconsidered: British India's Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence in Asia and Africa;" James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical–Anthropological Study," *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (September 2006): 189–208.

²³ The Red Line Agreement, signed in 1928, was an agreement between French, British, and American oil companies regarding the oil resources in the former Ottoman Empire. Most important for this discussion, is that it did not have power over oil companies that did not sign the Agreement. This allowed for some American oil companies excluded from the Agreement to pursue oil concession where other companies were unable.

American, oil companies. Finally, the British government “actively supported” companies that had partial British ownership by, for example, providing manpower, as oil companies vied for oil concessions in the Trucial Coast and Oman.²⁴

The British government tried to prevent American companies from participating in the Gulf oil industry outside of Saudi Arabia. It also sought to curb American influence in all of the oil companies working in the Gulf. One way the British administration did this was by insisting that British subjects, including persons from British India, staff oil companies. This staffing policy was possible given the already strong presence of Indians in the Persian Gulf. In addition, many of the British managers of oil companies had begun their careers in British India before moving across the Arabian Sea. For example, since APOC’s founding, Indians had worked for the company and British businessmen often moved from working in industries in India to positions as managers at APOC. Notably, the Director of APOC from 1909 to 1934 had worked previously at Shaw, Wallace & Co. in India, a whiskey manufacturer with offices in Calcutta and Bombay.²⁵ The oil companies needed not only managers, but also other skilled and unskilled staff to work in the oilfields, build and maintain refineries, and develop new sites of oil production. In addition, workers were needed for the numerous secondary businesses that supplied the necessary goods and services to the oil industry. This included everything from construction work to manufacturing to service provision.

The British were worried that large numbers of Americans in the Gulf would undermine British political authority. Even the opening of an embassy by the United States was viewed by the British administration as having potentially negative consequences. The British went to great lengths to forestall greater American influence, including giving BAPCO assistance via the

²⁴ Secombe and Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” pp. 550-551.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 558.

British army when the company needed additional workers. The British only approved oil agreements with the stipulation that the companies would hire large numbers of locals and British subjects. As a consequence, the British Political Resident in the Gulf had considerable control over the recruitment of employment. In addition to restricting the numbers of Americans working in the Gulf, the British also limited the numbers of skilled Persians and Iraqis working there, for fear of political upheaval. The political agreements between the British authorities and oil companies enforced the recruiting of workers from British India. Many of these employees came from APOC, but others were sent from Burmah Oil, where over six thousand Indians worked in 1904.²⁶ Still other Indian workers were recruited in Bombay by a British recruiting agent based there. By the beginning of World War II, the number of Indians working in the Gulf was rapidly rising. The growth of the Gulf was further spurred by Japan's entrance into the war. Japan's involvement meant a loss of Asian oil resources for the Allied forces, and oil in the Gulf, particularly Iranian oil, became of greater importance. Increased demand for oil meant more workers were needed in the oil industry. As the industry grew, more and more Indians went to work in the oilfields of the Gulf.²⁷

In order to move the large numbers of Indian workers necessary to power the oil industry, the British colonial administration refashioned the system that had been in place since 1833 to move indentured laborers from India to other parts of the British Empire. British recruiting agents were central actors in the process of moving indentured labor from India. These agents, often located in large cities, worked through subagents to find Indian workers to travel abroad. Recruiting agents were overseen by "protectors" who were responsible to the British colonial authorities for the welfare of migrants. Protectors ensured migrants were not coerced, were

²⁶ T A B Corley, *A History of the Burmah Oil Company, 1886-1924*, (London: Heinemann, 1983).

²⁷ Seccombe and Lawless, "Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50," pp. 553-554, 558, 561-562, 564-565.

healthy, and that they were treated fairly in their destination country.²⁸ This network moved Indian workers to the oilfields and continued after India's independence in 1947.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Indians continued to move to the Gulf. As the nascent Indian nation sought to define its boundaries, the migration of workers to the Gulf became a key arena in and through which Indian bureaucrats worked out the meaning of Indian citizenship and the obligation of the government to citizens abroad. At the same time, for their part, Indian migrants traveling to the Gulf called upon the Indian government to do this work as they made a growing number of claims for protection based on the rhetoric of citizenship and rights. Vazira Zamindar shows that in the wake of the partition of India and Pakistan, the category "refugee" became central to the working of Indian citizenship.²⁹ I argue migrants to the Gulf were also central to this debate. While fewer in number than those displaced by partition, migration and the recruiting practices of oil companies provided new challenges for the Indian government. By exploring this migration, the construction and limits of state sovereignty comes to the fore.

Labor and oil also played a role in the formation of the Gulf States. Strikes by Gulf Arab workers in the oilfields in the 1960s shaped the political structures of the Gulf today. Oil and its nationalization were key factors in a wave of anticolonial movements. In 1951, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC, formerly known as APOC), including the refinery in Abadan, Iran, was nationalized by Iran. As a consequence, the British built an oil refinery in Aden and additional oil projects were pursued in the rest of the Gulf. In the 1960s, the Arabic-speaking Gulf countries joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and subsequently nationalized their oil supplies. In 1973, an Arab oil embargo caused oil prices to skyrocket. With

²⁸ Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena*, pp. 136-144.

²⁹ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, (Columbia University Press, 2013).

increased oil prices, oil projects grew and additional manpower was needed. As a result, increasing numbers of Indians moved to work in the Gulf.

I argue that labor practices and migrant networks help shape regional oil production. Using both archival and ethnographic sources, I show that transnational labor circulations are integral to oil companies' policies and states' regulation of migration. While much research on migration uses national polities as central sites of engagement and approaches the Middle East and South Asia as separate and distinct regions, I take a divergent approach. This dissertation considers the entire process of migration – from villages to oilfields – and all parties involved in this process – from migrants to corporations. What emerge are migrants' and their networks' dynamic capacities to form and reform communities, states, and regions. By critically examining migrant networks, I explore migration from multiple sites and perspectives. I find that contemporary labor hierarchies cannot be read into the past and the logic of movement is more complex than the needs of an industry.

Contemporary Migration to the Gulf: Indians on the Arabian Sea

The migration of workers from India to the Gulf continues today. Furthermore, many of the networks that facilitated this migration in the middle of the twentieth century remain central to the migration of workers today. Oil companies continue to hire workers by contracting with Indian recruiting agents. These agents, like the agents who worked for oil companies in the 1940s and 1950s, serve as middlemen between Indian workers and the oil companies. Likewise, just as in the late British colonial era, the Indian government continues to regulate these agents in

the postcolonial era. Specifically, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) has overseen emigration from India and provided services for Indians abroad since 2004.³⁰

Today, over one million Indians travel to work in the oilfields annually. In order to facilitate this movement, recruiting agents and Indian bureaucrats work with oil company managers to manage the movement of workers on such a large scale. The MOIA collects partial data on workers requiring emigration clearance from the Indian government before they migrate. This category of Emigration Check Required (ECR) includes all those who have not matriculated and are migrating to one of seventeen countries, including all of the countries of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf.³¹ In 1992, it was estimated that 1,250,000 Indian migrant workers lived in the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, often referred to as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). By the late 1990s, approximately one million workers from South Asia moved to these countries annually. The MOIA's most recent numbers on migration come from 2012. In 2012, over 720,000 men who required emigration clearance migrated to work in one of the countries of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf [see TABLE 1: Indian Labor Outflows to the GCC].

³⁰ Before the formation of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of the External Affairs oversaw different parts of Indian emigration.

³¹ From 2008 to 2012, male migrants who had not matriculated and who traveling to the following countries required emigration clearance: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. From 2003-2010, the Indian government had a ban on travel to Iraq. This ban was lifted in 2010, and, from 2010-2012, travel to Iraq required emigration clearance. Women who have ECR passports must be over thirty years of age in order to migrate to one of these countries.

TABLE 1: Indian Labor Outflows to the GCC³²					
Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Bahrain	31,924	16,541	15,101	14,323	20,150
Kuwait	35,562	42,091	37,667	45,149	55,868
Oman	89,659	74,963	105,807	73,819	84,384
Qatar	82,937	46,292	45,752	41,710	63,096
Saudi Arabia	228,406	281,110	275,172	289,297	357,503
UAE	349,827	130,302	130,910	138,861	141,138
Total	818,315	591,299	610,409	603,159	722,139

In 2009 and 2012, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar were the top five states of origin for workers to the Gulf and workers from these five states made up approximately seventy-five percent and seventy-three percent of the ECR workforce going to the Gulf, respectively, those years. In the past few years, approximately forty percent of the workers requiring emigration clearance to the Gulf have migrated from Kerala or Uttar Pradesh [see TABLE 2: Indian Migration by State].³³

³² Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 2012-13*, (Government of India, 2013).

³³ *ibid.*; Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 2009-10*, (Government of India, 2010).

TABLE 2: Indian Migration by State					
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Andhra Pradesh	97,530	69,233	72,220	71,589	92,803
Bihar	60,642	50,227	60,531	71,438	84,078
Delhi	4,512	2,501	2,583	2,425	2,842
Goa	2,210	1,659	1,380	1,112	1,338
Gujarat	15,716	9,185	8,245	8,369	6,999
Haryana	1,779	1,052	958	1,058	1,196
Karnataka	22,413	18,565	17,295	15,394	17,960
Kerala	180,703	119,384	104,101	86,783	98,178
Madhya Pradesh	2,321	1,897	1,564	1,378	1,815
Maharashtra	24,786	19,128	18,123	16,698	19,259
Orissa	8,919	6,551	7,344	7,255	7,478
Punjab	54,469	27,291	30,974	31,866	37,472
Rajasthan	64,601	44,744	47,803	42,239	50,295
Tamil Nadu	128,791	78,841	84,510	68,732	78,185
Uttar Pradesh	139,254	125,783	140,826	155,301	191,341
West Bengal	26,094	21,187	28,900	29,795	36,988
Others	13,861	13,044	13,999	15,133	18,814
TOTAL	848,601	610,272	641,356	626,565	747,041

Migrants to the Gulf comprise a sizable percentage of the Gulf States' populations. In 2007, expatriates were approximately eighty percent of Dubai's population and Indians were the largest expatriate community in the emirate.³⁴ All of the countries of the Gulf have large non-

³⁴ Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Locating*

national populations. Saudi Arabia has the most non-citizen residents living there, but also the largest overall population. In 2004, foreigners made up twenty-seven percent of Saudi Arabia's population and, in 2008, foreigners made up fifty percent of the workforce. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Qatar had the largest percentage of expatriates living and working in the state. In 2006, eighty-one percent of the population was foreign and foreigners comprised ninety-two percent of the workforce.³⁵ [See TABLE 3: Population of Gulf and TABLE 4: Foreign Workers in Gulf]

Country	Nationals	Non-nationals	Total Population	% Non-nationals
Bahrain (2007)	527,433	511,864	1,039,297	49.25%
Kuwait (2006)	1,023,316	2,159,644	3,182,960	67.85%
Oman (2003)	1,781,558	559,367	2,340,925	23.90%
Qatar (2006)	122,779	543,730	666,509	81.58%
Saudi Arabia (2004)	16,527,340	6,150,922	22,678,262	27.12%
United Arab Emirates	825,495	3,280,932	4,106,427	79.90%
Total	20,807,921	13,206,459	34,014,380	38.83%

Home: India's Hyderabadis Abroad, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); A K Pasha, *Perspectives on India and the Gulf States*, (New Delhi: Détente Publications, 1999).

³⁵ Shane McGinley, "Revealed: Where Gulf Expats Sent Remittance in 2012," *Arabian Business*, May 13, 2013, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/revealed-where-gulf-expats-sent-remittance-in-2012-501232.html>.

³⁶ Nora Ann Colton, "The International Political Economy of Gulf Migration," *Middle East Institute Viewpoints*, February 2010, p. 34.

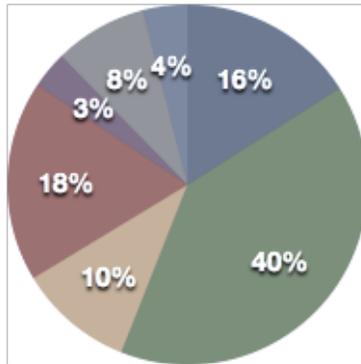
TABLE 4: Foreign Workers in the Gulf³⁷				
Country	Nationals	Non-nationals	Total Population	% Non-nationals
Bahrain	140,000	438,000	578,000	75.78%
Kuwait	445,000	1,780,000	2,225,000	80.00%
Oman	374,000	795,000	1,169,000	68.01%
Qatar	62,000	766,000	828,000	92.51%
Saudi Arabia	4,170,000	4,280,000	8,450,000	50.65%
United Arab Emirates	455,000	2,588,000	3,043,000	85.05%
Total	5,646,000	10,647,000	16,293,000	65.35%

The majority of Indians in the Gulf work in unskilled or semi-skilled positions. Unskilled and semi-skilled are two categories used by the Indian government historically and today to classify workers. The term “unskilled workers” refers to manual laborers who, in my research, mostly worked in construction in the Gulf. “Semi-skilled workers” usually have some technical training or experience and their positions include pipe fitters, steel binders, electricians, plumbers, bar benders, pressmen, masons, welders, and drivers. Other categories used by the Indian government include skilled and professional workers – a category that includes doctors, engineers, and bank managers; service workers; trade and business migrants or migrants who start their own businesses abroad; and non-technical workers, including school teachers, typists,

³⁷ Onn Winckler, “Labor Migration to the GCC States,” *Middle East Institute Viewpoints*, February 2010, p. 12.

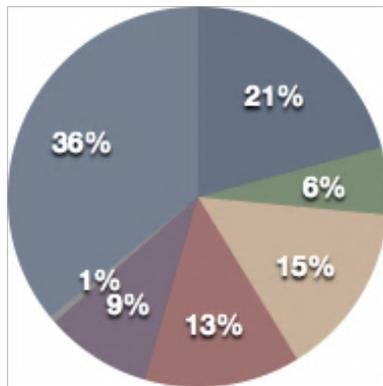
and clerks. [GRAPH 1: Occupation Category of Migrants in Gulf³⁸ and GRAPH 2: Occupations of Migrants in UAE³⁹]

GRAPH 1: Occupation Category of Migrants in Gulf



- Unskilled
- Skilled / Professional
- Trade / Business
- Others
- Semi-Skilled
- Service Workers
- Non-Technical

GRAPH 2: Occupations of Migrants in the UAE



- Professional/Technical and related workers
- Administrative, Executive and Managerial
- Clerical and Related Workers
- Sales
- Service
- Farmers, Fisherman and Related Workers
- Equipment Operators and Related Workers

³⁸ Anisur Rahman, *Indian Labour Migration to the Gulf*, (New Delhi: Rajat Publications, 2001), p. 57.

³⁹ S Irudaya Rajan, V J Varghese, and M S Jayakumar, "Looking Beyond the Emigration Act 1983: Revisiting the Recruitment Practices in India," in *Governance and Labour Migration*, (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2010), p. 18.

Why do these Indians travel to the Gulf? The factors are varied. Many of the men with whom I spoke told me they migrated in order to provide for their families. Many migrants told me that they worked in the Gulf in order to provide dowries for their wives and daughters. These familial obligations shape what it means to be a man in India. In addition, familial obligations and forms of masculinity impact the oil industry in the Gulf and help shape the specificities of oil production on the Arabian Sea.

Some Indians told me they work in the Gulf in order to mitigate the social inequality they face in India. In Abu Dhabi, UAE, one Indian Muslim from Bihar told me the following when I asked why he did not work in India:

Hindus get jobs easier [in India]. We [Indians] have a secular government, but in fact mostly non-Muslims are favored.... When there is a Muslim name [on a job application or CV], they [the employers] have a different attitude, and this almost always applies to government, education, and business.

He then went on to narrate how he experienced this discrimination first hand when he was traveling to Abu Dhabi for work. He describe his arrival at the airport in Mumbai, India:

When I was coming here [Abu Dhabi], I was asked ten types of questions [by Indian emigration officials] and when non-Muslims went through immigration, they [the emigration officials] just stamped [the passports] and let them go. This is the reason that Muslims tend to go abroad. We don't get opportunity there [in India]. And this is the same in most every state.... The good thing about L Corp [a European multinational corporation] is that they don't care about religion, caste, sect. They just see skilled workers.

Indian Muslims in the Gulf repeatedly told me that they faced discrimination in India. This discrimination and the higher salaries earned in the Gulf were seen by many as a means for economic and social mobility. In particular, hopes of increasing their income were a central motivator for migration. Almost all of the workers I interviewed, regardless of their religion and

education, told me that they would make at least six times the income they made in their village and three times the income they made working in urban areas or on oil and gas projects in India.

However, economic and social pressures are not the only reasons for migration. These migrants do not move in a vacuum, and migration occurs as part of a network that involves agents, government workers, and oil company managers. These actors' motivations, histories, and participation in transnational institutions help shape the migration of workers to the Gulf. Recruiting agents in India – many of which have family histories as traders with the Gulf – are central in this process; their choices and preferences have far-reaching implications. The choices agents make while recruiting and their business practices shape the specificity of oil in the Arabian Sea and impact the experiences of workers. These agents work closely with oil company managers and bureaucrats in the Indian government. The motivations of these groups are diverse and the expectations of migrants, government officials, recruiting agents, and managers often vary widely. Throughout my dissertation, I find places where actors translate their goals, motivations, and beliefs. These translations occur as actors collectively attempt to define such things as India as a “brand” or define such things as “best business practices.” As they work through the meaning of these concepts, the actors together shape the migration of Indians to the Gulf and oil production there.

In the first half of this dissertation, I examine the development of the oil industry in the Gulf through the perspective of labor relations, politics, and trade. In Chapter 1, I investigate historical labor unrest in the oilfields of the Gulf by Indian workers, particularly strikes by Indian workers during the late 1940s and early 1950s. I find that the processes through which workers move and the connections workers make vary and that these associations, in turn, shape how

solidarities were formed and worker claims were presented. In Chapter 2, I consider the Indian government's response to labor unrest in the Gulf and ask how emigration was significant in shaping state policies and national approaches to citizenship. In the case of the nascent Indian nation-state, emigration to the Gulf and negotiations with oil companies over contracts opened conversations about the nature of citizenship, the state's obligations to citizens, and the rights of citizens abroad. Over the second half of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of Indians became employed as laborers in the oilfields and *khalījī*, or Gulf Arab, workers were hired less frequently. I argue, in Chapter 3, there was an evacuation of politics from the oilfields. This evacuation occurred with many of the tools and techniques that were developed in the oil and coal industries in the United States. These policies include racialized discrimination and the segregation of the work force. However, the unique political structures in the Gulf, including the close connection between British oil companies and the British administration, in conjunction with sheikhly authority, allowed for a restructuring of the worksite. This restructuring, along with the inclusion of oil rents, made possible the evacuation of politics from the oilfields. The result was a method of staffing oil projects with expatriates. In Chapter 4, I explore the history of oil concessions in the Gulf and the legacy of colonialism. I argue that the regime of citizenship that allows for Indian workers to be vulnerable to abuse from employers was constructed by oil companies, British colonial authorities, and merchants in the Gulf in the middle of the twentieth century.

In the second half of the dissertation, I engage with Indian migration to the Gulf using both ethnographic and historical materials in order to understand the consequences of migration on individuals, families, communities, and states. I argue this migration has helped to define the specificity of the oil industry in the Arabian Sea. In Chapter 5, I examine how networks,

historical entanglements, and bureaucratic processes shape labor migration. I look at networks and scale-making by bureaucrats, business men, and laborers. I follow the process of migration and uncover how circuits of mobility are shaped. In Chapter 6, I describe the process of contemporary migration by charting how workers use networks to secure jobs and how employers use networks to find and evaluate potential employees. In the process of developing and negotiating networks, workers and employers come into contact with differing concepts of best business practices, expertise, hierarchy, and knowledge. I argue these differing frames converge at certain moments and spaces – such as interviews to hire for oil projects – as oil production attempts, and often fails, to attain a homogenized form. Then, in Chapter 7, I explore the ways in which the oil industry is dependent upon kinship practices in India. The idea of masculinity that requires men to go and work in the oilfields in order to supply gold for their daughters' and sisters' dowries is shaping of global economic movements and practices. Finally, in the conclusion, I reflect on the impact of migration not only on oil production in the Arabian Sea, but on the lives of Indian migrants living in the Gulf.

Following the social associations that emerge around oil production illuminates the possible paths that oil and migrants may take through the Arabian Sea. I illustrate how locality is constructed and the consequences of locality for politics, families, and workers. Looking at the specificities of oil in the Arabian Sea redraws the areas and assumptions of our analyses. Instead of seeing India and the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf as two disparate regions, we can see that the networks shaped during the extraction, refinement, and movement of oil and labor give the production of oil on the Arabian Sea its specificity.

CHAPTER I

A Politics of Locality: Indian Worker Movements in the Persian Gulf

The migration of Indians to work in the oilfields of the Persian Gulf grew as the oil industry expanded in the area. By the mid-twentieth century, work on the oilfields had become a major source of employment for Indian emigrants, and oil companies were hiring almost one-quarter of the Indian emigrants going overseas for jobs in 1951.⁴⁰ Though increasing numbers of Indians were moving to work in the Gulf, conditions were far from ideal. Both skilled professionals and day laborers faced discrimination and difficult working conditions. In the 1940s and early 1950s, workers living in Aden, Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, and Qatar all had similar complaints. These complaints revolved around poor living conditions, lack of medical and recreational facilities, “gross discrimination ... between senior staff which is American or British and the Indian or local junior staff,” poor sanitation, and the absence of any means for workers to redress grievances.⁴¹ In order to improve their working conditions, Indian workers in the oilfields deployed multiple methods – from work stoppages to hunger strikes to appealing to the Indian government for support. These actions by Indian workers in the Gulf helped form the oil industry in the Arabian Sea.

⁴⁰ Oil Companies in the Persian-Gulf and Mid-east – Recruit of Indian workers from India. NAI, Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], Emigration Section, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

⁴¹ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein [sic] Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

How did workers form the solidarities that guided their workplace struggles? What role did India's independence play in worker actions in the Gulf? Did the process of migration influence worker action? In this chapter, I look at how Indian worker mobilizations were dependent on solidarities built around a shared origin. Such forms of solidarity represent, to borrow a phrase from Farina Mir, a highly localized aspect of social lives – localized social lives that workers maintained as they moved from their natal villages to the Gulf.⁴² I examine the social associations developed by workers and how workers used these associations to change their working conditions in order to demonstrate the key role of natal villages and the nation-state for workers' mobilization. I also show how the politics of locality among workers shifted over time, as did the class dimensions of worker action. The result was inter- and intra-group solidarities informed by the process of migration.

This exploration of worker agitation in the oilfields does two things. First, examining transnational migration analytically decouples the nation and labor. Historically, much labor history has relied on the nation-state as the “main analytic or expository frame.”⁴³ Focusing on migration that crosses national borders does not negate the importance of the nation, but it reminds us that nation-states are only one factor informing labor politics. I examine how workers construct scales by examining oil production, the transnational movements and mobilizations of labor, and the significance of localized affiliations, national sovereignty, and shifting economic policies. Through critically following circulations in the Arabian Sea, the power of national and transnational institutions to obfuscate power and the limits of their power is revealed. Removing the automatic association between labor and the nation illuminates when and how workers

⁴² Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁴³ Geoff Eley, “Transnational Labour History: Explorations,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3, no. 1 (2006), pp. 164–66; Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

selectively invoke the nation. In the context of Indian independence, transnational migration highlights that nationalism and citizenship were used by workers to push for additional rights. Exploring these claims, in conjunction with other localized political claims, allows us to look at the construction of nationalism outside of the nation.⁴⁴

Second, by investigating the networks used by workers to move through the circuits connecting India and the Gulf, one sees the formation of a localized politics with transnational implications. The experiences of Indians working in the Gulf offers new insights into how the production of oil, the international managerial practices of natural resource extraction, and the politics of new nations were developed in the Gulf through engagements between actors participating in the oil network. These interactions helped develop labor regimes and oil complexes that impacted the development and growth of the countries of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf, and of international oil companies themselves.

In order to understand the production of labor politics, one must consider the materiality of oil and the managerial techniques used by the oil industry. In addition, one must consider how worker actions extend beyond the sites of production to workers' networks of affiliation. This extension challenges the boundaries of organizations, nations, and empires. In this chapter, I examine three sites of oil projects that Indians worked at in the Gulf in the 1940s and 1950s: Abadan, Bahrain, and Aden [see Map 2: Sites of Indian Worker Action]. I consider how workers registered complaints at these sites, with whom they formed alliances, and how and when they mobilized ideas of rights and citizenship.

⁴⁴ Maia Ramnath's work on the Ghadar movement provides an excellent discussion of the difference between nationalism and anti-colonialism as well as how a nationalism movement may occur outside the nation. Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See also Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 114-116.



Map 2: Sites of Indian Worker Action

Labor History and the Specificities of Oil Production

During the colonial period in India, thousands of Indians moved from their natal villages to work in industrial factories in India. Notably, labor historians have explored workers' ties to their natal villages, how workers' local affiliations impacted their labor practices, and how local affiliations informed labor politics. They have also considered the class and caste aspects of these migrations.⁴⁵ In addition to looking at the origin points of migrant workers, scholars have

⁴⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890 to 1940*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 210; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "Workers' Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay Between the Wars," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 603–47; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Class in Bombay, 1900-1940*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ranajit Das Gupta, *Labour and Working Class in Eastern India*, (Calcutta: K P Bagchi and Co., 1994), p. 45; Chitra Joshi, "Kanpur Textile

also considered why workers move, including the relationship between the needs of an industry and the migration of workers. For example, Ranajit Das Gupta's examination of migration to work in the factories of Calcutta argues that the most important factor in determining the composition of the workforce was the technology of the industry.⁴⁶ In the case of Indians working in the Gulf oilfields, I find that industry needs must be considered along with local affiliations and how workers migrate.

The oil industry in the Gulf was and continues to be structured by a disarticulated process – a process that is not determined solely by the needs of an industry and that is not centrally coordinated. This is not an accident of history; rather, it is an active goal of companies to disarticulate the process. Today, as in the past, many large oil companies do not want to hire their own laborers – thereby absolving themselves of direct responsibility for worker welfare. Instead, large oil companies work with subcontractors who, in turn, work with agents based in India to find workers there. This form of disarticulation combines with laborers' own selective affinities. As I seek to illustrate, given the ways in which labor circulates in the Arabian Sea, workers are central to, but not necessarily bound by, the oil industry and the history of the nation. My analysis deprioritizes industrial needs and focuses instead on how workers move, noting both the constraints on and possibilities of that movement. Here, in particular, I am interested in how migrant workers formed solidarities, how these solidarities were continually in flux, and how these solidarities were shaped and reshaped in key moments such as work stoppages or hunger strikes at oil projects.

The oil industry has some unique characteristics that are rooted in both the material qualities of oil and the managerial development of the industry. In his examination of the

Labour: Some Structural Features of Formative Years," *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, no. 44 (November 1981): 1823–38.

⁴⁶ Das Gupta, *Labour and Working Class in Eastern India*, pp. 63-64.

connection between oil and democracy, Timothy Mitchell investigates how the materiality of carbon and the differences between coal and oil have led to differing forms of political action. He notes that shifts in social relations came with the greater harnessing of energy produced by coal and helped support cities and large-scale manufacturing. In addition, the manner in which coal was transported and mined – namely, its requirement that laborers work in autonomous underground spaces and that coal transportation had chokepoints – enabled workers to strike effectively. Coal’s materiality and the worker relations it helped foster shaped “the kinds of mass politics that emerged, or threatened to emerge, in the first half of the twentieth century.”⁴⁷

The materiality of oil has likewise influenced its production in key ways and shaped forms of political engagements different than those surrounding coal. Some key differences between the mining of coal and the production of oil are that oil requires a smaller workforce and workers are continuously aboveground and therefore open to continuous supervision. In addition, oil’s lightness and fluidity allow it to be transported through pumping stations and pipelines and/or to be shipped. This flexibility of transportation means that oil is transported in a “grid.” This grid-like transportation differs from the “dendritic networks” coal followed via railway. Oil’s grid makes it less vulnerable to strikes of the kind that caused chokeholds for coal’s transport. Consequently, the transportation and working conditions used in the production of oil curtailed “the democratizing potential of petroleum.”⁴⁸ Despite the limitations imposed in political action by the materiality of oil, workers in the Gulf oilfields have, nonetheless, formed alliances and negotiated their working situations through political mobilization.

The material qualities of oil are not the only criteria that have influenced labor relations; management techniques and tools specific to the oil industry have also played an important role.

⁴⁷ Timothy Mitchell, “Carbon Democracy,” *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (2009): 399–432.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 408.

Techniques and tools used to manage workers in copper and coalmines in the United States were transplanted to the Arabian Gulf and applied to the production of oil in the Middle East. As Robert Vitalis illustrates in his history of the United States' involvement with oil production in Saudi Arabia, key methods developed by American oil companies to curtail labor strikes included the racial segregation of workers and discrepancies in pay based on race.⁴⁹ Of course, the use of racism as a management technique was not unique to the oil industry.⁵⁰ What were unique, I argue, were the attempts of the oil industry to homogenize labor practices globally. The internationalization of such managerial practices provided a unique site for worker protests, which, in turn, highlighted the specificities of oil production in the Arabian Sea. By looking at worker action in Abadan, Bahrain, and Qatar we see how Indian labor history, the materiality of oil, and American managerial practices influenced and were influenced by imperial administrators, workers, and managers.

Communist Strikes at the Abadan Oil Refinery

Beginning in March 1946, the employees at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) participated in a series of strikes without the approval of union officials, so-called “wildcat” strikes. The Tudeh Party of Iran or, literally, the Party of the Masses of Iran, was thought by British and Iranian officials to be the driving force of these strikes. This communist party had much influence in 1940s and early 1950s Iran and was able to mobilize tens of thousands of demonstrators in Iran’s capital, Tehran, and on the streets of Abadan, where the AIOC oil refinery was located. This was the largest refinery in the world at the time and the site where

⁴⁹ Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, (New York: Verso, 2009).

⁵⁰ For example, Das Gupta shows that racism in colonial industrial projects informed working conditions and management policies. Das Gupta, *Labour and Working Class in Eastern India*, pp. 63-64.

most Indians working in Iran were stationed.⁵¹ While Iranian officials understood the Tudeh Party to be a movement by workers to instigate for higher wages and better living conditions, British officials based in India and the Gulf saw the Party as symptomatic of Russia's growing influence in the Persian Gulf and harmful to British companies' businesses, especially the oil industry. This view by the British was reinforced when, also in 1946, the Iranian government, in response to pressure from Tudeh Party leaders, gave the USSR concessions to the northern Iranian oilfields.

The mass agitations against working conditions were not surprising. Manucher Farmanfarmaian, a high-ranking Iranian official,⁵² visited the camps and was appalled at the conditions in which workers lived. He wrote, "Wages were 50 cents a day. There was no vacation pay, no sick leave, no disability compensation. The workers lived in a shanty town called Kaghazabad, or Paper City, without running water or electricity...." He contrasted Kaghazabad to the British management's accommodations, which included air conditioning, swimming pools, and tennis courts.⁵³ Iranian officials were not the only ones to notice this stark disjuncture between the treatment of British workers and others. A British parliamentary delegation characterized the conditions of the (non-British) workers as "a penal settlement in the

⁵¹ In 1910, Anglo-Persian Oil Company, renamed AIOC when Persia changed its name to Iran, began recruiting large numbers of Indian workers to work in Persia because local labor was lacking in quality and quantity. By 1946, AIOC employed the most Indians in the Gulf and approximately 2,560 Indians worked for the company. I J Seccombe and R I Lawless, "Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 3 (August 1986): p. 563.

⁵² Farmanfarmaian was influential in the development of Iran's oil industry. He worked in the military, then 1943-49 was in the Ministry of Finance; 1949-58 Director General of Petroleum, Concessions, and Mines; 1958 Director of Sales for National Iranian Oil Company; and later Iran's first ambassador to Venezuela.

⁵³ Manucher Farmanfarmaian and Roxane Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil: Inside the Shah's Iran*, (New York: Modern Library, 1999), pp. 184-185.

dessert' with accommodation 'little better than pig-styes [*sic*].'"⁵⁴ The wildcat strikes at AIOC's oilfields and refinery culminated in a large general strike in July 1946, during which fifty employees were killed and 170 injured.

Scholars who discuss these strikes often consider the strikes' effects and, in particular, the relations formed by the AIOC, the Iranian Government, the British Government, and Iranian citizens as a result.⁵⁵ However, the laborers who participated in these activities were not limited to Iranians and a diverse group of workers participated in collective action against AIOC. One scholar attentive to this diversity is Ervand Abrahamian. In his discussion of the Tudeh Party's actions in Iran, Abrahamian explores the high percentage of minorities within the Party and the Party's promise of citizenship and secularism.⁵⁶ His focus on the multi-generational residents of Iran who supported the Tudeh Party indicates the diversity of workers who participated in the strikes, and sheds light on how solidarities were formed across groups and the complexity of political development in Iran. What Abrahamian does not engage with in depth are the temporary migrant laborers who also participated in the Party's political movements.

Attentiveness to the temporary workers at oil projects in Iran and their role in collective action expands the implications of the July 1946 strikes by decentering the nation from labor narratives and examining instead the global construction of the working class. One place the importance of temporary workers arises is in the case of Indian laborers at the refinery. At Abadan, four days before the general strike, five Muslim men from the Punjab were forced to resign from their positions at the Abadan refinery in Iran because they had joined the Tudeh Party. Despite their resignation, they continued to live in the camps near Abadan. In the coming

⁵⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (New York: Verso, 2011), p. 107.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*; Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

⁵⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

days, these five men helped organize a coalition of hundreds of Indians who, in solidarity with Arab-speaking and Farsi-speaking laborers, went on a strike that influenced AIOC and imperial policies in the coming years. A few days after these July strikes, the company, recognizing the danger of the expansion of the localized politics, paid for the five Tudeh Party labor organizers from the Punjab to fly back to Karachi as their “continued presence on the oilfields was considered so undesirable.”⁵⁷

Some aspects of this coalition deserve attention. First, the coalition was class-based. Indian managers did not participate in the strike and remained “loyal” to the company.⁵⁸ While they lived in the same conditions as the striking workers, their managerial position influenced their actions and oriented them towards a set of politics that was not tethered to their place of origin or native language. The coalition for the July 14 strike gained momentum from shared ideological (Tudeh) and class sympathies and formed multi-lingual and multi-ethnic alliances. Despite this broad coalition of actors, the five men who were considered the Indian organizers of the strike all came from a few districts in the Punjab near Lahore. These men shared a natal home, a religion, and spoke the same language. This points to the second interesting characteristic of the strike: while the workers were forming broad coalitions, local affective ties rooted in India influenced Indian worker actions. These actions were both based on and formative of a political sensibility that had local roots and followed, but was not limited to, the contours of the British Empire.

These strikes were just one set of a larger number of strikes occurring in the Gulf prior to India’s independence. Other strikes by Indians in the Gulf included strikes at the Kuwait Oil Company in 1946; in Bahrain in 1942 and 1947; in Saudi Arabia in 1943 and 1945; and in Qatar.

⁵⁷ Thomas letters to General Headquarters, 10 July 1946. NAI, MEA, Middle East Branch [ME], 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

⁵⁸ Note by Sd. H.C. Beaumont, 5 September 1946. NAI, MEA, ME, 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

British administrators in the Gulf often read these strikes as being signs of the “unrestrained nationalism” of Indian employees.⁵⁹ Yet, a closer look at the strikes at Abadan will show that these strikes were, indeed, influenced by a politics of locality, but a locality not limited to the boundaries of the nation. Rather, transnational migration opens up the space to see how migrants construct communities, nations, and empires.

Many narratives of the closing years of British rule in India focus on the departure of the British administration from the Indian subcontinent. Another history of this period is possible. In 1946, as the British Raj was preparing to depart from India, one British military intelligence officer based in Karachi was not devoting his time to the upcoming independence of India. Rather, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas was focusing on the Persian Gulf and the Indian workers based there. In the letters he wrote to his superiors in New Delhi that year, Thomas detailed his travels and long hours spent investigating the strikes discussed above, as well as other strikes in the Persian Gulf. Thomas spent the majority of the year locating the men who were dismissed from their jobs in these strikes, interviewing workers on leave from the Gulf, and searching for the organizers of the strikes at their homes in northern India.

Thomas’s research and the shifting policies at AIOC elucidate the strength of an imagined locality in informing larger political mobilizations; the lasting, powerful effects of affective local ties in transnational movements; and the importance of inter-group solidarity. For example, in order to mitigate the effects of these strikes, the management at AIOC attempted to break apart this inter-group solidarity. One strategy AIOC used was to encourage Arab-speaking employees to form their own union that operated, and negotiated, separately from the Farsi-speaking employee union. The hope of this policy was that it would decrease the Tudeh Party’s

⁵⁹ I J Seccombe and R I Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” p. 569.

influence amongst non-Iranian employees. And to some extent, the policy was effective as strikes increasingly segmented along linguistic and native lines.

For the Indian laborers, local networks intersecting with international carbon politics continued to inform worker attempts to renegotiate their labor and living conditions, but often their mobilizations were unsupported by other laborers at AIOC. On August 4, 1947, Indians again tried to strike in the hope of negotiating better working conditions. Organizers of this strike were able to get between four hundred and five hundred Indians to participate. Despite the success of mobilizing Indian workers, however, organizers were unable to bring Iranians or other nationalities into the strike. The result was that the Indians returned to work on August 6 without any changes in their labor conditions. This second, smaller strike in the Iranian fields indicates the importance of solidarity amongst workers for their actions to be effective. It also points to the power of a regional or national identity to mobilize workers from all over the Indian subcontinent. Like the earlier July strikes, the suspected organizers of the strike were dismissed.⁶⁰

Despite the absence of these workers, strikes continued in the Abadan refinery and Gulf oilfields with varying impact. In Iran, the government's response to these strikes was mixed from worker perspectives. The first minimum wage law came into effect and day rate workers (or unskilled workers) were converted into a more stable form of employment.⁶¹ However, the government also implemented marshal law and began the regulation of unions.⁶² While the strikes were small and seemed, at times, to be ineffective, they produced results over time and ultimately had a lasting impact on oil company management. Even today it is an informal policy

⁶⁰ Thomas letter to General Headquarters, 24 August 1946. NAI, MEA, ME, 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

⁶¹ Farmanfarmaian and Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil: Inside the Shah's Iran*, p. 186.

⁶² Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, p. 107.

of oil companies not to hire too many workers from the same area in order to avoid political action.

In 1946, workers not only went on strike in Iran, but workers at Kuwait Oil in Kuwait, a subsidiary of AIOC and Gulf Oil (an American company), also carried out a series of strikes that were influenced by the Tudeh Party. These strikes utilized multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic solidarities and in many ways appear similar to strikes at AIOC in Iran. Also, like the strikes in Iran, the Indian organizers of the Kuwait strikes were all from the same area of India and shared a linguistic background. Kuwait Oil, too, deported these workers before they could cause further disturbances.⁶³

British agents, such as Thomas, were troubled by the return of these workers to India and feared the consequences of “Tudeh propaganda” in the subcontinent. While many British officials in the Gulf were concerned with maintaining Britain’s access to oil, Thomas was also worried about the rise of communist sentiments among workers in India. He believed the communist ideas that spurred the strikes came to workers based in Iran and Kuwait via the Soviet Union, and he feared such ideas would spread throughout India. Thomas reported that many of the participants in the strikes were “fervent admirers” of the Tudeh Party. He wrote repeatedly to warn his superiors that the workers would continue to disseminate information on communism in India.⁶⁴

Through localized networks of affiliation, workers participated in and promoted subversive movements. These localized networks intersected with and informed transnational labor networks. According to British agents and oil company management, the blame for the strikes did not rest solely with the strike organizers. While both agents and management believed

⁶³ Thomas letter to General Headquarters, 31st August 1946. NAI, MEA, ME, 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

⁶⁴ Thomas letter to General Staff Branch, 10 July 1946. NAI, MEA, ME, 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

the organizers of the strikes were “a bad type of men,” they also laid blame on the “labour recruiting organisation in India for sending” these men to work in the oilfields.⁶⁵ This recruiting organization was instrumental in mobilizing thousands of Indians traveling to work in the Persian Gulf and was composed of government representatives, oil company recruiters, and local recruiters. The recruiting organization’s network spanned the Arabian Sea and was composed of the above key participants, along with workers and managers in the oilfields. The network also included oil company headquarters and management in places as far away as England and the United States. The political actions, debates, and collusions engendered within this network indicate the centrality of the materiality of oil, local affiliations, and international carbon managerial practices in structuring the labor politics of the Gulf.

While strikes, such as the July 1946 strike in Iran, were successful because of intergroup solidarity, at other times workers were segregated along linguistic, regional, or ethnic lines and did not have the opportunity to form such solidarities. Divisions were not always imposed from the top down. What also must be considered is how workers, managers, government officials, and local agents formed networks that shaped oil production in the Arabian Sea. Especially important was India’s independence in 1947. After India gained independence, some workers began to ask the nascent Indian nation-state directly to protect their rights abroad.

Skilled Workers in Bahrain and Claims for Universal Human Rights

In 1948, the nascent Indian government received a series of complaints from eight Indian chemists previously employed by the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) in Bahrain. The chemists were all well-educated Hindus; one was Sindhi, two Bengali, and five Malayalee. In their letters and petitions to the Indian government, the chemists claimed that they had been fired

⁶⁵ Thomas letter to General Headquarters, 24 August 1946. NAI, MEA, ME, 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

from their jobs because they had complained about the racist inequalities they faced at their worksite in Bahrain. The chemists argued that their dismissal violated the contract they had signed and they appealed to the Indian government to act as an advocate for their rights. The chemists made this claim for government action based on their citizenship and using the rhetoric of universal rights and the equality of Indians on a global stage. According to the chemists, the American management's refusal to recognize the equality of the chemists was the root of the problem. The chemists wrote letters to the government and newspapers and received considerable attention from the local Bombay press, as well as the federal government in Delhi. In response to the chemists' letters and the press coverage, the Indian government investigated the conditions of workers in the Gulf and, in particular, Bahrain.⁶⁶

The key problem, according to the Indian chemists, was that they were not treated fairly by the management at BAPCO. They blamed their unfair treatment on the managerial techniques used by Americans in the company. In a letter to the Indian government, the chemists stated that the Americans fostered a racist attitude towards the Indians. The chemists were offended that they were so poorly treated in spite of their education and accomplishments. Their treatment, however, was not out of the ordinary; it was a common American managerial tactic to divide the labor force at oil projects in terms of race, both in the Gulf and in North America.⁶⁷ Unlike the initial policies at AIOC that enabled diverse workers to form solidarity through shared religious beliefs and experiences, American managerial practices separated employees. This separation, at

⁶⁶ The Indian ambassador to Iran argued that the condition of workers in Bahrain was much worse than the condition of workers in Iran. Extract from note on "Bahrain." Original in AWT.Branch F. No. 3(9)-AWT/50. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. 22-8/48.

⁶⁷ For example, Vitalis outlines in great detail the work done to maintain color lines at the oil projects in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. See, Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, pp. 98-105.

least in Bahrain in 1948, was proving quite effective at preventing workers from forming the kind of political alliances that resulted in strikes.

The chemists, however, developed a new strategy: they asserted solidarity based on their profession and their citizenship in the new Indian nation. Also different from Indian participation in the strikes at Abadan, the workers in this case were appealing to a country outside of the country in which they were working, in an attempt to improve their labor conditions. Instead of forming the inter-ethnic, linguistic, and religious affiliations that enabled the Tudeh Party strikes, the chemists applied a rhetoric of international rights. Their demand for rights did not simply appeal to the Indian government based on their nationality and the nation's obligations to them as citizens, but also used the language of citizenship to appeal to a universal value of human rights. The Indian chemists wrote to BAPCO and the Indian government arguing for the "fundamental Right of Association and of speech recognised even under the U.N.O. [United Nations Organization] charter" and used this argument to critique their dismissal by BAPCO. Instead of seeking to form alliances with other workers to improve their working conditions, the chemists based their action in a new regime of rights and citizenship. In doing so, their largest complaint after their termination was not about their working conditions, but that they were dismissed from their position in a manner that, they argued, violated their human rights.

In order to raise awareness of their situation, the chemists appealed to the Indian press and a local Bombay newspaper took up their cause.⁶⁸ This local paper discussed the experience of workers at BAPCO as one of "racial hatred" and compared these experiences with Indian experiences in South Africa – only with the caveat that Bahrain was much worse than South

⁶⁸ It was perhaps due to this attention from papers that led the Indian government to investigate further the chemists' complaints. This may have been especially important given that some Indian officials felt the chemists had not been good employees and were, furthermore, making "a mountain out of a mole [*sic*]." Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein [*sic*] Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

Africa.⁶⁹ In one of the Bombay news articles, one of the chemists was quoted as saying, “The Americans are careful not to over-step the boundary as far as the sentiments of the Arabs are concerned. But an Indian remains a slave of the Company, segregated, discriminated, and snubbed on account of his colour.”⁷⁰ While the experiences of Indians at Bahrain was certainly unequal to that of Americans and northern Europeans, Arab workers, as well as Farsi-speaking employees, also lived in deplorable conditions and experienced what they considered racist treatment by the American managers.

The discourse deployed by the chemists was one being developed and propagated in the United Nations (UN). In the late 1940s, the same period that the United Nations was focused on ratifying the Declaration of Human Rights, such a strategy was not uncommon; for example, Pakistani workers in Saudi Arabia made similar claims.⁷¹ For the chemists, appealing to the Indian government on the basis of human rights had two implications. First, it made the implicit argument that ensuring the recognition of such rights was one of the duties of a liberal democratic state to its citizenry. Second, it banked on the notion that the Indian state would be particularly invested in protecting these rights given the country’s own anticolonial struggles. The Indian state, for example, had encouraged the International Labor Organization, even before

⁶⁹ Indians in South Africa faced racism, discrimination, and exclusion from social spaces. Parvathi Raman, “Being Indian the South African Way,” in *Rethinking Settler Colonialism*, ed. Annie Coombes, (Manchester University Press, 2006), 193–208.

⁷⁰ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein [sic] Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

⁷¹ This problem was also being discussed in the Pakistani press in the 1940s and early 1950s. In the Pakistani paper, *Freedom*, the following was written regarding Pakistani treatment by Americans in the Gulf: “But on reaching Saudi Arabia, the Pakistanis find out that the American officers drunk with racial arrogance, are all too primed to subject young Muslims to an unscrupulous ‘lynch-the-nigger’ treatment. And when the ‘niggers’ muster enough courage to protest against the treatment meted out to them, they are first handed over to the Police and then dispatched to Pakistan without any regard for the terms of contract.” Quoted in Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, p. 103.

India's independence, to develop a Declaration of Human Rights in 1944 as a method of critiquing colonial rule.⁷²

The rights to which the chemists referred were first articulated on an international stage with President Franklin Roosevelt's 1941 State of the Union address. In this speech, Roosevelt outlined four freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear – which he considered to be the right of every person in the world. The Allies adopted these four freedoms as their war aims during World War II and these freedoms formed the basis for Eleanor Roosevelt's work in the United Nations on the Declaration of Human Rights. Truman also reiterated these to the UN in 1946. We see here that the racist policies originating out of American oil company policies and these notions of rights and freedoms provided both a structure of repression and of critique. Thus, two differing ideals – racist American managerial practices and a universal discourse of rights – were circulating in the oil arena.

The chemists' claim to these rights indicates that they understood themselves as members of an international community of skilled laborers, entitled to make political demands based on basic, universally shared rights. The chemists felt they were entitled to this respect given their schooling and expertise. The chemists also insisted that BAPCO's management recognize their expertise, both in regards to the field of chemistry and in regards to management of oil companies. It was these claims, according to company management, that led to their ultimate dismissal from their positions and summary deportation, as the management feared the chemists would foster discontent with a larger swath of BAPCO employees by critiquing management practices and policies.

⁷² Daniel R Maul, "The International Labour Organization and the Globalization of Human Rights, 1944-1970," in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 301–20.

One Indian official, based in Baghdad, visited Bahrain, Kuwait, and the Trucial Coast in order to ascertain the position of Indians in the oilfields. In his letters to the Indian government in New Delhi, he indicated that workers took oil jobs because there were no jobs in India and were thus compelled to sign contracts that were unfavorable for them. The lack of jobs in India, however, did not mitigate the conditions that workers faced. Indian government officials understood the end of colonialism in India to be a strong factor in mobilizing Indian citizens and motivating them to challenge poor treatment. One government official wrote, “As soon as they reach these places, they find themselves in an inferior position, and being discriminated against. This could be endured in the past, but the change over in India makes these young men feel humiliated.”⁷³ Here, the official indicated that India’s new independence altered how workers understood their rights and that India’s independence influenced their understanding of their rights.

Class was also a factor in the worker actions at BAPCO in the late 1940s. Despite the attention and support the chemists received from the Indian government, not all Indian workers appealed to the Indian government as a means to change their working conditions. In addition to the eight chemists working at BAPCO in the late 1940s, there were also over one thousand other Indians employed by the company.⁷⁴ In 1948, approximately one-third of these employees were skilled employees, or monthly wage laborers, such as the chemists. The other two-thirds of the Indian employees working at BAPCO were daily wage laborers. In a survey of returning workers from BAPCO by the Protector of Emigrants in Bombay (POE), it appears that a few workers were terminated because of their participation in collective action. These employees were, like

⁷³ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrain Petroleum Company. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F 22-8/48-Emi.

⁷⁴ This is four times more than the 352 Indians working at the BAPCO in 1940. Annual Report of the Bahrain Petroleum Co. Ltd. for the year 1940. NAI, MEA, Near East Branch, 1941. 360-N/41.

the chemists, skilled, with many working as clerks. Those that claimed they were fired because of collective action said that they, along with three hundred other employees, had written a petition requesting medical facilities near their camps, provisions that were guaranteed in their contract. In speaking with the POE, these workers hoped that the Indian government would take action to enforce their contract and contest their unjust dismissal. Other skilled workers complained to the POE that they were treated with racism. These complaints, like the complaints of the chemists and those seeking medical facilities, came from well-educated, professional employees.

The POE also interviewed twelve unskilled workers who complained about their working conditions in Bahrain in 1948.⁷⁵ Complaints included being injured on the job, not being paid their full salary upon termination, and being terminated without due cause. These workers made no attempt to contact the Indian government to negotiate on their behalf or enforce their contracts. One of the key differences between these complaints and those made by the chemists and the clerks was that these unskilled employees were unhappy with their working conditions, but they did not make claims regarding citizenship status or human rights in their appeal for assistance from the government. Which rights of citizenship and rhetoric of rights workers mobilized is telling of class differences. In the wake of independence, a certain type of citizen, one who was of a higher education and income level than most of the population, felt able to situate himself within a cosmopolitan and international workforce. Through situating himself in

⁷⁵ Worker complaints against BAPCO continued into the 1950s. In 1953 in Bahrain, the main problem was housing and workers found there were bad landlords. These landlords had a lot of power over workers whose housing was not supplied by the company because foreigners could not buy land in Bahrain. Not only were Indians unable to buy land and, therefore, have secure housing, but foreign laborers also had very little job security. Indian laborers (and those of other nationalities) constantly had to negotiate the possibility of losing their job. Workers were on a daily contract and this did not provide them with the same stability in income or job security as monthly wage employment. Oil Companies in the Persian-Gulf and Mid-east. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F6-6/53-Emi.

this workforce, the skilled worker made claims upon the nation-state that the nation ought to ensure his (or her) rights. This citizen was also, through emigration and appeal to a discourse of international human rights, able not only to influence the Indian nation's emigration policies, but also to inform the government's understanding of citizenship and rights.

The form of labor mobilization that relied upon international human rights discourse and the citizenship differed markedly from the strikes in Iran and Kuwait just a few years earlier. These differences could indicate a shifting sense of both political action and national obligation for workers. As industry practices began to shift, companies encouraged recruiters to hire workers from diverse areas of India. In addition, the Indian national increasingly began to negotiate with oil companies on behalf of workers. These changes indicate shifting politics of locality that were used by workers to mobilize labor activity – a politics of locality based on the nascent Indian nation and an evolving category of “citizenship.” Importantly, however, ability to petition the nation was not equally accessible to all citizens.

Racism and Hunger Strikes at the Aden Refinery

Like the workers at BAPCO, workers in other areas of the Gulf found racism on the job site unacceptable after India's independence. With the oil crisis in Iran from 1951 to 1953 and the related nationalization of the refinery at Abadan, AIOC directed its refinery investments elsewhere and, in particular, to building a new refinery in Aden. In 1952, British Petroleum (BP)⁷⁶ hired over six hundred Indians to help build the refinery. These workers included a couple

⁷⁶ BP was subsidiary of AIOC. In 1954, AIOC renamed itself British Petroleum [BP].

of Indian doctors hired exclusively to attend to workers from Asia, as well as a few clerks; the rest of the Indian employees were hired as cooks.⁷⁷

The larger oil companies did not contract their own labor nor did they negotiate labor contracts directly, electing to use contractors instead. In the case of the refinery project in Aden, British Petroleum worked with two contractors, Bechtel Company and George Wimpey & Company.⁷⁸ These contractors sent their general managers to negotiate the contracts with the Indian government.⁷⁹ Embedded in the same migration network that Thomas had blamed for the unrest amongst Indians at Abadan, these contractors were pivotal figures between local recruiters and the oil companies and point to the persistence of the oil network in the Arabian Sea. These contractors often held great sway with the Indian government. One recruiter for both Bechtel and Wimpey boasted that he could move “recruits and others in and out of India without the need of visas or travel documents.”⁸⁰

For workers, contractors were often a source of stress – they facilitated migration, but often at the expense of the worker. Workers felt exploited not only by their employers, but also by the recruiting agents. Workers coming for the construction of the Aden refinery claimed that they were not told about the working conditions in Aden. In particular, they said the agent who recruited them did not portray the labor conditions accurately. Workers also claimed that the recruiting system was trying to “mak[e] capital” off workers, thereby implying that the contractors, local recruiters, and, perhaps, even the government were charging workers high rates

⁷⁷ In addition, the company was hiring eight thousand local laborers and it was thought by Indian government representatives that only a few Indians would be kept at the refinery once construction was finished. Express Letter to All Passport Issuing Authorities in India, 24 November 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration. 6637/52-Emi; Aden- Recruitment of 600 skilled workers from India. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁷⁸ Aden- Recruitment of 600 skilled workers from India. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁷⁹ Letter to Sampath from Ghatge, 13 October 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration. D5080/52-Emi.

⁸⁰ Letter to Ghatge from Thadani, 19 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

for jobs in the Gulf or emigration permission.⁸¹ Even paying high rates did not guarantee jobs. For example, one worker reported that he paid a bribe of INR 200 to be hired for a manual labor position at Abadan. However, when he arrived at the site, the company discovered that he was underage and sent him back to India.⁸²

According to workers, exploitation was not limited to the recruiting process. At the Aden refinery construction project, workers were employed for a contract of eighteen months.⁸³ Indian employees worked most Sundays and workers reported putting in at least ten hours a day.⁸⁴ While recruiters claimed ten-hour workdays were stipulated in the contract, laborers complained that these hours were too long and that they had not been informed of these hours before arriving in Aden. Workers also complained that the long hours constrained their ability to contact the Indian government as a form of redress. For example, one Italian priest told the Commissioner of the Government of India in Aden that the workers wanted to come meet with him, but had little time because they worked Sundays.⁸⁵ Furthermore, workers were confused by the payment system for overtime hours. The company claimed that workers would be paid overtime upon completion of their contracts, but workers were unaware of this condition.⁸⁶

In addition to working long hours, workers in Aden reported mediocre living conditions. Indian employees lived twenty miles from the site of the refinery in tents. They were provided meals for a small fee (two shillings a day) and their cost of living was included in their wages. They ate in a common mess hall that did not allow for the employees to follow dietary

⁸¹ Letter to Indian Trade Commission from Indian Employees Committee, 4 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁸² Report on the Service Conditions etc. of Indian employees in the Oil Refinery Project at Aden. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F6-4/53-Emi.

⁸³ Aden- Recruitment of 600 skilled workers from India. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁸⁴ Letter to Ghatge from Thadani, 19 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁸⁵ Aden- Recruitment of 600 skilled workers from India. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁸⁶ Letter to Thadani from Ghatge, 26 March 1953; Letter to Ghatge, 26 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

restrictions.⁸⁷ Finally, Indian workers were not allowed to bring their families to Aden during their contracts.⁸⁸ The shared experiences of migration and dealing with difficult working conditions and unresponsive employers thus served to bring Indian workers together and foster a sense of solidarity.

In 1953, 350 Indian employees at the Aden Refinery construction project went on a forty-eight-hour hunger strike.⁸⁹ The workers' complaints fell into two main categories: living conditions and discrimination.⁹⁰ Workers reported that the food was of poor quality and "unpalatable to Indian taste" and that the latrines were unacceptable. Even a European personnel supervisor at the refinery agreed that the food was not good. This supervisor said that as a result of bad food, many workers lived on bread and jam and could not perform hard labor. He also said that the latrines were unsatisfactory and too close to the Indian employees' tents.⁹¹ When an Indian government employee decided to visit the camp, he found that the bathrooms were "insufferable" and smelled bad; the food, he decided, was not "bad," but "by no means good."⁹² In addition, the company insisted that the workers were happy with their hours and living conditions.⁹³

The Indian employees argued that discriminatory practices at the refinery were the main reason behind their long work hours, and also a factor restricting their access to recreational facilities. One worker said that he worked a minimum of ten hours a day, but more often worked twelve or fourteen hours and was given no credit for overtime. He described spending all day in

⁸⁷ Aden- Recruitment of 600 skilled workers from India. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁸⁸ Letter to Manager, BP, from Ghatge, 23 February 1953. NAI, MAI, Emigration, 1952. D 4498/52.

⁸⁹ Telegram to Embassy of India, Cairo. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁹⁰ Letter to POE, Bombay, from BP, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. G/16307.

⁹¹ Extract from Monthly Report No. 5 of 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁹² Letter to the Secretary, MEA, from Thadani, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi.

⁹³ Letter to Ghatge, 26 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

the hot sun and, upon asking for a transfer, being refused. When he quit, he said that the European worker who replaced him who was given a “fat” salary and assistants.⁹⁴ Such discrepancies in the treatment of Indians and Europeans were compounded by the fact that the American manager in charge of the Indian employees’ mess hall reportedly abused their nationality in the most “insulting of terms.” Indians were also barred from other spaces. The cinema, for example, was off limits to Indian workers and designated “European only” – something the Indian workers said was in breach of their contract.⁹⁵ Indians also faced barriers accessing other leisure activities. For example, Indians did not feel they were getting adequate time at the cricket field.⁹⁶ In addition, Indian employees were upset because the bar was only open part of the day, but, in the American and European mess halls, it was always open. They felt segregated from “Italian and other white employees” and felt that Indians were treated more poorly than European employees. They also pointed to their living accommodations, which were made of plywood and extremely hot as a result of having no fans.⁹⁷

From the perspective of the Indian employees, the discrimination they faced was based on skin color.⁹⁸ Despite experiencing these inequalities, Indians were not above marshaling discriminatory discourse in their own favor, when necessary. Indian workers complained about being forced to live with Arabs,⁹⁹ whom the Indians described as having a “lower standard of

⁹⁴ Extract from Monthly Report No. 5 of 1953; Letter to the Trade Commissioner, Aden, from Bechtel and Wimpey, 20 May 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁹⁵ Letter to the Secretary, MEA, from Thadani, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi; Letter to Indian Trade Commission from Indian Employees Committee, 4 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

⁹⁶ Letter to POE, Bombay, from BP, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. G/16307.

⁹⁷ Letter to the Secretary, MEA, from Thadani, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi.

⁹⁸ Letter to the Trade Commissioner, Aden, from Bechtel and Wimpey, 20 May 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi.

⁹⁹ Letter to POE, Bombay, from BP, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. G/16307.

living and not of clean habits.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it was deemed particularly outrageous that they, Indian workers, were *not even* treated as well as the Arab employees. They complained of being paid less than workers coming from the Levant and the same amount as local workers with less skills and experience. One Indian highlighted the situation by pointing out that the Adenese “orderly who serves the office with tea and has little or no qualifications to be called literate draws as much pay as us ... the Indian is getting a very raw deal.”¹⁰¹

When the hunger strike began, Indian workers sent a telegram to the Indian ambassador in Egypt.¹⁰² Before the strike, the workers had conveyed their grievances to the Commissioner of the Government of India in Aden and complained that they were working ten-hour days and not getting overtime. Furthermore, they complained that if and when employees resigned, they were forced to pay for their own return passage. Paying for this passage was an economic hardship and had the effect of “virtually keep[ing] them in bondage for the period of their contract.”¹⁰³

The hunger strike successfully drew the attention of BP and the Indian government. The demographics of this strike were different from the strikes at Abadan or the complaints of the chemists in Bahrain. Notably, the striking workers were all Indians and did not form alliances with workers from other nations, as was the case in Abadan. Also distinct from both Abadan and Bahrain, this strike mobilized workers at all levels, from day laborers to skilled employees. The fact that it was not just skilled, educated Indians making claims on the Indian government based on citizenship, but unskilled, less educated workers as well suggests that an expanding notion of citizenship was forming and gaining popularity among workers abroad. This notion of

¹⁰⁰ Extract from Monthly Report No. 4 of 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi.

¹⁰¹ Letter to Indian Trade Commission from Indian Employees Committee, 4 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

¹⁰² Telegram to Embassy of India, Cairo. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.23-9/52-Emi.

¹⁰³ Letter to the Secretary, MEA, from Commissioner, 22 May 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration. 11(5)CA/53.

citizenship cut across the various differences among Indian workers, but emphasized instead their differences from European and Arab employees. Because they comprised such a large cross-section of workers, the striking Indian employees were able to garner the support of the Indian government, which, in turn, exerted pressure on the oil company to improve workers conditions.

The hunger strike ended forty-eight hours after it began, and no one was fired as a result of the action.¹⁰⁴ Rumors circulated in the camp that some employees were fired because they helped to organize the strike, but when the Indian government interviewed the workers, they reported not feeling intimidated after the strike. Rather, according to the Bombay POE, one of these leaders was fired because he was “incompetent and undesirable” in character and the other was fired because his position had become redundant.¹⁰⁵ In response to the complaints by Indian employees, BP and its contractors insisted that working conditions were the same for Indians as they were for American and European workers. From the companies’ perspective, the whole strike could be blamed on “a few malcontents” who were not representative of the majority. Some Indian employees at the camp agreed with the company’s assessment. One Indian worker said of his colleagues, “while earning only a pittance in India are accustomed to low standards of living, come to the Aden Refinery and make fantastic demands.”¹⁰⁶ Despite these discrepancies in Indian perspectives and the companies’ dismissive view of the strike, the bulk of employees stood by the Indian Employee Committee, which worked as a representative of Indian workers in their struggles with the company and organized the strike.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to Undersecretary, MEA, from POE, Bombay, 12 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2489/53-Emi.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Secretary, MEA, from Thadani, 18 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 3206/53-Emi; Letter to Das Gupta from Ghatge, 1 August 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 3496/53-Emi; Letter to POE, Bombay, from BP, 29 August 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. G/16402.

¹⁰⁶ Letter to the Secretary, MEA, from Thadani, 10 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi.

The Commissioner of the Government of India at Aden felt that the “unity exhibited by the Indian employees during the hunger strike has I believe made some impression on the European management.”¹⁰⁷ The workers’ unity as Indians and as a negotiating block may be compared with the failed strikes of the early 1950s. Strikes often lost their effectiveness due to lack of unity among the Indian employees. The gap between employees was most pronounced between senior and junior employees, at least according to one Indian government observer who argued that senior workers were loath to join collective action. Government officials attributed this lack of unity to a generational difference – namely, that senior workers were more submissive, whereas junior workers felt more strongly about their rights and were more emboldened by the new independence of India.

When employees complained to the Indian government concerning their treatment, they were significantly aided by employee associations. Employee associations gave legitimacy to employee complaints by increasing the solidarity of worker action. In turn, the Indian government contacted these associations in order to evaluate the claims of workers when government officials based in the Gulf were unable to do so. However, the Indian government did not view all employee associations equally. Some had only weak influence and the workers who joined feared losing their jobs for doing so. One employee association letter written to the Indian government was unsigned because the employees feared they would be fired if their action was discovered. Unfortunately, this strategy had a self-fulfilling effect, as government officials viewed the letter with skepticism and suspected the association either did not actually exist or did not represent a large number of employees because of the lack of signatures.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein [sic] Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

During the strike, company management met with the Indian Employee Committee. However, management declined to keep a written record of what was discussed, arguing that it was not the policy of the company to “deal with a group or a nationality unless they returned to work and tendered their requests through the proper channels set up for them.”¹⁰⁹ The company also argued that Indian employees got the same rice, fish, meat, and other food as all other workers at the site. They pointed out that Indian chefs cooked the food for all Indian employees. One company manager said, “The British Americans, and Italian personnel accept the condition with understanding and tolerance; not so the Indians.” Many of the managers felt that Indian employees simply needed to adapt and claimed that Indian employees were “reactionary” and likely to “inflect other employees with radical ideas.”¹¹⁰

Management also attempted to legitimate the discrepancies in pay based on global inequalities. One manager argued that the company was “in no way responsible for the different standards of living and comparative wage scales throughout the world.”¹¹¹ Through such an argument, the managers claimed that the differences in treatment and pay of employees were based on the nationality of the employee, even as the management simultaneously refused to deal with employees through national employee unions. This argument was common in the oil industry in the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia, one oil company claimed, “racial discrimination is unknown in the Company’s operation.” A manager at the company went on to say,

Benefits given to one nationality usually extended to all others. Saudi Arabs are handled on an equal basis and we seldom find any one nationality being given any preferential treatment ... This follows the principle laid down by Saudi Arabian Government requiring that the

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of Meeting with Two Representatives of Indian Employees, 3 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

¹¹⁰ Report of Dr. Chand, Embassy of India, Baghdad, 22 April 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration (originally in AWT section), 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi/ D.2049/AWT/54.

¹¹¹ Report Dated 30 July 1953 from Messrs. Middle East Bechtel Corporation and George Wimpey & Co., Ltd., Aden. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

company treat the Saudi Arab on an equal basis with personnel recruited from countries located east of the Atlantic.¹¹²

These types of claims sought to naturalize differences between American management and workers hired from the Middle East or India. The international oil management practices applied in Bahrain and Aden, as well as in other parts of the Gulf, such as Saudi Arabia, used racial discrimination as a method both to control the workforce and then excuse such practices, by pointing to global inequalities that just existed “naturally.”

In addition to discrimination, companies used outright intimidation to control their employees. During conversations with workers, the Commissioner learned that Indian workers lived in daily fear of their employer. He wrote that the Indian employees were “terrified of victimization” due to a “spy system” that the Company used to control employees. This spy system was composed of six Indian informants who provided the company with information about the other Indians. The result was that the rest of the Indians were afraid of the informants.¹¹³ This spy system was particularly perilous for the Indians who led the Indian Employee Committee, as they feared the company was compiling a “black list” of those suspected to have led the strike and that the employees on the list would be “sent packing.”¹¹⁴ When the Indian government reopened recruitment shortly after the strike, this fear became more pronounced.¹¹⁵ This was because Indian workers at the refinery knew there were many Indians willing to take their place, so with reopened recruitment, disgruntled workers could be easily dismissed and replaced by workers who would not complain.

¹¹² Letter to POE, Bombay from E.E. Evans, Recruiting Agent, Arabian American Oil Co, 30 March 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

¹¹³ In response to these allegations, the Commissioner “gave [the Indian employee] a short lecture on building national character, for communicating to his colleagues [at the refinery].” Extract from Monthly Report No. 4 of 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2954/53-Emi.

¹¹⁴ Letter to Secretary, MEA, from Commissioner, 27 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2779/53-Emi.

¹¹⁵ Telegram to Foreign Office, New Delhi, 8 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 27321/53-Emi.

In the wake of the hunger strike, the Indian government looked into the living conditions of workers at the Aden refinery. Directed from the central government in Delhi, the Commissioner of the Government of India in Aden and the Protector of Emigrants in Bombay investigated the claims made by workers and attempted to form a plan of action to redress their poor treatment. One of the government's immediate actions was to briefly halt all recruitment from India for the Aden refinery.¹¹⁶ In the inquiry into the effects of the strike, the government spoke with two workers who were thought to have led the strike and were subsequently dismissed from their employment. According to these workers, the results were mixed: there were still no fans in workers' sleeping areas; cold water was available to Indians; the food had deteriorated, but beef was being served less often; and the hours of work had not changed significantly, though workers at least now knew they were accruing overtime. One worker said that if the living conditions improved, workers would not mind the hours.¹¹⁷ Finally, in September, the workers were able to move into a new camp.¹¹⁸

The choice to go on a hunger strike and not a regular strike deserves some attention. Building upon the popularity of trade unions in India after World War I, strikes in India were a preferred method of agitating against working conditions and promoting solidarity amongst workers. In 1951, there were 120 registered strikes and hundreds of additional strikes in the Indian bidi industry alone.¹¹⁹ The hunger strike, in contrast, was less popular and uncommon in

¹¹⁶ Letter to Undersecretary, MEA, from POE, Bombay, 12 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 2489/53-Emi; Letter to POE, Bombay, from Undersecretary, MEA, nd. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 23-9/53-Emi.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Das Gupta from Ghatge, 1 August 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 3496/53-Emi.

¹¹⁸ Report Dated 30 July 1953 from Messrs. Middle East Bechtel Corporation and George Wimpey & Co., Ltd., Aden. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

¹¹⁹ Rina Agarwala, "From Work to Welfare," *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 2006): p. 430; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890-1940," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 179-230.

the Gulf. Facing restrictions on labor unions and formal strikes, the hunger strike at Aden gave workers a means to address their working conditions. This method of protest, popularized by Gandhi, was especially poignant given the history of India's colonization and the contemporary discrimination workers faced. By appealing to the Indian government to protest both their treatment during the process of migration and after arriving in Aden, these workers defined themselves as a community of Indians and, through their strike, evoked memories of the country's own struggle for equality.

Conclusion: Citizenship, Worker Rights, and Oil Companies

Workers defined social affiliations and politics of locality from the village to the nation as they responded to the management practices of oil companies and attempted to improve their living conditions. The strikes, protests, and complaints lodged by workers illustrate that while the materiality of oil imposed certain parameters on labor, the production of oil was also a site where international carbon managerial practices and localized politics met. This conjunction presents opportunities to destabilize historical narratives that focus on the history of the nation-state and shed light instead on how workers' various networks and solidarities created and invoked scales of the local, national, and transnational.

Despite worker protests, however, the situation for workers in the Gulf did not improve. Throughout the 1950s, workers repeatedly complained of discrimination and lack of job stability. For example, in Qatar in 1953, workers pointed to continued differential treatment of Indian and non-Indian employees. Indian workers felt they were discriminated against on the basis of their nationality and religion. This discrimination was not constrained to one type of worker. Laborers as well as skilled professionals complained. Not unlike the chemists in Bahrain, one medical

doctor complained that he was treated “like an ordinary medical orderly.” Given their even lower pay, day laborers felt especially vulnerable to discriminatory policies. At Qatar Petroleum Company (QPC), laborers felt that discrimination at the company influenced everything from their daily interactions with management to their housing conditions. Anger over the latter came to a head and rig workers stopped work for a short period in 1953. Strikes by Indians, however, were becoming less effective. During the strike in Qatar, the ruler, Sheikh Ali al-Thani, intervened. With this intervention, the men returned to work, despite the fact that the company did not comply with their demands.¹²⁰ Throughout the 1950s the ability of Indian workers to agitate for better working conditions was increasingly curtailed.

Looking at worker action before and after India’s independence illustrates how India’s independence allowed workers to appeal to the nation-state for assistance and protection. Workers faced discrimination, and oil companies often hoped this discrimination would limit workers ability to make effective claims on management. But the dignity that Indians felt they were due after India’s independence served to bolster their claims. This independence also helped Indians to form alliances across linguistic and, at times, class divisions. In the case of labor strikes in the oilfields of the Persian Gulf in the 1940s and 1950s, investigations into the materiality of oil and its consequences for labor action may be coupled with an exploration of international carbon managerial practices in order to give meaning to these strikes that is not bound by the history of the nation or empire. It is not on oil alone that the network hinges. The requirements of the oil industry are not defined solely by the industry itself. Instead, one must consider the multiplicity of actors within the network and the localized politics those actors bring with them to the oilfields. By the mid-twentieth century, materials, ideas, and people were all

¹²⁰ Extract from the report submitted by Mr. Mahboob Ahmed, 5th August 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration (originally AWT section), 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi. D892/54.

moving through circuits that cross-cut empires and nations, solidifying the salience of those political entities in some instances, challenging them in others. This investigation of how affiliations and networks informed migration and enabled workers' actions helps us to understand to what ends the postcolonial nation was invoked from abroad. In the next chapter, I will examine the Indian government's response to these claims from workers abroad.

Chapter II

Citizens Abroad: The Indian Government and the Regulation of Emigration

With the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the fluidity of the boundaries between India and the Gulf was partially restricted and the flow of labor and capital was altered. Despite these changes, the migration of Indians to work on oil projects continued. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the Indian government considered and approved petitions by oil companies that wanted to recruit Indian workers for oilfields in the Gulf. In the 1960s, these petitions increased. Petitions by oil companies to recruit Indian laborers shared many similarities with the contracts used by the British government during the colonial period. Before approving these petitions, bureaucrats in the Indian government needed to decide how the state should care for citizens' rights abroad through the regulation of emigration. In these conversations, regulating the emigration of Indians to work in the oilfields of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf developed into a bureaucratic debate that influenced the Indian government's approach to citizenship and sovereignty.

The view of citizenship arising from Enlightenment ideals stresses individual rights within a rule of law framework.¹²¹ For the nascent Indian nation, and today, the question of how the rights of individuals are best ensured by the government was, and continues to be, a pressing issue. The rights of citizens to emigrate, in particular, is an area where the rights of citizens to

¹²¹ T H Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1950).

make their own choices runs in tension with the government's duties to protect its citizens. Within liberal democratic societies, the norm, established in the French Revolution, is that citizens are permitted to emigrate from their homelands.¹²² Often, in India, the obligations of the state appear to run counter to this liberal ideal. Today, emigration from India by men is free, except for those who have not matriculated and are traveling to one of seventeen countries, including all of the countries of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf.¹²³ The precedence for the restriction of emigration has its roots in the colonial period and the selective implementation of colonial policies by the nascent Indian government.

Through debates on emigration to the Gulf, the implementation of policies, and the negotiation of worker contracts, bureaucrats in the Indian nation-state defined the state's obligations to its citizens and debated the implications of citizens working abroad for national sovereignty. As Akhil Gupta argues, in a postcolonial context, it is through the "discourses and practices of the modern nation-state" that the meaning of citizenship emerges.¹²⁴ The methods the Indian government developed to oversee emigration of workers to the Persian Gulf in the early years of Indian independence bridge two competing notions of Indian citizens. In one, citizens are vulnerable and, in the other, citizens are rational liberal actors. This division became important as the Indian state sought to determine what its duties were to its citizens abroad. As

¹²² John Torpey, "Leaving: A Comparative View," in *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*, ed. Nancy L Green and Francois Weil, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), p. 13.

¹²³ From 2008 to 2012, male migrants who had not had at least ten years of schooling and who were traveling to the following countries required emigration clearance: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. From 2003-2010, the Indian government had a ban on travel to Iraq. This ban was lifted in 2010, and from 2010-2012, travel to Iraq required emigration clearance. Here, I am specifically discussing the rights of men, as the women face additional restrictions on migration and this is discussed later in the dissertation.

¹²⁴ Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 99.

questions regarding the nature of the state and citizenship were being debated, bureaucratic practices were developed to oversee emigration, many of which remain in play today.

In the study of migration, much of the literature focuses on nations' immigration policies and their treatment of immigrants. Just as important, but usually ignored, is the role of emigration in defining the nation. Emigration policies are a key mechanism through which states have defined their citizens and the development of passports and visas have similarly helped nations to define their borders and assert sovereignty.¹²⁵ Furthermore, regulating emigration has important implications for the construction of national sovereignty. In his work on sovereignty, Stephen Krasner describes four different governmental conditions that "sovereignty" may be used to designate. These meanings include "international legal sovereignty" or the recognition of a state by others; "Westphalian sovereignty" or a government free from external authorities; "domestic sovereignty" or a government's authority within its borders; and "interdependence sovereignty" or the ability of a government to control its activities and movement within and across its borders. These types of sovereignty are distinct, but they are not mutually exclusive – a nation may have one type, but not another, or a nation may have many of these types of sovereignty.¹²⁶ Upon India's independence in 1947, for example, India gained Westphalian sovereignty, but still needed to work to establish interdependence sovereignty. Aihwa Ong discusses another way scholars may engage with sovereignty, which she calls "graduated sovereignty." This type of sovereignty emerges as governments adjust to the demands of global capital. She argues, "Graduated sovereignty is an effect of states moving from being

¹²⁵ Donna R Gabaccia, Dirk Hoerder, and Adam Walaszek, "Emigration and Nation Building During the Mass Migrations From Europe," in *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*, ed. Nancy L Green and Francois Weil, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 63–90; Torpey, "Leaving: A Comparative View."

¹²⁶ Stephen D Krasner, "Globalization and Sovereignty," in *States and Sovereignty in the Global Economy*, ed. David A Smith, Dorothy J Solinger, and Steven C Topic, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

administrators of a watertight national entity to regulators of diverse spaces and populations that link with global markets.”¹²⁷ The connection between global markets, national sovereignty, and citizenship are central features of governments. In 1950s India, I argue the relationship between these features offers a new perspective on government sovereignty. At that time, the bureaucratic techniques the Indian state developed to manage transnational migration contributed to growing assertions of India’s sovereignty and the nation’s obligations to its citizens.

Discussions of citizenship were central in the development of governance for the new Indian nation. Citizenship was such a crucial issue that Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, argued that the topic “probably received far more thought and consideration [in 1949] than any other article contained” in India’s constitution.¹²⁸ Following in the wake of the violence and upheaval of the partition of India and Pakistan, the Indian government defined who was a citizen of India and who was a citizen of Pakistan. Even before the constitution was passed on January 26, 1950, citizenship provisions were brought into force. As shown in Vazira Zamindar’s work on partition, these citizenship provisions linked “birth, residence, migration, and citizenship.” Importantly a “‘domicile’ and birth ‘in the territory of India’” were needed for a person to be a citizen of India.¹²⁹ A majority of the debates in the Constituent Assembly, the elected body that drafted and ratified the constitution, concerned how to discern the citizenship of Pakistanis and Indians, but refugees were not the only group under discussion. People abroad

¹²⁷ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). For another view on the relationship between globalization, neoliberalism and sovereignty, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 91.

¹²⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, (Government of India, December 2001), p. 516.

¹²⁹ In Zamindar’s work on these categories of citizenship, she points out that this is derived from colonial law and that the domiciles of children under eighteen are dependent on their fathers and the domiciles of women are dependent on their husbands. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

who were “Indians in origin” or who “consider themselves to some extent Indians” posed additional types of possible citizens for the newly formed government to consider. According to Nehru, procedures had to be put in place so that these Indians abroad did not become aliens without citizenship rights in any country. In these discussions, Nehru and other members of the Constituent Assembly were concerned about Indians abroad who were the descendants of indentured laborers. Nehru argued that these people should be able to apply at Indian Consuls General and register their names to be citizens.¹³⁰

These debates regarding citizenship and the subsequent adoption of the citizenship articles defined the Indian government’s early approach to citizenship. Throughout the 1950s, this policy continued to change as government officials and the courts decided individual citizenship cases. The increasing numbers of Indians working in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf reinforced the need for the Indian government to establish clear guidelines for citizens abroad. Migration to the Gulf was different from the historic practice of indentured labor migration, and the Indian government needed to retool emigration policies to address the needs of migrants to the Gulf. Through its reinterpretation of colonial policies, the Indian government addressed the claims Indian citizens working abroad made on the government through the lens of the Emigration Act of 1922. In this process, two competing definitions of citizenship arose – both of which were seen as having implications for India’s reputation internationally and for the protection of religious groups in India. The contracts of Indians working in the Gulf became a key site through which the tensions between these two definitions were worked out. Examining these contracts and the debates around them illuminate how the bureaucratic apparatuses used to move manpower to the Gulf developed, and what role oil companies played in this development.

¹³⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, pp. 516-517.

Staffing the Construction of the Refinery in Aden

In 1952, British Petroleum (BP) approached the Indian government about hiring six hundred Indians for the construction of the Aden refinery. BP was building a refinery in Aden in the wake of the nationalization of oil by the Iranian government in 1951. In particular, the expulsion of western companies from the city of Abadan, Iran, and the loss of the refinery there – the world’s largest refinery at the time – necessitated BP’s new refinery project. The nationalization of the refinery at Abadan also meant many of the approximately two thousand Indians working for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company lost their jobs.¹³¹ Many of the Indian workers at the Abadan refinery had been working in skilled positions and faced unemployment upon returning to India. However, instead of rehiring these unemployed Indians, BP wished to hire cooks and other non-technical workers, such as clerks. As bureaucrats in the Indian government attempted to make a decision regarding BP’s petition, two issues came to the fore. These issues revolved around racism against Indians and India’s international standing as a nation. Both of these issues concerned India’s status as a newly independent nation and the nation’s representation by its citizens abroad.

Indian cooks were categorized as semi-skilled workers by the Indian government and this category of worker was unlike most of the Indian workers in Aden at that time. Prior to the construction of the refinery at Aden, the Government of Aden had forbidden Indian domestics from immigrating to the country, as there were ample numbers of Adeni to perform the jobs. With the arrival of almost three thousand foreigners for the refinery project, there were no longer

¹³¹ I J Seccombe and R I Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” *International Migration Review* 20, no. 3 (August 1986), p. 563; Letter to Minister Home Affairs from K. Appunni Menon, 10 December 1952. NAI, Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], Emigration Bureau, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

sufficient numbers of local workers, and the oil companies, with the assent of Aden's government, looked to India to supply domestic staff, including cooks.¹³² Eventually, the Indian government granted permission to BP and two contractors, Bechtel and Wimpey, to conduct this recruitment. But as the recruiting process began, Indian bureaucrats were troubled by some of the recruitment practices. First, the government was concerned that the company was only hiring six hundred Indians and that the positions for which they were hiring Indians were not skilled positions. They contrasted BP's plans to hire Indian cooks with BP's proposal to hire 1,500 skilled workers from Italy and suggested the company was discriminating against Indians.¹³³ Particularly important to many bureaucrats in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was the fact that Indians were not being treated the same as Europeans and Americans; instead, the bureaucrats argued, Indians were being treated like Arabs.¹³⁴ This form of discrimination caused many officials to claim that the oil companies were treating Indians as the British had treated India under colonialism.¹³⁵ The most blatant source of discrimination, according to Indian officials, was found in oil companies' hiring practices. These arguments were congruent with a general rhetoric used in discussions of Indian overseas emigration that India that was defined and represented by its citizens abroad.

¹³² Letter to POE Bombay Regarding Aden Refinery Construction, 26 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

¹³³ Extract from monthly report no. 12 of 1952 from Indian Government Commission, Aden, 17 December 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. D 7061/52-Emi.

¹³⁴ Extract from Monthly Report No. 4 of 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. D 7061/52-Emi; Report from Qatar Petroleum Company, 10 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi. This complaint was not unique to Indians, and Pakistani workers were also dissatisfied with their treatment. For example, when Pakistani workers arrived in Abu Dhabi in the late 1960s, they were unhappy because they found that local men were paid higher wages for similar work. British Embassy, Beirut. *Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Development*, 5 December 1967. FCO 8/70, RE (2), 287-300.

¹³⁵ Action taken on the report of the Good-will Mission to the Persian Gulf in 1948. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

A second problem regarding BP's recruitment was brought up by the Commissioner of the Government of India in Aden, A. B. Thadani, when he heard about BP's recruitment. Thadani's critique revolved around the relationship between India's international reputation and the class of workers going abroad. After six cooks traveled to Aden, the Commissioner wrote to the government in Delhi, arguing that no more Indian cooks should be allowed to migrate to Aden. He pointed out that the Indians currently living in Aden were rich and the arrival of poor Indians to work as cooks would harm the reputation of India.¹³⁶ As the Commissioner put it, the cooks would "lower India in the eyes of everyone." In addition, he argued, without their families the "servant class" or cooks, would "get into all sorts of trouble" and their presence "would also start economic conflict with another class of Arabs."¹³⁷ Put bluntly, cooks were seen as poor international ambassadors of India. Other Indian officials vehemently disagreed with the Commissioner's assessment. The Protector of Emigrants (POE) in Bombay wrote to the Commissioner that it was "the first time in my life that I have ever heard it suggested that the profession of a cook is a dishonourable one." He further argued that every country had cooks and he had never heard that the profession was "degrading to the mother country."¹³⁸ In this debate, the idea that citizens working abroad served to embody and represent India was not disputed; rather, the dispute centered on the nature of the work and the class of the citizen migrating.

India's new status as an independent nation provided an important framework and context for this debate. One official wrote that it was the view taken by the Indian government

¹³⁶ The concern over poor citizens migrating and hurting the nation's reputation has colonial antecedents. During the colonial period, the British government did not want poor English people in India so as not to tarnish the image of the empire. See, for example, K A Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex, and Class Under the Raj*, (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); Sara Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

¹³⁷ Extract from monthly report no. 12 of 1952 from Indian Government Commission, Aden, 17 December 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. D 7061/52-Emi.

¹³⁸ Letter to POE Bombay Regarding Aden Refinery Construction, 26 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

that “Emigration from dependent British India was a source of embarrassment; emigration from free India may be a source of strength.” In order to ensure that emigration was a source of strength, any proposal for Indian emigration had to be considered on its own merits and would only be permitted if emigration was sure to be on “honourable terms, consistent with the dignity of India.”¹³⁹ In such arguments, the honor of India was embodied in each migrant and it was the Indian government’s duty to oversee emigration in order to maintain India’s reputation abroad.

Problems with the recruitment of workers for the Aden refinery continued. As clerks began to migrate to Aden in increasing numbers, accusations of racial discrimination against Indians abounded. The oil companies were accused of hiring only the lowest level of clerks from India. Furthermore, these clerks were not paid enough to maintain a standard of living, and, similarly to the cooks, this was seen as disparaging both India’s reputation and the reputation of all Indians living in the Gulf. In addition, there were allegations that even though the clerks were paid only at the lowest skill level, they were actually working at a much higher level. Officials argued that the company was taking advantage of the high rates of unemployment in India.¹⁴⁰ Like the debates regarding the emigration of Indian cooks, questions of the respectability of labor, how the choices of individual citizens regarding emigration reflected back on the reputation of India, and how much of a choice workers had were all at the center of these critiques and engagements. In order to respond to worker complaints and build a consensus regarding the role of the state in governing emigration, bureaucrats returned to the Emigration Act of 1922.

¹³⁹ Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the “Effect of Emigration.” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

¹⁴⁰ Letter to the Secretary of the Government of India from A.B. Thadani, 18 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. D. 3206/53EMI.

Colonial Legacies: The Emigration Act of 1922

In 1922, the Government of India, under the advisement of Sir G. L. Corbett, a British member of the Indian Civil Service, passed the Emigration Act of 1922. This new Act replaced the Emigration Act of 1908. It was thought, in 1922, that a new Emigration Act was necessary because the 1908 Act dealt primarily with indentured labor and, since the Defense of India Rules, emigration with the intention of laboring for hire was illegal.¹⁴¹

In order to regulate emigration, the Emigration Act of 1922 outlined three types of emigrants. This categorization of emigrants was similar to the Emigration Act of 1908, but the categories in 1922 were defined more broadly. According to the Emigration Act of 1922, the first type of emigrants was unskilled workers or laborers, such as agriculturalists, porters, and rickshaw pullers. These workers were prohibited from emigrating to any country that was not approved by Parliament.¹⁴² The second type of emigrants were skilled workers “of a comparatively low order and status, belonging to classes of persons who by reason of their ignorance, were likely to be imposed upon or by reason of the number in which they emigrate were likely to create political or economic problems in the country of immigration.” This category included domestics, artisans, clerks, shop assistants, entertainers, and food servers.¹⁴³ The third category of emigrants was reserved for professionals, such as businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and students. These professionals were assumed to have a “higher degree of intelligence or knowledge” and were thus left outside of the scope of the 1922 Act and not required to obtain

¹⁴¹ Indian Emigration Act - Proposal for an amendment of. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 17-6/53-Emi.

¹⁴² Countries approved for migration by unskilled workers were printed in the Gazette Notification by the Central Government after receiving approval by Parliament. Indian Emigration Act 1922 – Considerations of to extend its provisions to journeys by AIR and LAND – unaccompanied domestic servants, etc. 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 17-6/54-Emi.; “Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act (No. VII of 1922) for the Year 1952.” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

¹⁴³ Indian Emigration Act 1922 – Considerations of to extend its provisions to journeys by AIR and LAND – unaccompanied domestic servants, etc. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 17-6/54-Emi; See also the Emigration Act of 1922, section 02.

“No Objection Certificates.”¹⁴⁴ Women and minors faced additional impediments to emigration. Classified together, both were prohibited from emigrating unless the Protector of Emigrants, upon “examination” of the potential emigrant, was “satisfied that he/she can take care of himself/herself in the country of employment.”¹⁴⁵ These laws reduced the ability of women, children, and unskilled workers to migrate using the discourse of protecting vulnerable groups.

The Emigration Act of 1922 also limited unskilled emigration to those countries approved by the Government of India. In the original implementation of the Act, emigration was only controlled when workers were emigrating overseas to work for hire and when emigrants were assisted in their departure. Workers who emigrated on their own did not need to follow the outlines of the Emigration Act, because emigrating on one’s own reflected a form of initiative that ought not be discouraged. This deregulation of unaided unskilled labor migration was overturned in 1938 by the Indian legislature and all unskilled emigrants were deemed to be within the scope of the Emigration Act.¹⁴⁶

Since its adoption, various departments had been placed in charge of administering the Emigration Act of 1922. In 1937, the Department of External Affairs was established and a key role of the Ministry was to oversee the Emigration Act. In 1941, the Department of Indians Overseas oversaw the regulation of emigration within the Commonwealth and for Indian

¹⁴⁴ Indian Emigration Act 1922 – Considerations of to extend its provisions to journeys by AIR and LAND – unaccompanied domestic servants, etc. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 17-6/54-Emi; Annual Report on the working of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922 and the Rules framed thereunder for the port of Calcutta for the year 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi; Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the “Effect of Emigration.” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

¹⁴⁵ Limitations on women’s ability to emigrate relates to their precarious citizenship status. As discussed by Zamindar, the domicile requirement for citizenship established in 1949 formalized women’s statuses as citizens who were dependent upon their father or husband. Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*; “Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act (No. VII of 1922) for the Year 1952.” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

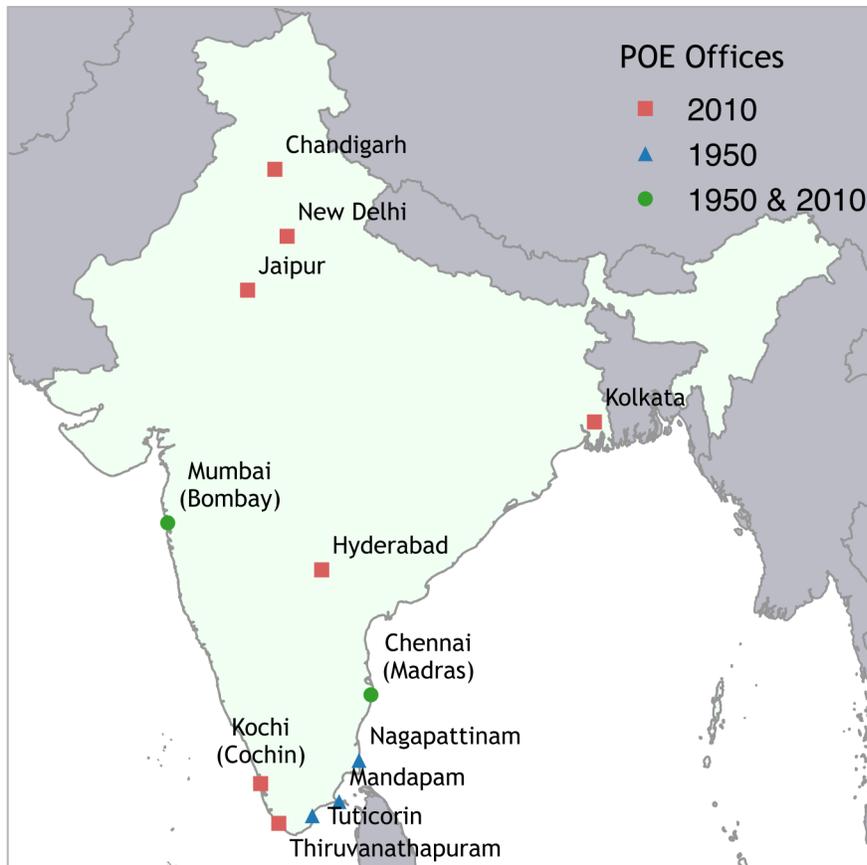
¹⁴⁶ Indian Emigration Act - Proposal for an amendment of. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 17-6/53-Emi.

pilgrims to holy sites in Saudi Arabia. In August 1946, the Commonwealth Relations Department oversaw all emigration as covered by the Indian Emigration Act of 1922 and emigration within the Commonwealth. In 1947, the Commonwealth and the External Affairs Departments merged and, in 1949, the Ministry became known as simply the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Within the Ministry, duties were divided regionally and functionally.¹⁴⁷ Until 2004 and the establishment of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs,¹⁴⁸ the Ministry of External Affairs, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, oversaw the emigration of workers to the Gulf. Within the MEA, emigration was overseen centrally by the Controller-General of Emigration. In the early 1950s, the Controller oversaw local Protectors of Emigrants (POE) offices located in hubs of emigration: Madras, Mandapam, Negapattinam, Tuticorin, and Bombay [MAP 3: POE Offices in India, Past and Present].¹⁴⁹ It was these local POE offices, administrators at the MEA and Ministry of Labour, and emigrant reports of their working conditions that shaped the implementation to the Emigration Act of 1922 and the Indian government's response to migration to the Gulf.

¹⁴⁷ “For instance, the Foreign Secretary deals with Continental Europe, America, the Middle East and the Far East; the Special Secretary deals with United Nations affairs, and the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations deals with Commonwealth countries, South East Asia and Africa. There are three Joint Secretaries and one deals with Continental Europe, Administrative and Personnel; the second with the Americas, Africa, South East Asia, North East Frontier and Emigration - and the third with Protocol, the United Kingdom, the Recovery of Abducted Persons and passports and visas. Similarly, the work was divided among the different Deputy Secretaries and Under Secretaries.” Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report 1951-52*, (Government of India, 1952).

¹⁴⁸ The MOIA was originally named the Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs when it was established in May 2004. In September 2004, its name was changed to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*; Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report 1950-51*, (Government of India, 1951). Today, there are POE offices located in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, and Jaipur. The POE office based in Mumbai oversees the bulk of the emigration to the Gulf and is the busiest, by far, of all the offices.



Map 3: POE Offices in India, 1950 and 2010

For many Indian government employees, explaining the underlying principles of the Emigration Act of 1922 was central to bureaucratic attempts to implement it. Bureaucrats were clear that their purpose was not to “enlarge [the Act’s] scope or change its basic structure.”¹⁵⁰ In the development of the Act, Corbett suggested that the Act prohibit emigration to countries where Indians did not enjoy the same rights as other classes of British subjects. It was feared that any imposition of an inferior status on Indians living and working in another nation would damage the whole country’s status and foster constant political trouble. Conversely, Corbett suggested that emigration to countries where rights were given to Indians should be permitted

¹⁵⁰ Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 1022 for 23rd December 1955 Regarding Proposed Amendment of the Indian Emigration Act 1922. 24 November 1955. NAI, EMI, Emigration, 1955. F. 23-21/55-Emi.

and encouraged. Corbett reasoned that emigration to such countries would solve problems related to India's growing population, provide economic opportunities, and "give Indians a wider outlook on the world in general."¹⁵¹

While Indian bureaucrats after independence agreed upon these principles, the implementation of the Act was difficult. This difficulty arose from balancing the rights of individual citizens and the duties of the state. In the mid-1950s, Indian bureaucrats working for the MEA reflected on the reasons behind the 1922 Act. They discerned two ideologies behind the legislation. First, from Corbett's note written in 1921,

It would be wrong to endeavour to hamper or control free emigration. It would be unjustifiable interference with the liberty of the subject. No nation controls free emigration. Free emigration presupposes a certain amount of intelligence, money and enterprise, and in cases of this kind, the individual should be left to decide for himself.¹⁵²

Government officials interpreted this quote as highlighting and prioritizing the rights of citizens to emigrate and the need for the government to respect the freedom of its citizens. According to bureaucrats at the MEA, however, this notion of liberty for citizens also had to be balanced with the responsibilities of the government. Sir George Barn, in a speech introducing the Emigration Act of 1922, said,

It is the unskilled workers who require the greatest measure of help and protection from the Government and the Bill endeavors to give it to them. The skilled worker is in a very different position to the unskilled worker. He is much more capable of looking after his own interests and, consequently requires less help and protection from the Government. At the same time we feel that the emigration of skilled workers should be under some measure of control, and that the Government should give him some measure of protection.

¹⁵¹ Indian Emigration Act - Proposal for an amendment of. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 17-6/53-Emi.

¹⁵² Indian Emigration Act 1922 – Considerations of to extend its provisions to journeys by AIR and LAND – unaccompanied domestic servants, etc. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

In this quote, Sir Barn assigned differing levels of agency to the types of workers able to emigrate and argued that the government owed such workers differing types of responsibility. In contrasting these two arguments, Indian bureaucrats laid out the two poles of the debate on emigration.

Often, in the early 1950s, Indian politicians and bureaucrats were sharply divided on the government's role in regulating emigration. Some expressed concerns over the increase in India's population and suggested that a program that encouraged or subsidized emigration would be an ideal solution.¹⁵³ Other bureaucrats suggested that it was better for Indians to remain in India than face discrimination abroad. This perspective often drew connections between colonialism and Indian emigration. One official wrote:

It would appear that in the present context of world affairs it is just as well that people of India in particular should not venture abroad, if only the reason that her experience of emigration problem ranging over a century and more has been one doleful saga of exploitation by the colonial powers to begin with, and of the denial of legitimate rights of emigrants in more recent times.¹⁵⁴

Arguments such as these equated the exploitation of emigrants to the exploitation of the country under British colonialism. A central feature of the arguments for restricting and controlling emigration was the changed circumstances of India after independence.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Indian Emigration Act 1922 – Considerations of to extend its provisions to journeys by AIR and LAND – unaccompanied domestic servants, etc. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

¹⁵⁴ Lanka Sundaram, "Effects of Emigration on the Economic Situation of the Population of Selected Asian Countries of Emigration (with reference to India)," 10 September 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

¹⁵⁵ "We conclude, that the condition of Indians seems really pitiable and naturally after the 15th August 1947 the conditions have much changed and they [emigrants] are right in asking us to intervene in the matter and look after their interests." Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

Historical Understandings of Emigration

The connection between India's colonial history, independence, and emigration were developed within a specific historical framework. In 1953, many members of the government considered migration to have been a problem in the past, but to no longer be a pressing concern. In postcolonial India, they argued, emigration affected only a "fringe" of the Indian population. Emigration was also understood to be a permanent activity whereby Indians settled abroad for the entirety of their lives. Conflating emigrants with indentured laborers, many government bureaucrats understood Indians abroad to have moved out of India from the 1850s through the 1920s.¹⁵⁶ Migrants' roles in these new lands as indentured laborers limited the amount of money migrants were able to send home, and low incomes combined with slow travel times meant that workers rarely returned to India for visits. This view of migrants, and particularly the notion of migration as a historical activity involving mainly poor Indians, was largely developed in relation to Indian emigrants currently abroad in the early 1950s. In 1950, more than 600,000 Indians lived in Malaya and Singapore; over 400,000 lived in the British West Indies; almost 300,000 lived in both South Africa and Mauritius; and about 150,000 lived in Fiji and British East Asia. In the eyes of many bureaucrats, these populations had lost their Indian "roots."¹⁵⁷ Bureaucrats assumed that these expatriate Indians maintained a tenuous connection to India by

¹⁵⁶ Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the "Effect of Emigration." NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi. For a more detailed discussion of indentured labor, see, for example: Marina Carter, *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834-1874*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Crispin Bates, "Coerced and Migrant Labourers in India," *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies* 13 (2000): 2-33; Anand A Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Roots in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁵⁷ Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the "Effect of Emigration." NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

occasionally sending money to relatives living in India. These remittances, however, were assumed to be small.¹⁵⁸

How to deal with the descendants of indentured laborers abroad was discussed by Nehru at the Constituent Assembly on March 8, 1948:

Now these Indians abroad, what are they? Are they Indian citizens? Are they going to be citizens of India or not? If they are not, then our interest in them becomes cultural, humanitarian and political.... Either they get franchise of the nationals of the other country or treat them as Indian minus franchise and ask for them the most favourable treatment given to the alien.¹⁵⁹

Concern over Indians abroad had been important to Nehru even before independence. In Singapore on March 1946, Nehru addressed a crowd of over 10,000 Indians and said, “When India attains independence, she would immediately decide who her nationals were and Indians overseas would be Indian nationals unless they choose otherwise.”¹⁶⁰ Nehru and many Indian administrators focused on Indians abroad whose parents or grandparents had left India as indentured laborers. The result was that Indians abroad were often assumed to be synonymous with indentured laborers.

This historic understanding of migration influenced perspectives on returned migrants; returnees were thought to be lower class and undesirable.¹⁶¹ For example, administrators

¹⁵⁸ Most Government officials argued these remittances were negligible and had little noticeable effect. Other officials pointed out that the scope of emigrants’ remittances could not be fully known because banks did not disclose remitted funds under Rs. 20,000 and Indians often remitted under that amount.

¹⁵⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru and S. Gopal, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Volume 7 (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund), p. 618, cited in Amit Singh, “India’s Diaspora Policy: a Case Study of Indians in Malaysia,” May 9, 2014.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ The association between migration and lower-skilled work was not limited to overseas labor migration. As Ranajit Das Gupta shows in his study of migration to work in factories in Eastern India, the majority of migrant laborers were of lower castes or dalits. Ranaji Das Gupta, *Labour and Working Class in Eastern India*, (Calcutta: K P Bagchi and Co., 1994), pp. 43-46.

assumed that the few emigrants who did return to India brought back no savings. Regarding returned migrants, one official wrote:

Such persons are mostly those who were unable to make headway in the country of their emigration owing to their own shortcomings, indifferent health, etc. And therefore finding the circumstances uncongenial in their old age or on becoming otherwise infirm. Being poor, they could not naturally be expected to bring with them any wealth on their return to India.¹⁶²

This view of indentured labor relied on class assumptions of migration. These class assumptions shaped, in turn, assumptions regarding the potential contributions Indians abroad could make to the Indian nation and the level of attachment these Indians abroad were thought to have for the new nation.

The question of overseas Indians became more salient for the nascent Indian government as the nature of emigration changed. In 1953, many officials in the government felt that the problem of nationalism and the new nation were particularly connected to emigrants. Officials adopted the perspective that emigration meant permanent resettlement abroad and they argued that Indians who settled abroad had lost their Indian identity. They argued that any emigrant who felt a particularly strong connection to India would not be able to go abroad for long because of “high emotions,” presumably emotions attached to an overwhelming nostalgia for their homeland.¹⁶³ The new Indian migrants were different from the indentured laborers who rarely returned to India. Indian migrants to the Gulf were usually wealthier and of a higher class than indentured laborers. In addition, most migrants to the Gulf had neither the means nor intention to permanently live there. As seen in their petitions to the Indian government, these migrants continued to identify as Indians and used their citizenship to request the protection of the Indian

¹⁶² Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the “Effect of Emigration.” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

government. As overseas citizens, these migrants embodied the nascent Indian nation and, therefore, needed to be treated with the dignity due it as a free nation.

Regulating Emigration to the Gulf

In the early 1950s, neither the heads of the Emigration Section of the Ministry of External Affairs nor a Parliamentary representative presenting at the International Labor Organization (ILO) on migration considered the emigration of Indians to the Middle East a population worthy of study.¹⁶⁴ This, however, was rapidly changing. Only one year later, officials at the MEA said that after Malaya, the Persian Gulf was the mostly important area to which Indians were migrating.¹⁶⁵ By 1952, the POE office in Bombay, the main POE office for emigration clearances to the Gulf, was busier than ever before, with increased requests for emigration clearances and an increased number of cases in which workers had attempted to emigrate illegally.¹⁶⁶

Migrants to the Gulf were markedly different from the indentured laborers that had left India in the latter half of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth century. Notably, migrants to the Gulf only left India on short contracts, averaging one to three years, and returned to India once the contracts ended. Usually, their families remained in India. These workers also brought back larger amounts of money, reflecting the large pay discrepancies between earlier indentured migrants and migrants to the Gulf. In 1938, the Indian government collected data that

¹⁶⁴ Lanka Sundaram, "Effects of Emigration on the Economic Situation of the Population of Selected Asian Countries of Emigration (with reference to India)," 10 September 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi

¹⁶⁵ Report on the working of the Indian Emigration Act (VII of 1922) for the year 1951. NAI, MEA, S.E.A. Section. 2/54/6551/10003.

¹⁶⁶ Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922 and the Rules Issued Thereunder during the Year Ending 31st December 1952, of the Ports of Bombay, Porbandar, Bedi Bunder and Port Okha. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

indicated that 31,844 Indians returned from abroad and brought back INR 116,841.¹⁶⁷ Only twelve years later, in 1950, the number of returned emigrants for which the government had data was much smaller, only 5,598 returnees, but these returnees were coming from the Gulf specifically and they brought with them INR 125,000.¹⁶⁸ This indicates that the form of labor migration was shifting and that Indians were going abroad to more lucrative jobs for shorter periods of time.

As more oil companies became established in the Gulf and hired increasing numbers of Indian workers, methods of recruiting Indians also solidified into standardized practices. Some contractors recruited in India directly. In Bombay, in 1952, there were 670 authorized recruiting agents. The government, building on laws established in 1930, oversaw these agents to ensure that workers were not charged for the cost of recruitment. Smaller recruiting agents were required to deposit an amount equal to one and one-half times the single fare for a migrant and more established agents were able to deposit a lump sum with the POE to ensure workers were recruited fairly and not stuck in a foreign country.¹⁶⁹ Some larger oil companies and contractors recruited directly for themselves and BP's India branch acted as an agent for both oil companies and "territories" in the Gulf under British administration.¹⁷⁰ This method of recruitment relied upon colonial practices, oil companies' influence, the politics of oil production, the temporary nature of emigration, and India's status as a new nation meant that this recruitment system was also innovating new ways of moving Indians abroad.

¹⁶⁷ While I believe this data is representative of a growing trend, the Government of India did not collect systematic data on the numbers of all returned emigrants and many government officials believed that returned migrants often hid their assets from Government officials.

¹⁶⁸ Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the "Effect of Emigration." NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

¹⁶⁹ Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922 and the Rules Issued Thereunder during the Year Ending 31st December 1952, of the Ports of Bombay, Porbandar, Bedi Bunder and Port Okha. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

¹⁷⁰ Annual Report on the Working of the Emigration Act. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1955. F20-2/55-Emi.

Increased emigration to the Gulf and the unique character of this migration opened up debates in the Indian government regarding the Emigration Act of 1922, the Act's interpretation, and its implementation. Two primary problems that arose in the early 1950s involved the scope of emigration – namely, which emigrants were covered by the Act – and whether the Act applied to emigrants that flew out of India (a distinction I elaborate on below). These debates were related primarily to the types of workers being hired by oil companies and how those workers were then treated. For bureaucrats, these issues directly related to debates on the nature of Indian citizenship and the role of the state. Importantly, as a new nation, Indian bureaucrats wanted to differentiate contemporary Indians abroad from earlier indentured laborers. In exerting controls over emigration, bureaucrats worked to protect citizen rights, maintain India's reputation internationally, and exert the sovereignty of India to control its borders.

In 1953, the government estimated that 6,000 to 7,000 Indians were traveling to the Gulf annually, and were estimated to be remitting around INR 2,500,000 every year.¹⁷¹ Less than one-third of these migrants, however, fell under the scope of the Emigration Act and, therefore, the jurisdiction of the MEA. One way that emigrants who would be classified as skilled emigrants worked around the jurisdiction of the Act was by flying out of India. The original wording of the Act only covered departures by sea and workers used this loophole to fly out of India without going through the necessary steps. In 1950, 1,584 people were documented as having left India in this manner. In the early 1950s, rumors circulated in the Bombay POE office and the MEA that “chartered aircraft left Bombay almost every month carrying workers who had not been registered under the Emigration Act.” Not all oil companies followed this practice and the more established companies were thought to register Indians and then fly them out. However, other

¹⁷¹ Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act (No. VII of 1922) for the Year 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi; Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the “Effect of Emigration,” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

companies regularly participated in this practice and the American Independent Oil Company, a consortium of American oil companies, regularly flew Indians to Saudi Arabia without registering them.¹⁷² These companies also used this practice as a way to control workers. The company management could threaten to dismiss current workers by reminding them of how easily they could be replaced with new workers, brought in “without going through the Emigration formalities.”¹⁷³ By utilizing air travel, oil companies, agents, and workers were able to circumnavigate the restrictions of the Emigration Act when it was in their interest to do so.¹⁷⁴

In addition to not covering migration by plane, the categories of the Emigration Act were outdated and did not map well onto the types of labor used on the oilfields. One particular limitation was the Act’s definition of “skilled” worker. In some cases, the federal government defined the category; for example, in 1948, the Controller General of Emigrants wrote to the local POE offices and instructed them to re-categorize the occupations of *darwān* (watchman) and *daftarī* (clerks) as skilled.¹⁷⁵ More often, the category of skilled worker was fluid and shifted as local POEs in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras variously classified candidates and sent these classifications to the central government. The ability of local Protectors to make such classification decisions stemmed from the difficulty in formally classifying all types of work and the fact that some occupations were skilled in one context but unskilled in another. This meant that POEs needed the discretion to decide the quality of employers and positions on a case-by-case basis. But this flexibility also meant that occupations were often inconsistently

¹⁷² Letter to the Controller General of Emigration from the Protector of Emigrants, Bombay. 24 August 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section. D3091/54-Emi.; Letter to Yunus from POE, Bombay, 4 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section. D2721/53-Emi.

¹⁷³ Indian Emigration Act - Proposal for an amendment of. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 17-6/53-Emi.

¹⁷⁴ Letters to Yunus from Mr. Ghatge, 4 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. D2721/53EMI.

¹⁷⁵ India Letter No. F27-5/48-Emi; Letter to the Controller General of Emigration from the POE, Calcutta, 25 May 1954, D1937/54-Emi; NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F17-3/54-Emi.

categorized.¹⁷⁶ Another effect was that the category of skilled worker generally expanded, as more and more occupations fell under the jurisdiction of the POEs.¹⁷⁷ This policy of allowing POEs to classify occupations and send their decisions to Delhi meant that the interpretation and implementation of the Emigration Act was constantly changing. The choices POEs made in enforcing the Emigration Act were made at a local level. These local choices then informed federal policy.

At times, there was tension over the classification of occupations. In 1954, the Bombay POE suggested that the category of skilled worker should be broadened to include engineers, doctors, “and other highly skilled personnel.”¹⁷⁸ These were considered “professional” workers and were not considered within the jurisdiction of the Emigration Act. Some officials agreed with the Bombay POE, arguing it would give the government greater control over emigrants.¹⁷⁹ Other POEs suggested that the government should no longer classify emigrants and allow all prospective migrants to freely travel. In order to continue safeguarding the interests of Indians, these POEs suggested that workers simply be banned from traveling to countries where Indians were treated poorly.¹⁸⁰

Questions of how to classify workers were wrapped up in officials’ competing understandings of the proper role of the government in relation to its citizens abroad and the abilities of those citizens to secure their rights as workers. Such questions also overlapped with questions of whether to expand the Emigration Act to apply to air travel. One official wrote that

¹⁷⁶ Classification of professions as skilled work, etc. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F17-3/54-Emi.

¹⁷⁷ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

¹⁷⁸ Letter to the Undersecretary of the Government of India, MEA, from Protector of Emigrants, Bombay. 29 January 1955. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section. F. 66/55-Emi.

¹⁷⁹ Indian Emigration Act - Proposal for an amendment of. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 17-6/53-Emi.

¹⁸⁰ Letter to the Controller of Emigration, Madras, from the Protector of Emigrants, Madras. 4 December 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section. F. 66/55-Emi.

since “the people involved . . . were mostly skilled workers we could afford to wink at their departure as normally they could be depended on to have a fair idea of their own interests.”¹⁸¹

This concept of citizenship and government obligations understood these emigrants to be rational actors. Conversely, however, the official’s logic also suggested that less skilled workers might not be so rational, thus revealing the class and caste assumptions shaping which citizens were seen as needing more oversight from the government.

Registering Worker Complaints

Some POEs pressed for the expansion of the Emigration Act and stressed that it was necessary for the government to convince citizens of the Act’s importance and, indeed, its utility for those who complied with it.¹⁸² One advantage of the Act, they argued, was that it facilitated the ability of workers abroad to register complaints regarding their treatment by employers. Upon arrival in India, emigrants could register complaints against their employer with the local Protector of Emigrants. The POE would then investigate the complaint and, if the complaint was found to be valid, the POE would attempt to negotiate with the company on behalf of the worker. If a worker did not get permission to emigrate, however, the government felt it was unable to act on behalf of the worker if a problem arose.

The proportion of complaints received regarding oil companies was not large in comparison with the number of workers traveling to work for the oil companies, but complaints did grow steadily in the early 1950s. In 1951, twenty-five complaints were lodged with the POE in Bombay; two of these complaints were found to be false.¹⁸³ By 1952, the MEA in Delhi

¹⁸¹ Indian Emigration Act - Proposal for an amendment of. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 17-6/53-Emi.

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ Report on the working the Indian Emigration Act (VII of 1922) for the year 1951. NAI, MEA, SEA section. 2/54/6551/10003.

instructed the POE offices to ask returning workers if they had complaints against their employer. Progress in resolving complaints was slow. In 1952, there were thirty-one complaints pending and four additional complaints were received.¹⁸⁴ In 1954, forty-nine new complaints were received. Complaints usually involved the behavior of the employer or compensation the worker believed he was owed.¹⁸⁵

In order to ensure the rights of Indians in the Gulf, officials proposed a plan that involved job site inspections. The first step was to ask British political agents in the Gulf about the conditions for workers there. Second, the Indian government should try to send representatives to the Gulf as soon as possible. The push to have Indian representatives on the ground in the Gulf was prompted by the idea that only Indian officials would safeguard Indians, and that the British could no longer be relied upon to protect Indian citizens. An additional step, officials suggested, was to decrease the number of complaints received by the POE offices. In order to do this, bureaucrats in New Delhi asked that the POE in Bombay warn workers of the situation abroad so that they might choose not to go in the first place.¹⁸⁶ The warning was accompanied by a form signed by the worker that he was aware of the risks, understood the terms of the contract, and accepted those terms “without reservation.”¹⁸⁷ The result, officials hoped, would be to dissuade those workers who were likely to “feel disgruntled and make complaints on returning to India” from migrating. By dissuading some complaints in this preventative manner, government

¹⁸⁴ Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922 and the Rules Issued Thereunder during the Year Ending 31st December 1952, of the Ports of Bombay, Porbandar, Bedi Bunder and Port Okha. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

¹⁸⁵ Annual Report on the Working of the Emigration Act. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1955. F20-2/55-Emi; Report on the working the Indian Emigration Act (VII of 1922) for the year 1951. NAI, MEA, SEA section, 1952. 2/54/6551/10003.

¹⁸⁶ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

¹⁸⁷ Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922 and the Rules Issued Thereunder during the Year Ending 31st December 1952, of the Ports of Bombay, Porbandar, Bedi Bunder and Port Okha. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F. 17-6/54-Emi.

officials hoped to decrease the amount of “flimsy” complaints, thus giving the government more time to investigate legitimate complaints.¹⁸⁸

An example of the difficulty the Indian government had in assessing the complaints that came from workers may be seen in the case of Mr. Diaz. Mr. Diaz was an employee at the Aden refinery construction project who was fired for not being able to perform his duties. When he was fired, Mr. Diaz was forced to pay for his own passage back to India.¹⁸⁹ The management at the refinery construction project argued that Mr. Diaz was a “neurotic type of man, unsuitable for a strenuous construction job.” To support this assessment, the manager reported that Mr. Diaz, who worked as a clerk, had told one of his supervisors that stapling, his primary task, caused him heart palpitations and that he suffered a dislocated shoulder from excessive stapling.¹⁹⁰ These health problems rendered him unable to complete his work. In addition, the company said that Mr. Diaz had mostly unfavorable work reviews and a belligerent attitude.¹⁹¹ Due to these complaints, BP felt it had due cause to fire Mr. Diaz without a month’s pay in lieu of a termination notice. According to Mr. Diaz, BP also garnished INR 500 from his wages in order to cover his passage back to India and this left him with only INR 5. Mr. Diaz was told that any additional money due to him would be sent to the Bechtel office in Bombay for him to pick up.

When Mr. Diaz was terminated, the Indian Employment Committee¹⁹² advised him to visit Mr. Thadani, the Commissioner of the Government in Aden, to complain. Upon meeting Mr. Diaz, the Commissioner agreed that Mr. Diaz was “a neurotic person,” but the

¹⁸⁸ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

¹⁸⁹ Letter to the Ministry of External Affairs from the Commissioner of the Government of India, Aden, 3 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. D2956/53-EMI.

¹⁹⁰ J. F. Williams, 30 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. T.J. Dias, Badge No. 7180.

¹⁹¹ Letter to Administration from W.H. Jones. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F23-9/52-EMI.

¹⁹² The Indian Employment Committee was an informal representative body of Indian workers at the Aden project. It is discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter.

Commissioner also felt the company should pay a month's salary in lieu of termination notice and cover Mr. Diaz's return passage to India. These issues, the Commissioner claimed, were moral ones, and he wrote to the Ministry of External Affairs for legal advice.¹⁹³ The Ministry of External Affairs replied that workers only have to pay for the type of passage for which they are entitled and were responsible for the fare only if they had quit their jobs. If a worker is fired, he may be responsible for his own return fare, but there should be a way for the worker to appeal. The case of Mr. Diaz encouraged the Indian government to renew its talks with the Government of Aden regarding the arbitration of complaints of Indians against the oil companies. However, because there was nothing in place at the time, Mr. Diaz's only recourse was to file a complaint with the POE in Bombay.¹⁹⁴

In order to address migrant complaints like Mr. Diaz's dismissal, the Ministry of External Affairs sent the POE of Bombay a list of questions to ask returned migrants. The most important point of these questions, according to their memos, was to ascertain if workers registering complaints upon return were exaggerating their work situations in the Gulf.¹⁹⁵ The government not only relied on reports from returning workers, but also actualized the plan to send representatives to oilfields report directly on the conditions there.¹⁹⁶ The complaints considered most important by the government often revolved around discrimination against Indians at their worksite. In the investigation of these complaints, officials were divided in their view of workers as rational actors versus workers as precarious subjects in need of protection. Overlapping with

¹⁹³ Letter to the Ministry of External Affairs from the Commissioner of the Government of India, Aden, 3 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. D2956/53-EMI.

¹⁹⁴ Letter to the Commission from the Ministry of External Affairs, 11 August 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration. F. 23-9/52-Emi.

¹⁹⁵ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

¹⁹⁶ Letter to Thadani from Ghatge, 3 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

these competing notions of workers was another set of questions regarding the role and obligation of citizens abroad to represent India in a positive light.

Hindus, Discrimination, and Oil Company Policies

The idea that temporary Gulf migrants were representatives of the new nation made worker complaints against employers for discrimination particularly salient to Indian officials in the MEA. Not wanting to perpetuate a cycle in which colonial inequalities were reinforced, administrators advocated that Indians should only be allowed to travel to countries where Indians were treated equally with locals.¹⁹⁷ The implementation of this policy, however, was difficult given the international managerial practices of the oil companies, the fact that many Indians did not want to be treated similarly to Arabs, and the increasing numbers of uneducated Indian workers going abroad.

Class played a large role in the regulation of emigration. As seen earlier in the desire not to have cooks go abroad, officials worried about India's reputation. In response to complaints by Indian migrants regarding their employment in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf,¹⁹⁸ one government official wrote, "I prefer millions of Indians to perish of hunger than a few to earn a living ignominiously and cause dishonor to our country."¹⁹⁹ Officials attempted to address this tension between allowing citizens the freedom to migrate and fears over the consequences of poor Indians moving abroad by negotiating the contracts for Indian workers. These negotiations took place at the same time that members of the Indian bureaucracy were debating the role of the government in regulating or encouraging emigration, the rights of citizens to emigrate, the

¹⁹⁷ Letter to Undersecretary, MEA, from Seshan, 22 October 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section. D 3798/54-Emi.

¹⁹⁸ The previous chapter on Indian strikes in the oilfields discusses claims Indian laborers in the Gulf made upon the Indian nation in order to ensure their labor rights.

¹⁹⁹ Letter to the Secretary General, MEA, 10 July 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

impact of India's citizens abroad, and the ideal way to implement the Emigration Act of 1922. As these contracts were negotiated, religion also emerged as key defining characteristic of citizens.

In debating the class of emigrants going abroad, bureaucrats working in the MEA considered citizens not as a homogenous category, but within the specificity of India's demography. These demographic specifics were particularly salient in terms of religion. While hiring for the refinery in Aden, one accusation brought against the contracting companies Bechtel and Wimpey was that these companies were discriminating based on religion.²⁰⁰ A "refugee" from West Pakistan had applied for a clerk position at the Aden refinery project and the agent for the contractors told him, "the policy of the Company is to recruit only Indian Christians."²⁰¹ In response, the man wrote to the President of India to complain. This complaint was passed to the Ministry of External Affairs, which asked the POE to investigate. This investigation became even more pressing when another complaint from an Indian Hindu came in arguing, "In all cases Hindus are discriminated against." This was additionally problematic for bureaucrats because the companies were not reemploying those Indians who were forced to leave their jobs and return to India when BP left Iran due to the crisis between AIOC and the Iranian Government.²⁰²

The reason Bechtel and Wimpey gave for their preferential hiring of Christians was the need to set up a cheap kitchen. To illustrate their point that this was not racial discrimination, they noted that they were willing to take Hindus and Muslims who did not follow restrictive

²⁰⁰ Letter to the Secretary for the Government of India, MEA, from Commissioner for the Government of India, 29 January 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. D752-AWI/5342.

²⁰¹ Letter to the Indian Consulate, Aden, from Bhagwanji Virji Satikuvar, 28 January 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration 1952. D1110-AW5/B47.

²⁰² Letter to Minister of Home Affairs from Appunni Menon, 10 December 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 1101/53-Emi.

(and, the companies argued, expensive) dietary restrictions. Indian officials were split on the reasonableness of this explanation. For example, the Protector of Emigrants based in Bombay believed it was reasonable, but the Undersecretary for the Ministry of External Affairs overrode the POE's decision and halted recruitment until a better explanation was given.²⁰³ Thadani, the Commissioner of the Government of India in Aden, took a conciliatory tone between the two. In Thadani's opinion, the company ought to recruit "persons of a broad mind' who can eat at one kitchen." In addition, he argued that this should be quite possible because the contract period was for a short time. Thadani developed this position after speaking with a representative of the contractors who explained the need for a common mess for workers. Thadani's only complaint was that Arabs were given special arrangements. In reply to this complaint, the contractors relied on the need to make special provisions only for the host country. They said that if they were building a refinery in India, then they would consider special kitchens for Hindus.²⁰⁴ Despite claims to the contrary, the logic of religion did play a factor in some of the hiring decisions. The head recruiter for both Bechtel and Wimpey said that he was hiring "Indians of all types" except for Sikhs. The reasoning he gave for this was that "Sikh employees are apt to be argumentative when a number of them gather together in an organization."²⁰⁵ Indian officials made no formal or written complaints regarding this discrimination.

In response to considerable pressure from the Indian government and the halting of recruitment in India, Bechtel and Wimpey agreed to recruit Hindus, Muslims, and Parsis as long

²⁰³ Letter to the Under-Secretary, MEA, from the POE, Bombay, 14 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 1112/53-Emi.

²⁰⁴ Note for Office Record from Thadani. NAI, MEA, Emigration Bureau, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

²⁰⁵ Letter to Mr. Ghatge from A.B. Thadani, 19 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration Bureau, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi. The project at Aden was not the only place where Indians faced discrimination based on religion. For example, in 1953, an Indian mechanic was unable to travel to work on an oil project in Qatar because he was not Muslim. Report submitted by Mr. Mahboob Ahmed, Second Secretary to our Embassy in Baghdad. D 892/54-Emi; NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

as they agreed to the present kitchen situation and did not need religious days off.²⁰⁶ Eventually, the Indian government allowed these contractors to restart the recruitment of Indians for the Aden refinery project and the companies immediately engaged a dozen Hindu and Parsi workers.²⁰⁷ Despite assurances from Bechtel and Wimpey, the Ministry of External Affairs asked the Protector of Emigrants in Bombay to collect information on the religion of workers being recruited to ensure the company was hiring a diversity of Indians.²⁰⁸ In June 1953, thirty-four Christians, five Hindus, and one Muslim were recruited. Government officials were unhappy with these numbers. They questioned why Christians, a minority, were still being recruited in larger numbers than Hindus.²⁰⁹

The discussion over diet and discrimination against Indian workers emerged again later that year when the Commissioner for the Government of India in Aden investigated complaints by workers regarding the food they were served. The employees at the Aden refinery claimed that fifty percent of the meals were beef and the other fifty percent were mutton. No other choices were served, and this was particularly problematic as Hindus do not eat beef and some also do not eat mutton. Perhaps forgetting his position on “open-minded” Indians working for the project that he had taken a year earlier, the Commissioner wrote to both the Ministry of External Affairs and the POE to complain, saying he could not see why Indians had to eat beef and that this forcing of beef upon workers struck him as discrimination against Indians. He claimed this

²⁰⁶ Letter to Thadani from Ghatge, 26 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

²⁰⁷ When finished, in 1955, the refinery was processing five million tons a year. Annual Report of Aden, 1955. NAI, MEA, R&I, 1956. 3(24)R&I/56; Letter to POE Bombay Regarding Aden Refinery Construction, 26 March 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

²⁰⁸ Letter to POE, Bombay, from Undersecretary MEA, 16 May 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

²⁰⁹ Letter to the POE, Bombay, from Undersecretary, MEA, 9 October 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F 23-9/52-Emi.

was especially true because they did not serve pork to Arab Muslims.²¹⁰ The POE, in turn, argued that the workers were also given salad and curries, so there was no need for Indian workers in Aden to eat beef.²¹¹

Bureaucrats working in the MEA objected to the selective hiring of religious groups may be read in two different, but not mutually exclusive, ways. The most obvious would be that in the context of partition and following a period of heightened communal identities, bureaucrats working in the Indian government were aware of possible discrimination against Hindus and wanted to actively protect against it as a way of protecting Indian citizens and, metonymically, the nation. This was especially important in the context of the decision made by the Indian government in the late 1940s that Pakistani Hindus could come to India and become Indian citizens.²¹² Hinduism and the Indian nation were linked.²¹³ In the aftermath of the violence of partition and the formation of a separate Islamic nation for Muslims, the Indian government found secularism to be a politically difficult idea; indeed, the term “secularism” did not appear in the Constitution until 1967.²¹⁴ The question becomes, then, to what extent secularism was mobilized as principle of statecraft in the early years of India’s independence.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Letter to Ghatge from Thadani, 28 April 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. 12(1)CA/53.

²¹¹ Letter to Ghatge from Thadani, 5 June 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F 23-9/52-Emi.

²¹² Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*.

²¹³ The link between Hinduism and the Indian nation has been written about at length. See, for example, Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*, (SUNY Press, 2012); Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*, (Princeton University Press, 2012); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, (C. Hurst & Co., 2001); G Pandey, “Can a Muslim Be an Indian?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 608–29.

²¹⁴ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, “Introduction,” in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Duke University Press, 2007), 1–44.

²¹⁵ I draw the distinction between secularism as a “value” and secularism as a “principle of statecraft” from Nivedita Menon, “Living with Secularism,” in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Duke University Press, 2007), 118–40.

Many of the Indian officials working at the MEA were mobilizing a Gandhian view of secularism that promoted pluralism and tolerance.²¹⁶ Indian government officials were informed by a definition of secularism according to which it was the government's job to protect the religious rights of citizens. This view of secularism differs from that often discussed in Western Europe and the United States, which emphasizes instead the separation of religious and state institutions. The belief that bureaucrats in the Indian government were being more inclusive in their view of who counted as an Indian citizen is also supported by data from the population of Indians living in Aden at the time. In the early 1950s, over ten thousand Muslims were classified as "Indians" in Aden. When the Pakistani consul heard of this, he argued that they should "naturally" be classified as Pakistani Muslims in view of their religion." However, when he attempted to get them to re-register to change their nationality, not a single Indian Muslim changed his nationality.²¹⁷ MEA officials were very proud of this fact and used it to reinforce the idea of the inclusive nature of the Indian state. In its debates with the oil companies regarding religious hiring, the Indian government was, in a sense, encouraging oil companies to interact with Indian citizens in a similar manner as the state itself did – by respecting and protecting religious practice. While this policy was by no means consistently applied, as is seen in the example of the exclusion of Sikhs from the Aden project without complaint, this vision of India as a plural nation motivated officials in the MEA.

Many Indian officials felt it was necessary to push for the rights of Indians abroad in terms of both workplace quality and religion. These bureaucrats argued that Europeans and Americans were better educated, drew higher salaries, and had better positions in oil companies.

²¹⁶ For a longer discussion of Mahatma Gandhi's view of secularism and how Nehru's view of secularism differed from this, see Rajan and Needham, "Introduction," pp. 15-16; Sunil Khilnani, "Nehru's Faith," in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Duke University Press, 2007), 89–103.

²¹⁷ Annual Report of Aden, 1955. NAI, MEA, R&I, 1956. 3(24)R&I/56

As a result, these employees were able to fight for their rights, even if those rights were not explicitly stated in their contract. According to Indian government officials, most Indians abroad were not “sufficiently well educated, occupy comparatively only minor and inferior categories of service and do not have such a social and official status as to provide them with sufficient guarantees (unwritten) to be able to take care of their interests.”²¹⁸ Through writing and negotiating contracts with oil companies, the government was able to ensure that Indians’ “rights” were assured. In writing these contracts, a logic of Indian bureaucratization was applied to oil company practices and a conceptualization of a vulnerable Indian emigrant emerged. This vision of the vulnerable Indian, we will see in Chapter 5, still dictates emigration policy.

Negotiating Contracts

The Indian government oversaw emigration not only through interpreting the Emigration Act of 1922 and the principles set by the British colonial government, but also by continuing the British system of approving contracts signed by workers. In overseeing these contracts and forbidding the emigration of workers when contracts were not approved or followed, the Indian government relied on Section 17 of the Emigration Act of 1922 to reinforce their authority. In general, the oversight of emigration was thought to mean that even if workers chose to emigrate of their own “free will,” the government still had the last say in approving emigration. Withholding permission was particularly important when workers would face indignities or unsafe working conditions.

The British used contracts in conjunction with the Indian Emigration Act in order to oversee the emigration of Indians to the Gulf during the colonial period. One reason the British

²¹⁸ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

insisted upon contracts was that they desired a way to arbitrate worker disputes, and the Emigration Act provided guidelines that Indians could use to sue oil companies in the Agency Courts.²¹⁹ Disputes often arose over contracts and the recruitment of workers. In 1936, the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), after receiving intense pressure to hire more Indians from both the British authorities in Bahrain and the colonial British Government of India, sent a representative to draft a Foreign Service Agreement (FSA) and open a recruiting office. Before drafting the FSA, the representative began recruiting workers with a paper contract. The POE in Bombay refused to allow those workers to travel to Bahrain and threatened the BAPCO representative with imprisonment for breach of the Emigration Act. The representative then drafted a FSA, but it was rejected as unfair to Indian employees. The contract was viewed as unfair because it gave the company the ability to fire Indian workers without notice and did not have provisions for migrants' return to India. It took five months for the POE to give permission for workers to travel. During these five months, Indian workers bypassed the ban on hiring by paying for their own fair to go to Bahrain. Once in Bahrain, these workers were then hired directly by the oil company.²²⁰

In 1941 and 1943, the British considered revising the contracts for the Indian employees at BAPCO. The matter was dropped both times without substantive revisions, but it did set a precedent that was used in subsequent contract negotiations. When, in January 1952, the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) contract was finalized between Kuwait Oil and the Indian government, this contract became the standard for Indian employers in the Gulf. Modifications were only allowed

²¹⁹ Hassan Mohammad Abdulla Saleh, "Labor, Nationalism and Imperialism in Eastern Arabia: Britain, the Shaikhs and the Gulf Oil Workers in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, 1932-1956" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1991), p. 69.

²²⁰ Seccombe and Lawless, "Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50."

on a case-by-case basis.²²¹ With the formalization of this contract, the forms required by the Indian government for Indians to migrate to the Gulf were differentiated from the standard forms used by emigrants to other areas.²²² Through the development of this contract and subsequent negotiations with Gulf oil companies in the early 1950s, the Indian government developed standards regarding living conditions and influenced the managerial practices of the oil companies.

Assuming a certain level of similarity between oil companies, the Indian government used the Kuwait Oil contract in negotiations that began with BAPCO in 1951. BAPCO was reluctant to implement the same contract as KOC. In part, BAPCO was reluctant to use the same contract as KOC because it meant that Indian employees would have a different contract than other employees. In response, bureaucrats working in the MEA attempted to use conventions developed by the International Labor Organization to strengthen their arguments. The Indian government also used oil companies' own practices to strengthen their point. When Indian officials met with resistance from managers, representatives in the MEA argued that the oil companies already treated Indians, as well as a few other nationalities, uniquely through BAPCO's method of classifying Indian and Pakistani workers as "rupee-contract employees." Through these debates with oil companies, bureaucrats in the Indian government continued to press for greater consistency and homogeneity across oil companies with regards to their treatment of Indian workers.

Similar to the debates that surrounded emigration more generally, there was not a hegemonic position amongst Indian bureaucrats as to what the best conditions were for Indian workers in the Gulf. Some bureaucrats, working from an understanding of citizens as rational

²²¹ Letter to Sampath from POE, Bombay, 11 October 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. D5853/52-Emi.

²²² Annual Report on the Working of the Emigration Act. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1955. F20-2/55-Emi.

actors, argued that the Indian government was not in a strong position to negotiate contracts or take action against oil companies. They argued that the government should not take a role in contracts because Indian workers could take these positions of their “own free will.” The choices Indians made to migrate were in response to internal pressures in India and lack of jobs. Unemployment was strongly felt in the oil industry and there were no positions within India for those with oil worker skills.²²³ Others pointed out that jobs in the Gulf were very lucrative for Indians and emigrants saved more during one contract period in the Gulf than they could hope to save “in a lifetime of work” in India.²²⁴

In contrast to these points, officials argued that Indian laborers in the Gulf needed to have their rights protected not only for themselves, but also for the reputation of India. As in earlier debates regarding India’s reputation abroad, officials argued that emigrants should not be allowed to travel to places that were not conducive to their “health and happiness and [were] derogatory to their country’s name.” The implication of this type of argument was that the Indian government should refuse oil companies the permission to recruit labor if those companies did not agree to certain key issues. These officials felt that oil companies would be quick to cooperate, given the high quality and inexpensiveness of Indian labor.²²⁵

In the early 1950s, the Indian government developed with the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) a contract for Indians working at the company. According to bureaucrats at the MEA the key issues were disability compensation for workers, company facilitation of worker remittances to India, allowances for workers to bring families with them, free housing

²²³ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein *and* Revision of Form of agreement entered into between Bahrein Petroleum Co. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi; Iraq’s Request for helping them in their Oil Industry – Note from the Ministry of Mines and Fuel. NAI, MEA, WANA section, 1960. 6-C(34)/60WANA.

²²⁴ Letter to Ghatge from Sinclair, 14 January 1954. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

²²⁵ Marginalia, NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1953. F.6-6/53-Emi.

and transportation, one month's notice upon termination, paid leave, a system of arbitration for employees, sick pay, adequate medical facilities, limiting the workday to ten hours a day for six days a week, and paid overtime after ten hours of work.²²⁶ When these issues met with resistance from oil company executives, the Indian government reevaluated the issues in order to see which were the most important. In paring down their key concerns, bureaucrats decided on the workweek and the family clause as central concerns for Indian workers.

How long laborers could work was decided by an examination of the average amount of hours each company expected employees to work. Many officials felt the standard should be forty-four hours a week. This standard was developed by examining the workweek at Assam Oil Company.²²⁷ This workweek was a vast improvement over the workweek negotiated by British colonial authorities prior to independence. The contract for Indian artisans in 1941 in Bahrain required six workdays a week for nine hours a day. Overtime was required, but the pay remained the same as their regular hours pay.²²⁸ Despite their belief in the forty-four hour workweek, Indian officials did not feel able to enforce this position and differing maximum hours thus varied across companies. At Petroleum Concessions Ltd, Petroleum Development (Qatar) Ltd, and BAPCO, Indian employees were expected to work 48.5 hours per week. However, at Kuwait Oil the workweek was 44.5 hours and it was only forty-four hours at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.²²⁹ While the contracts were largely to help protect the rights of Indian workers abroad, the government did not wish to unfairly tip contracts in favor of employees. One way they

²²⁶ A parallel may be drawn here with indentured labor and the desire to regulate the treatment of workers abroad. However, both during the colonial period and in the early years of independence, the desire to legislate for better working conditions did not necessarily mean that workers' conditions were improved. See, for example, Carter, *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers*, p. 4.

²²⁷ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein *and* Revision of Form of agreement entered into between Bahrein Petroleum Co. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

²²⁸ Forms of Agreement for Indian employees of the Bahrain Govt. NAI, External Affairs Dept., Near East Branch, 1941, 52-N/41

²²⁹ The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was renamed BP after the nationalization of oil in Iran.

sought to balance this was by formalizing a requirement that employees who did leave their position abroad had to return the advance given to them.

The family clause was particularly important to many Indian officials, one of whom even brought the issue up at the annual meeting of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Defining the family was difficult. Indian officials were conscious of the plurality of ways Indians may define marriage – from having more than one wife to supporting parents and grandparents. Despite these multiple definitions of family in India, officials feared that too broad a definition would cause employers to look elsewhere and not hire Indians.²³⁰ Indian bureaucrats invested large amounts of work into developing and arguing for family provisions within the contracts, but they were unable to persuade oil companies to agree to these provisions. This desire for family settlement may have come from discussions regarding the allowance of family provisions for Indians already settled abroad in Malaya, Burma, and other places, who were living in those countries permanently.²³¹ Given the short duration of contracts to work in the Gulf, oil companies did not want to agree to family policies there. These policies also reflected the desire of the British Protectorate in the Gulf to limit the influence of foreigners in the region.

Like the family clause, many aspects of contract negotiations were decided with the Indian government conceding more than the oil companies. In negotiations with BAPCO, however, the Indian government did gain a more clear description of employee leave as well as the fact that workers must be housed in constructed, as opposed to tent, housing.²³² For projects such as the construction of the Aden refinery, during initial negotiations, the companies agreed to the “basic principles” of the Kuwait Oil Company’s contract and both sides agreed that when the

²³⁰ Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein Petroleum Co., Bahrein *and* Revision of Form of agreement entered into between Bahrein Petroleum Co. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

²³¹ Letter to Seshan from Mukherjee, 29 February 1956. NAI, MEA, Emigration Section. F. 66/55-Emi.

²³² Revision of form of agreement entered into between Bahrein Petroleum Co. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1948. F. 22-8/48-Emi.

Kuwait Oil contract changed, so would the Aden contract.²³³ The contracts for workers at the Aden refinery included stipulations that the workers had to take a medical test; that they acknowledged that they worked “at [their] own risk;” and that their references would be checked. The Protectors of Emigrants in Bombay looked over these contracts and insisted that they needed to contain stipulations for overtime; that the companies could not stop pay during strikes; and that companies had to give reasons for terminating employment.²³⁴

In 1952 at the Aden Refinery Project, there were different contracts for artisans, domestics, and general class employees.²³⁵ The key issue for the Indian government representatives overlooking the Aden contract was the issue of jurisdiction in the form of arbitration. In the case of the KOC contract, the British Political Agent in Kuwait was the arbitrator of disputes concerning the project.²³⁶ While many Indian officials agreed that this situation should be continued, other Indian officials felt that the Indian government ought to look at the issue “from the company’s point of view” and argued that arbitration should be overseen by the Government of Aden and the Indian Commission in Aden.²³⁷ The actual arbitration, however, did not seem to be a joint project and workers had trouble appealing their case once they lost their position with the company.²³⁸ These debates over arbitration and the general role the Indian government adopted in negotiating contracts directly impacted how sovereignty and

²³³ Letter to Sampath from Ghatge, 3 November 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 6261/52-Emi.; Letter to Sampath from Ghatge, 10 November 1952, NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 6378/52-Emi.

²³⁴ George Wimpey and Company Limited, Preliminary Agreement and Form of Agreement. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. F 23-9/52-Emi.

²³⁵ Letter to Sampath from Ghatge, 10 November 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 6378/52-Emi.

²³⁶ Letter to POE, Bombay from Deputy Secretary, MEA, 8 December 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 23-9/52-Emi.

²³⁷ Letter to Deputy Secretary, MEA, 22 December 1952. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. 7027/52-Emi.

²³⁸ Other contracts asked that the company remit a portion of the workers’ pay for employees through company representatives based in India. See: Skilled workers engaged by the Bahrein [sic] Petroleum Co., Bahrein. NAI, MEA, Emigration. F. 22-8/48-Emi. This position may be because some countries, such as Ceylon and Burma, had limited the amount of money Indians living there were able to remit back to India. Material required by Sri Lanka Sundaram M.P. for a paper on the “Effect of Emigration.” NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1954. F. 13-9/54-Emi.

citizenship were being defined by the Indian nation. Debates over the movement of Indians helped cement sovereign boundaries of the new nation. Furthermore, Indian bureaucrats argued that Indian citizens abroad were representative of India and therefore needed to be treated with the respect due to India.

Conclusion: Emigration and the Postcolonial Nation

In working to ensure the proper working conditions for Indians abroad, the Indian nation-state defined its citizens. By protecting the religious sensibilities of Indians and negotiating their work contracts, bureaucrats in the Indian government attempted to compel oil companies to engage with Indian citizens in a manner that recognized the vulnerability of Indian workers. In attempting to influence oil companies to adopt this position, the government reified a notion of Indians as vulnerable citizens and normalized a restrictive policy of emigration that continues to the present.

Emigration from India to the Gulf provided a wholly new type of emigration for the nascent Indian state to manage. Most studies examining the emigration of Indians to the Gulf start in the 1970s and end with a focus on the Emigration Act of 1983 and how that Act responded to increased emigration to the Gulf. Yet, this focus ignores the groundwork laid by the early Indian state in regulating emigration, how the management of emigration helped the Indian state define itself and its obligations to citizens, and how the debates that occurred in the early 1950s have repercussions for today's management of emigration.

The debates regarding the Emigration Act of 1922, policies developed to deal with recruiters in the 1930s, to address complaints by workers, and to negotiate contracts all converged to shape emigration practices regarding the oversight of emigration of workers to the

Gulf that still have repercussions to this day. These practices indicate that prior to the Passport Act of 1967 and the new Emigration Act of 1983, the processes developed to handle emigration were related to emigration to the Persian Gulf. They were also instrumental in developing the duties of the state and its obligations to its citizens. As people moved internationally after independence, right of citizens and restrictions on citizens' movement were developed together. Developing these transnational citizenship regimes allowed the Indian government to define its borders and its people. Exploring the interactions between new nations, citizens, and transnational industry reveals how postcolonial nations attempted to establish sovereignty and the meanings of citizenship.

Chapter III

“We are the Government Here:” Strikes and Shifting Labor Practices in the Arabic-speaking Gulf

The previous two chapters have considered Indians in the oilfields of the Gulf. In most cases, Indians worked alongside *khalījī*, or Gulf Arab, workers. This chapter will consider the role of *khalījī* laborers on the oilfields and offer another perspective on the relationship between the British protectorate, oil companies, and labor. The British protectorate in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf began with the signing of treaties between the British government and the rulers of the Gulf in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The treaties gave the British control of the Arabic-speaking Gulf’s external relations, while ensuring British assistance to help Gulf rulers, or sheikhs, maintain internal control. The countries now known as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were under British sovereignty or protection. While Oman and Muscat did not fall under their direct control, the British still exercised a great amount of influence over the Sultanate. In 1913, the Ruler of Kuwait signed a treaty that he would only grant oil concessions to those companies approved by the British government. In 1914 the Ruler of Bahrain signed the same contract, in 1916 the Ruler of Qatar, in 1922 the Rulers of the Trucial Coast (today known as the UAE), and in 1923 the Rulers of Muscat and Oman.

In the first half of the twentieth century, another type of contract gained political and economic importance in the Gulf States: oil concessions. Contracts for oil concessions were first negotiated between an oil company and a ruler. The British government then approved these

contracts. In many cases, there was a blurring between British oil companies and the British government, with the latter holding controlling shares in such oil companies as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Concession agreements signed on the Arabian side of the Gulf in the 1930s specifically stated that the workers brought in to work for the companies would be from the neighboring Arab Gulf countries. This was important to Gulf leaders given the depressed state of the economy after the collapse of the pearl market.²³⁹

Yet, despite the rulers' requests that local subjects be hired for the oil company operations, locals did not have the appropriate technical training to meet oil company requirements. As a result, the oil companies reserved the right to hire foreign workers. For the British government, this was worrisome. In the case of the Bahrain Petroleum Company and Kuwait Oil, Americans owned these companies one hundred percent and fifty percent, respectively, and the British worried that such a strong presence of Americans would undermine British authority in the Arabic-speaking Gulf. In addition, the British worried that the oil companies would bring in Persian workers, whose influx would reopen Persian claims of sovereignty over Bahrain, in particular.²⁴⁰ In the case of Qatar, British officials cited the "backward" nature of the people to argue that foreigners should not be employed there. More specifically, the British worried that unrest among local workers could lead to the deaths of foreign workers and subsequent demands that the British Empire be responsible for bringing justice to these incidents.²⁴¹ Ironically, we will see that the claim of "backwardness" was used just twenty-five years later to argue for the exclusion of nationals from the worksite and against

²³⁹ I J Seccombe and R I Lawless, "Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50," *International Migration Review* 20 (August 1986), p. 551.

²⁴⁰ Hassan Mohammad Abdulla Saleh, "Labor, Nationalism and Imperialism in Eastern Arabia: Britain, the Shaikhs and the Gulf Oil Workers in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, 1932-1956" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1991), p. 64.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 64.

trade unions.

Due to disruptions caused by World War II, oil company policies regarding the Arabic-speaking Gulf, and the time it took to locate large oil reserves, it was not until the 1950s that the Gulf States began exporting oil in large quantities.²⁴² Once oil production began, it quickly became the dominant economic activity of the Gulf States. For example, in Qatar in 1966, the economy was entirely dependent upon oil revenues, which were thirty million pounds a year.²⁴³ By 1969, there were three oil companies with concessions in Qatar. Two of these companies produced approximately seventeen million long tons of crude and oil revenues increased to fifty million pounds per year.²⁴⁴ With increased oil production, labor relations within the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf States changed. Residents that were formally nomadic and pastoralist, fishermen, or at work in the pearl industry found new jobs in the oil industry. In addition to these new, higher paying jobs, the governments of these nations now had larger amounts of money to hire workers for government positions and developed plans to share the newfound oil wealth.

A major source of concern for the oil companies was the stability of the workforce – both on the oilfields themselves and in the industries building infrastructure for oil production. Workforce stability also impacted political stability and was, therefore, a main concern of both the British administration and the rulers of the Gulf countries. In the wake of a series of strikes held by *khalījī*, or Gulf Arab, workers in the Gulf in the 1960s, the governments and the oil companies worked together to reduce the impact of these strikes. The result was an evacuation of politics from the oilfields through the replacement of *khalījī* workers with foreign workers.

²⁴² Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (New York: Verso, 2011); Secombe and Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50.”

²⁴³ “Qatar,” 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66. *RQ* (2), 709-713.

²⁴⁴ R.H.M. Boyle Letter to British Political Agency, Doha, 7 April 1969. *RQ* (3), 7-11.

While oil production began on a large-scale following World War II, there was oil production and refinement in the area before this time. Both in the pre- and post-war periods, worker strikes at oil projects were common. Often, these strikes were made-up of coalitions of workers and brought together workers of differing religions and ethnicities. In Bahrain, the first organized strikes occurred in November 1938. These were inspired by ideas of Arab nationalism that were “spreading across the increasingly well-educated Bahraini population, and reform movements [that] were emerging in Kuwait and Dubai.”²⁴⁵ These strikes were not only by Sunni and Shi’a Bahrainis but also involved Indians; together, the strikers sought equal pay for Bahrainis and Indians. Some of their demands were met, but not equal pay. There was another strike in 1943 that did more to further worker demands. Organizers of oil workers focused on common conditions as a way to bring workers together.²⁴⁶ From 1933 to 1945, the British showed little interest in such activities, as the treaties detailed that the Gulf rulers ran the internal workings of their sheikdoms and the British had a general policy of non-interference with the Gulf. This changed once worker unrest began to shift into political unrest, but even then, given the relative lack of interest in developing oil resources during this period, the British focused more on the strategic value of the Gulf than its potential as a source of oil.²⁴⁷

By 1948, according to Timothy Mitchell, “the era of the mass strike was over.”²⁴⁸ It was effectively ended by industry-level changes in the way oil was extracted, processed and shipped.²⁴⁹ But while the system allowed for a more flexible energy network than coal, it did not

²⁴⁵ Jane Kinninmont, “Bahrain,” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 35.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁴⁸ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, pp. 152-153.

²⁴⁹ Importantly, Daniel Yergin shows that pipelines were developed in the 1860s in the United States as a way of moving oil that was not be easily interrupted by striking workers. Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*, (New York: Free Press, 2008 [1991]), pp. 16-18.

halt worker actions altogether. Instead, workers staged “brief interruptions aimed at vulnerable points or critical moments,” particularly in the production of petroleum.²⁵⁰ Such interruptions would sometimes pause oil production for months, but, more often, only for a matter of days. The changing nature of energy production and oil’s material qualities thus shifted the efficacy of strikes, just as social relations in the Gulf States were shifting in conjunction with changes in political and economic conditions.

This chapter examines strikes by Arab workers in the Gulf during the 1960s – when the oil industry was beginning to standardize the mass production of oil on the Trucial Coast. I compare the reasons workers gave for their strikes and the competing reasons for the strikes outlined by Gulf governments, the British administration, and oil companies. Central factors for all parties were the power of rumors; the assumption that outside parties were influencing the strikes; and the enduring power of the idea of “tribes” as easily explaining all dynamics of Gulf society. I then consider the development of labor policies on the Trucial Coast and the rise of contractors in the oil industry. I conclude by arguing that the role of Indians as laborers in the Gulf was informed by these genealogies of labor policies and strikes. This argument pushes against a simplistic understanding of Indian labor in the Gulf as a response to the new wealth of the nations. Instead, I suggest that forms of governance and management practices were better suited to working with foreigners whose recourse to government support was tenuous. This merging of managerial practice and governmental style provided the foundation for the current labor laws in place in the Gulf.

²⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, pp. 152-153.

1963 Abu Dhabi Strikes

In late May and early June 1963, the *khalījī* workers, or workers from the countries of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf, at the oil projects in Abu Dhabi held a series of strikes. These strikes began at the onshore projects of Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company (ADPC)²⁵¹ and ADPC's sub-contractors.²⁵² Located over 100 kilometers west of Abu Dhabi City, the strikes were centered at Jebel Dhanna, Tarif, and Murban [Map 4: Abu Dhabi Strike Sites, 1963]. On May 21, at Jebel Dhanna, the workers guarded the gates to the camps and did not allow company officials to enter. The strike was well-organized, non-violent, and the order to strike was "passed around quickly and obeyed absolutely."²⁵³ At other oil projects in Abu Dhabi, the strikes were more volatile. In Tarif, the office was "besieged" by around one hundred workers with sticks and, when a British agent visited the Tarif offices, he and his companions faced a crowd of thirty workers "armed with stones and iron bars." The unrest radiated out to smaller camps, and at a nearby camp, called Santa Fe, the expatriate staff, mostly Americans, were "besieged in the offices and mess-hall" and property was destroyed or stolen.²⁵⁴ The lack of violence at Jebel Dhanna may have been due to the residential pattern of the project. At Jebel Dhanna there were eight hundred Arabs, who worked mainly as laborers and drivers; about six hundred Indians and Pakistanis; and about four hundred Europeans. The workers were housed separately according to region of origin; the Indians and Pakistanis did not share a camp with the local workers and the Europeans had their own camp. Beginning May 31, the strikes spread offshore and the workers

²⁵¹ ADPC was a subsidiary of Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) established in 1939 to hold Abu Dhabi oil concessions. The major shareholders of IPC in the 1960s were British Petroleum (previously named the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company), Deutsche Bank, Shell, and the British Government.

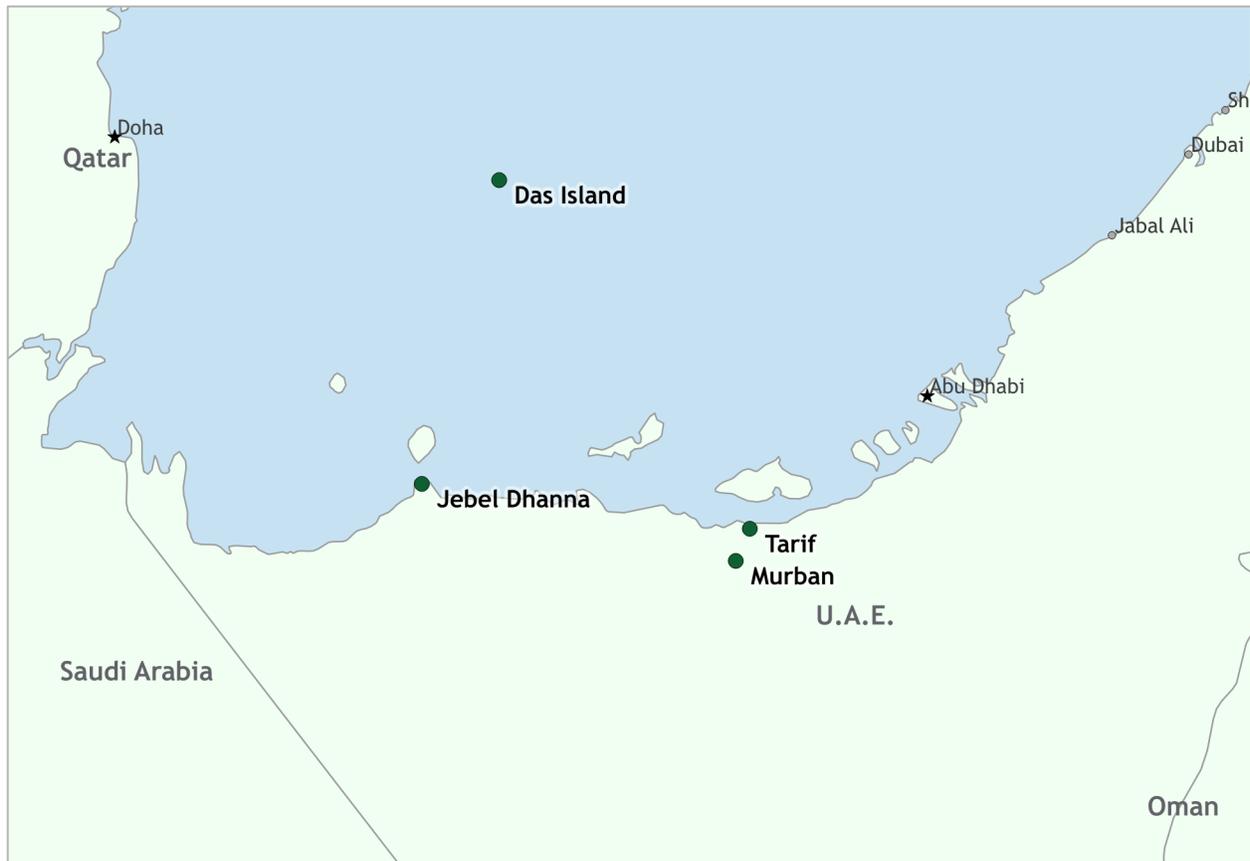
(<http://www.adnoc.ae/content.aspx?newid=27&mid=27>)

²⁵² J.E.H. Boustead, Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 28 May 1963. *RE* (1963), 568.

²⁵³ The main players at Jebel Dhanna were ADPC and the consultants at the Jebel Dhanna project, Eastern Bechtel Corporation. J.E.H. Boustead, Record of a visit to Jebel Dhanna, 29 May 1963. *RE* (1963), 573-576.

²⁵⁴ J.E.H. Boustead, Report of Visit to Tarif, 28 May 1963. *RE* (1963), 569-570.

at Abu Dhabi Marine Areas Ltd (ADMA)²⁵⁵ at Das Island also began to participate in the strikes. Here, too, violence erupted: two British managers were beaten and two Indian clerical staff were injured.²⁵⁶



Map 4: Abu Dhabi Strike Sites, 1963

Unlike the strikes in Bahrain in the late 1930s, these strikes were marked by the participation of less-skilled *khalījī* workers and the lack of participation by management. The labor laws in Abu Dhabi at the time may have been a factor shaping the participation of different groups. In 1961, the Ruler of Abu Dhabi made a temporary Labour and Worker's Law that did

²⁵⁵ Today this company is ADMA-OPCO (Abu Dhabi Marine Operating Company). It is a subsidiary of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC).

²⁵⁶ Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963, *RE 1963*, 578-580. Telegram No. 324 From Bahrain to Foreign Office, 1 June 1963. *RE (1963)*, 564.

not apply to those under the jurisdiction of the British administration.²⁵⁷ The Labour and Worker's Law classified two types of workers: daily and monthly. For daily workers, the workday was eight hours; wages were to be deducted on days workers were absent; transportation was made available to workers to and from work; companies provided free water and rest facilities; after the first month, the daily wage was paid for a day of rest each week; and after two weeks of employment, workers were paid for religious and official holidays. For monthly workers, such as drivers, watchmen, foremen, and skilled workers, the workday was also eight hours; but overtime was two times workers' normal pay; nationals had to be hired first and foreigners were required to get permission from the municipality; the companies were required to supply water; and for absences, workers were to be warned three times and the municipality told before action was taken by the company. The municipality would then investigate the absence and advise the worker. Finally, companies were required to submit a list of all workers showing names, nationality, and occupation.²⁵⁸ The differences in working conditions for daily and monthly pay workers, the emphasis the Abu Dhabi government placed on oil companies hiring nationals, and the government's attempts to track foreigners in the country influenced the contours of worker actions. The tendency of workers to strike along linguistic and ethnic lines hints at the tensions within the country between the government, oil companies, British government, and workers in the oilfields.

At both Jebel Dhanna and Das Island, the British management and administration believed that the workers were striking out of sympathy for their compatriots at other sites. They offered the lack of violence at Jebel Dhanna as the basis for this claim.²⁵⁹ Another reason the

²⁵⁷ P.C.D. Archer to British Embassy, Beirut. 26 September 1961, *RE* (1961), 669.

²⁵⁸ Labour Law, Abu Dhabi State, 28 August 1961. *RE* (1961), 670-1.

²⁵⁹ Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963; J.E.H. Boustead, Record of a visit to Jebel Dhanna, 29 May 1963.

British administration feared that the offshore and onshore strikes were connected was because the workers at ADMA and at ADPC made a similar series of demands.²⁶⁰ Onshore, these demands included a wage increase, paying locals the same as other Arab employees (“equal pay for equal work”), and hiring local men for work currently done by expatriates – in particular hiring locals for the semi-skilled positions held by the Lebanese and other “northern” Arabs. Workers also demanded the dismissal of unpopular managers, one of who was an Abu Dhabi national, and all of whom, a British government bureaucrat pointed out, were responsible for discipline in the camps.²⁶¹ At Das Island, worker demands were almost exactly the same as the demands at Jebel Dhana, with a few key differences. First, at Das Island there were more Indians and Pakistanis working in technical and managerial positions and, thus, the foreigners identified by the striking *khalījī* workers included not only Arabs from outside of the Gulf, but also Indians and Pakistanis.²⁶² The workers at Das Island, like Jebel Dhanna, also requested that all jobs be given to nationals, and, going a step further, asked for educational programs in order to make this possible. Furthermore, they requested that three men be taken from the Island, including an Indian doctor. Both onshore and offshore, workers not only requested better jobs, but also complained about problems that arose in moments of cultural interaction. The tensions between foreigners and nationals must have been palpable, as a final request on Das Island was that “if a foreigner made a mistake (offends) he is to be prosecuted by the Ruler’s Representative or his deputy on the Island.”²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963.

²⁶¹ Eventually, the Abu Dhabi national in question was shot in the leg during the conversations by the Ruler’s son, Sheikh Sultan, when the Sheikh was drunk and thought he was being attacked during the negotiations. *ibid.*; Confidential Memo from Bahrain to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963, *RE* (1963), 561.

²⁶² Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963.

²⁶³ Worker Demands to H.E. Sheikh Hamdan B. Mohammad. 8 Muharram 1363 (1 June 1963), *RE* (1963), 582.

National Identity and Pan-Arab Solidarity

The similarity of the workers' demands, both at onshore and offshore projects, fueled British speculation regarding the strikes. British administrators argued that either the workers were copying each other or, more probably from the British perspective, the strike was being coordinated from the outside. While both British government officials and oil project managers preferred the latter theory, they had trouble finding evidence to corroborate it.²⁶⁴ Rumors and speculation fueled the British administration's and the oil companies' perspectives on the strikes and their potential consequences.²⁶⁵ Believing the strike in Tarif was completely unexpected and "without any real cause," one official wrote that "everyone in the management of the oil company seems convinced that trouble is being deliberately stirred up by agitators from outside but no one seems to know what the motives for this are."²⁶⁶ While there was no direct evidence that the strike was instigated by external forces, some of the Abu Dhabi workers had been employed elsewhere in the Gulf and this lent weight to the fear that these workers "may well have come under hostile influence."²⁶⁷ In the months after the strikes, rumors of potential strikes abounded. For the British, these rumors were spurred by fears that the radio broadcast "*Sawt al-Arab*," or "Voice of the Arabs," which discussed worker salaries and conditions, was instigating

²⁶⁴ J.E.H. Boustead, Confidential Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 3 June 1963, *RE* (1963), 577.

²⁶⁵ Rumors were also circulating among workers. For example, the precipitating event at Das Island may also have been the arrest of an Awamir employee who was stealing cars and joyriding them around the camp at night. A British manager apprehended the man, but as the manager spoke no Arabic, the Awamir was taken to the Arab Affairs Officer. Upon his release, the Awamir told his colleagues he was beaten by the Arab Affairs Officer, who was Lebanese, in the U.K. camp. Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963.

²⁶⁶ J.E.H. Boustead, Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 28 May 1963.

²⁶⁷ Confidential Memo from Bahrain to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963.

workers to strike. The main problem, according to this radio broadcasts, was that foreigners were being given better jobs and higher pay than nationals.²⁶⁸

In Jebel Dhanna, the management of both ADPC and Bechtel,²⁶⁹ for their part, also believed that the strike had no cause and was instigated by outside troublemakers.²⁷⁰ Echoing these sentiments, a British government administrator wrote:

Although the workers may have had some genuine grievances, the strikes were worked up by a group of agitators and a degree of co-ordination and organization was displayed which is *totally foreign to Abu Dhabi nature*. Most of the companies had a small group of trouble-makers usually men from outside Abu Dhabi, amongst their employees, but hitherto they had not been allowed by Abu Dhabi authorities to sack them. It is not yet clear whether these trouble-makers were acting on their own initiative or whether they were receiving instructions from outside.²⁷¹

In this analysis of the strikes, the British assumed that Abu Dhabi workers imagined a locality that was bounded by the relatively new boundaries of the state. Belonging to this new state were local actors that the British believed could be defined by a type of personality. The British expected affiliations and actions to run along these new state lines. And yet, the perceived concreteness of these boundaries by the British is surprising given the difficulty the British faced when attempting to determine oil concessions in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁷²

When one looks at the strikes from the perspective of the workers themselves, another framing emerges: one could also read these demands as Abu Dhabi locals making a claim for a *khalījī* network that moved fluidly across state boundaries. The networks defined by the workers

²⁶⁸ D. Slater to P.W. Summerscale, Political Residency Bahrain, 29 July 1963. *RE* (1963), 586-7; D. Slater to F.D.W. Brown, Political Residency Bahrain, 12 August 1963. *RE* (1963), 588.

²⁶⁹ Bechtel is an American civil engineering and construction company. See Chapter 5 for a longer discussion of the effects of contracting on the oil industry and labor organization.

²⁷⁰ J.E.H. Boustead, Record of a visit to Jebel Dhanna, 29 May 1963.

²⁷¹ Confidential Annex to Abu Dhabi Monthly, Diary No. 5 of 1963, May 1 – May 31. *PG* (24), 148-150. Emphasis is mine.

²⁷² Foreign Office 1016/56. Report by J.B. Howes, Assistant Political Agent Bahrain, on special duty in connection with the exploration party of Petroleum Concessions Limited in the Dhahira, 21 December 1938. *RE* (8), 641-51.

were not confined to the geographic boundaries established to ease oil concessions.²⁷³ At Jebel Dhanna, the strikes were attributed to the company's proposal to fire seven workers. Only two of these workers were Abu Dhabians. The most influential of the men the company wanted to fire were three Awamir from Hadhramaut, part of the Aden Protectorate. This claim for a *khalījī* locality defined by kin and exchange relations was also reflected in workers' demands for autonomy from both the British administration in the state and the oil companies' control over oil projects. At times, workers conflated the government and the oil companies. During the strike at Jebel Dhanna, one striker told an Austrian manager, "You are not the boss now, we are the Government here."²⁷⁴ Even after work at Jebel Dhanna resumed, workers remained resistant to British or oil company authority. Workers threatened management with violence and they said they would tell on the management to the Sheikh and he would then throw the managers out of the country.

Sheikhly Authority and Colonial Policing

The workers' claim for their role in governance also emerged in their negotiations during the strikes. Initially, the workers did not want to give their demands to the companies' officials. At Tarif, workers refused to discuss their demands with the company there, and insisted that they would only speak with Sheikh Sultan, the son of Sheikh Shakhbut, the Ruler of Abu Dhabi.²⁷⁵ This demand by the workers to speak directly with the Ruler or one of his sons was repeated at the other sites. The workers at Das Island wanted to negotiate directly with another of the Ruler's

²⁷³ The commonalities between the Gulf States has been explored by researchers. See, for example, Paul Dresch, "Introduction: Societies, Identities and Global Issues," in *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*, ed. Paul Dresch and James Piscatori, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005).

²⁷⁴ J.E.H. Boustead, Record of a visit to Jebel Dhanna, 29 May 1963.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

sons, Sheikh Said. Such appeals revealed the workers' understanding of the Ruler as an advocate for their rights, as well as the authoritative figure with regard to work negotiations. The prestige workers assigned to the Ruler and members of the royal family was such that even representatives of the Sheikh, if not actually related to the Sheikh, were not always accepted as authorities; a representative for Sheikh Sultan, for example, was unable to prevent the workers from striking at the Santa Fe camp.²⁷⁶

While the workers may have understood the Sheikh to be the legitimate authority figure, the British characterized the Ruler's response to these strikes as largely ineffective.²⁷⁷ They saw him as overly sympathetic with the workers and pointed to his reluctance to punish those who used violence.²⁷⁸ When the Ruler encouraged the companies to raise wages, the British interpreted this as a simplistic and ineffective response, designed primarily to maintain his own popularity.²⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the British were not insensitive to this popularity and the significance of the Ruler's image. Early in the days of the strikes at ADPC, Sir William Luce, the British Political Resident in Bahrain, met with the Ruler to impress upon him that "his primary responsibility [was] to enforce law and order." Sir Luce attempted to clarify to the Ruler the British government's position on the strikes. He told the Ruler, the "British were not concerned with industrial disputes between workers and their employers or with breaking strikes, but we were concerned with the security of lives and property of people under our jurisdiction who were working in his State." He continued that if the Ruler was unable to maintain order and the British "saw that the lives and property of those to whom we have an obligation were thereby imperiled, I should not hesitate to take such steps necessary to protect them." Sir Luce was confident that

²⁷⁶ J.E.H. Boustead, Report of Visit to Tarif, 28 May 1963.

²⁷⁷ Confidential Memo from Bahrain to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963.

²⁷⁸ J.E.H. Boustead, Report of Visit to Tarif, 28 May 1963. J.E.H. Boustead, Record of a visit to Jebel Dhanna, 29 May 1963.

²⁷⁹ J.E.H. Boustead, Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 28 May 1963.

Sheikh Shakhbut would take the appropriate action and he believed having the British interfere in the matter would hurt the Ruler's reputation and standing among the populace.²⁸⁰

Despite these warnings, after a few days of strikes, the British were still dissatisfied with the Ruler's response. The Ruler had been using his sons, Sheikh Sultan and Sheikh Said, to act as intermediaries with the workers, but the British believed these sons had little influence.²⁸¹ At Jebel Dhanna, Sheikh Sultan drank heavily during the strikes. The result was that workers, the company, and the British government had to postpone meetings to discuss the workers' terms. For his part, the Ruler's son was also displeased with the companies and accused them of blatantly ignoring laws established by the Ruler.²⁸²

At the strikes on Das Island, Sheikh Said acted as the Ruler's representative and may have been more effective than his brother was at Jebel Dhanna. Sheikh Said arrived at Das Island after the Ruler's representative there admitted he could not control the situation because the workers "regarded him as a company stooge."²⁸³ Immediately upon arrival, Sheikh Said agreed to throw out the troublemakers. He also "mixed extensively with the workers during his stay on Das."²⁸⁴ In order to resolve the strike on Das Island, Sheikh Said tried to send forty troublemakers back to Abu Dhabi City by ship. However, a number of other workers also wished to go and when the ship eventually sailed, about four hundred strikers, or two-thirds of the Arab workforce, left the island.²⁸⁵ The result was a "wholesale withdrawal of local labor."²⁸⁶ The Ruler ordered the arrest of five principal troublemakers upon disembarkation. After the ship

²⁸⁰ W.H. Luce to Foreign Office, 5 June 1963. *RE* (1963), 567.

²⁸¹ Confidential Memo from Bahrain to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963

²⁸² J.E.H. Boustead, Record of a visit to Jebel Dhanna, 29 May 1963.

²⁸³ Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963.

²⁸⁴ Confidential Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 3 June 1963.

²⁸⁵ Telegram No. 328, From Bahrain to Foreign Office, 3 June 1963. *RE* (1963), 565.

²⁸⁶ Economic Annex to Abu Dhabi Monthly, Diary No. 6. June 1 – June 30, 1963. *PG* (24), 156-7.

sailed, the Island was quiet.²⁸⁷ When the ship arrived in Abu Dhabi, the forty troublemakers were arrested and the remainder of the men returned quietly to their homes.²⁸⁸ Over the course of the following few weeks, the majority of the workers returned to work on Das Island.²⁸⁹

The Ruler's response to the trouble at Das Island surprised the British because they thought Sheikh Shakhbut should deal more strongly with the troublemakers. Instead, he released the forty men he arrested, including those known to have committed violence. He also dismissed the affair as minor and said that the company could have avoided the strike had it paid its workers more. In addition, Sheikh Shakhbut used rumor as a tool to attack company management practices. He accused the company of causing the strike because it allowed the General Manager of ADMA to beat an Arab for trying to steal a car. The British accepted the validity of this story, but insisted that the assailant was the Lebanese manager, not the British General Manager. Further surprising the British, the Ruler declined to arrest the troublemakers in Tarif.²⁹⁰

According to the British administration and management of oil companies, the ineffectiveness of Sheikh Shakhbut was compounded by the inability and reluctance of the Abu Dhabi police to restore order.²⁹¹ In part, the British claimed the Abu Dhabi police were ineffective because they lacked training and leadership;²⁹² they were also seen as identifying with the workers and supporting their cause. At the Tarif strikes, the police "fraternised with the strikers, shaking hands and rubbing noses with them."²⁹³ And at Das Island, the police were

²⁸⁷ Telegram No. 328, From Bahrain to Foreign Office, 3 June 1963.

²⁸⁸ J.E.H. Boustead Letter to Political Residency, Bahrain, 17 June 1963. *RE* (1963), 584-5.

²⁸⁹ Abu Dhabi Monthly Diary No. 6 of 1963, June 1 – June 30. *PG* (24), 152-3.

²⁹⁰ J.E.H. Boustead Letter to Political Residency, Bahrain, 17 June 1963.

²⁹¹ Confidential Memo from Bahrain to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963.

²⁹² J.E.H. Boustead, Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 28 May 1963.

²⁹³ J.E.H. Boustead, Report of Visit to Tarif, 28 May 1963.

completely absent during the strike on the island, something the British attributed to police solidarity with the strikers.²⁹⁴

Sheikh Shakhbut was “disturbed” by accounts of the unsatisfactory performance of his police force during the strikes; he had hoped the police would be more effective in controlling workers. As a result, in early July he agreed to hire a Bahraini police officer to train the Abu Dhabi police force for three months, with particular attention to be paid to security duties.²⁹⁵ In October of 1963, in order to improve the police force, the British administration proposed that a riot squad be trained and stationed near Jebel Dhanna. They also suggested that the police force’s salaries and conditions of service be regularized.²⁹⁶ Through these types of policies and moving of personnel, the British administration sought to develop a security apparatus that could be used to protect the lives of Europeans in the Gulf and the property of oil companies.

In order to ensure effective protection of British property and persons, the British administrators sent two units of the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) to the area, in case there was additional trouble.²⁹⁷ The TOS were instructed to interfere only if the Abu Dhabi police force “failed and the Europeans and other foreign nationals’ lives are threatened.” The TOS were also instructed not to stop the strikes, but rather “to guard each installation and to form a defended centre in each area, where European and other foreign national staff can take shelter if the police are overwhelmed.”²⁹⁸ The British also sent the HMS Striker in the vicinity of Das, but “out of sight of the Island.” The Striker was to act as a backup in case the TOS lost control of the

²⁹⁴ Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963

²⁹⁵ Confidential Annex to Abu Dhabi Monthly Diary, No. 7 of 1963, July 1 – July 31. *PG* (24), 159.

²⁹⁶ F.D.W Bron Letter to Political Residency, Bahrain, 16 October 1963. *RE* (1963), 613.

²⁹⁷ Confidential Memo from Bahrain to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963; Telegraph No. 322, From Bahrain to Foreign Office, 31 May 1963. *RE* 1963, 563.

²⁹⁸ J.E.H. Boustead letter to Political Residency, Bahrain, 30 May 1963. *RE* (1963), 571.

onshore situation. In anticipation of such an event, plans were drawn up for Sir Luce to order a landing party from the Striker onto the island.²⁹⁹

In addition to installing a larger military presence and implementing police training, in the weeks after the strike, representatives from ADPC and ADMA met with the Ruler to discuss how to avoid future strikes. The representatives suggested that the men must first give their complaints to the company and the Ruler's representatives before going on strike; the police force should be bolstered so as to be more effective during strikes; the strikers should not be paid for the duration of the strike; and the present warning system should be maintained.³⁰⁰ The Ruler agreed to all of these suggestions, but later reconsidered his agreement regarding the written warnings and asked the companies, only a few days later, to cease giving written warnings because they upset the workers. The largest point of friction came when the companies said that they did not want to take back the men thought to be the leaders of the strikes. The Ruler disagreed with the company position and said these men should be taken back as a gesture of forgiveness. After much discussion, the Ruler conceded that the companies must do what they thought was right, but that it was against what he thought best.³⁰¹

The Politics of *Khalijī* Workers

A central concern shared by the British administration, the oil companies, and the Ruler was how to best manage the local population of workers. One British administrator wrote, "The companies are working under great difficulties, far greater than they had probably anticipated, both in regard to nature of labour, its extraordinary ineffectualness and its apparently inimical demands on them." The British believed that worker demands, the hot climate, and long work

²⁹⁹ Telegram No. 324 From Bahrain to Foreign Office, 1 June 1963.

³⁰⁰ In this system, employees were reprimanded, or warned, three times before talks of dismissal.

³⁰¹ J.E.H. Boustead Letter to Political Residency, Bahrain, 17 June 1963.

hours wore on managers and made them more irritable with workers. Despite these hostile conditions, the British government cautioned the companies to remember that strikes were costly and that it was better to avoid them. The solution, the administration offered, was that the local workers should be treated “with a tolerant and a certain liberal attitude toward a primitive people.” Furthermore, the management should try to understand that these “primitive people” see foreigners as “intruders” in their land. The British administrators suggested that companies adapt to cultural norms when possible. For example, they praised the Arab company, CAT, for giving workers a large enough food allowance to feed not only themselves, but also “quite a number of hangers on” that lived in the camp with them. Both the company and the administration felt it was cheaper to feed extra people than lose thousands of pounds a day during a strike.³⁰²

Such strategies sought to improve day-to-day operations, but broader industry-level changes were creating new problems and contributing to growing worker dissatisfaction. For example, after construction ended at these oil projects, the number of workers needed to maintain the oil projects decreased significantly and resulted in the dismissal of most workers from their jobs. It was feared that local workers, upon termination, would cause trouble and stop oil production. The termination of *khalījī* employees was especially problematic.³⁰³ In an effort to maintain their own positive reputation, oil companies contracted jobs out to smaller companies, thus removing themselves from the economic and political risks associated with firing workers.

In 1960, commercial quantities of oil were found in Abu Dhabi and there was a further shift from exploration and drilling by the company to drilling by contractors. These contractors operated differently from the seismic party contractors used by the companies in the past.

Previously, ADPC had maintained all relations with labor onshore and with the local

³⁰² The management of Bechtel, a California contractor, also seemed to be very good at this. J.E.H. Boustead, Confidential Letter to Political Residency, Bahrain, 11 October 1963. *RE* (1963), 614-17.

³⁰³ D. Slater to Political Residency, Bahrain, 15 September 1963. *RE* (1963), 589-90.

government, such that contractors appeared, to many people, to be a part of the company. In contrast, the new drilling contractors hired and fired employees themselves. While ADPC said it would do its best to ensure conditions were to its standards, there was still the fear that contractors were tougher on laborers, quicker to fire employees, and only looking for a quick profit on projects. In anticipation of these changes, the company was anxious for locals to understand that contractors were separate from the company and that the latter was no longer responsible for labor relations.³⁰⁴

Both the ADPC and the British administration feared that new contractors lacked the experience and knowledge necessary to “handle” local labor. When the company was in charge of operations, for example, it saw it as part of its long-term interest to train rig crews to operate rigs. There was concern that contractors did not feel the same way and would not consider local crews sufficient. Similarly, the British administration saw any method of operating that did not use a maximum number of local laborers as likely to stir unrest. Thus, in 1960, there were twice the number of men in a shift than would be the case in North America because such a practice was seen as beneficial for Gulf relations. Previous contractors had learned how to interact with local workers through the company’s camp bosses, but the fear was that new company contractors would not have this experience and that workers would not be patient with a second round of cultural offenses. Earlier in the year, there had already been an incident involving one of the new contractor’s managers. The seismic team was returning and stopped the truck for one of the men. When the contractor’s manager saw that the worker had stopped to say his prayers,

³⁰⁴ Foreign Office doc 371/149084. E.F. Henderson, Political Agency, Abu Dhabi, Letter to D.F. Hawley, Political Agency, Dubai, 1 September 1961. *RE* (12), 319-21.

the manager said he would not wait and drove off, leaving the worker miles out in the desert. In response to this incident, ADPC removed the contractors involved in the incident.³⁰⁵

Both the large oil companies and the British administration attributed a portion of the strained industrial relations to contractors. However, there were two larger problems that the companies and the administration felt were at the root of the strikes. First, it was hard for the government and companies' management to control local workers, as the workers did not recognize the authority of the British administration or companies. The British also worried that the workers were overly susceptible to outside influences, such as Pan-Arab movements, and the British feared these influences would destabilize the region and lead to a loss of oil revenues. The second problem, closely connected to the first, was the inefficient control of the Ruler, Sheikh Shakhbut, over the population. This, the British argued, was due to the Ruler's unpopularity with the local workers in Abu Dhabi.

The interconnected nature of these problems was illustrated, in the eyes of the British, by the strikes on Das Island. When the laborers were leaving the island after the strike, the British reported that some of the men were going through the crowd disparaging the Ruler and praising Nasser. One of the European managers rode on the boat back with the four hundred men and said that "many of the men felt a genuine sense of grievance about their pay, but almost all were highly critical of Shakhbut, who, they said, was receiving a vast income from the oil and was doing nothing for them." These workers argued that a "new republic" should be established in Abu Dhabi.³⁰⁶ This quote was often taken as sufficient evidence for Sheikh Shakhbut's inability to rule Abu Dhabi. However, not all workers were thought to be unhappy with Sheikh Shakhbut, and many went along on the strike in order to voice grievances about labor conditions, treatment

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Report of Strike on Das Island, 3 June 1963.

by oil management, or out of fear of being “beaten up” if they did not participate. In reading the issues this way, both oil companies and the British administration insisted on seeing the strikes as a symptom of the ineffectiveness of local rule rather than as a broader reflection on the managerial practices of the oil companies and their contractors.

The British focus on the Sheikh’s role in political change and labor disputes is reflected in Christopher Davidson’s history of Abu Dhabi. In his discussion of the bloodless coup that overthrew Sheikh Shakhbut and installed the Sheikh’s younger brother, Sheikh Zayed, as the Ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1966, Davidson relies on a model that sees the Gulf as “hybrid governments . . . that fused centuries-old sheikhly and monarchical powers with new, rational-legal ministries and appointed bureaucrats.”³⁰⁷ In other places Davidson collapses the economic and political systems and calls this “tribal capitalism.” This form of capitalism entails the monarchy “placing key representatives of other powerful families and loyal clans in directorial roles in the surfeit of new parastatals and private companies charged with overseeing the new economic sector.”³⁰⁸ These descriptions of the governmental practices in the Gulf attempt to explain the persistence of monarchical leaders in the present, with limited pushback from the general population.

In the case of Abu Dhabi, Davidson argues that regime change was the result of Sheikh Shakhbut’s imperfect participation with “tribal capitalism.” After approximately thirty-five years as Ruler, Sheikh Shakhbut was brought down by what Davidson characterizes as “miserliness.” This miserliness took the form of a lack of interest in developing the infrastructure of Abu Dhabi or investing in such things as public education and health care. He also resisted

³⁰⁷ Christopher Davidson, “Introduction,” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 2.

³⁰⁸ Christopher Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 2.

infrastructural changes and refused building permits. Abu Dhabian merchants found this difficult to reconcile and believed they were losing money because of this lack of development.³⁰⁹ In addition, in order to save money in the early 1960s, Sheikh Shakhbut cut back on personal allowances to key al-Nahyan leaders.³¹⁰ The discontent of leading merchants and family leaders created an opportunity for Sheikh Zayed to undermine Sheikh Shakhbut's authority and initiate a coup in 1966. When Sheikh Zayed took over from Sheikh Shakhbut, "almost overnight, Sheikh Zayed's oil boom government effectively ended his family's historic tax-raising role and provided fresh opportunities for his people's economic participation and self-enrichment."³¹¹ Sheikh Zayed's "legitimacy" was "derived from little more than his lineage and personality." Thus, he oversaw an "efficient distribution of wealth to families and individuals."³¹² Davidson argues that Sheikh Zayed's more successful participation in "tribal capitalism" was informed, in part, by the citizens' preference for his ruling style and allocation of revenue. Whereas Sheikh Shakhbut did not adequately invest the profits from oil rents into the development of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed built infrastructure that improved the quality of life for citizens of the emirate.

My analysis of shifting power relations in the Gulf differs from that of Davidson in that I do not think the category of tribe should be used to gloss the diversity of actors in Gulf politics. Instead, I argue that labor dynamics were directly related to the managerial practices of oil companies and worker response to these practices. This reading of the strikes involves not only the ruling families of the Gulf and their subjects, but also includes the British administration and oil companies. The inclusion of these actors highlights the work done by the British administration and oil companies to depoliticize labor in the oilfields.

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 41. The al-Nahyan family is the ruling family of Abu Dhabi and both Sheikh Shakhbut and Sheikh Zayed are members of this family.

³¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 52.

³¹² *ibid.*, p. 51.

Unrest throughout the Gulf

Abu Dhabi was not the only state to experience strikes and political disturbances in the 1960s. In 1965 there were disturbances in Bahrain that lasted a fortnight in March and April. Like many of the strikes at the time, the issue of redundancy was a pressing issue for the workers and employers in this instance. In addition, the British understood the strikes to be representative of dissatisfaction of the population under the Ruler and feared the emergence of a pan-Arab nationalism.³¹³ One British administrator wrote:

[The] pretext was redundancy of some BaPCo workers but the affairs rapidly developed into a trial of strength between the regime and those elements – mainly the youth – who chafe at the anachronism inherent in Shaikhly regime under British protection and long for national assemblies, trade unions, election, political newspapers and all other paraphernalia of independence and progress . . . strikers and demonstrators stressed slim resources of the Bahrain State Police to their limit and it was touch and go if British troops would have to intervene. The life of the country was seriously disrupted.

As was the case in Abu Dhabi, generational differences were important and the youth of the country were thought to be a pressing problem. In Bahrain, there was an annual population increase of just over three percent, seventy-five percent of the population was under thirty years of age, and nearly fifty percent of all jobs were occupied by foreigners.³¹⁴ Then, in 1967, there was further unrest among workers in the southern Gulf. This unrest, according to British intelligence reports, coincided with the Khartoum Conference and the increased pan-Arab labor

³¹³ Confidential Dispatch No. 1 (1011/66), A.D. Parsons to British Political Agency, Bahrain, 2 January 1966. *PG* (24), 470-77; Iraq's Request for helping them in their Oil Industry – Note from Ministry of Mines and Fuel (India), NAI, WANA, 1960. File No. 6-C(34)/60,

³¹⁴ Confidential Dispatch No. 1 (1011/66), A.D. Parsons to British Political Agency, Bahrain, 2 January 1966.

activity that followed that conference. In this case, the British administration believed that the initiative came from both the communist and Baathist parties in Damascus.³¹⁵

The following section will consider the strikes that occurred in Qatar in 1967. I will then consider the attempts by the British and local governments of Abu Dhabi and Qatar to regulate workers and develop labor laws. At the end, I will suggest that the use of foreign workers became preferable for local governments and the British administration due to the inability of these workers to make claims directly to the state. However, this inability to appeal to the state was not rooted in “tribal” notions of membership. I show that the idea of tribal membership had some fluidity: who could belong shifted and was constructed through networks of kin and obligation. Instead of relying on a rigid notion of tribal membership, I look at these kin networks in conjunction with colonial policies, oil companies’ practices, and local political actions.

Qatar Strikes, 1968

Between 1960 and 1972, the residents of Qatar experienced three regime changes. In 1960, Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani came to power after his father, Sheikh Ali, abdicated. Sheikh Ahmed implemented Qatar’s first nationality and labor laws in the early 1960s. He also worked to regulate trade by setting up a trade registry and a chamber of commerce and regulation.³¹⁶ In 1972, Sheikh Ahmed’s cousin and the Deputy Ruler of Qatar, Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, disposed of Sheikh Ahmed. Similar to Sheikh Zayed in Abu Dhabi, when Sheikh Khalifa took the throne, he cut family spending and increased spending on social

³¹⁵ R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments,” 5 December 1967. FCO 8/70. *RE* (2), 287-300. The persistence of the strong Syrian influence is interesting, as some of the larger groups that were thought to influence workers in the Gulf, in particular the Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers and the Palestine Labour Federation, were based in Cairo.

³¹⁶ Steven Wright, “Qatar,” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 117.

programs. Also like Sheikh Zayed, Sheikh Khalifa is considered by many to be the first modernizing ruler of Qatar.³¹⁷

In August 1968, there was a strike in the offshore oilfields run by Shell Oil Company. In part, this strike was notable because it was the largest generalized industrial unrest in Qatar since 1963. It was also notable because workers defied the instructions of the Deputy Ruler, Sheikh Khalifa, to return to work — an uncommon reaction to the Ruler’s intervention in Qatar. The British administration in Qatar viewed the strikes as similar to those by laborers in Abu Dhabi in 1963. In both cases, the administration believed that the strikes were spearheaded by a small, organized group of workers who were influenced by outside forces within the Arab world. The majority of workers in Qatar, the British administration believed, participated in but were not excited by the strike. Unlike in Abu Dhabi, worker committees were unable to get all oil workers in the country to participate and the workers at Qatar Petroleum Company (QPC), the other oil company in Qatar at the time, did not participate in the strike.³¹⁸

Workers at Shell first voiced their grievances on August 24, 1968. On August 26, daily-rate workers at both Shell Company and Shell Marketing Company went on strike. Monthly workers continued to work, and they maintained essential services. On August 27, workers at Shell on Halul Island joined and workers communicated between the onshore project and the island via a radio taken from a moored tanker. When the strike began, the Deputy Ruler ordered replacement workers to step in. This was refused by Shell because working on marine operations was very dangerous for untrained workers and because the company feared sabotage. By the end of the day on August 27, the British administration believed that most workers wanted to return

³¹⁷ See, for example, the United State’s Library of Congress page on Qatar:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/qatoc.html>

³¹⁸ QPC was a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company. “Qatar,” 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66; State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Assessment and Recommendations,” 6 December 1968. LAB13/2164. *RQ* (2), 675-8.

to work, but were restrained by the organizers. On August 28, the workers' committee was thought to be negotiating with workers at QPC and those in government service for a general strike on August 31. It was assumed that if the strike had continued, the intermediate staff would have joined, most likely stopping Shell's oil production in Qatar completely. Before this could happen, on the evening of August 28, the strike leaders saw the Deputy Ruler, apologized for their behavior, and instructed the men back to work, telling them the demands would be pursued by constitutional means.³¹⁹ In addition to working with Shell, the Deputy Ruler also tried to pacify the workers. When Shell refused to pay workers for the days the workers were on strike, the Deputy Ruler said he would personally pay their wages if the workers agreed to give him, in writing, two weeks' notice before striking. The workers' committee refused this proposition.³²⁰ During the strikes, there was no violence or damage.³²¹

The engagement of workers with the ruling family in Qatar was slightly different than in Abu Dhabi in 1963, and the British administration believed workers in Qatar were less eager to work with the current Sheikh or the Deputy Ruler. They also believed that the objectives of strike leaders in Qatar were to "cultivate a more aggressive attitude on the part of the Qatari people vis-à-vis the oil companies, and to encourage the workers to reject the traditional paternalism of the state in labour relations."³²² In addition, it seems that the workers' organization was trying to undermine the position of the government in the strikes. Immediately

³¹⁹ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Labour Strike at Shell Company: August, 1968," 6 December 1968. LAB13/2164. *RQ* (2), 679-80.

³²⁰ This is like the policy the British government attempted to pass in England requiring workers to vote and then wait before striking. In 1968, it was refused by the Trade Union Congress. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/1960-radicalisation.htm>; State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Shell Company of Qatar," R. Morris, 6 December 1968. LAB13/2164. *RQ* (2), 690-1.

³²¹ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Labour Strike at Shell Company: August, 1968."

³²² State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Assessment and Recommendations."

before the strike, the leaders of the workers' committee had asked to see the Deputy Ruler, but the Deputy Ruler was busy thanks to a visit by the Iraqi Ambassador. The strike leaders did not tell the workers why the Deputy Ruler did not meet with them, giving the workers the impression that they were refused a meeting for no reason. On the day of the strike, the Deputy Ruler told leaders that they had gone on strike contrary to the Labour Law and he would not negotiate until workers returned to work, registered their grievances, and indicated they were willing to wait fifteen days before striking. On August 27, the leaders met with the Deputy Ruler and said they would return to work, but they did not actually do so until after a second meeting on August 28. During the strike, the Deputy Ruler was annoyed, angry, and suspicious of foreign influence behind the strike.³²³

This strike followed upon an earlier strike that occurred at Shell's operations in Qatar a year before.³²⁴ For the British, it was "difficult to understand" the labor troubles at Shell because "Shell was internationally known for the quality of its personnel management and the value it placed on good industrial relations."³²⁵ In fact, both the British and the Qatari government agreed that the management of Shell always properly negotiated with the workers' committee and that the working conditions at Shell were better than at QPC, where there were no strikes. As a result, the British administration and the oil company management decided that QPC workers did not strike because the company was staffed by older, more conservative workers and these workers took a leading role in labor relations between Qatari workers, the company, and the state.³²⁶

³²³ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Labour Strike at Shell Company: August, 1968."

³²⁴ This earlier strike ended due to the mediation of the QPC workers' committee. State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar," R. Morris, 6 December 1968. LAB13/2164. *RQ* (2), 681-6.

³²⁵ *ibid.*

³²⁶ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Assessment and Recommendations."

In contrast, the Director of Labour in Qatar, Mr. Khreis, a Jordanian,³²⁷ suggested that the Shell operation was “trouble prone” for a few reasons. First, it was an offshore operation, which generally caused labor trouble. Second, there were frequent changes on the personnel side, leading to a lack of continuity in policy and lack of contact with worker representatives. Third, the trouble tended to happen when the general manager was away. Finally, several members of the workers’ committee were thought to be irresponsible and “out to make trouble.”³²⁸

The other key problem for Shell, according to Mr. Khreis, was the organization of workers. At QPC, there were two workers’ committees. One of the committees was at the Dukhan oilfield and the other was at the Umm Said terminal. At each location, the committee representatives represented both Qatari daily-rate workers (i.e., unskilled workers or laborers) and Qatari monthly-rate workers (i.e., semi-skilled, skilled, and supervisory). Ideally, the workers’ committees were supposed to represent all nationalities, but in practice they represented only Qatari workers, leaving other nationalities to raise concerns through informal channels. At Shell, on the other hand, there were two different workers’ committees at the same worksite. One committee represented Qatari daily-rate workers and the other represented Qatari monthly-rate workers. The monthly-rate committee was inactive and the trouble stemmed from the daily-rate workers’ committee.³²⁹ The leaders of the committees were becoming “professionalized as the same people tend to be re-elected year by year. The members are working class and illiterate, but they are becoming more experienced and this makes dealing with them somewhat easier.” As the

³²⁷ Opinions of Mr. Khreis varied between QPC and Shell. Shell considered him unhelpful and a source of much of their labor problems. QPC found him to be “uncorruptable” and helpful. State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Shell Company of Qatar;” State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Qatar Petroleum Company (Q.P.C.)”

³²⁸ *ibid.*; State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.”

³²⁹ Note that in 1966, there was only one workers’ committee at Shell, so there is an increase in the three years of an additional committee. “Qatar,” 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66.

committees became more established, they were likely to refer disputes to the court or to a conciliation hearing.³³⁰

At QPC, the workers' committees did not have a formal legal status, but they were treated as such by the company's management, and the workers' committees were decided by election. In 1967, the elections coincided with Ramadan and the government had decided to postpone them until after the holiday. Suspecting this was a tactic to postpone elections indefinitely, there was unrest at the camps. When the elections finally took place in March 1968, they were well attended and orderly. The tensions seen elsewhere in the Gulf between youth and an older, more conservative generation were also at play in Qatar. In Qatar, the young workers also identified more with the cause of Palestine. At the elections at QPC, the older generation won the election. As a result, "the workers' committees at both Dukhan oilfield and Umm Said terminal were loyal to the Al Thani family. They were very conservative in the outlook, and were bona fide representatives of the labour force, with real authority to negotiate with the Company on its behalf." In part, the loyalty was ensured by the election style. The laborers nominated ten men in order of preference to be on the executive committee. The names were then given to the Deputy Ruler and the first three he found to be acceptable were given the position.³³¹ Despite the formalization of this process, the actual ability of the Deputy Ruler to refuse the workers' choices appears limited. In 1965, a person considered by the Deputy Ruler to lack respect and who was suspected of making "clandestine visits" to Cairo was reelected by the workers at Shell. When the Deputy Ruler tried to block him taking the position, the workers resisted, "confirmed the election," and the Deputy Ruler acquiesced.³³² After the election of the executive committee,

³³⁰ "Qatar," 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66.

³³¹ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Qatar Petroleum Company (Q.P.C.)," R. Morris, 6 December 1968. LAB13/2164. *RQ* (2), 687-9.

³³² "Qatar," 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66.

a new council was appointed. The British believed that this council's representation and organization was based on tribal membership. In addition to facilitating the elections, the company gave the committee space to meet. During meetings, workers took their individual grievances to the committee. The efficiency of the system was seen in the fact that there had been no strikes at QPC since 1963.³³³

At Shell, the management of the company understood workers' committees to operate quite differently. They claimed that the committees had no influence and that there was a lot of dispute among the workers as to their committee. What they did agree with QPC on was that the leaders of the workers' committees were traveling to Egypt where they were exposed to pan-Arab nationalist sentiments. Shell's management also feared that the leaders of the workers' committees were in touch with workers at Kuwait Oil Company and with workers in Bahrain because they showed knowledge of conditions at other oil projects. Despite these beliefs, there was no evidence of workers coordinating with others.³³⁴

The difference in the treatment of worker committees by the management of Shell and QPC reflected the differing managerial styles at each company. At Shell, conflicts often had to be passed along to a supervisor who worked off-site. At QPC, conflict could be solved on-site with a superintendent. The immediacy of conflict resolution and familiarity between workers and management led the British administration to suggest that QPC had implemented a model that

³³³ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Qatar Petroleum Company (Q.P.C.)."

³³⁴ "Qatar," 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66; State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Shell Company of Qatar."

British firms in the Arab world might want to consider mimicking in order to avoid costly strikes.³³⁵

During the strikes at Shell in 1968, the workers demanded four basic things. First, they asked for a raise of sixteen percent, backdated to August 1967 to compensate for an increased cost of living. Second, the workers asked for an increase in annual increments. This increase would bring Shell in line with QPC's pay and had been promised by the Deputy Ruler the year before.³³⁶ The question of wages was, according to the Director of Labour, Mr. Khreis, the key issue in the strike and he narrated the history of this wage dispute in order to clarify the workers position to both the British administration and the oil companies' management. Mr. Khreis said that in early 1967, workers made a deal where they would not receive any wage increases. However, in 1968, with the closing of the Suez Canal, the price of rice was increasing. The workers argued that this was an exceptional circumstance. Shell's management rejected this argument and wages had been a source of dispute ever since. The disagreement over wages was further compounded because the company wanted to link a raise with the workers' approval of a pension scheme.³³⁷ Without approval of the pension scheme, neither QPC nor Shell were able to implement their redundancy schemes and, thus, were stuck with an excess of local workers.³³⁸

³³⁵ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Appendix II: Note on the organisation of personnel management and industrial relations at Q.P.C. and Shell." 6 December 1968. LAB13/2164. *RQ* 2, 695-7.

³³⁶ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Labour Strike at Shell Company: August, 1968."

³³⁷ Both QPC and Shell had developed the same pension scheme. The main difference was that QPC's scheme would only apply to Qatari workers, whereas Shell's would also apply to other Arab workers and South Asians. State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Shell Company of Qatar"; State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Appendix III: Shell Company of Qatar: proposed pension scheme," 6 December 1968. LAB 13/2164. *RQ* (2), 698-707; State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar."

³³⁸ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Assessment and Recommendations."

The result was that Shell was holding out a raise as a bribe to workers. However, the workers' saw through this and refused to link the two issues.³³⁹

The third demand by workers concerned the advancement of *khalījī* Arabs in Shell's administration. The workers were upset by the failure of the company to upgrade certain laborers and to promote certain workshop men who had passed the trade test earlier that year. Finally, the workers wanted the company to cease using contractors because contractors did not hire many locals and the contractors did not pay well.³⁴⁰ Both of these demands addressed the fact that Qatari workers were looking for promotion opportunities in the oil companies and they wanted training in order to take higher positions.

Contract work often caused problems in the 1960s at oil companies, even though the policies for contract work varied between companies. The conditions for contract work were different at Shell and QPC. At QPC "contracting was on social amenity work of direct benefit to the workers (whereas contracting at Shell was still mainly operational in character)."³⁴¹ At Shell, the drilling rig was operated on contract. Mainly Yemenis, Adenis, and Omanis were hired for the positions because they were willing to live on dhows and Qatari nationals were not. The Labour Department insisted that nationals must be hired, but Shell was reluctant to hire nationals as it would cause expenses to rise and they would have to hire twice as many workers. In order to avoid this, the company threatened to send the rig to Dubai or Abu Dhabi for maintenance.³⁴²

³³⁹ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar."

³⁴⁰ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Labour Strike at Shell Company: August, 1968."

³⁴¹ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Qatar Petroleum Company (Q.P.C.)."

³⁴² State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Shell Company of Qatar."

The British administration and Shell believed “the real cause” of the strike to be contract labor.³⁴³ Prior to this time, the Qatari government and the oil companies had signed a provision that limited contracting. According to this provision, contracting could only occur if a few key issues were satisfied: the work had to be temporary or specialized in nature; Qatari nationals had to be hired first if they were available and able;³⁴⁴ and wage rates had to be the same as for equivalent jobs with the company. In the summer of 1968, these conditions had been satisfied and Shell hired contract labor with the permission of the Qatari government. The British administration believed that because workers had agreed to this, they were unable to strike on the issue and were, therefore, merely using the issue of wages as a reason to strike. The oil workers’ resistance to contract labor was, according to the British and Qatari administrations, harmful to the country. It was believed by both governments that “non-local labor was an essential factor in the economic development of Qatar.”³⁴⁵

At both Shell and QPC, as was the case throughout the Gulf, firing redundant workers and, in particular, firing workers who were nationals was problematic and fraught. In the mid to late 1960s, the majority of Qataris were unskilled (vis-à-vis the oil industry) and did not have adequate knowledge of English to work in management positions. These workers could be hired for construction phases of oil projects, but the companies had little use for them after

³⁴³ *ibid.*; State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.”

³⁴⁴ In order to ensure in the future that there were more Qataris to take skilled jobs, the Qatari government was setting up adult vocational training classes based on a model developed in Saudi Arabia. This would allow for Qataris to take highly skilled and professional/technical positions. Once the centers were established, they also planned to accept “suitable trainees from other Arabian States in the Gulf.” State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.” A detailed explanation of the scheme is given in: State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Appendix I: Note on Industrial Training Project,” 6 December 1968. LAB 13/2164. *RQ* (2), 693-4).

³⁴⁵ State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.”

construction was finished. At QPC, the management wanted to dismiss a group of redundant workers, but the government would not let them. There were four main reasons for this. First, the government feared the workers would leave, with their money, to find work in Abu Dhabi. Second, the “workers wanted to force the Company to produce a permanent and generous pension scheme.” Third, the dismissal of workers had been the source of QPC labor trouble in 1963 and neither the company nor the British administration wanted a repeat of the strike.³⁴⁶ Finally, the state feared swelling the numbers of unemployed as there was a link between high unemployment and political instability. This was the case of the strikes in Bahrain in 1965. As a result, QPC retained approximately four hundred workers who management had already found to be redundant.³⁴⁷

Oil companies were not alone in having worker redundancies. In government positions in Qatar, over half of the nationals employed were redundant. Similar to the “tribal capitalism” that Davidson posits helped secure Sheikh Zayed’s position in Abu Dhabi, the Qatari government relied on family connections and favors to maintain stability. Nationals qualified for social assistance and “fit men expect[ed] personal aid from the sheikhs connected with their families.” Students who had gone abroad for education also relied on the government to find them jobs that suited their “qualifications and prestige.”³⁴⁸ While both the oil companies and the Qatari government were forced to deal with a large number of redundant workers, not all nationals of Qatar received the same job protection. In 1964, QPC fired some redundant employees. These workers were all members of the Mohennedy tribe. This tribe had some disagreements with the ruling family of Qatar, al-Thani, and migrated to Kuwait in 1963. Failing to find work there, the

³⁴⁶ State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Qatar Petroleum Company (Q.P.C.),”

³⁴⁷ “Qatar,” 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*

group returned to Qatar.³⁴⁹ The tribe's uncertain political standing led to the government not protecting all nationals equally. This standing may also have influenced the fact that other workers did not feel solidarity with the workers who were dismissed and, as a result, there was no collective action following their dismissal.

The Uncertain Role of Foreigners in the Oilfields

Non-*khalījī* workers were the easiest to fire when their positions became redundant. In particular, the oil companies' management found that Indians and Pakistanis could be fired without any problems.³⁵⁰ Like the situation in Abu Dhabi, nationals and other *khalījī* workers with connections to the nation were potentially destabilizing. Furthermore, the authority of the Ruler was not always absolute and the consequences of strikes meant the loss of money for oil companies. Managing the population also required heavy investment in policing and armed forces. In contrast, workers from India were thought to be largely apolitical and, therefore, as posing little danger of destabilizing the state government or having the ability to create large-scale work stoppages.³⁵¹ This was particularly true because Indian workers showed no interest in the pan-Arab movements that the British administration, oil companies, and local governments suspected of influencing the *khalījī* and other Arab workers.

In 1968, Jordanians and Palestinians were the largest minority groups in Qatar. Future industrial projects would require additional outside laborers because it would take a long time for

³⁴⁹ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Qatar Petroleum Company (Q.P.C.)."

³⁵⁰ "Review of the Events in Qatar in 1964," British Political Agency, Doha, 2 January 1965. *PG* (24), 359-68.

³⁵¹ One British administrator wrote, that over half of the population was foreigners "and have continued to devote their energies into making money and have not greatly troubled themselves with thoughts of politics." "Review of the Events in Qatar in 1964," British Political Agency, Doha, 2 January 1965; "Review of Events in Qatar in 1970," FC08/1472. *RQ* (3), 566-73.

the government-training scheme to produce enough skilled workers to stop needing immigrants to fill the positions.³⁵² The presence of foreign workers was problematic for many reasons. First, some Arab groups were believed by the British administration to undermine the political situation in the Gulf; Palestinian workers, for example, openly disliked the Qatari and the Jordanian governments. In part, Palestinian dissatisfaction was due to the discrimination they faced. In addition, Palestinians were upset because of deportations from Qatar. Nonetheless, as much as the British believed Palestinians contributed to destabilizing the Gulf, there was no actual evidence of organizing efforts among the Palestinians working in the Qatari oilfields.³⁵³

In the 1960s, the British administration feared that there was discontent in the Gulf due to growing nationalism, the Arab League, pan-Arab movements, and the oil industry. Similar to the destabilizing forces that were thought to influence the 1963 strikes in Abu Dhabi, Palestinians and the Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers were thought to be at the heart of the strikes in Qatar.³⁵⁴ While the British understood the most destabilizing forces to come from other parts of the Arab world, they also feared that labor movements in England and the United States would influence worker committees. In particular, the British administration wanted to “discourage” contact between workers in Qatar and international labor organizations.³⁵⁵ By focusing so much attention on outside influences, however, the British failed to recognize and address the interest of workers in international labor movements or the tensions among Arab workers in Qatar. “Arab” workers were not a homogenous category and not all non-Qataris were viewed the same

³⁵² State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.”

³⁵³ “Qatar,” 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66.

³⁵⁴ *ibid.* For example, worker resistance to contract work was believed to originate from the Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers, an organization that was opposed to contracting on principle. However, the effect of workers striking against contract work was that they disliked it when it involved non- *khalijī* Arabs, but were not upset by the presence of other *khalijī* Arabs in the workforce. This discrepancy added to tensions at oil projects.

³⁵⁵ “Qatar,” 7054, [illegible] 4/05 530/66.

by Qatari workers. While some Arab workers were considered outsiders to Qatar and their presence, via contract work, was one of the worker complaints during the strike, other Arab workers were considered to be part of the worker movement. For example, one of the three strike leaders was Bahraini.³⁵⁶ This points to a circumstance similar to that of Abu Dhabi in 1963, in which workers who were local were defined more by *khalījī* networks that spanned the Gulf region than clearly demarcated, as the British believed, by recently drawn national boundaries.

Qatari Labor Laws

While the British were wary of outside influences among the workers in Qatar, the Qatari government wanted to join international organizations in order to improve the situation of workers. In Qatar in 1963, the Ruler, Sheikh Ahmed, implemented new labor laws, but by 1966, Shell, QPC, and the Ruler were dissatisfied with the way the laws were being interpreted.³⁵⁷ In 1968, Mr. Khreis, the Director of Labour in Qatar, considered the labor situation to be unsatisfactory. He pointed, in particular, to the issue of workers' committees' legal standing – or lack thereof. The labor law permitted joint consultative committees, but these had not been implemented. This meant the workers' committees in 1968 had no legal status and were not registered with the Labour Department. Instead of restricting committees' activities, however, this situation gave the committees greater leeway to “meddle” in politics. The solution,

³⁵⁶ State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Labour Strike at Shell Company: August, 1968.”

³⁵⁷ Confidential Annex to Qatar Diary No. 1 of 1963. *PG* (24), 80; F 0371/185470: R.H.M. Boyle Letter to G.P. Wall, Bahrain, 17 August 1966, *RQ* (1), 417; R.H.M. Boyle to Letter to G.P. Wall, Bahrain, 7 September 1966, *RQ* (1), 419.

according to Khreis, was to legalize trade unions and specify their responsibilities and limits. In this way, he argued, order and discipline could be maintained in industrial relations.³⁵⁸

A judge of the Labour Court in Qatar also complained that labor relations in the country were problematic and claimed that a major problem was the court's inability to enforce its judgment. This was particularly true in cases in which defendants had influence with the ruling family. In 1968, for example, there were fifty cases in which the judgments were ineffective. According to the judge, "this was contrary to the basic conception of the rule of law and a denial of the elementary rights of the individual worker." Furthermore, the judge argued that non-nationals in Qatar were a "great disadvantage" in the court system. The Labour Code provided indemnities and paid holidays only for Qatari nationals. Other workers could only obtain these benefits if an appropriate clause was inserted in their contracts, and the majority of non-national workers did not have formal contracts of service. As a result, it frequently happened that Qatari and other workers were employed side by side on the same job, but enjoyed different conditions of labor. The whole situation, the judge argued, was due to the influence of the merchants of Doha who wanted a supply of cheap foreign labor. The judge noted that the situation would have to change when Qatar joined the International Labor Organization (ILO).³⁵⁹ Joining the ILO, he

³⁵⁸ Workers' committees were only present at the oil companies. In cases where a labor problem arose with other private companies, the government's position was to "encourage the workers to select a delegate to represent their case. With personal complaints, individuals could always go and complain at the *majlis* of the Deputy Ruler." State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar."

³⁵⁹ By 1967, the only Gulf State to have joined the ILO was Kuwait. The British understood Kuwait's participation in the organization thusly: "[In 1962, Kuwait was] anxious to project itself on the international scene by joining the United Nations and its associated agencies. In 1963 it applied for membership of the International Labour Organisation and sent a tripartite delegation to the annual conference. On arrival, the credentials of the workers' representative (a Kuwaiti Personnel Officer from the Kuwait Oil Company) were challenged by the communist group and by Egypt. Through the mediation of the Arab League Office in Geneva a compromise was arranged. The communist block withdrew its objection; the Kuwaiti delegates took their seats; the application for membership was approved; and the Kuwait Government agreed to legalise trade unions. These were, in fact, set up in 1964 and there oil unions have ever since been under Arab nationalist influence (although not representative of the Kuwait

argued, would pressure the government to “amend its labour laws and practices to conform to internationally accepted standards.”³⁶⁰

In order to cement labor relations and improve labor conditions, other members of the Qatari government also wished to join the ILO. Joining an international organization was not new for Qatar and in 1964 the country had joined the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization.³⁶¹ As a first step in joining the ILO, the Deputy Ruler had sent a letter to the British Political Resident in Doha indicating Qatar’s desire to join the organization. The British replied that they were against Qatar joining the ILO.³⁶² When pressed on this issue, the British tried at first to defer the conversation. They told the Director of Labour that if all Qatar wanted from joining the ILO was technical assistance that they could receive such assistance without becoming a member and pointed to the example of Saudi Arabia, whose lead the British felt Qatar should follow in all matters relating to international labor politics.³⁶³ However, this reply did not satisfy the Director and he felt that the technical assistance was “irrelevant.” Instead he argued “the object of joining would be to take part in the widespread international activities of this United Nations organization.” To which the Political Resident’s office replied that if Qatar joined the ILO, it would have to follow the rules set by the organization. This meant Qatar would need to send a tripartite committee to the annual conference and include a worker representative in this committee. The British argued

oil workers as a whole).” R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.” The British understood Kuwait’s participation in the ILO to have caused greater Arab nationalist movements in the country and, they claimed, to have been to the detriment of Kuwaiti national workers.

³⁶⁰ State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.”

³⁶¹ Review of Events in Qatar in 1964, P. McKearney. 2 January 1965. *PG* (24), 358-68.

³⁶² State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar.”

³⁶³ State of Qatar, “Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Assessment and Recommendations.”

this would be hard to do, especially considering that workers' committees did not have legal status. Therefore, the British argued, "It would be unwise for Qatar to join the ILO unless it was prepared to give full legal recognition to labour unions in the internationally accepted sense."³⁶⁴ Despite the fact that the British were not eager for Qatar's government to recognize trade unions, both the Director of Labour and the Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers were eager to formalize the government's recognition of unions.³⁶⁵

While the British administration did not want Qatar to join the ILO, they were more ambivalent with regard to the country strengthening ties with the Arab League. The British believed that such an association was likely to bring into question state labor policies that the British also found problematic – in particular, the discriminatory treatment between Qataris and other Arabs and the permissive attitude adopted toward Iranian immigration. While the British wished for a stricter view by the Qataris on Iranians in the country, they also feared that closer association with the Arab League would lead to increased demand for workers' associations, specifically, the legal recognition of trade unions in place of the de facto recognition by the government of existing oil company committees. This would allow Qatari workers to organize themselves more effectively and would bring the union leaders into closer contact with pan-Arab and international labor movements.³⁶⁶

The British anticipated that the labor question was likely to become very important in Qatar in the coming years. In particular, they believed the legalization of trade unions would likely be a serious issue and they contended that this issue was political, not industrial. The British argued that the effective mobilization of Gulf workers was a tempting target to three

³⁶⁴ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Record of discussions: Government of Qatar."

³⁶⁵ State of Qatar, "Report on Labour, Industrial and Social Developments: Assessment and Recommendations."

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*

groups. First, it was a potential target to the nationalist elements in Qatar and Bahrain who were frustrated by the lack of devolution of power by ruling families. Second, it could also be targeted by other Arabs working in the Gulf States – Arabs who suffered from discrimination and lack of political expression. Finally, it was a target for pan-Arab political groups as a means to exert pressure and support pan-Arab policies. Despite these dangers, the British cautioned that a negative stance regarding trade unionism was not necessarily the wisest course. They saw the trend in Arab countries towards the development of trade unions. While there was the danger of subversion, unions could also be a major factor in the gradual political revolution of the Arab world in terms of internal social reform and blocking international communism. Therefore, the British suggested that the Deputy Ruler delegate this aspect of government administration to a member of the ruling family; importantly, that person should have sufficient control over the Labour Department and be able to maintain relations with both the oil companies and with international labor groups.³⁶⁷

Shifting Labor Patterns, 1969 Qatar

While members of Qatar’s government wanted to implement stronger labor laws and strengthen the position of unions in the country, by the late 1960s and early 1970s fewer and fewer Qataris were actually working in vulnerable positions in the oil industry. By 1969, in oil wealthy countries like Qatar, local people no longer did the lowest level jobs—this position had been assumed instead by migrants. Increasingly, the majority of Qataris had shifted away from performing manual labor. This did not mean all Qataris were rich; indeed, a “minority of indigenous Qataris [were] still living in poorer circumstances” but the British administrators argued that this was because they were “too proud to beg assistance from the Ruler, and either

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*

too lazy, or too backward in education and training, to find themselves a better niche in society.” This led to a stark situation in which one could literally see the contrast between the “very large palaces and grandiose villas” of the native Qataris and the “shanties and sheds in which the mainly expatriate labour-force live.”³⁶⁸

As suggested by Davidson, the discrepancies between the conditions for national and foreign workers were due, in part, to the reallocation of oil money. The huge amounts of oil revenues were beneficial in distributing wealth across Qatari families. According to one Qatari government official, fifty-three percent of the oil revenue went to the ruling family. Of that, ten million pounds went to the Ruler and his immediate family and three million pounds went to the Deputy Ruler.³⁶⁹ From the Ruler, wealth was then redistributed through tribal networks. However, “tribal capitalism” was not the only factor in the decreasing numbers of Qataris working in the oil fields. The British administration and companies’ resistance to recognizing unions and the increased pressure on the state to reinforce security measures meant that the stability of the state was best assured by hiring foreign workers – workers who could be easily fired and deported from the country.

Labor Laws in Abu Dhabi and Colonial Narratives

The development of labor laws in conjunction with labor unrest and oil industry growth occurred not only in Qatar, but throughout the Gulf. In 1966, Abu Dhabi established a labor law and in 1967, Sheikh Zayed, inaugurated the Labour Department. Abu Dhabi’s labor law was similar to the laws established in other parts of the Gulf and was studied in London before its implementation. This law applied not only to nationals of the Trucial Coast or Muslims, but to all

³⁶⁸ E.F. Hendersen Letter (“First Impressions of Doha”) to British Residency, Bahrain, 13 July 1969. *RQ* (3), 15-21.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*

workers in the emirate. However, the working conditions laid out in the law were basic. So basic, in fact, that the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company happily viewed them as “reasonable and simple,” noting that “the Company’s own regulations are more advanced” and that the new law lacked even provisions to ensure that workers had access to shade and drinking water.³⁷⁰ The law also sided heavily with companies; it prohibited strikes and lockouts prior to the hearing of the case by a reconciliation committee, forbade violence to persons and property, and forbade workers in public utilities from striking “if such action will endanger public health, endanger life, or cause serious damage to property.”³⁷¹

In conjunction with writing the Labour Laws, the British administration outlined a series of problems that they understood Abu Dhabi to be facing as the state developed. First, there was a problem of wage levels. The labor law allowed the Department of Labour to regulate minimum wages, but a year after the law’s drafting, this still had not happened. An even larger problem regarding wages was that the government had recently issued a schedule of grades and salaries for government employment. The oil companies, in particular, feared that this would cause all wages in the country to rise. Instead of raising wages in the government, the British administrator suggested a family allowances scheme.³⁷² Abu Dhabi government officials resisted this input from the British, insisting that “the worker in Abu Dhabi should benefit through increased wages in the growing prosperity of the town” and that, as the town developed, the average worker would need more money to enjoy these new amenities.³⁷³ They also objected to

³⁷⁰ R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.”

³⁷¹ Abu Dhabi Labour Law. Appendix B to R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments,” 5 December 1967. FCO 8/70. *RE* (2), 305-7.

³⁷² The Lebanese Social Insurance Scheme, developed by the British Embassy in Beirut, was held up as a model for this. R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.”

³⁷³ “Note of a discussion with Syed Hussan Jumaa,” 5 December 1967. FCO 8/70. *RE* (2), 302-4.

the family allowances scheme because it would improve the working conditions of nationals, but would do nothing to help the large foreign workforce in the country. Second, the British administration worried that “attempts would be made to subvert labour,” especially because there was not a social security scheme currently in effect. Finally, the development of Abu Dhabi through oil wealth, the British administration argued, would necessitate the development of health and other services. A solution to these problems, according to the British administration, was that a United Nations expert should draw up a scheme for the development of social services based on Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and other Gulf sheikhdoms. The alternative, the British administrator argued, was sure to be similar to “the unfortunate pattern of development in Kuwait and Qatar, where [the] all-important oil industry has been run largely by expatriate labour, whilst the local nationals prefer the easier life in government services.”³⁷⁴ This suggestion moved national and *khalījī* labor out of the oilfields and put these workers solely under the management of the local government.

Another problem facing Abu Dhabi’s newly developing oil economy was illegal immigration. The British feared that as wages increased, so too would illegal immigration.³⁷⁵ Abu Dhabians did not want to take jobs as unskilled workers and preferred more prestigious jobs, such as truck driving and working on the oilrigs. Large contractors were thus forced to hire foreigners to take these jobs and would even send “a truck to the town with the foreman” to get extra laborers if needed. The Ruler drew up a law concerning foreigners, but they had to wait to implement it until the Political Resident in Bahrain offered his suggestions. One key issue that was immediately apparent was the need to better regulate work permits. The regulation of work permits points to the differences in how labor was being understood. The Director of Labour

³⁷⁴ R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.”

³⁷⁵ “Note of a discussion with Syed Hussan Jumaa.”

issued permits to nationals regardless of skill (red permits) and to all foreigners working in skilled or executive posts (blue permits), but no permits were issued to unskilled foreigners. For the British administrators, not giving permits to unskilled foreigners was a potential source of trouble because it resulted in unskilled laborers not being properly overseen. Increased oversight of unskilled foreigners, according to the British, diminished the risks of internal political subversion. The British tried to encourage the issuing of work permits to all workers by arguing that doing so would be beneficial to nationals. Permits, according to the British, ensured nationals “benefitted as much as possible from the development at hand” by not losing jobs to unskilled foreigners.³⁷⁶ However, considering most nationals refused unskilled labor positions, this seems largely incongruous.

Like the development of labor policies in Qatar, the British administrator offered opinions on the development of Abu Dhabi’s labor laws. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the administration had a very negative opinion of trade unions, especially in the Gulf. The Director of Labour, Sayyid A. Hijazi, was dissatisfied with the current condition of labor laws in Abu Dhabi and wanted to implement a series of reforms. These reforms included Abu Dhabi joining the ILO, labor education that would inform workers of their rights, the recognition of trade unions, the opening of more labor offices in the oil fields, and setting up a Department of Social Affairs.³⁷⁷ The British administration’s objections to these reforms were similar to the objections given in Qatar. In particular, the British administration worried that these reforms would open Abu Dhabi to disruptive outside influences, such as pan-Arab groups.

In conversations with Sayid Hassan Jumaa, a high-ranking Abu Dhabi government employee, a British administrator elaborated the problems with trade unions and the reasons that

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*; R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.”

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

Arab nations “had never had the ability” to develop industrial movements. First, trade unions had become the only civilian institution with political significance. This was because Arab countries were unable to evolve adequate political institutions. Second, “in the traditional evolutionary Arab states, it was difficult for trade unions to develop on Western European lines because industry was either relatively unimportant to national security or it was all-important.” Third, Arab nations were “paternalist in nature,” meaning that they protected the rights of workers without workers themselves having to agitate for changes. Finally, given the “the lack of developed political institutions and the banning in many countries of political groups opposed to the ruling regime, the trade unions became a target for infiltration by political forces seeking some form of expression.” When asked if the Abu Dhabi government should try to help develop these unions, the administrator insisted that the change must happen slowly. The administrator argued, “there was certainly no case for formation of trade unions in a primitive society such as existed in Abu Dhabi.” A better solution, according to the British, was a system of Joint Consultative Committees for the oil industry, such as the ones in Qatar.³⁷⁸

This narrative of Abu Dhabi and other Gulf States as primitive societies was used by British administrators to reinforce an understanding of sheikhly rule that relied upon the rulers distributing wealth amongst the population and differential treatment between national and foreigner workers. According to this view, the labor reforms that the Director of Labour wanted to implement were “quite unsuitable for a primitive society in an early stage of evolution.”³⁷⁹ In many ways, this rhetoric by British administrators mimics the discourse that oil companies developed at oil sites in countries as diverse as “Mexico, Iran, Venezuela, Colombia, Nigeria,

³⁷⁸ “Note of a discussion with Syed Hussan Jumaa.”

³⁷⁹ A British administrator reported that when he told this to Hijazi, who had a degree in sociology from a university in London, Hijazi was “extremely frustrated and angry.” The administrator seemed to be at a loss as to why. R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.”

[and] Saudi Arabia.” In these countries, local populations asked oil companies for development and training. The companies responded with the nineteenth-century idea that “long, slow tutelage” was best for the development of native populations.³⁸⁰ In the Gulf, this view reinforced the role of the sheikh in a “tribal society” to distribute money, provide social services, and protect the nationals in a paternalistic fashion.³⁸¹ While this view of labor relations was contested and debated amongst Abu Dhabi governmental employees, the British administration’s insistence upon tightening measures in order to ensure the stability of the sheikhs or the internal security of the state most often won out.

Conclusion: Evacuating Politics from the Oilfields

In 1963, local laborers working in the oilfields of Abu Dhabi went on strike to negotiate for better working conditions. These strikes were similar to many of the strikes of *khalījī* workers in the Gulf throughout the 1960s. While these strikes contributed to the instability of political regimes during this period, they also reflect *khalījī* networks, the desire for local governance, and Gulf workers’ engagement with international conversations about labor laws that were occurring in the 1960s. By examining these strikes and the responses they engendered among the oil companies, the British administration, and local rulers, we can begin to see their significance as cornerstones in the development of labor policies in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf. The strikes reflect a key moment in the shifting demographics of workers in Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and other countries in the Arabian Peninsula. This shift tracks from a time when many laborers, or unskilled workers, were nationals of Abu Dhabi or other areas in the Arabic-speaking Gulf to the

³⁸⁰ Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, (New York: Verso, 2009), p. 40.

³⁸¹ R.L. Morris to British Embassy Beirut, “Abu Dhabi: Report on Labour, Social and Industrial Developments.”

present, when labor is supplied from outside of the region. This shift was not merely a consequence of the new wealth from oil production. Rather, labor movements in the region were instrumental in this transition.

In 1972, the British formally ended their colonial relationship with the Gulf. In the 1970s, the relationship between oil companies and the states further shifted with the formation and rise to prominence of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the subsequent decision of many countries to nationalize their oil supply. Despite these shifts towards state-controlled oil, the evacuation of politics that began in the 1960s continued. One major result is that even today, forty-five years later, there are no *khalījīs* working as laborers in the oilfields of the Gulf; instead, foreigners do the bulk of the work.

Due to the Gulf's labor history, foreign workers in the Gulf are structurally vulnerable. These workers are dependent on their employers for their visa, paycheck, and continued work. They are also disenfranchised and unable to unionize. The labor policies developed in the wake of strikes by *khalījī* workers in the 1960s helped alter attitudes in the Gulf towards foreign labor. In addition, the policies and procedures implemented in the wake of these strikes shaped an approach to labor relations that endures to this day. Through their prescriptive advice and approaches to strikes that often used military or police action to resolve conflict, the British government constructed and reinforced an understanding of Gulf governance that looks today like Davidson's "tribal capitalism." This form of governance had consequences for which types of jobs foreigners and citizens took, as well as the implementation of labor laws in the Gulf. In the next chapter, I look at how this understanding of the Gulf is used to define the *kafala*, or sponsorship, system, thereby occluding the ways in which oil companies and the British colonial administration constructed contemporary labor hierarchies.

CHAPTER IV

Formalizing Labor Hierarchies in the Gulf: Colonial Administrators, Merchants, and Oil Companies

During Ramadan of 2010, I took *iftar*, or broke the daytime fast Muslims observe during the month of Ramadan, with South Asian migrant workers living in Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These men were residents of the Emirate's "abandoned" camps. The workers at the abandoned camps had the bad luck to work for companies that had gone bankrupt or were in financial difficulties following the global economic crisis of 2008. As a result, these companies closed their operations completely or laid off large numbers of workers. Often, the company owners fled the UAE in order to avoid debtor's prison, while the workers – many of whom had not been paid their wages – were left stranded in the UAE. These migrants most often worked at smaller companies that provided parts and services to larger multinational corporations (MNCs). With the economic turmoil of 2008, many of these smaller companies were unable to pay their bills or their employees. The low-level employees of these defunct companies continued to live at the camps, but because their employers no longer paid the bills, the workers had no water and no electricity. The men at the *iftars* were Muslims from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Stuck, waiting in these camps, they had no plane ticket home, no paycheck, and nowhere to go.

Daily during the month of Ramadan, a few men from a group who collected donations to feed workers traveled with me from Dubai to the far side of Sharjah. There, we did not visit the city, but instead went to an industrial area, where I drove my cheap economy-sized car through

ruttled dirt roads to arrive at a lane full of over-priced grocers and cheap food stalls. At one of the food stalls, owned by a Pakistani man, the volunteer group had arranged to provide meals for the abandoned workers. Most often, I went to these meals with two Indian Hindu men, one from Gujarat and the other from Tamil Nadu. These were highly gendered affairs, and I never saw another woman in this area. In addition to feeding the workers, this volunteer group provided legal assistance and purchased tickets home for workers.

While attending these *iftars*, I spoke with the men about their experiences and hopes for the future, as well as their anger and frustration at their situation. Unable to send money to their families, work another job, or return to their homes, migrant laborers expressed to me their feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and disenchantment with living in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf. One abandoned worker told me, “We do not have a degree; none of us can read. Why do they not give us the money they owe us? They have two cars and live like sheikhs, but they do not pay us.”

Unfortunately, the experiences of these abandoned workers are far from unique. Many workers whose employers continue to operate in the Gulf face poor working and living conditions. For example, in late 2013 and 2014, Qatar was under increasing scrutiny in the international news as it prepared to host the 2022 World Cup. News articles discussed the poor treatment of workers and argued that Nepalese workers were working in slave-like conditions. Other South Asians also faced unsafe working conditions. The Indian government went on record in early 2014 stating that over six hundred Indian workers had died in Qatar while working on the preparations for the World Cup.³⁸²

³⁸² Men are not the only ones to negatively experience the *kafala* system. Anthropologist Ahmed Kanna describes training for maids during which the maids are instructed to call the employer “mama” and told that they will be beaten if they do not properly clean kitchen utensils. Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 64.

A lack of strong labor laws seems endemic to the Arabic-speaking Gulf. This impacts workers' ability to agitate for better working conditions – something viewed as a positive or a negative depending on one's position within the system. One Indian human resources manager at an oil company in Abu Dhabi told me: "The greatest thing about the UAE is the strong laws. Here workers cannot strike and cause problems. If there is any problem at a worksite, you just call the police and they come and take care of it. It saves so much stress." When I asked whether there were more strikes at sites in the desert given their isolation from the city and thus from police action, the manager replied, "No! There are none. The police will even come to the desert." The situation contrasts sharply with the history of labor unrest detailed in the previous chapters, in large part due to the shift beginning in the 1960s towards hiring increasing numbers of foreign workers to work in the Gulf – workers with more limited means and opportunities to contest their working conditions.

The previous three chapters explored how historic strikes by workers in the Gulf, and the responses of Indian and Gulf governments, along with oil company management and the British administration, helped to shape the contemporary migration of workers to the Gulf, the work they do, and their experiences. In the last chapter, I explored strikes by *khalījī* workers in the Arabic-speaking Gulf and the reaction of Gulf governments, the British administration, and oil companies' management to these strikes. One result of those strikes was the depoliticization of the oilfields. *Khalījī* workers were hired for government positions and Indians, believed to be apolitical, were hired increasingly to work in the oilfields. A significant factor in this process was the writing of labor laws in the Gulf. In this chapter, I explore the legal developments and changes that led to this restructuring of Gulf labor, and the role of merchants, British administrators, and oil companies in this process. I highlight the complex, ever-shifting

connections between oil, governance, and culture that have shaped the development of the labor system in the Gulf. In my analysis, I consider not only how Gulf rulers distributed wealth from rents, but also how oil companies and colonial administrators informed politics in the Gulf. I consider the larger context that includes strikes on the oilfields, as well as colonial fictions concerning the Gulf, the politics of Indian and *khalījī* merchants, and oil company policies. This analysis considers how a diverse set of actors informed the establishment of the *kafala*, or sponsorship, system. I will show that as the British administration left the Gulf in 1971, Indian laborers were moving to the Gulf in increasing numbers. I argue that the labor relations prevalent today have been shaped by the interactions of imperial governance, merchant activities, oil company policies, and worker actions over the course of the twentieth century.

The *Kafala* System's Impact on Worker Experiences

Today, non-*khalījīs*, or people who are not Arabs from the region, are excluded from the political and cultural milieu of the Gulf States, and foreigners' ability to access state resources and participate in governance is limited. Ahmed Kanna characterizes governance in Dubai, for example, as based on two assumptions held by both the Ruler and the citizens of the emirate. The first is that citizens are dependent on the ruler. The second is that only citizens are able to make claims on the state for protection.³⁸³ For migrants to the Gulf, this means that there are no strong labor laws to protect them, they are unable to appeal to the state, and there are legal structures that formalize their exclusion – most notably the *kafala* system.

³⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 72.

The *kafala* system currently in place in the Gulf is most often discussed as underpinning and enabling worker abuse.³⁸⁴ In this system, all workers who come to the Gulf do so under the oversight of a *kafil*, or sponsor. These sponsors are most often employers. The conflation of sponsors and employers, combined with the lack of effective labor law enforcement in the Gulf, means workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse from their employer. Not only are workers dependent on employers to enter the country, they must also receive permission from their employer in order to change jobs.³⁸⁵ The system is closely associated with two types of laws: alien residence laws and laws of commercial companies, both of which protect the economic interests of citizens of the Gulf and limit foreigners' ability to participate in the economy. In some Gulf countries, these laws formalize exclusion by forbidding foreigners from owning land, requiring all companies to be majority owned by *khalijīs*, and requiring all migrants to have a *kafil*, or sponsor.³⁸⁶ The laws of commercial companies are closely related to the labor system. All non-citizens working in the Gulf must have a citizen act as a sponsor for their visas. Needing a sponsor for a visa does not differentiate the Gulf States from other nations and countries like India, the United States, and Great Britain – all of which require valid visas with a work sponsor in order to live and work in those nations. What differentiates the Gulf is the extent to which this process seems to impact the lives of migrants. Passports are held by employers and, with the lack of strong labor laws and enforced labor policies, the position of workers in the Gulf is

³⁸⁴ Andrew Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 63-64; Anh Nga Longva, "Keeping Migrant Workers in Check: The Kafala System in the Gulf," *Middle East Report*, no. 211 (Summer 1999): 20-22.

³⁸⁵ Jane Kinninmont, "Bahrain," in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.5

³⁸⁶ While this system remains dominant in most of the Gulf, there have been some changes. In 2003, Dubai began allowing foreigners to buy property and, in 2009, Bahrain began allowing workers to change jobs without their employer's consent.

particularly precarious. This vulnerability is further strengthened by the impossibility of foreign workers becoming citizens of the Gulf States and thus accessing the rights granted to citizens.

The *kafala* system has certain benefits and plays an important role in the production of the state. Because the Gulf countries are small, they delegate certain authorities to their citizens through the *kafala* system.³⁸⁷ Political scientist Christopher M. Davidson notes the benefits of the sponsorship system for the rulers of the Persian Gulf monarchies. He finds that the *kafala* system has benefits for citizens, “including a sponsorship system that allows regular citizens to build rent-generating business empires on the backs of foreign workers and, less tangibly, the maintenance of a subtle social hierarchy that invariably elevates the ‘locals’ above Arab and Asian immigrants.”³⁸⁸ The sponsorship system lends stability to monarchical rulers and helps to generate revenue for citizens. The latter, for example, are required by law to receive a share of the economic benefits from oil and gas endeavors and the subsidiary industries that are built around them. In these formulations, the main actors in the establishment and maintenance of the sponsorship system are the rulers and the citizens of their countries.

Many discussions of the *kafala* system elucidate how the system continues cultural practices from before the discovery of oil in the Gulf. In anthropologist Anh Nga Longva’s discussion of migration to Kuwait, she builds upon the seminal work of Frederik Barth and Abdalla S. Burja, and makes explicit what social customs and policies allow for the efficient running of Kuwait’s intensely multicultural and multiethnic society.³⁸⁹ She argues that a pre-World War II model defining tribal membership is central to the definition of the Kuwaiti

³⁸⁷ Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 100, 103-105.

³⁸⁸ Christopher Davidson, “Introduction,” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 2.

³⁸⁹ Frederik Barth, *Sohar: Culture and Society in an Omani Town*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Abdalla S Burja, *The Politics of Stratification: a Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

citizen. In addition, according to Longva, traditional understandings of labor dictate the jobs open to immigrants and the relationship between employer and employees is based on previous models of slave-slave owner relations.³⁹⁰ Other anthropologists have noted the significance of previous models of employment in defining the contemporary system. Specifically, the pearl trade and the role of indentured laborers or slaves in that trade was, according to Andrew Gardner, an “early rendition of the contemporary *kafala* system.”³⁹¹ While these social relations are certainly significant, they are far from clear cut. As Neha Vora illustrates on her work in Dubai, while the *kafala* system may make integration seem impossible, the management of the *kafala* system is dependent on expatriates who run and oversee businesses in the Gulf.³⁹² This system is also far from predetermined. Prior to the discovery of oil in the region and in the early days of oil production, foreigners held a multiplicity of positions in the Gulf. An examination of Indians in the Arabian Peninsula illustrates the diversity of social relations present historically in the Gulf, and a historical perspective illuminates the process through which foreigners were increasingly excluded from politics in the Gulf.

Trade in the Arabian Sea

Often, Indians’ presence in the Gulf is dated to the oil boom of the 1970s. The narrative, told to me repeatedly by government officials, recruiting agents, and migrants, was that “suddenly in the 1970s” Indians began moving to the Gulf. While many examinations of migration from India to the Gulf begin their studies with the oil boom of the 1970s, the population of Indian traders and merchants living in the Gulf prior to that time was not

³⁹⁰ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*.

³⁹¹ Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, p. 37.

³⁹² Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 21, 110-114.

insignificant. This reading of the Gulf's isolation mimics colonial narratives regarding the region. Such narratives lend greater weight to the cultural aspects of social relations, such as the *kafala* system, but obfuscate the role of oil companies and British administrators in constructing these laws. A historical examination of Indian merchants and traders in the Gulf, and these merchants' relationship with *khalījī* merchants, complicates the view of the Gulf as isolated.

While exchange between the Gulf and India dates back millennia, I focus here on the late nineteenth century onward in order to understand contemporary trade and labor circulations in the Arabian Sea.³⁹³ In Dubai, under the protection and instigation of the British, the Sheikh deployed an ethnically pluralist mode of governance in which mainly Persian and Indian actors (primarily merchants) made equally legitimate claims on the market and political protection of the state of Dubai. The British encouraged trade and were particularly interested in helping Indians establish themselves in the Gulf, as they tended to be proponents of British policy.³⁹⁴ There were fifty Indian families in Dubai in 1900.³⁹⁵ By 1961, 1,645 Indians lived in Dubai and

³⁹³ The British dreamt of connecting a railway between the Middle East and India in order to facilitate trade and communication. Board of Trade. 26-30 July 1928. Note on Trade in the Persian Gulf. British Library [IOR:L/PS/18/B411], *RE* (7), 762. For examinations of the connections between South Asia and the Middle East as well as the exchange of ideas and practices that occurred between these two, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800*, (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2004); Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002); Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler's Tale*, (New York: Vintage, 1992); Mary Elaine Hegland, "Shi'a Women's Rituals in Northwest Pakistan: The Shortcoming and Significance of Resistance," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2003): 411-42; Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Barbara D Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religion and Political Mobilization in India*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³⁹⁴ Fatma al-Sayegh, "Merchants' Role in a Changing Society: the Case of Dubai, 1900-90," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 1998), p. 88; Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation*, pp. 46-48; S.F. Given, Foreign Office, to Brown, Bahrain. 10 September 1962. BT1181/3, *RE* (1962), 522-3.

³⁹⁵ Christopher Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, (Columbia University Press, 2011).

over 3,500 were thought to live throughout the Trucial States. A British official described this Indian community in the Trucial States as “wealthy, influential, and long established.”³⁹⁶ By 1961, the Indian Association in Bahrain had two hundred members from the prominent trade families based in Bahrain. From the main associations in Bahrain in the early 1960s, it appears that there were a large number of Indian traders from the states of Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.³⁹⁷

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Britain dominated trade with all of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia. However, most of this was trade was from British India. In 1913, the British Empire, including India, accounted for twenty-one percent of Persian trade including both imports and exports. By 1923, this had increased to fifty-seven percent and oil accounted for the largest portion of the trade. Imports from India and Britain to the Gulf played a large role in trade. The total imports into Bahrain, in 1925, were £1,621,869 and Indian imports accounted for £1,210,223 of this. The same year, imports into Kuwait were £496,000 and exports were £547,000 and, of this, India accounted for £373,000 imports and £298,000 exports. In Muscat, trade was £613,000, £674,000, and £474,000 for 1924, 1925, 1926, respectively, and imports were twice that of exports and almost all the trade was with India. Chief imports from India were cotton goods and coffee; chief exports to India were dates and dry sardines.³⁹⁸ In 1955, there was “considerable trade” between India and the port of Aden, the majority of which was through dhows and small steamers.³⁹⁹ In 1953, Indian trade with Aden comprised £6.66 million of Aden’s total trade, excluding petroleum, which was £42.08 million;

³⁹⁶ Letter to British Residency, Bahrain, from Political Agency, Dubai. February 2, 1962. BL, File BT1001/1.

³⁹⁷ Letter to Indian Embassy, Baghdad, from Indian Association Bahrain, 21 November 1961. NAI, MEA, 1961. MI321(15)/62.

³⁹⁸ Board of Trade. 26-30 July 1928. Note on Trade in the Persian Gulf. British Library [IOR:L/PS/18/B411], *RE* (7), 761.

³⁹⁹ Annual Report, Aden 1955. NAI, MEA, 1955. 3(24)RI/56.

in 1954 India's trade with Aden was £5.8 million and Aden's total trade (excluding petroleum) was £41.94; and in 1955 India's trade was £5.42 million and Aden's total, without petroleum, was £41.28 million.

Indian traders often had offices or representatives spread from India to the Persian Gulf. Common places for offices included Bombay, Bahrain, Dubai, and Karachi.⁴⁰⁰ Many families had offices in all of these ports, with some of these family company offices enduring to the present. One Indian trading family worked in the pearl industry in the late 1800s, as importers of Indian goods to the Gulf in the 1930s, and today ships materials from India to the Gulf and the rest of the world.⁴⁰¹ Throughout this time, this Indian trading family had offices in Karachi (prior to 1947), Bombay, and Dubai. In 1933 and today, they keep their headquarters in Bahrain.⁴⁰² This family is just one of many trading families with offices in both India and the Gulf States historically and today. The presence of large numbers of Indians in the Gulf prior to the oil boom of the 1970s elucidates the importance of the Gulf for Indian traders. The relationships between the Indians living and working in the Gulf and *khalījīs* were varied.

A Snapshot of Indian Traders in the Gulf

In 1954, an Indian delegation, including Dr. Jagdish Chand, visited Kuwait and Bahrain and spoke with officials regarding Indian businessmen in the Gulf. In particular, Dr. Chand spoke with the British Political Agent about the difficulty faced by Indian businessmen trying to get the "No Objection Certificates" required for Indians to travel in the Gulf. The British Agent

⁴⁰⁰ Letter to Government of India, Foreign Department, New Delhi, from Dharamdas Thaveradas Importers and Exporters. NAI, 1932. File No. 3237.N/35.

⁴⁰¹ In 2007, this company sent electronics to the United States from Gujarat. Bill of Landing No. APLU007971398. From Mundra to Norfolk, VA.

⁴⁰² Letter to Government of India, Foreign Department, New Delhi, from Dharamdas Thaveradas Importers and Exporters. NAI, 1932. File No. 3237.N/35; Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 81.

replied that he would like for Indians to cultivate more joint business with the locals. In Kuwait, the Ruler said it was not possible to allow more Indian businessmen, and he blamed this on the behavior of Indians already in Kuwait, especially while consuming alcohol. The Ruler said that in Kuwait alcohol is allowed to foreigners, but Indians are “misbehaving in public places when drunk.” Despite these complaints and difficulties, Dr. Chand found that “there [was] a large number of Indians living in Bahrain and Kuwait, flourishing in all walks of life. Generally their relations with locals are cordial.” In Bahrain, in particular, Dr. Chand thought Indian influence was perceptible and the people in Bahrain were pro-Indian. This was due, in part, to the large number of Indian films shown in Bahraini cinemas and the fact that Hindustani was understood by one in ten Bahrainis. At local stores, Indian goods were sold. There was interplay between Bahrain and Kuwait with Arab merchants visiting India. In both countries, Indian currency was the official currency. In Kuwait, Indian businessmen were given credit without guarantee.

Unfortunately, however, Dr. Chand feared the situation for Indians in Kuwait was worsening due to economic development and the influx of Arabs from other parts of the Middle East. The influx of Arabs was hurting the Indian community because all Arabs “inherit a common culture” and were, therefore, “homogenous.” Dr. Chand believed that while orthodox locals sometimes disliked these new Arabs, most of the Arabs arriving from other parts of the Middle East were intimate with locals and were jealous of Indians. Though clearly collapsing differences among Arabic-speaking people, Dr. Chand was pointing to new and growing problems Indians in the Gulf were facing both with their own countrymen and with their neighbors. According to Dr. Chand, the influx of Arabs led to nationalist feelings among Kuwaitis. Englishmen were hiring local Arabs for jobs for which they used to employ Indians.

Locals, however, were not yet displacing Indians because the former did not have sufficient training for skilled or semi-skilled positions in oil companies. Dr. Chand described the situation:

Indians are efficient enough to hold their jobs. Their work is appreciated – they have proved to be more trustworthy than other Arab outsiders. However, due to increasing competition, Indians have to put up with all conditions. And this competition is not only with Arabs, but also because the POE in Bombay is ever ready to send replacements. The biggest problem facing Indians was their own attitude. Indians were “not change[ing] with the times.”

Mr. Chand observed the quality of Indian workers to be high, but believed problems arose because Indians were not socializing with locals and the Indian community was divided. For example, in Kuwait the Indian community was full of “bickering” amongst Indians to the point that the police had to get involved.⁴⁰³

This tension between Indians and locals also developed in other Gulf States. In the Protectorate of Aden in 1955, for example, there were 15,000 Indians. Most came from the Bombay Province and were Gujaratis, Parsis, and Bohras. The Indians in Aden were well-off, owned considerable property, and worked in areas such as textile trading and general contracting, or were engineers, lawyers, and doctors.⁴⁰⁴ Ten thousand of the Indians in Aden were Muslim and there were two hundred Sindhis. The majority of the Indian Muslims were “called Hindis, i.e., those who have married Arab women and have settled here.” Yet, despite these marriages, Indians were not seen as well integrated into Adenese society and “their social life by and large [was] quite distinct.” The Bohras and the Khojas maintained their own mosques, and the Hindus in Aden remained even more distinct. They were mostly vegetarians;

⁴⁰³ Embassy of India, Baghdad. 3 July 1954. Letter Oil Companies in the Persian Gulf and adjacent areas – Living and working conditions of Indian Employers, to Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. NAI, MEA, 1954. F. 14(1)-Pol54].

⁴⁰⁴ This was probably the same in Muscat, where the head of the hospital was an Indian who worked at the hospital from the early 1950s until the mid 1960s. Annual Report, Aden 1955. NAI, MEA, 1956. 3(24)RI/56; Confidential, Muscat Annual Report for the Year 1963. British Library *PDAW*, PG (24), 69.

dressed uniquely; purchased most of their food, clothing, and goods from India; and their wives and children lived in India. To outside observers, it appeared that neither Indian Hindus nor Indian Muslims wanted to integrate with Adenese society. The problem was not merely religious; Indians also cited the treatment of women as a reason against allowing Arabs to join Indian clubs. This resistance against assimilation ran both ways – Arabs, themselves, were not particularly eager for Indians to integrate either. Indian administrators blamed this lack of assimilation, by both Hindus and Muslims, as the root of hostility Indians faced. The administration feared that if Indians did not work harder to assimilate, “their future cannot be bright.”⁴⁰⁵

In Aden, legislation was proposed to restrict immigration. It was the view of the Indian Consulate in Aden that this legislation was directed primarily against Indians, Italians, and other Europeans. This was because Indians had a “monopoly for certain types of jobs, professions etc. which the Arabs think would go to them but for the Indians.” But with the help of certain prominent Arabs in the area, the bill was sufficiently modified to lessen its impact on the Indians in the Protectorate. Simply put, as in other areas of the Gulf, there just were not enough qualified locals to fill all of the open positions. In Aden, there was “not a single arab [*sic*] lawyer or doctor or an engineer.” Those Arabs who were skilled got jobs easily but, these trained professionals were not present in adequate numbers to staff oil projects.⁴⁰⁶

One of the ways the Indian community attempted to mitigate its negative image was to conspicuously refrain from contesting government elections. It was thought that with Indians comprising approximately twelve percent of the population, they could get a member elected if they chose. In 1955, one Indian, Mr. Mansoor, ran, but the majority of the Indian community did

⁴⁰⁵ Aden, Annual Report. NAI, MEA, R&I Section, 1956. 3(24)R&I/56.

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*

not support him. Instead, they claimed that all positions should be held for Arabs, perhaps in an attempt to gain the favor of their neighbors.⁴⁰⁷ This focus on positive relations with Arabs became increasingly important over the course of the twentieth century as moves were made to exclude Indians from Gulf commerce. But, as seen above, not all relationships were strained. In the 1950s, we see Indians occupying a diversity of positions and the relationships between Indians and *khalījīs* were at times good and at other times poor. This complexity indicates that there were many possible ways social relations could have been formalized in the Gulf. In order to understand the contemporary moment, it is important to consider the circumstances around the implementation of the *kafala*, or sponsorship, laws.

Implementing the Law of Commercial Companies

The formal restricting of economic activity by the Gulf governments began in the twentieth century, as conflict increased between Indian and *khalījī* merchants. Trade difficulties and larger political concerns were deeply entwined. For example, in 1963, Muscat imported large amounts of Sindhi cattle and other goods, equaling £219,550 that year. In return, Muscat exported dates to India, the largest purchaser of this economic staple. Relations between India and Muscat, however, were strained when the Indian government imposed a restriction on the import of dates.⁴⁰⁸ While not all relationships between Indians and *khalījīs* were fraught, antagonism began to build in the twentieth century and closely paralleled dissatisfaction with the British administration's roles in the Gulf.

Despite the culturally inclusive nature of the Gulf, the movement to exclude foreigners from economic activities and the roots of the *kafala* system can be detected as early as the 1930s,

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Confidential, Muscat Annual Report for the Year 1963. British Library *PDAW:PG* (24), 69.

long before oil produced large amounts of revenue for these nations. The relationship between Indian traders, merchants, oil companies, and state authorities has been historically complex and dynamic. At times, Gulf trading families, Indian merchants, politicians, and rulers worked together to conduct business and expand trade options. At other times, antagonism was based on political protests. In 1938, the British had to come to the aid of the Ruler of Dubai when merchants took over half of the city. These merchants asked the ruler to limit his personal income and do more to grow the economy.⁴⁰⁹ In 1953, Dubai merchants and young nationalists formed a loose organization, called the National Front. This organization “opposed the growing influence of Persian and Indian merchants ... [and was] responsible for agitating against the British presence.”⁴¹⁰ Much of this agitation against the British was in response to the anticolonial movements taking place in Egypt. This was because the Dubai merchants understood, as did the British, that Indian merchants were supportive of the British Empire and used the British government to help make inroads into markets in the Gulf.⁴¹¹ These trade relations influenced how Indians were treated while living in the Gulf. Foreigners working in the country became an easy target for reforms and an easier population to police and control than local, *khalījī* Arabs. The following two cases illustrate the connection between the British colonial administration, local merchants, and Indian traders. These cases represent early moments in the formalization of the *kafala* system.

The first case looks at Qatar, where the ruling al-Thani family dominated trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a result of this family’s influence, Qatar was unique in

⁴⁰⁹ Christopher Davidson, “The United Arab Emirates,” in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 8.

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*; Al-Sayegh, “Merchants’ Role in a Changing Society: The case of Dubai, 1900-90,” pp. 97-98.

⁴¹¹ In 1903, Indian merchants even funded the British expansion into the port town of Qatif, Saudi Arabia. Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 80.

the Gulf in the early twentieth century because there was only one Indian living there.⁴¹² Even after the rulers of Qatar made a treaty with the British and welcomed more Indian traders, Indians were still disinclined to go to Qatar as they had difficulty reinforcing trade and lending agreements. Collusion between Gulf rulers and reluctance by the British to press certain matters with Gulf leaders made it difficult for Indians to conduct business. The Dharamdas Thaveradas Importers and Exporters, an Indian family involved in trade, was unable to collect money owed to them by Essa al-Thani, a member of the Qatari ruling family, in 1932. While the British Political Agent in the Persian Gulf had directed al-Thani to pay, the latter had ignored the Agent's decisions. Furthermore, the Indian traders were unable to follow-up with their claim as the ruler of Dubai continuously blocked their access to the Political Resident when he visited.⁴¹³ The inability of the British to enforce their ruling is a sign of tension and of the uneven control of the British in India and the Arabian Peninsula.

The second case further illustrates the increasingly unsteady situation for foreigners in the Gulf. In 1963, Mr. Bhatia, an Indian living in Dubai, was informed that he was no longer able to receive imports of Philips radios from the company. Since 1957, Mr. Bhatia had been the Philips radio agent in Dubai. However, Philips had written to Mr. Bhatia and told him that new regulations made it necessary for all agencies to be held by Dubai citizens. As a result of this new regulation, Philips Radio would send its next shipment of radios to a firm called the United Arab Agencies (UAA) – an agency owned by two very wealthy Dubai merchants. When Mr. Bhatia protested, the UAA told him he could have a quarter of the company and act as titular agent if he did the ordering. Further stipulations by the UAA included that Mr. Bhatia would not have access to the accounts and that the arrangement had to remain a secret. Displeased with this

⁴¹² Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), p. 22.

⁴¹³ Letter to Government of India, Foreign Department, New Delhi, from Dharamdas Thaveradas Importers and Exporters. NAI, 1932. File No. 3237.N/35.

offer, Mr. Bhatia continued to protest and the matter was referred to the British Political Agent.

The British intervened and the final arrangement agreed upon was that Mr. Bhatia would invest twenty-five percent and would receive twenty-five percent of the profits. The British administration found “there are several unsavory factors about the affair.” First, Mr. Bhatia had no other agencies and was dependent on Philips for his livelihood whereas the owners of agency were the richest in Dubai. Second, Mr. Bhatia had lived in Dubai for his entire life, as had his father and grandfather. Third, the regulation the Ruler had described in his letter to Philips did not exist and there were dozens of agencies held by foreigners that were not touched. Finally, it was widely believed the Ruler had a financial interest in United Arab Agencies.⁴¹⁴ Mr. Bhatia’s experiences were only one of many instances of increasing restrictions on Indian merchants in the Gulf and are an example of the implementation of the sponsorship, or *kafala*, system. In the case of Mr. Bhatia, it appears that the Ruler of Dubai worked with powerful merchant families in order to exclude a non-*khalījī* resident from the economy, even though the latter’s family had lived in the Gulf for generations. In mediating this dispute, the British put the blame largely on Mr. Bhatia, whom British officials argued ought to have taken a local partner earlier. Taking a *khalījī* partner, according to the British, was the growing trend in the Gulf and one that they did not discourage. In fact, their decisions in this matter lent weight to the increasingly common practice of raising *khalījī* incomes by requiring partial ownership by locals – a requirement still in force today.

In many discussions of the *kafala* system, the implementation of the system is understood to be a formalization of pre-Gulf oil relations. This formalization was particularly important due to the increasing wealth that accompanied the intensification of oil production in the region. But

⁴¹⁴ A.J.M. Craig, H.M. Political Agent. 2 December 1963. Confidential Annex to the Trucial States for the Period November 1-30, 1963. *PDAW:PG* (24), 219-220.

by tracing the genealogy of the policy and considering the historical context of the region, the law may be analyzed as part of a complicated set of relations that involved not only traders and the Rulers, but also the British colonial government and oil companies.

An immediate antecedent to the sponsorship system was a law passed in Kuwait in 1960. This law, known as the Law of Commercial Companies stated that foreigners could not be the majority owners of businesses, or, in other words, all businesses had to have at least fifty-one percent ownership by Kuwaitis.⁴¹⁵ This model was becoming more and more popular in the Gulf, and, by the mid-1960s, the British noted that local merchants were putting pressure on the Gulf governments to legally restrict the share of foreigners in the economy.⁴¹⁶ The exclusion of foreigners from the state in Kuwait was further formalized with a 1975 amendment to the Alien Residence Law that included mention of the *kafala* system and listed *kafil*s, or sponsors, as employers. By 1980, *kafil*s were required for all foreign workers.⁴¹⁷ Laws of commercial companies and alien residence laws are still prevalent in the Gulf. The result is that in the contemporary Gulf, all companies must be majority-owned by citizens, while non-citizens experience a precarious living situation.⁴¹⁸ The precarious lives of migrants are further compounded by the labor policies of the Gulf. But these labor policies, and the *kafala* system specifically, did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, the politics and policies of oil companies and the British administration contributed to the development of the system.

⁴¹⁵ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*, p. 78.

⁴¹⁶ P. McKearney, British Political Agent, Qatar. 2 January 1965. Review of Events in Qatar in 1964. British Library, *PDAW*, PG (24), 360.

⁴¹⁷ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*.

⁴¹⁸ The requirement for 51% ownership also pertains to publicly traded companies. These companies have stipulations on when and how stocks may be traded. The exception to the 51% citizen ownership is found in companies that limit their business to free trade zones.

The Problem with the Resource Curse

In many discussions of politics and labor in the Gulf, oil plays a dominant role in determining social relations. Oil underpins the infrastructural development of the Gulf, and is often understood in terms of scarcity, consumption, and as a “resource curse.” According to the latter framing, oil and the wealth produced from oil rents hinder democracy and democratic institutions and forms. In Abdelrahman Munif’s novel, *Cities of Salt*, he points to the fiction that associates modernity, progress, and oil. He writes of the transformation that occurs in a fictional port on the Arabian Sea with the discovery of oil. “So Harran had been since the beginning of time.... The [oil] company men, who had visited many places before Harran chose it as port and headquarters of the company, as well as a city of finality and damnation.”⁴¹⁹ Yet, the association between oil and modernity so poetically destabilized in Munif’s novel is, nonetheless, often uncritically assumed within many discussions of the region. Consider, for example, the following news report’s romantic narrative of Dubai’s “modern” transformation thanks to oil:

While it is known today more for its fast cars and life of luxury, it was not that long ago that the city was as familiar with camels and dhows as it is now with Ferraris and indoor ski slopes.... Everything changed for Dubai with the discovery of oil in the Gulf in the late 1960s, bringing a soaring economy and an army of traders who flocked to the emirate to settle there. As it began to export crude oil, the petro-dollars flooded in to Dubai....⁴²⁰

The wealth from oil rents is popularly understood to have ushered in a new period of wealth, connection with the rest of the world, and material modernity – a modernity that is contrasted to a pre-oil past that is portrayed as timeless and traditional. While this association with modernity, progress, and oil are repeated in many sites of oil extraction, arguments that focus on oil wealth

⁴¹⁹ Abdelrahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*, trans. Peter Theroux, (New York: Vintage, 1987 [1984]), p. 198.

⁴²⁰ Kerry McQueeney, “Dubai before the Boom,” May 15, 2012. *Daily Mail*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2144613/Pictures-Dubai-1960s-1970s-city-fishing-settlement.html>. Last accessed 4/2/15.

as creating a rupture with the past are particularly popular in examinations of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf.

At the same time that oil is linked to modernity, however, it is also often assumed that oil wealth has simultaneously enabled the GCC States to maintain undemocratic processes through the redistribution of oil rents to citizens. Paradoxically, then, oil wealth is associated with ushering in material modernity, but delaying or staving off social and political modernity. Increasingly, scholars have critiqued this assumed automatic connection between oil rents and undemocratic processes. Gwenn Okruhlik's work on rentier wealth's impact on the state, for example, shows that political outcomes are not predetermined. Even though oil rents are paid directly to the state, such payments do not dictate the relationship between the state and citizens. Instead, Okruhlik argues, historical and social contexts, together with an exploration of how rents are deployed, offers a more fruitful method of analysis.⁴²¹ Timothy Mitchell similarly questions the discourse of the resource curse. Noting that the leading industrialized countries are also some of the world's biggest oil producers, Mitchell argues that one must consider the materiality of oil; the sites where oil is extracted, refined, and shipped; the international political context; and "the ways in which carbon energy helped manufacture forms of agency capable of effective intransigence."⁴²² Critiquing the connection between oil wealth and undemocratic practices opens up space to explore an expanded range of actors and associations that have shaped labor systems in the Gulf.⁴²³

⁴²¹ Gwenn Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States," *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 3 (April 1999): 295–315.

⁴²² Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (New York: Verso, 2011).

⁴²³ Of course, the relationship between energy and culture has long been an area of exploration for anthropology. Leslie White argued that the most important factor in cultural evolution was energy. He wrote, "Culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is increased, or as the efficiency of the instrumental means of putting the energy to work is increased." Leslie A White, *The Science of Culture*, (New York: Grove Press, 1949).

Oil, Society, and Politics

In order to understand how oil, oil companies, and the technopolitics of oil impact contemporary labor in the Gulf, one must look at how actors selectively invoke larger social relations and the shifting nature of oil economies over time. By considering the historical context of labor relations in the Gulf and the actors involved, oil rents become only one aspect of a much larger network. In Fernando Coronil's analysis of oil production in Venezuela, he argues that in societies where wealth depends on the commodification of nature, rent becomes a defining factor in politics and oil rents capture the organization of economic activities. Rents must be both productive and create profit, but also distributed in such a way as to ensure political stability.⁴²⁴ Coronil's insights are rarely extended to research in the Gulf, however, where scholars focus on the role of rent distribution but pay less attention to interactions between oil companies, local merchants, and governmental authorities. Michael Watts' work on Nigeria provides one model to expand the actors at play in oil politics. He describes his work as an exploration of petro-capitalism. Petro-capitalism, to Watts, is a dynamic set of forces that "produces, from the realities of forms of rule and political authority into which it is inserted, specific sorts of ... governable space (that is a specific configuration of territory, identity and rule)."⁴²⁵ These governable spaces are scaled onto local, ethnic, national, and global levels and they are the products of oil complex and petro-capitalism (but can work against each other). Oil capitalism involves a monopoly over mineral exploitation, the security apparatuses of the state, and institutional mechanisms by which oil revenue is distributed. The result is that for countries that

⁴²⁴ Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 49.

⁴²⁵ Michael Watts, "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics* 9, no. 1 (March 2004), p. 53.

receive a large percentage of their GDP from oil, oil influences development and this development “produced conditions which challenged and undermined the very tenets of the modern nation-state.”⁴²⁶ This is what Coronil poetically describes as the “Faustian exchange of oil for the illusion of progress.”⁴²⁷ The power of oil rents and their ability to influence forms of rule must be traced through the associations made by actors and the scales that emerge through these associations.

Doug Rogers and Andrew Barry take up the complicated intersections of oil and democratic institutions by attending to the material aspects of oil and examining how these material aspects impact politics.⁴²⁸ Rogers uses ethnography to understand how oil enters into “broader, and heavy politicized, fields of signification” in Russia.⁴²⁹ This research builds on work by Gabrielle Hecht, who looks at nuclearity in Africa and France “as a technopolitical phenomenon that emerges from political and cultural configurations of technical and scientific things, from the social relations where knowledge is produced.”⁴³⁰ Thinking about the implications of national imaginations and technological innovations, Rogers argues, “technical matters are deeply embedded in signifying practices.”⁴³¹ This work also resonates with Barry’s examination of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline and his findings that objects are integral to politics and how materials become imbricated in public disputes and actors in events.⁴³² The

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 54, 60-61. For another perspective on the relationship between Nigerian oil and the nation-state, see Andrew Apter’s exploration of the strategic construction of the nation, culture, and tradition with oil wealth. Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁴²⁷ Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, p. 391.

⁴²⁸ Andrew Barry, *Material Politics: Disputes Along the Pipeline*, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).

⁴²⁹ Douglas Rogers, “The Materiality of the Corporation: Oil, Gas, and Corporate Social Technologies in the Remaking of a Russian Region,” *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (May 8, 2012): 284–96.

⁴³⁰ Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 10.

⁴³¹ Rogers, “The Materiality of the Corporation: Oil, Gas, and Corporate Social Technologies in the Remaking of a Russian Region,” pp. 293-294.

⁴³² Barry, *Material Politics: Disputes Along the Pipeline*, pp. 2-3.

material properties of oil influence the effectiveness of worker actions, as discussed with regard to Indian labor strikes. But, as seen in the work of Hecht, Rogers, and Barry, the interplay of politics and oil is not limited to worksites, but also impacts state policies and oil companies. In the Gulf, we may consider how oil impacted state policies and development by considering the history of oil exploration and concessions.

The Gulf and Oil Development

Pre-oil Gulf societies had small populations, numbering between 5,000 and 25,000 people, and leadership was defined by political loyalty rather than geographic boundaries. These groups were loosely structured and, like the political leadership today, sheikhly authority was hereditary and patrimonial.⁴³³ Beginning in the late 1800s, rulers in the Gulf began conceding their external affairs to the British government.⁴³⁴ Overseen by the British Raj based in Bombay, in this system rulers in the Arabic-speaking Gulf had to give up hostilities in the sea, and, in return, the British accepted the authority of the rulers on land. From this point onward, the construction of colonial fictions played a significant role in the colonial administration and legitimization of the British presence in the Gulf. For example, one officer in the British Indian Army, Lieutenant-Colonel David Lorimer, who visited the Gulf in the late 1890s, wrote of the region: “The general impression of Dohah [*sic*] is unattractive; the lanes are narrow and irregular, the houses dingy and small. There are no date palms or other trees, and the only garden

⁴³³ James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, “Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical–Anthropological Study,” *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (September 2006), p. 101.

⁴³⁴ James Onley, “The Raj Reconsidered: British India’s Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence in Asia and Africa,” *Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (March 2009), p. 50.

is a small one near the fort, kept up by the Turkish garrison.”⁴³⁵ Such views of the Gulf as desolate and isolated were repeated throughout the twentieth century by British colonial authorities, with isolation conflated again and again with lack of development and “backwardness.”⁴³⁶

Even as the economic activity of the region changed, similar tropes endured. By 1969, in the Trucial States, agricultural practices were increasing; there were water cargo jetties, a cement factor, a fertilizer plant and a flour mill; people had access to health and education facilities; and vocational training for artisans had begun. Yet, despite these changes in infrastructure with the commercial export of oil, the British argued the social mores of the region remained stagnant. The British administration in the Gulf deployed the same language the British Raj had used to describe an unchanging India to describe the Gulf. According to this discourse, the Gulf was ostensibly in the grip of unchanging religious practice and traditions frozen in time. One British administrator wrote, “The gaunt stronghold of medieval Islamic thought and tradition still cast its gloomy shadows over every aspect of social life.” Often classified as “Puritanical Wahhabism,” this understanding of religion was felt to be most prevalent in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whereas the Trucial States were felt to have “stirrings” of liberal ideas. Another administrator suggested that the withdrawal of the British army from the Gulf might facilitate some minor form of Islamic reform, whereas others felt that the British withdrawal would lead to a greater entrenchment of this “puritanical” form of Islam.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Confidential dispatch No. 1/41 from Sir S. Crawford, Political Resident, Bahrain, to Mr. D.J. McCarthy, Arabian Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 14 April 1969, British Library [FCO8/1146]. *RQ* (3), 9.

⁴³⁶ Board of Trade. 28 June 1928. Oil Interests in the Persian Gulf. British Library [IOR:L/PS/18/B413], *RE* (7), 769.

⁴³⁷ Letter to British Political Agency, Doha, from RHM Boyle, 7 April 1969. British Library, FCO8/1146, *RQ* (3), 7-11; Review of Events in Qatar, 29 December 1969. British Library, *RQ* (3), 23-33.

These colonial fictions are central to how the history of the Gulf was written and the power relations inherent in this writing. One of the strengths of the interdisciplinary work in anthropology and history is the examination of the power of historical narratives and how certain fictions become fixed as “real.” Stephan Palmié points out that the writing of history is an exercise in power. Western modernity, in particular,

Ultimately rests on a fortiori logic that unfolded – and continues to unfold – not on the basis of any transhistorical first principles, but through the global realities of power that it both reflects and reproduces into its own narrative structures or dispelling them into the realm of the irrelevant, mistaken, unreal, or fictitious.⁴³⁸

One way anthropologists and historians have grappled with dominant narrative structures is found in the work of David William Cohen. Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo examine “the interstitial, intermediate, indeterminate, and unfinished frames of knowledge” that arise in an event.⁴³⁹ In doing so, they lay bare the ethics and politics of knowledge production. Importantly, those in power, including colonial authorities, worked and reworked certain tropes and the effect was a limiting of the possibilities for engaging with current and historic events.⁴⁴⁰ This reworking of knowledge concerning the Gulf was applied in administrative activities and oil company management.

Drawing Borders and Oil Concessions

Further lending weight to the colonial fictions developed by the British administration was the resistance British oil companies met when they tried to search for oil. Oil companies had difficulty exploring and then accessing oil in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf, and the colonial

⁴³⁸ Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition*, (Duke University Press, 2002).

⁴³⁹ David William Cohen and E S Atieno Odhiambo, *The Risks of Knowledge*, (Ohio University Press, 2004), p. xi.

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

administration believed that distrust by local sheikhs and people created barriers for oil exploration. For example, British officials observed that people living in the area viewed many “modern” items, such as cars, with distrust. As late as 1938, the British administration claimed, “Some people thought cars were animals and drank water from troughs, while [another tribe] believed that we had some ‘medicine’ which, if poured on to the hills, would turn them into silver.” The “ignorance” of the people was compounded by the “ignorance” of the sheikhs; many of whom the British felt did not even understand Arabic properly. The result was that the sheiks were “obstructive in spirit” during oil exploration. Imposing what the British perceived as arbitrary demands, the sheikhs of the Trucial Coast put restrictions on where oil exploration parties could visit and the length of time groups could stay in areas. One sheikh also asked that the exploration parties not use “motors” when looking for oil.⁴⁴¹ This last point was particularly difficult for the surveyors, who were not willing to travel by camel and thus greatly hampered by the request.

According to British colonial administrators, there were five key problems in oil exploration. First, British administrators argued that the sheikhs disliked large-scale commercial penetration and were reluctant to pay off prominent local people in order to maintain control. Second, there was anti-Christian fanaticism. Third, Abu Dhabi was hostile to both Muscat and the oil company. Fourth, there were jealousies among various factions and there was fear that the company would enrich one group but not another. Finally, there was “mental defeatism. The incapacity to understand that the activities of the oil company, and the feelings that ‘no’ is the easiest and safest answer.”⁴⁴² The colonial description of problems presented a simplistic view of

⁴⁴¹ Report by J.B. Howes, Assistant Political Agent Bahrain. 21 December 1938. British Library [FO 1016/56], *RE* (8), 643-645.

⁴⁴² These tropes were not only propagated by the British, and the Indian government administrators in the Gulf also had a poor view of the Arabs native to the Gulf. One Indian administrator based in Aden

Gulf societies that reinforced oft-repeated colonial fictions regarding the region. These narrative tropes included trying to explain the Gulf through the social structure of tribes, understanding Islam to be a monolithic category that was in opposition to Christianity, and describing the rulers as petty and childlike. Furthermore, Gulf rulers were seen as lacking a progressive vision of the future and, thus, unable to see the benefits of the British development of the oil industry.

The larger role of these fictions in obfuscating the relationship between the British administration and oil companies emerges in the following examination of the establishment of states' boundaries in the Gulf. In 1938, the British administration asserted that it was "impossible to define boundaries between tribes. In fact, there are none."⁴⁴³ The lack of clear boundaries meant that the British felt they had to try to draw the boundaries prior to offering oil concessions. Resolving boundary issues and increased oil exploration became even more important for the British administration after the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) was nationalized by Iran 1951. This nationalization led to the boycotting of Iranian Oil and the closure of the refinery at Abadan. This nationalization was also driven by worker action, including collective action by Indian laborers. One of the results was increased British attention on the Arabic-speaking Gulf as a source of oil and as a site for new refineries.

The drawing of boundaries in the Arabic-speaking Gulf helped cement sheikhly authority over certain areas. The British administration also hoped that drawing boundaries would ensure

described of the Bedouin as, "insurrection is in the very bone of the Bedouins; most are xenophobic and resent submission to authority but they abide by tribal conventions and traditions." He then compared the Bedouin with the tribesmen of the Northwest Frontier Provinces in India. Through this form of discussion, the Indian government officials were able to dismiss the actions of the Bedouin and other residents and question how much was nationalistic as opposed to the nature of the Bedouin. This was a striking assertion given that the same administrators also understood Aden to be "an ancient Kingdom, not less ancient than that of India." Annual Report, Aden 1955. NAI, MEA, 1956. 3(24)RI/56; Report by J.B. Howes, Assistant Political Agent Bahrain. 21 December 1938. British Library, FO 1016/56, *RE* (8), 646.

⁴⁴³ Report by J.B. Howes, Assistant Political Agent Bahrain. 21 December 1938. British Library [FO 1016/56], *RE* (8), 642.

the sheikhs' compliance with the policies of the British government and the oil companies. Disputes over boundaries caused costly delays for oil companies and, in years where some oil companies had record profits, other oil companies suffered due to holdups on the agreements for oil concession boundaries.⁴⁴⁴ Disputes over boundaries were a recurring problem for the oil industry. For example, in 1968, the American oil company Continental, after drilling five wildcats – drilling in sites previously unexplored for oil and gas – and spending close to USD \$15 million, found no oil in Qatar. As a result the company decided to relinquish its concession in Qatar. Upon hearing the news, the British Resident of Bahrain reported that the Deputy Ruler of Qatar was “gleeful.”⁴⁴⁵ This was because the Deputy Ruler believed that the British had been unwilling to “see a decision reached on the Qatari/Abu Dhabi sea-bed boundary, because it would give Continental a valuable area at sea, which at present belongs to BP [British Petroleum], thereby increasing American oil interests and reducing those of Britain.”

What I want to emphasize here is the interconnected nature of the British administration in the Gulf and oil companies. The Deputy Ruler of Qatar's response to Continental's relinquishment of the concession sheds lights on the close ties of politics and industry. Because Continental was an American oil company and BP a British one, the Deputy Ruler believed the British were reluctant to settle the boundary line and that this impacted the drawing of state boundaries in the Gulf. The British Political Agent resisted this explanation and told the Deputy Ruler that the British “were more interested in seeing a just and reasonable settlement at sea

⁴⁴⁴ For example, in 1963, after Kuwait declared independence, Kuwait Oil Company oil production was six percent over the previous year's number. The market also had expanded with a Japanese company that was doing off-shore drilling and the Japanese company was up 150% from the previous year. However, that same year, Shell had to suspend its agreement over offshore drilling pending agreement of concession boundaries. Foreign Office. 2 January 1964. Kuwait: Annual Review for 1963. British Library (BK 1011/1), *PDAW:PG* (24), 24.

⁴⁴⁵ The Deputy Ruler was Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad. In 1972 he deposed his cousin and ruled Qatar until his son disposed him in 1995.

between the two countries than anything else, and that our financial interests were of secondary importance.” But the Deputy Ruler did not believe the Political Agent and told the Agent that he would:

[Reply] to Continental immediately, accepting their relinquishment and asking them to retire from the scene as soon as possible. He would then have a concession on his hands, which he intended to offer to BP – at any rate all that area in dispute with Abu Dhabi. BP would then be able to develop the Dunduq field and Qatar would get her rights, which she so badly needed.

The Deputy Ruler believed this would spur the British to settle the dispute in Qatar’s favor.

The agent reported his response:

I reminded the Deputy Ruler that the concession area could not be altered, until a satisfactory agreement had been reached with Abu Dhabi over the median-line. And we went over all the familiar argument of low-water mainland only, etc., etc., once again.⁴⁴⁶

Despite the British protests regarding their disinterest in material gains from the dispute, after the Deputy Ruler of Qatar gave the oil concession to BP, the boundary dispute was settled in favor of Qatar, and therefore British Petroleum, by the Agreement of 1969.⁴⁴⁷ The history of BP and the companies’ connection to the British government may have influenced this agreement.

Previously named the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), the company changed its name to BP in 1954, following the nationalization of AIOC in Iran. Until 1979, the British government had controlling interest in this company.⁴⁴⁸ Boundary debates in the region also erupted into violence. For example, the state that is today known as Oman experienced three wars from the

⁴⁴⁶ Confidential Oil Company in Qatar, Telegram No. 70, to the Foreign Office. 11 May 1968. British Library [FCO8/741], *RQ(2):779*.

⁴⁴⁷ Hiran Wasantha Jayewardene, *The Regime of Islands in International Law*, 1st ed., (AH Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), p. 516 n687.

⁴⁴⁸ This BP is one of the companies that joined together to make the company we call BP today.

1950s to the 1970s, all concerning the drawing of boundaries and oil concessions.⁴⁴⁹ As the state boundaries of the Gulf were drawn, oil concessions and operating oil wells brought previously large amounts of capital to the rulers of the region.

Conclusion: Merchants, Oil Companies, and Shifting Politics

Within the context of increasing wealth from oil and the exploration of boundaries, *khalījī* merchants were potentially politically disruptive to the political system as it was attempting to settle. Long involved in a world trade economy, for example, Bahrain had been situated at the crossroads of the Portuguese, Ottoman, and Saffavid Empires from the 1300s to the 1800s. Its merchants participated in the spice trade, pearl trade, and other trade along the Silk Road.⁴⁵⁰ Merchants were also influential political players. In the 1960s, sheikhdoms such as Qatar and Abu Dhabi saw changes in leadership as citizens sought rulers who would redistribute oil rents in ways that would help in the development of the states. Influential families, often including merchants, oil companies, and the British administration in the region, were central to the monarchs' ability to rule, maintain peace within the state, enforce borders, and police the workforce.

While merchants were attempting to exert greater control over the market and participate in anticolonial activities, oil companies restructured the government of the Gulf States and contributed to changes in the political landscape. Oil companies are often the invisible participants in the restructuring of governments in the wake of oil discovery. The sponsorship system certainly allowed greater internal stability in the region as merchants were able to access

⁴⁴⁹ Mandana Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵⁰ Juan Cole, "Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shiism in Eastern Arabia, 1300-1800," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 2 (May 1987): 177–203.

a larger percentage of oil rents. However, this system also worked to support British colonial and oil companies' interests in ensuring productivity through control of the workforce. This control was all the more important as the British faced competition from the Americans in the region. An example of this is the previously discussed conflict between British Petroleum (a British company, formerly known as AIOC) and Continental (an American company). The result was that competition between oil companies also influenced the drawing of state boundaries.

But the role of oil companies in governance was not limited to the drawing of state boundaries. As the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf developed as a site of oil exploration, the relationship between the British and the Gulf shifted. It was assumed by the British administration that the decision of the British to depart in 1971, conveyed to Gulf rulers in 1968, came as a surprise to the latter. As the departure of the British from the region drew near, some British administrators in the Gulf attempted to forecast the future relationship between the Gulf and Britain. Oil was important to the British economy. With the Americans in Saudi Arabia, many British administrators saw the benefits of maintaining a relationship, but cautioned that the relationship would be difficult to maintain without England offering the Gulf countries help. Many urged the government to do so, as the importance of the Gulf was not limited to its production of oil; with income from oil rents, the Gulf also represented an important market for British goods. Using newfound oil wealth, merchants imported large amounts of British goods.⁴⁵¹ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, British market share in the Arabian Peninsula fluctuated between twenty-five percent and thirty-five percent.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Confidential dispatch No. 1/41 from Sir S. Crawford, Political Resident, Bahrain. One particularly important type of goods was military weapons. For example, in 1968, British exports to Qatar were estimated to be £7.1 million and in 1969 they were £5.5 million, excluding defense contracts. Defense contracts were lucrative for the British government and, in 1969, £19.5 million in British contracts – namely in power and gas and armed supplied – were signed. The connection between oil wealth and weapons purchases continues today. In 2013, the United States and Saudi Arabia signed a contract in

The British administration assumed that the failure or success of the postcolonial Gulf States would impact the British, but that this fate was largely out of British hands. Still, there was disagreement in the British administration regarding the best path for the new Gulf States. Some felt the success of the Gulf States would be dependent upon their moving towards a new, representative form of government, with educated Gulf Arabs taking roles in government management. From the British perspective, the problem with moving towards a more representative form of government was that the families of the Gulf rulers were drawing considerable allowances from oil revenues and thus ruling families were loath to accept the need for shifting governmental forms.

Not all British officials agreed on the need for a more representative government, however; indeed, some British officials argued that a sheikhly government would be most amicable to British interests post-1971.⁴⁵³ Maintaining a good environment for British economic interests was uncertain given the rising number of foreigners in the region and the growing number of foreigners staffing the government. For example, in Qatar, the bulk of the ministries and departments of government were staffed by expatriates from other countries of the Arab world, with Palestinians being the most prevalent nationality in the government. These Arab expatriates were seen as destabilizing to the nations and a source of subversion of the Gulf governments.⁴⁵⁴ Tied up with the question of government staffing and expatriates were oil projects. In order to manage these competing pressures and maintain stability, the British helped

which the US would sell Saudi Arabia \$60 billion in advanced aircrafts and weapons. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/13/us-saudi-arabia-arms-deal>

⁴⁵² Confidential Review of Events in Qatar in 1979, British Library [FCO8/1472], *RQ* (3): 570.

⁴⁵³ Confidential Dispatch No. 1/41, Mr. E. F. Henderson, Political Agency, Doha, 13 July 1969, First Impressions of Doha, British Library [FCO8/1146]. Confidential Dispatch No. NBQ1/2 from Mr. D. J. McCarthy, Arabian Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, regarding the first impressions of the Political Agent, Qatar, 5 August 1969, British Library [FCO8/1146].

⁴⁵⁴ Confidential Dispatch No. 1/41, Mr. R. Boyles confidential summary and valedictory dispatch No.1/1 from Doha, 7 April 1969, British Library [FCO8/1146].

set up a system that limited foreigners to precarious roles as workers with limited rights; employed mainly nationals in government positions; and constricted the ability of foreigners to own companies and property.

By encouraging Gulf governments to hire citizens for positions in government and hiring more foreign employees for oil projects, oil companies were better able to control their workforce. Furthermore, by encouraging the development of the *kafala* system, the companies increased workers' dependency and disenfranchisement in terms of their ability to mobilize for better worker conditions. In addition, the British administration sought to keep the Gulf States stable by ensuring the rest of the population was content. This included making sure that merchants, who had much political sway, were happy and that the rulers made concessions to merchants in order to legitimate and secure their authority within the territory.⁴⁵⁵

Oil companies and the British administration thus worked together to reinforce a vision of the Gulf that worked in their best interests. Through military force, contracts, and the setting of geographic boundaries, the Gulf was shaped in an image of tradition largely invented by the British. This shaping included acquiescing to merchant demands to enforce their market share. In this way, colonial fictions and oil company practices converged to shape the new economies and social relations that emerged. These historic moments helped to shape current practices. Locals, foreigners, governmental policies, and oil companies developed a system during the twentieth century that is still in play today.

My goal in this chapter has been to show that, rather than see the Gulf as an isolated region characterized by timeless traditions, we need to evaluate how “modern” economic practices are made to appear traditional through powerful narratives about the region and a complex set of historical relationships. Oil exploration and the development of the oil industry in

⁴⁵⁵ al-Sayegh, “Merchants’ Role in a Changing Society: the Case of Dubai, 1900–90.”

the Gulf illustrate the meeting of the global oil economy and local politics – a picture that is even more complicated when foreigners and merchants are included. The histories of migration and colonialism must be coupled with an examination of oil company policies in order to understand the process of carbon extraction and the influence of laborers in the development of the oil economy.

Chapter V

Of Mangoes and Men: Circulation in the Arabian Sea

While doing fieldwork in Mumbai, India, I spent a few days most weeks at Mancom Recruiting Agency's offices.⁴⁵⁶ Located in an office park, the staff of this large agency occupied offices throughout two buildings. Mango trees surrounded the buildings, providing shade and a respite from the surrounding noise and crowd of Mumbai's northern suburb. The junior employees of the office and I often spent our lunchtime trying to pick mangoes without the building's guards noticing and chasing us off. We ate the mangoes when they were green, or unripe, with salt and enjoyed their tart flavor. Later, after the mangoes had ripened, we enjoyed the sweet fruit as a dessert after our lunch.

Not far from Mancom's offices was the recruiting agency of Mr. Hussain, a recruiting agent I had been introduced to at a meeting between recruiting agents and the Indian government's Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA). Mr. Hussain was a young man who had studied in London and spent half of his year in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the other half in Mumbai. Articulate, outgoing, and engaging, when I met Mr. Hussain, he immediately invited me to visit his office. At Mr. Hussain's office, there were no mango trees; it was located on the third floor of an anonymous office building in Mumbai. Much smaller than Mancom, Mr. Hussain's company needed only a few rooms to hold its entire staff. While small,

⁴⁵⁶ The names of companies and individuals, with the exception of politicians acting in their official capacity, have been changed throughout this dissertation.

this office had a long-standing connection with the Gulf, and Mr. Hussain's work as a recruiting agent followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. When describing his family history to me, Mr. Hussain made a slippage between mangoes and migrants that illustrated to me how the conceptual and material apparatuses that used to facilitate trade are now used to structure labor migration to the Gulf.

Mr. Hussain's family began shipping goods to the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf in the late British colonial period. His grandfather was a customs agent in Mumbai and he went on hajj in the early 1940s. While he was in Mecca, Mr. Hussain's grandfather stayed at a guesthouse where he met people from Oman. During their conversations, a family from Oman asked him if he could supply "textiles, construction material, steel pipes, carpets, mangoes, basically everything," and Mr. Hussain's grandfather agreed. This meeting proved to be the beginning of a lucrative trading company that focused on exporting materials and fruit from India to the Trucial States (later the UAE) and Oman. Mr. Hussain's father continued this business and spent his time moving between India and the Gulf. In the late 1970s, the family "started exporting people," but still focused on exporting goods, especially mangoes. However, in the 1990s, the family found that exporting goods had become less lucrative and they began to "export more and more" workers to the Gulf. When I met Mr. Hussain, his company focused primarily on recruiting hospitality workers for projects in Oman and the UAE. Due to the recruiting practices of the company, many of the hospitality workers the company sent were from districts near the family's ancestral home in Gujarat.

How is one to understand this commodification of workers? The move from mangoes to migrants may be too easily understood or interpreted as a sign of a villainous recruiting agent. Recruiting agents, like Mr. Hussain, are usually discussed in literature on migration as predatory

figures.⁴⁵⁷ My neighbors and acquaintances in India were surprised that I would spend time with such undesirable people. A common way of referring to recruiting agents was as “racketeers” who were “sending unskilled workers abroad for a life of misery.”⁴⁵⁸ How can one understand the commodification of migrants not to be a sign of recruiting agents’ morally questionable activity? In this chapter, I argue that both the history of recruiting agents and the contemporary process of migration rely upon the commodification of workers and the restructuring of export processes to accommodate not only mangoes but also men. I show that recruiting agents’ desire for profits, the Indian government’s rhetoric of protection, and workers’ aspirations all legitimate this restructuring and create a network in which all three actors’ histories and actions become entangled. In these entangled histories of circulation in the Arabian Sea, different understandings of historic migration in the Indian Ocean, locality, and the role of government emerge. Circulation in the Arabian Sea depends on actors’ diverse social associations and their multiple paths as they regulate, facilitate, or experience migration. The associations of migrants, government bureaucrats, and recruiting agents are not identical and the different routes migrants travel illustrate how migration is constantly being negotiated and reshaped.

In this chapter, I examine multiple, overlapping networks in order to understand relations between the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf and India and, in particular, labor migration from India to the Gulf States. I explore how government bureaucrats, through attempts to regulate the

⁴⁵⁷ For example, Rajan, Varghese and Jayakumar argue corruption arises in the migration process from a “nexus formed between erring government officials and recruiting agents. In addition, Shah finds that workers who migrate without recruiting agents earn higher salaries and state they are happier in their jobs in the Gulf. S Irudaya Rajan, V J Varghese, and M S Jayakumar, “Looking Beyond the Emigration Act 1983: Revisiting the Recruitment Practices in India,” in *Governance and Labour Migration*, (Routledge India, 2010), pp. 251-252; Nasra Shah, “Relative Success of Male Workers in the Host Country, Kuwait: Does the Channel of Migration Matter?” *International Migration Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 59-78.

⁴⁵⁸ Chandrani Banerjee, “The Clay Pigeons,” *Outlook India*, September 21, 2010.

boundaries of the state and format citizens,⁴⁵⁹ shape circulations in the Gulf that are deeply imbricated with their understandings of history and their relationship with business. At tension with these government policies are trade relationships and the circuits recruiting agents use to move goods. I look at how recruiting agents and government officials meet and attempt to standardize and regulate the process through which migrants move. Difficulties arise due to the differing social associations of the participants and the diverse understandings of the history and contemporary role of migration held by the actors. These differences are overcome through the use of business language and, in particular, the idea of “brand.” By agreeing on “brand” as a central element of Indian migration, recruiting agents and bureaucrats are able to work together to design and implement bureaucratic apparatuses, including the steps migrants are supposed to follow before migrating. I argue that juxtaposing the social associations of government bureaucrats and recruiting agents not only shows how Indian labor migration to the Gulf reshapes existing practices to allow for migration, but also lends insight to the commodification of workers and their treatment as products of trade. Finally, I explore the social associations of migrants in order to understand the limits of the bureaucratic apparatuses and the multiplicity of ways migration may be shaped. I do this by examining how the networks laborers use to migrate impact the conceptual and material apparatuses of migration.

Recruiting Agents and Indian Migration

At independence, the Government of India adopted the British colonial laws that oversaw migration. In the implementation of these laws, the government also reinforced the roles of

⁴⁵⁹ The idea of “formatting” presented here comes from the work of Andrew Shryock. Formatting refers to the idea of how “identity” and “community” are “self-consciously displayed” and the disciplinary work done to maintain this display. Andrew Shryock, “In the Double Remoteness of Detroit: Reflections on Ethnography, Culture Work, and the Intimate Disciplines of Americanization,” in *Off Stage/on Display*, ed. Andrew Shryock, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 309.

recruiting agents. Recruiting agents were central to staffing oil projects during the British colonial era and they continue to be central to labor migration from India to the Gulf.⁴⁶⁰

Recruiting agencies are businesses registered with the Indian government that work as intermediaries between prospective migrant workers and companies that wish to hire them. From the 1830s to the 1920s, recruiting agents facilitated the emigration of Indians as indentured laborers throughout the British colonial empire. These agents were often British businessmen based in port cities who worked with Indian subagents based in the interior of India. The recruiters were overseen by “protectors” who were responsible to the British colonial authorities for the welfare of migrants. Protectors ensured migrants were not coerced, but were healthy and treated fairly in their destination country.⁴⁶¹ This structure of migration continues today, but the social associations of recruiters and government bureaucrats have changed.

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs was created in 2004 in order to provide services to Indians abroad and to supervise the Protector of Emigrants (POE) offices. Prior to 2004, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of External Affairs had overseen emigration. In a conversation with Dr. Didar Singh, the Secretary of the MOIA from December 2009 until November 2011, he stressed that the Indian government does not wish to interfere with migration and “only wants to protect the most vulnerable of workers.” With the goal of protecting these workers, the MOIA regulates both emigration and recruiting agent activities. In order for men and women who are considered vulnerable to migrate legally, they must go through a local Protector of Emigrants office. The policy is that, at the POE offices, the officers are to check the documents of the migrants who have “Emigration Check Required” (ECR) in their passports. The offices ensure that the worker has a valid job offer with a company that is not blacklisted by

⁴⁶⁰ See, for example: Thomas’s letters, NAI, External Affairs, ME, 1946. 10-(91)-ME/46.

⁴⁶¹ Thomas R Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 136-137, 144.

the government. The stated purpose behind this form of checking is to reduce the instances of workers stuck at “abandoned camps,” ensure that workers are being paid a fair wage, and avoid sending workers to companies that have abused workers in the past. When unskilled or semi-skilled workers migrate legally, it is the job of the recruiting agent to ensure that the government guidelines are followed and that the jobs they are going to meet the government’s standards.

Recruiting agents play a central role in the migration of Indians to work in the oilfields of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf, and, as such, serve as organizers of labor circulation. In general, it is difficult for an unskilled or semi-skilled Indian with ECR stamped in his passport to legally migrate to the Gulf States without working through a recruiting agency, especially the first time he goes abroad. How these agencies recruit migrants and the areas from which they recruit impacts the flow of migration to the Gulf. In 2008, the average daily number of migrants receiving permission from the Indian government to migrate was 3,430 people. Of these people, recruiting agents facilitated 3,275 clearances, or over ninety-five percent of the necessary clearances.⁴⁶² This predominance of recruiting agent clearances reflects the central role most recruiting agents play in the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. The way in which workers come into contact with agents varies, but these agents help migrants negotiate the governmental policies that restrict the movement of unskilled or semi-skilled workers to the Gulf and provide links between multinational companies and Indian labor.

Recruiting agents are necessary actors in overseas labor migration because very few companies are able to recruit directly in India.⁴⁶³ Often, recruiting agents work through local sub-agents or agents that are not registered with the government. Subagents are usually local men

⁴⁶² S Irudaya Rajan, V J Varghese, and M S Jayakumar, “Looking Beyond the Emigration Act 1983: Revisiting the Recruitment Practices in India,” p. 280.

⁴⁶³ In order to recruit in India, companies must complete large amounts of paperwork and negotiate multiple government offices. This amount of paperwork and the uneven application of policies at different offices is enough to discourage almost all companies from attempting to do so.

who have some experience working in the Gulf. They are unregulated and charge fees to prospective migrants to help find them work in the Gulf. Many subagents have connections with agents who are registered with the government and these subagents act as middlemen between recruiting agents and workers. Registered agents, usually referred to simply as recruiting agents or RAs, have legal standing that allows them to take “orders” from companies for available jobs, advertise these jobs, hold interviews with prospective workers, facilitate the paperwork needed for migration, and send the worker to the Gulf. Recruiting agents often described to me their work as “catching” a man and then “exporting” him.

The language of “exporting” people is reinforced through the historic trade connections between the Gulf and India. For recruiting agents like Mr. Hussain, migration in the Arabian Sea has long been based on trade and the movement of goods. In the colonial and early national periods, traders often worked as recruiting agents. Some of these traders worked independently of oil companies by bringing Indians to the Gulf whom they then hired out to the oil companies.⁴⁶⁴ At other times, Indian traders were contracted through oil company management to hire workers through their offices in Bombay.⁴⁶⁵ In their dealings with oil companies, Indian traders have played a key role in the recruitment of workers for the oilfields since the industry’s inception in the Gulf.

Circulating Mangoes and Men

From the late colonial period to the present moment, as traders moved through the Arabian Sea, they were moving goods, including mangoes. An examination of the history of the

⁴⁶⁴ I J Seccombe and R I Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” *International Migration Review* 20, no. 3 (August 1986): 560.

⁴⁶⁵ Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922 and the Rules Issued Thereunder During the Year Ending 31st December, 1952, of the Ports of Bombay, Porandar, Bedi Bunder and Port Okha. NAI, MEA, Emigration, 1952. File No. F.20-8/52-EMI.

mango and the mechanisms for its export provide insights regarding the ease with which recruiting agents today are able to redeploy the apparatuses used to export mangoes to export people. The mango is the national fruit of India, and its history is detailed on the Government of India's website. Thought to have originated in Burma or Assam, India, the mango has since spread to the rest of the world. According to popular stories, the Mughal emperor Akbar planted the first large orchard in India in the sixteenth century. This orchard was located in Darbhango, Bihar, and was called *Lakhi Bagh* because Akbar planted one lakh, or one hundred thousand, mango trees there.⁴⁶⁶ From the very beginning, the mango's movement was caught up with that of men and broader webs of meaning. Buddhist missionaries spread the mango throughout Southeast Asia, and Portuguese Christian missionaries introduced the mango to the Americas, via Brazil. Like Mr. Hussain's grandfather, who began his work as a trader through connections made on hajj, religion, goods, and people are often entangled as they circulate on currents that move through the Indian Ocean.

The value of world trade in mangoes today is second only to that of pineapples. India produces over fifty percent of the world's mangoes and is highly reliant on this trade for local employment. In 2001, the four highest producing Indian states for mangoes were Andhra Pradesh (AP, now Telangana and Seemandhra), Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar. The crop accounts for thirty-nine percent of India's area of fruit crops. In 2007, agriculture, forestry, logging, and fishing accounted for just over sixteen percent of India's GDP and employed sixty percent of the population. Excess labor, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, allowed for the high percentage of worker input into this export crop. The states that are the most agriculture heavy also send the most laborers to the Gulf. One reason for this is because

⁴⁶⁶ One place this story is found is on the Government of India's website on India's national fruit, the mango: http://knowindia.gov.in/knowindia/national_symbols.php?id=13. Last accessed February 15, 2015.

migration of one or more sons is often a strategy used by farming families to support the family and maintain their small plots of farmland.

The impoverishment and underemployment of India's farmers and their connection with the export of mangoes are not the only features that tie the movement of mangoes and workers. There are also strikingly similar procedures to the processes of exporting mangoes and people from India. Indian mangoes are harvested at a pre-mature stage to capture the early market and are then ripened by dipping them into ethrel, a plant growth regulator. Ripe fruits can be stored for four to ten days; picking pre-mature fruits and holding off the ripening process extends this period. Next, mangoes are packed into wooden, bamboo, or cardboard boxes and sent by rail or truck to large ports where they are shipped by sea. In 2010, the largest importers of Indian mangoes, outside of South Asia, were the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain. The value of trade with the UAE alone consists of over one-third of the complete value of Indian mango export. These countries – with the exception of the United Kingdom, where the data is not available – are also the largest recipients of Indian unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. In 2010, ninety-five percent of unskilled and semi-skilled Indian labor migrants, for whom data is collected, traveled to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).⁴⁶⁷

Mr. Shah, a recruiting agent based in Mumbai, explained to me the ideal way that an agent recruits. Here, I outline his steps with additional insights I gleaned from watching this process at multiple companies. First, a recruiting agent receives an order from a client detailing the “requirements,” or number of workers and desired skill sets. After the agent receives these requirements, he gets from the company the following documents: power of attorney, the letter of demand, the specific contracts, visa copies (or a block visa for Saudi Arabia), and a contract

⁴⁶⁷ Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 2012-13*, (Government of India, 2013), p. 53.

regarding placement fees. This paperwork provides the agent with the authority to recruit workers for the company. After the paperwork is in place, an agent mobilizes possible recruits. This may be done through working with a database maintained by the company or advertising in local papers; for skilled or professional positions, online websites like monsterindia.com may be used. The agent then screens CVs and makes a shortlist of possible workers who match the company's requirements. At large offices like Mancom, pre-interviews are conducted in order to screen candidates. Once the candidates have been screened, the agent draws up an interview schedule. If there are many possible candidates in Mumbai, then interviews may be held there. This is not always the case, however, and sometimes it is necessary to travel to other parts of India in order to recruit workers. Most often, the company will send a representative to be present at the interviews. On occasion, however, the recruiting agent will conduct interviews for the client. Once workers have been hired, all workers, including skilled and professional workers, need to have their degrees and certificates verified, go through medical screening, and obtain a visa. After this, passports are put forward for visa endorsement with the country to which the migrant is traveling. Some countries, like Kuwait, require that round trip airline tickets be included. Once the visa has been endorsed, those migrants with ECR in their passport must receive clearance from the local POE office.

The process of exporting mangoes requires much of the same paperwork as that needed to "export" people. Indian emigration has unique features that are largely due to the restrictive nature of the emigration process for "vulnerable" Indians. In order for a mango to be exported from India, the following documents are required. First, the order for the goods must be present, including the invoice, packing list, and certificate of origin. For migrants requiring an emigration check (i.e., ECR passport holders), before a recruiter can even begin recruiting, they must get

approval from the POE to recruit workers for each position and the company must also be approved. This is similar to a mango's invoice. Then, the workers who are selected must provide a "No Objection Certificate," which is given by the police in their natal village, and may be considered similar to a mango's certificate of origin. Next, in order for mangoes to ship, shipping bills and bills of handling are necessary and, for payment, letters of credit and bills of exchange. Likewise, in order for workers to travel, they must have valid contracts with payment that is deemed acceptable by the Indian government, as well as plane tickets.⁴⁶⁸ Worker quality is also checked through medical examinations and through skill tests administered by recruiting agents. This quality control is similar to the phytosanitary certificate, GLOBAL GAP certificate, and health certificate required of mangoes.⁴⁶⁹

The similar documentary requirements and screening processes for migrants and mangoes formats both as commodities, regulating their movement in analogous ways. In addition, emigration processes often deploy the same structures used to move goods, reinforcing the strong sense of commensurability of the two seemingly disparate objects. The importance of quality control is repeatedly stressed to farmers and exporters by the Indian government, which seeks to increase export numbers and maintain the positive image of Indian mangoes around the world. In many government pamphlets for farmers, it is stressed that good-looking, high quality mangoes must be sent abroad. This concern for quality control is also apparent in the MOIA's attempts to protect "India's brand image" through regulating the migration of vulnerable workers. Like fruit, laborers must meet certain conditions to go abroad. Similar language commodifies migrants and imagines them circulating, like mangos, as both exported objects and

⁴⁶⁸ The minimum pay required by the Indian government is much less than almost every other country that sends laborers to work in the Gulf. Recruiting agents in India often attribute this to the lack of strength of the Indian Government when it comes to the Gulf.

⁴⁶⁹ For a complete list of documents needed in order to ship mangoes, see: <http://agriexchange.apeda.gov.in/Market%20Profile/one/MANGO.aspx>. Last accessed January 1, 2012.

symbolic representatives of the nation. This language of quality or brand allows recruiting agents and government officials to overcome differing understandings of locality, history, and the role of the government, and shape together the apparatuses that oversee and structure the process of migration.

The Process of Migration

Migration is complicated and time-consuming. As a result, at many recruiting agencies, registered recruiting agents did not personally handle the recruiting of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Registered recruiting agents tended to be more skilled, more educated, and have more financial resources than their employees or subagents. It is difficult to become a registered recruiting agent and, in order to register with the Government of India, agents have to fill out lengthy paperwork and deposit twenty lakh rupees (over \$31,000 USD in 2015) with the Indian government. These policies encouraged family legacies, like Mr. Hussain's company. Other agents came to the business through government ties. For example, Mr. Shah had been in the recruiting agency business since 1975. Before this time, he had worked as a secretary for a Gulf consulate in Mumbai. He made many contacts with Gulf-based companies during that time. He told me, "It came natural to deal with Middle East countries and I got the idea that I should be an exporter [of goods] and manpower." For Mr. Shah, government employment provided an entry into business in the Arabian Sea.

The contacts, personality, and status of recruiting agents often influenced the number of workers each company sent abroad and, therefore, the size of the staff at each office. For example, at Mr. Shah's and Mr. Hussain's smaller recruiting agencies, they each developed relationships with companies in the Gulf and handled the recruiting of skilled workers. At

Mancom, a larger agency, the actual recruiting agent or business owner was not involved in the recruiting process at all. Instead, the owner worked to develop relationships with oil companies in the Gulf.

At Mancom, two senior workers, both women, handled the recruitment of skilled workers and professionals. At Mr. Shah's office, his daughter was being groomed to take over the business, as Mr. Shah was ready to retire. Mr. Shah's daughter was unique as she was the only woman I met who was going to be a registered recruiting agent. However, in the upper management of recruiting agencies, women were often present, but not in the same large numbers as their male colleagues. As at Mancom, women in all the offices I visited worked exclusively with skilled or professional workers or as secretaries. Recruiting agents explained to me that subagents and unskilled or semi-skilled laborers were inappropriate for women to work with because they were "rough" or "uneducated" and, in the case of unskilled or semi-skilled laborers, often lower class and lower caste.

For the recruitment of unskilled workers at Mancom, one manager oversaw three junior employees who handled the bulk of the unskilled recruitment. Employees at recruiting agencies and, in particular, the office workers who specialized in recruiting unskilled and semi-skilled workers, often had special relationships with subagents. These subagents were not employed within a recruiting agency. Instead, one subagent would have a group of men from his home state that he took to different recruiting agents for jobs. He usually helped the applicants to create résumés and prepare for interviews. Employees at recruiting agencies typically had a few subagents with whom they preferred to work, and at interviews they would put the workers from these subagents first for interviews. These relationships were very important, as interviews were

often overcrowded and so overbooked that most applicants were not able to meet with the employer for an interview.

Subagents' charge to workers for these services ranged anywhere from INR 20,000 to INR 100,000; workers told me that the average amount they paid was INR 70,000, or about \$1,880 USD in 2009 and 2010. The amount charged by subagents was much higher than the amount charged by registered recruiting agents. According to the Emigration Act of 1983, registered recruiting agents may only charge forty-five days of the laborer's wages and this amount could not exceed INR 20,000. If a worker was brought to an RA by a subagent, usually the subagent paid the RA's fees from the money the subagent collected from the worker. In the many cases I observed, this practice enabled subagents to charge in excess of this legal limit, while simultaneously absolving the recruiting agent from charging illegal fees. In addition, some employees of recruiting agents at times took gifts from subagents in order to put their workers first through interviews or "push" the employer to hire certain workers.

The gifts given by subagents to employees of recruiting agencies were objects of much speculation and gossip in the recruiting agencies I visited. At most recruiting agencies, employees told me that they did take gifts, and they assumed that their colleagues did as well. When gifts were given or taken, workers concealed their actions from colleagues, for fear of being found out and fired. Yet, the frequency of gift giving and its illicit nature was such that workers often accused one another or even their bosses of taking gifts. The gifts often took the form of money, but could also be jewelry, mobile phones, or other electronics. One junior office worker, Ram, was particularly concerned because he heard from his friends that his boss was going with him on his next set of job interviews and Ram suspected this was because his boss thought he was taking gifts from subagents. Taking "bribes" from prospective employees was

expressly forbidden by the owner of Mancom. Mancom's owner told his staff, "applicants are willing to pay money to get a job," but he repeatedly warned that taking such money was grounds for termination. He further elaborated to his employees that, in the past, workers at Mancom had "accepted bribes to ensure jobs, make documents, vouch for candidate to client and Mancom has terminated on such grounds." Despite these warnings, the staff at Mancom still speculated regularly about other staff taking "bribes." Ram, for example, pointed to his manager's nice car and house and expressed disbelief that either would be affordable without the gifts given by subagents. Furthermore, such gift-giving was practiced not only by subagents, but also by returned migrants, who often brought gifts to recruiting agency employees. These gifts usually took the form of watches, cologne, and alcohol. In return for the gifts, workers hoped recruiting agency employees would assist with finding new positions in the Gulf.

Some workers arrived at recruiting agencies without a subagent. If hired, these workers were able to save quite a bit of money in terms of the fees normally paid to agents and/or subagents. Some workers sought to develop a relationship with an employee at a recruiting agency in order to have the employees help them at job interviews—for example, by giving gifts, as noted above. For their part, some multinational oil companies would not hire workers who came with a subagent and only worked through registered recruiting agents. These companies specifically asked the registered recruiting agents with whom they worked not to work with subagents. In enforcing this preference, some companies were even known to have stopped working with an agency once it was discovered that they were working with subagents. This policy by some oil companies led to either workers arriving on their own or subagents being more furtive in their role. However, only a small number of companies adopted such a policy; not coincidentally, the ones that did were also the companies that had higher standards in their

employment criteria. For veteran workers in the Gulf who could meet these criteria, they were able to get these better jobs and, by avoiding subagents, paid less money to do so.

Recruiting agents thus mediated between migrants and companies, and between migrants and the government. Their connections with the Gulf were based on historic and contemporary trade relations. These connections and the current process of migration led to the refashioning of the apparatuses used to move mangoes to move men instead. Though located in India, recruiting agents had relationships that spanned not only India, but also the Indian Ocean and, in particular, the trade that traversed the Arabian Sea. In the next section, I explore how these relationships reconciled themselves with representatives of the Indian nation-state.

The Government and Labor Migration

During my research, tensions arose between government officials and recruiting agents concerning the former's role in promoting and overseeing migration. Many of these tensions were rooted in the differing perspectives on the histories of migration held by RAs and bureaucrats. Both government officials and businessmen understood a long history of connection between India and the Gulf. However, each of these groups offered a different narrative of that history, its dynamics, and its geographic scope. Their narratives reflected the multiple relationships each actor relied upon to shape their role in the migration process. Despite these differences, government officials and recruiting agents did work together to create the bureaucratic apparatuses that structured migration. These apparatuses were built on historic trade policies and procedures, and, in the contemporary moment, were also informed by the differing business models held by recruiting agents and the government.

The oversight of migration, through Indian POE offices, passports, and visas, is one way in which the government attempts to regulate the ethnic, spatial, and temporal borders of India. These border-controlling techniques are reinforced by narratives that imagine strong national boundaries and homogenous populations. However, migration and trade move through national boundaries and have the potential to disrupt the boundedness of nations.⁴⁷⁰ Migration and trade influence the negotiation and restructuring of boundaries and histories of circulation between the Gulf States and India.

One way to understand this negotiation of boundaries is to investigate how histories of trade and state histories of connection meet, overlap, and differ. In recruiting agents' accounts, such as Mr. Hussain's story, the history of these circulations began prior to the independence of India and the nation does not figure as an actor per se, but rather as a bureaucratic space through which goods and workers pass. The workers in the narrative are portrayed not as laborers, remitters, or citizens, but as items that can be exported like mangoes. In addition, according to RAs, migrants' primary role is to circulate through and reinforce networks informed by commerce, religious ties, and regional identities. National boundaries and ideas of locality are imagined differently in these narratives, in ways that challenge the supposed boundedness and primacy of nation-states. As boundaries are disrupted, they are replaced by associations and relationships. These networked associations shape how participants together rework apparatuses to facilitate the migration of workers.

⁴⁷⁰ Werbner notes that transnational movements, such as migration, trade, and religious connections, disrupt "neat notions of boundedness." Pnina Werbner, "Global Pathways: Working Class Cosmopolitans and the Creation of Transnational Ethnic Worlds," *Social Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1, 1999), pp. 33-34.

A Bureaucratic History of Emigration

From the perspective of the Indian government, the historic and contemporary migration of workers has been one continuous practice. For the government bureaucrats with whom I spoke, this understanding of migration's long history was encouraged by the endurance of institutions from the colonial period to the present. At a meeting between representatives of recruiting agents and of the MOIA, Dr. Singh, the Secretary of the MOIA at the time, explained to recruiting agents how he understood the historical role of agents and the governmental oversight of emigration:

The POE is the oldest industry in India, except the spice trade. Since the slave trade was banned in 1824, the British set up the system of Protector General of Emigrants and there were registered agents based in the presidencies. They offered employment abroad. This was called indentured labor, but it is the same as today and it is a replacement to the slave trade. The experience you [recruiting agents] have no one else has and we expect this industry to be number one.

At this meeting and in subsequent discussions I had with Dr. Singh, he indicated that he saw a continuation from slavery to indentured labor during the colonial period to contemporary "free" labor migration. Dr. Singh's narrative exemplified the Indian government's perspective and thus warrants further unpacking here.

The narrative relies upon certain assumptions regarding India and the nation-state's history. In this narrative, India is an historic space, predating independence, with boundaries that have existed through multiple political eras. The international labor migration of Indian workers is understood as having passed through three stages, representing different phases of economic development and mapping onto different geographic areas. The first stage Dr. Singh discussed was slavery. Slavery was one of the ways Indians moved throughout the Indian Ocean prior to the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. This form of emigration is largely conceptualized by

the Indian government as part of the pre-colonial period of India. For example, Indians first began arriving in South Africa in 1653 when the Dutch sold Indians into slavery there. Gyan Prakash discusses the history of labor and slavery in India during the early colonial period. He finds that the British used their understanding of India's hierarchical social system to argue that slavery had existed in India prior to British rule and was, in fact, sanctioned by Islam and Hinduism. After the abolishment of slavery in England in 1807, the British then used this understanding of slavery in India in order to legitimate colonial rule. Through colonialism, the British argued that they were helping Indians break free of such practices.⁴⁷¹ With the banning of slavery, Dr. Singh's second stage of Indian emigration, indentured labor, began. Indians traveled to such places as Mauritius, where over seventy percent of the population fits into the category of "Person of Indian Origin" (PIO – an official category of the Indian government for passport and visa purposes).⁴⁷² From the 1830s onward, India was one of the largest sources of indentured labor in the world.⁴⁷³

For Dr. Singh, the narratives of Indian slavery, indentured labor, and contemporary migration mapped onto political structures and geographic places. Slavery was a pre-British colonial phenomena and indentured labor was related to the British presence in India. These

⁴⁷¹ Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003). This idea of breaking free of practices repeats a story of development and modernization that was often used to legitimate colonial rule. Other examples of practices (real or imagined) that were used to legitimate colonialism include *sati*, child marriage, and health initiatives. See, for example David Arnold, "Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (New York, 1988); Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past," in *Recasting Women*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 27–87.

⁴⁷² The case of Mauritius is interesting for two reasons. First, most indentured laborers were from Bhojpur, Bihar. Second, most of the indentured laborers who left India returned later. Ministry of External Affairs, *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, (Government of India, December 2001).

⁴⁷³ Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 75.

labor circulations followed the contours of the colonial world, but were mostly contained within the Indian Ocean. In contrast, labor migration in the contemporary, national period is global in scope. According to Dr. Singh, “The contours of globalization will be determined by migration.” Migration must be managed because migration is global and migrants are representatives of India. What remains constant throughout these three periods is the idea of “India” and her inhabitants as culturally homogenous and clearly defined by strong national borders, even as Indian migrant traverse those boundaries.

According to Dr. Singh, it is the right of citizens in the national era to decide whether to migrate or not, without interference from the government. However, this is not always true for workers that the government classifies as “vulnerable.” “Vulnerable” migrants, according to the Indian government, are those men who have not matriculated and wish to work in the oilfields of

the Arabic-speaking Gulf; women face even greater restrictions and, if they have not matriculated and are under the age of thirty, they have difficulty traveling to the Gulf. Annually, almost one million “vulnerable” men travel from India to the Gulf for work. The category of “vulnerable” used to be formalized by a stamp received in passports that read “Emigration Check Required”

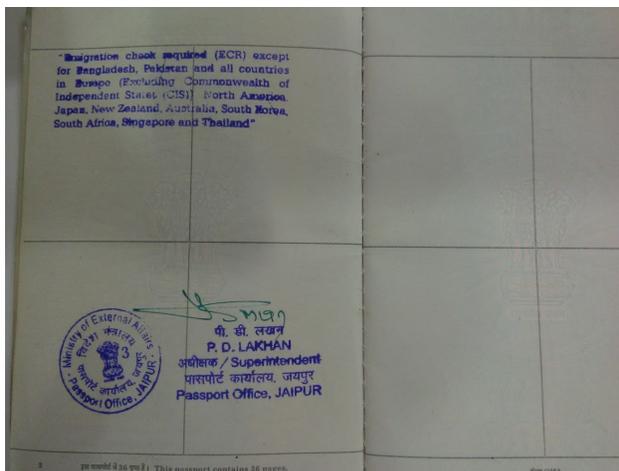


Image 2: ECR Stamp 2010

[Image 2: ECR Stamp, 2010]. Today, “Emigration Check Required” is printed at the top of the biographic section of the passport [Image 3: ECR Stamp, 2015]. As these “Emigration Check Required” (ECR) or “vulnerable” workers attempt to travel to the countries for which this check

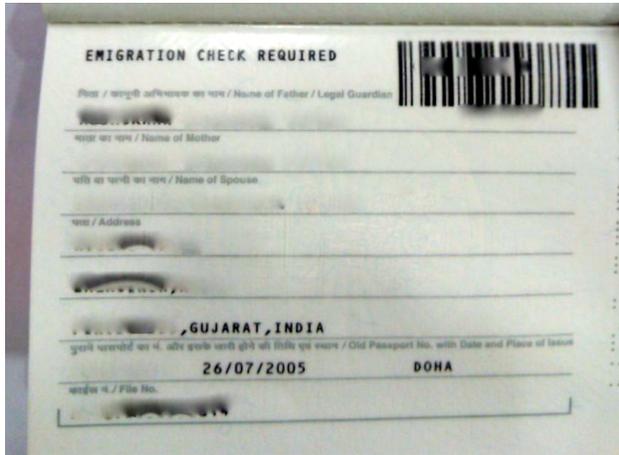


Image 3: ECR Stamp, 2015

is required, airport passport control officials check to ensure that approval has been given by a Protector of Emigrants (POE) office.⁴⁷⁴

Historically, those who did not require an emigration check were given a stamp of “ECNR” or “Emigration Check Not

Required,” but today the policy is to leave this blank for ECNR, making ECR the

marked category.

Government regulation of migration and national borders is effected through the issuing of passports, visas, and documents related to travel. With the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the fluidity of the boundaries between India and the Gulf were partially restricted. One sign of this was the administration of visas to persons wishing to visit India. After India’s independence, visas continued to be administered by British Agents in the Gulf. In the 1960s, the Indian government attempted to shift control of the visa administration in the Gulf from local British Political Agents to the Indian Consulate General in Muscat, Oman. From 1960 to 1961, the government reformulated policies regarding the distribution of visas a number of times. There were concerns that British administrators in the Gulf were providing visas to India to persons who had been blacklisted from India for smuggling; while, at the same time, the Indian administration did not want to share its list of blacklisted persons with the British administration because some British citizens appeared on the list. As the Indian government attempted to shift

⁴⁷⁴ From 2008 to 2012, male migrants who had not matriculated and who traveling to the following countries required emigration clearance: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. From 2003-2010, the Indian government had a ban on travel to Iraq. This ban was lifted in 2010, and from 2010-2012, travel to Iraq required emigration clearance.

the administration of visas, merchant communities in the Gulf pressured the British administration, Gulf rulers, and the Indian government to reverse this policy. Once visa responsibilities were shifted to the Indian Consulate in Muscat, visa applicants faced delays in receiving their visas. The British Resident in Qatar wrote to the Indian Consul General,

The Ruler's last words to me before entering the plane to take him to Dubai was on the subject of visas for Indian [*sic*] which is still very much on the forefront of his mind. He is evidently under considerable pressure from members of the merchant community to try to effect some change in the present arrangement.⁴⁷⁵

This pressure by the Qatari merchant community points to the importance of India for their business dealings.

Complaints against the new visa granting policies were that they were slow and inconsistent. While the goal of shifting the visa system was to regulate smuggling and avoid giving visas to known smugglers, it was largely ineffective in achieving this goal. No sooner had the shift been made than the blacklisted smuggler, the "Arab Ibrahim" – the original impetus for the changed system – was granted another visa from the Indian Consulate in Muscat.⁴⁷⁶

Boundaries were being transgressed in unwanted ways, but, in order to maintain good relations with the Gulf States, the Indian government attempted to demonstrate its willingness to modify its visa policies. In letters, the British Political Agent in Doha warned that delays in the granting of visas could have adverse effects on the "substantial" community of Indian traders in Qatar.

This was especially the case as the Qatari ruler believed that Qatari visas for India were being purposefully "held up" by the ruler of Muscat.⁴⁷⁷ In response to the Political Agent's concerns,

⁴⁷⁵ Letter to the Consulate General of India, Muscat, from the British Political Agent in Doha. December 10, 1960. NAI, MEA, 1960. A. File no. c.1317/60.

⁴⁷⁶ Letter to the Maharashtra Government from the Ministry of External Affairs. March 16, 1961. NAI, MEA, 1961. File no. SUB-11-A.

⁴⁷⁷ Letter to the Consulate General of India, Muscat, from the British Political Agent in Doha. November 19, 1960. NAI, MEA, 1960. A. File no. c.1317/60.

the Consulate General of India repeatedly downplayed these complaints, and the Consul wrote dismissively that he “had no doubt” that the Indians living in Qatar “could look after themselves.”⁴⁷⁸

In contrast to the Consulate’s response, the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi took these complaints seriously. The Ministry reworked the system so that visas did not have to be sent to Oman. Instead, the British Political Agents in the Gulf were once again given the power to grant Indian visas, with the caveat that they should check the names with the Indian Consulate. The reasoning behind this was that because oil had been discovered in Qatar, the country was “likely to become of increasing importance to India as an export market.”⁴⁷⁹ This importance of the Gulf as an export market and the Indian government’s attempts to be involved in trade are also apparent in the Indian establishment of trade missions. In 1949, Indian officials traveled to Kuwait and Bahrain to speak with Indian laborers there and to examine their labor contracts.⁴⁸⁰ In 1961, India made arrangements to open an Indian Trade Mission in Kuwait.⁴⁸¹

In these historic moments, the Indian government conditionally supported Indian traders in the Gulf and encouraged emigration while simultaneously delineating the boundaries of the nation. These moments of interaction helped shaped the complex relations between trade and the nation. Both historically and today, agents, traders, and government officials try to reconcile

⁴⁷⁸ Letter to British Political Agent in Doha from Consulate General of India, Muscat. January 7, 1961. NAI, MEA, 1961. File No. N60-25/MST/61.

⁴⁷⁹ Comment by R. Azel Khan on Confidential Memo, 18 March, 1961. NAI, MEA, WANAR Division, 1961.

⁴⁸⁰ Report of the Goodwill Mission to the Persian Gulf. NAI, MEA, Emi, 1948.

⁴⁸¹ Lok Sabha starred Question no. 6058. NAI, MEA, WANA, 1961. F. 38-13(8) WANA/61. Other areas in which the Indian Government attempted to influence trade within the Persian Gulf and slow smuggling are apparent in the actions taken to control the flow of money out of India. Despite the unpopularity of the policy with merchants, it was required for importers to receive their payments for merchandise through banking channels – often British banks located in Muscat. This, along with insisting that export and import are separately financed, allowed for regulation of exchange control. Request from Mr. N. P. Torprani to Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1955. NAI, MEA, WANA, 1955. F 8(11)-WANA/55.

differing perspectives to facilitate and shape circulation in the Arabian Sea. Today, recruiting agents continue to petition the government to help facilitate their role in labor migration to the Gulf.

A Meeting between The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and Recruiting Agents

In February of 2010, the two largest associations of recruiting agents in India met with the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in Mumbai, India. The meeting took place in Mumbai because of the large number of recruiting agents in the city. Of the 591 active registered recruiting agents in India in 2005, three hundred were based in Mumbai.⁴⁸² One agent told me this was because “Bombay is a place where people from all parts of India will end up.” Mumbai is a dense geographic transfer point; migrants from the rest of the country travel there in search of work, while laborers already going to and returning from the Gulf circulate through the city. Mumbai is also a central node in terms of sending workers overseas; it is close to the Persian Gulf and an ideal place for recruiting agents to open their offices. The centrality of the city is further reinforced by its long history as a port city in the Indian Ocean and a hub for trade. In the first half of the twentieth century, Bombay was a home base for Indian traders and a destination for Arab merchants not only to conduct commerce, but also to meet and discuss events occurring throughout the Arab world.⁴⁸³

I was invited to the meeting between the recruiting agent associations and the MOIA by the presidents of the two associations. Given the relatively insular world of recruiting agents, I had met many of the members of both associations. While some recruiting agents belonged to

⁴⁸² Rajan, Varghese, and Jayakumar, “Looking Beyond the Emigration Act 1983,” p. 278.

⁴⁸³ Fatma al-Sayegh, “Merchants’ Role in a Changing Society: the Case of Dubai, 1900–90,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 1998), p. 92.

only one association, the membership of the associations overlapped considerably. Recruiting agents often told me that the two associations treated their members quite differently, but to my eyes, at least at this meeting, the associations' views and initiatives seemed quite similar. Their positions were so similar, in fact, that watching the presentations by the associations' respective presidents was like watching the same PowerPoint presentation twice.

Both associations delivered presentations that encouraged the Ministry to implement more programs to train Indians, and discouraged the government from implementing further oversight of recruiting agents. The initiatives presented at the meeting continued to push for changes that these associations had been advocating for over the last decade. Worried that Indian workers would not be competitive with workers of other nationalities, the associations hoped that the government would adjust policies to be friendlier towards their business. In the meeting, policies and approaches to migration were articulated, debated, and translated by both the associations and government officials. As I observed these discussions, it became increasingly clear that business and government enactments of policies were based on differing conceptions of history, geographic frames, and economics.

The recruiting agents present argued that the Government of India should be attentive to their needs and learn from their hands-on experience. In the presentation by one association, they urged Dr. Singh, the then Secretary of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, to change the current emigration policies based on the experiences of recruiting agents. One slide read:

The [Recruiting Agent] Council has been able to create awareness to the Government of India (MOIA) towards flaws inherent in the implementation of provisions of Emigration Act 1983 by giving suggestions to amend act and rules towards this object. In this course the Council representatives have been interacting with the Government authorities viz-a-viz the honourable Minister, the Secretary and other senior Government officials. For example, Emigration Rules 1983 have been amended and notified on 9th July 2009, incorporating the suggestions

given by the Council. However, there are many other suggestions that have not yet been accepted by the Government but those are most necessary to be done [sic].

The achievements mentioned by the Council in the above quote include the government allowing recruiting agents to charge migrants more money for emigration; changes in the processing of paperwork by the Ministry; and allowing the transfer of recruiting agent registration.

The changes that the recruiting agents hoped to enact fell into three general categories. The first involved improving the skills of potential migrants; recruiting agents wanted the government to open more trade schools and to teach English to potential migrants. The second change was reduced oversight of recruiting agents and a lessening of punishment for agents' procedural lapses. In addition, agents wanted the security deposit they had to pay reduced from twenty lakhs rupees to ten lakhs rupees, and they wanted to get rid of the requirement that agents needed to have a high school degree. Thirdly, recruiting agents hoped the government would make it easier for agents to attract foreign companies and not have those companies go to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, or the Philippines instead. In order to make Indian laborers more attractive and thus create more business for recruiting agents, the RAs hoped that the MOIA would stop implementing a minimum wage for Indian employees abroad, change visa policies, and simplify the emigration process.

The RAs presented these suggestions in a didactic manner; they wished to inform and instruct the government of the "realities" of emigration rules and how the government could best fix "flaws" in the emigration of Indians. The presentations emphasized that the government ought to limit its restrictions on the migration of workers and instead focus on giving workers skills that would make them competitive for a greater number of jobs. Underlying these objectives were contradictory impulses. On the one hand, RAs were arguing that the government

ought to be hands-off with business; but, on the other hand, agents were simultaneously asking for a larger government role in the education of laborers. Underlying this seemingly contradictory argument was a self-understanding by which the recruiting agents recognized themselves as rational economic actors requiring only laissez-faire regulation, but conceptualized potential labor migrants as not properly rational and thus needing increased government intervention and oversight.

The government's position did not map neatly onto the recruiting agents' position. Dr. Singh, explained that he saw the government's role as fostering a business environment while only protecting the bare minimum of rights for workers. Dr. Singh said that the Indian government oversees migration in order to protect workers from agents that would charge too much money to facilitate the workers' migration, and from companies that would not treat the workers fairly. Possible problems with companies included not paying agreed wages, forcing workers to work too many hours, or otherwise abusing workers. The orientations and motivations of the two parties thus differed: whereas recruiting agents sought to improve the skills of workers (thereby promoting the agents' own business interests), the government saw itself as needing to protect workers from both recruiting agents and oil companies.

India's Brand Abroad

While the impulses of business and the government did not overlap completely, the government and RAs agreed that Indian migrants shaped India's brand image abroad. This concept of "brand" allowed for coordination of meanings, mediation, and translation that helped overcome the threat of incommensurability between the government's and agents' understandings of migration, its history, and their roles within it. Following in the footsteps of

Annemarie Mol, who examines how outcomes in medical diagnosis and treatment are coordinated, I look here at how recruiting agents and the Indian government draw together diverse sets of practices and bureaucratic apparatuses in order to bring together a “coherence-in-tension.”⁴⁸⁴ It is this coherence, in turn, that makes possible the coordination and circulation of huge numbers of papers, emigrants, and bureaucrats within and through the system connecting India and the Gulf. And, as I have noted above, this circuit looks strikingly similar to that used to move mangoes and other goods.

The new Indian nation implemented laws and policies similar to colonial ones that required all people who wished to migrate to receive clearance from the government. Over time, these laws have become more relaxed, so that now only those persons whom the Indian Government considers “most vulnerable” must receive clearance before emigrating for work. Vulnerable workers are men who are traveling to seventeen specific countries, including all of the Gulf countries, and who have less than tenth class education. As a result of being classified as “vulnerable,” these men must receive clearance prior to migrating. Women who are under thirty years of age and are unskilled are not able to migrate for work, and women over the age of thirty and who are unskilled are classified as vulnerable workers and must receive clearance prior to migrating. One official described these changing policies as follows: “We have liberalized the migration regime because we wanted only people who are really vulnerable, less educated, and unable to take care of themselves [to have to receive clearance]. Those who are reasonably educated can take care of themselves, so why restrict?”

When I spoke with officials from the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, they explained the need to control migration by pointing to the need to protect vulnerable workers. In part,

⁴⁸⁴ Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*, (Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 83-85.

officials argued, the government has to ensure that workers are traveling to legitimate jobs in the Gulf States, with employers that have not abandoned workers previously. This was not the only reasons officials cited however. They also told me that such policies work to protect India's image abroad and stressed that India must maintain its "brand image" internationally. It would not look good, they explained, if the wrong types of Indians traveled abroad: "We do not want people to think we are a nation of beggars." Poor Indians must be assured of jobs prior to emigrating so they would not end up begging on the streets, thereby reflecting negatively upon India. According to these officials, migrants to the Gulf are the most likely to end up beggars, as there is no strong oversight of companies and large numbers of uneducated Indians from rural areas migrate, only to find themselves stranded, uncared for, or unemployed. In contrast, government officials described the ideal Indian abroad as the Indian who migrates to America and is "rich, skilled, and educated."

The MOIA's interest in the "brand image" of India meant that government officials used the language of business and marketing to inform migration policies and practices. This same concern with brand was reflected by small business owners and recruiting agents. One agent reflected on the close connection between the brand of India and his company: "When people show up [for interviews], they come so scrubby, but I want them to look professional and the minute the client sees them, I want him to want those guys. Brand. It's all about creating a brand as the best." Another recruiting agent told me, "People are saying India is being degraded by sending illegal workers and therefore losing its [India's] reputation." For these agents, the reputations of their country and of their company were seen as interlinked and dependent upon the migrant.

Consequently, RAs argued that they were not the ones in need of greater regulation. Rather, they felt the government must focus on improving the skills of migrants. One recruiting agent told me the government should “create a school to train [school] dropouts in their understanding of cleanliness, language, and how to be office boys.... We need to groom them in working in the corporate sector. Grooming in all aspects and we want to give skilled people instead of rough people.” Another agent also reflected on the connection between disciplining the mind and bodies of Indian workers. He told me the government should “teach morning exercises and yoga” in order to “teach discipline” to potential migrants. The underlying assumption was that workers were not disciplined and that only through the regimentation of (government imposed) routine would they become proper representatives of the Indian brand.

What both recruiting agents and the government agree on is that the body of the worker is a representation of “India.” And here again the parallel trajectories and relations of mangoes and migrants become apparent. The government understands both mangoes and people as fiscally important to India: laborers’ become valuable remitters and mangoes help to level trade deficits. They are both lucrative sources of income: an exporter of mangoes may expect to double his/her money and an exporter of people, or licensed recruiting agent, charges up to INR 20,000 per person. However, poor quality mangoes and uneducated, ungroomed migrants threaten India’s image. Quality control and areas of exchange are immediate corollaries for both laborers and mangoes.

In conversations with recruiting agents and government officials, migrants and mangoes alike were conceptualized as objects moving through markets. Like the mango, the migrant represents Indian businesses, the Indian nation, and Indian character. This shift between migrant and mango was made possible, in part, by the fact that both the government and RAs tended to

view potential Indian migrants as relatively passive, yet malleable objects – a view made possible by the socio-economic status of most migrants. For the government, migrants were in need of protection, therefore, regulating recruiting agents and companies was necessary to shift how Indians were viewed abroad. In contrast, recruiting agents wanted the government to take greater responsibility for training the poor to be better workers. Central to this notion of training was a disciplining of the body, which RAs argued would also serve to discipline the mind. Through “uplifting” and disciplining the worker, they reasoned, India and recruiting agents themselves would rise in international opinion. Agents also argued that such education and improvement would diffuse out to other potential migrants. One agent said, “If one guy goes to Saudi [Arabia] as a laborer, his neighbors will be inspired and go. But if one guy goes to the West then slowly others will get inspired to get trained so that they can go.” In this narrative, the government training of potential migrants allows for an expansion of the places a farmer’s son can travel. No longer confined to the Gulf, recruiting agents dreamt of a world where training would allow workers to go to the West for better jobs and higher salaries.

Recruiting agents and government officials were able to agree upon the threat of the migrant to India’s brand because of their socio-economic class. This understanding of the worker was also close to a neo-liberal understanding of how labor should be approached. Michel Foucault notes that migrant labor, from the neo-liberal perspective is “an investment, the migrant is the investor. He is an entrepreneur of himself who incurs expenses by investing to obtain some kind of improvement.”⁴⁸⁵ According to government officials and recruiting agents, this neo-liberal migrant is embodied in the well-educated migrants who travel to the United States or Western Europe. These neo-liberal migrants are the India that ought to be seen abroad. In

⁴⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, (New York: Picador, 2010), p. 230.

contrast, the “vulnerable” laborers in the Gulf do not fit the neo-liberal model and do not seek education as a means of improving their possible income from migration. This irrationality and the “scrubby” worker threaten India’s image abroad.

The policies of the government and the actions of recruiting agents are not immediately commensurate. Both groups have differing understandings of what the government’s role ought to be in the migration process. In the moments of interaction discussed in this chapter, the agents and the government push against each other, develop hierarchies, and also translate concepts so that processes can be developed. Brand became an agreed upon concern for both the government and the recruiting agent. Examining these factors, in conjunction with worker techniques to negotiate government and recruiting practices (as detailed in the following section), allows me to highlight and critically engage with the production of commensurabilities between migrants and commodities and the similarities in the process of circulation and management of migrants and mangoes. These similarities reveal how bureaucratic structures and business interests converge to attach an apparatus of power and a logic of movement to both mangoes and migrants.

How does this affect the migration patterns of workers? What role do the social associations of laborers play in the production of a migrant system? I use the poetics of migrants and mangoes as an entry point for my discussion of the production of labor and migration. Critical to this examination is how bureaucratic visions are enmeshed in other processes. Through this examination, we can see how bureaucratic practices, such as the Emigration Check for vulnerable workers become “enacted” in practice.⁴⁸⁶ In contrast to the government’s view of migration, which centers upon the Indian nation, or the recruiting agents’ view, which focuses on trade, migrants themselves have a networked understanding of migration that is rooted in their

⁴⁸⁶ Mol, *The Body Multiple*; Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 5.

localized understanding of the migration process. Potential migrants developed this sense of what is local as they forged relationships to help facilitate their migration.

Workers' Networks and the Process of Migration

Examining the perspectives of recruiting agents and the government sheds light on some of the structures and expectations that laborers must negotiate as they move through the process of migration. When migrants told me about their experiences, they revealed practices rooted in differing senses of space and travel. For the migrant, the move was a deeply historical one that was constantly in flux as they interacted with various actors in the networks connecting the Gulf and India. These networks were not stable, but constantly recreated as the social associations of workers inform the production and management of labor.

A few districts located near the city of Hyderabad, India, send large numbers of migrants to the Gulf. Many of these migrants are Muslims who travel to work in unskilled laborer positions. The covariance between religion and poverty is not unique to the districts around Hyderabad, and many Indian Muslims seek to travel to the Gulf in order to improve their economic standing. South Asian Muslims, in particular, migrate in disproportionately high numbers to the Gulf. Roughly thirteen percent of India's population is Muslim. Yet, over forty percent of my interviews with Indians abroad were with Muslims, even though I made no selection for religion. At one construction site run by a Western European-based multi-national corporation in Abu Dhabi, UAE, for example, interviews I conducted revealed that over fifty percent of the workers from India were Muslim. My data correlates with other survey data; in a study conducted in 2001, it was found that approximately ninety percent of the people going to the Gulf from two districts in Bihar were Muslim. However, Muslims were only fifteen percent,

on average, of the population in rural areas of these districts and were nineteen percent and twenty-eight percent of the population in urban areas of the districts.⁴⁸⁷

Indian Muslims face social and economic inequalities that influence their decision to migrate to the Gulf. In 2006, the Sachar Committee Report, known formally as the Prime Minister's High Level Committee Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India, found that Muslim populations are concentrated in areas with poor infrastructure and that Indian Muslims experience discrimination in the public sphere. The disadvantages faced by Muslims in India include lower literacy rates, unequal access to educational and governmental institutions, and problematic representation in the media.⁴⁸⁸ These disadvantages often converge with regional discrimination and economic disparities to heighten the inequalities that Muslims face. Due to these inequalities, Muslims often see migration to the Gulf as the best solution to address their economic and social inequalities.

Syed Ali traces the connection between Islam, the Gulf, and migration in his discussion of migration from Andhra Pradesh to Dubai.⁴⁸⁹ Ali studies the connection between migration and social practice. He finds a "culture of migration" in Andhra Pradesh that creates an "atmosphere

⁴⁸⁷ Anisur Rahman, *Indian Labour Migration to the Gulf*, (New Delhi: Rajat Publications, 2001), p. 35. Thomas Blom Hansen has studied the religious aspects of South Asian migration. He illustrates how the Middle East enters into the popular imaginary of Muslims living in Mumbai, India, through narratives that are told by migrant workers and how these narratives are policed by religious and community leaders in order to reinforce notions of the Middle East as a spiritual center. The result for Hansen is that migration is linked to "a turn towards a more elitist/scripturalist form of Islam." Thomas Blom Hansen, "Bridging the Gulf: Migration, Modernity and Identity Among Muslims in Mumbai," in *Community, Empire and Migration South Asians in Diaspora*, ed. Crispin Bates, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 261–85; Thomas Blom Hansen, "Predicaments of Secularism: Muslim Identities and Politics in Mumbai," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (2000), 255–72.

⁴⁸⁸ Prime Minister's High Level Committee, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*, (Government of India, November 29, 2006).

⁴⁸⁹ Syed Ali, *Dubai: Gilded Cage*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Syed Ali, "'Go West Young Man': The Culture of Migration Among Muslims in Hyderabad, India," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2007): 37–58.

that leads people to migrate.”⁴⁹⁰ Ali argues that migration is a “learned social behavior” and that this learned behavior, in conjunction with a celebration of migration in Hyderabad, influences people to migrate.⁴⁹¹ This celebration of migration leads to a spread of the influence of migration throughout Hyderabad society; additional people begin to migrate and institutions in society begin to change, even for those who do not migrate.

Here, I extend Ali’s insights by examining the social aspect of migration and its impact, not on institutions, but on the process of migration itself. While visiting villages in Andhra Pradesh, I met with former, current, and aspiring migrants to the Gulf – including some who had migrated legally and some who had done so without formal documentation. Groups of young men told me they all wanted to travel to the Gulf. Indeed, the social aspect of migration was so strong that an activist who works for the welfare of migrant workers told me “people are crazy to go abroad. There is a competition in this.” One of these young men was Mohammed. Mohammed lived with his mother and paternal uncle’s family in Andhra Pradesh. He worked on the family farm, a small plot of land that did not produce enough to support his family. In order to help provide a greater income, Mohammed wanted to travel to the Gulf. In order to understand Mohammed’s migration, I trace his associations and attend to how he created and utilized networks. These relationships had a profound impact on his experience, often mediating the ways in which the bureaucratic apparatuses used to regulate migration were mobilized.

Mohammed had traveled “irregularly” to the Gulf before. Irregular migration means migration that does not follow the proper processes and/or does not have valid documents. In Mohammed’s case, he had gone to Dubai on a visit visa that was only valid for two months. In

⁴⁹⁰ W Kandel and D S Massey, “The Culture of Mexican Migration: a Theoretical and Empirical Analysis,” *Social Forces* 80, no. 3 (2002): 981–1004; Ali, “‘Go West Young Man’: The Culture of Migration Among Muslims in Hyderabad, India,” p. 38.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

order to get this visa he had paid one lakh rupees (INR 100,000 or \$2,000 USD in 2009) to a man who had an office in a nearby town. In return for this money, this man was supposed to provide a work visa and get the necessary clearance from the government that would allow Mohammed to travel. The money Mohammed paid was a huge amount for him. To contextualize this amount, in India in 2003, the average monthly income of farmers was INR 2,115.⁴⁹² Part of that amount went to the cost of getting the visit visa. Another portion of the fee Mohammed paid was given for government approval that would allow Mohammed to travel. One recruiting agency employee told me, “It costs INR 200 for the POE [Protector of Emigrants office] to process a legit visa and they charge INR 2,000 or more, usually INR 7,000, to process illegal ones.” Some POE offices, unfortunately, have a history of abusing power and applying the rules related to migration unevenly. This history is well publicized in Indian newspapers and the subject of much gossip by migrants and recruiting agencies. An investigation by the Indian Criminal Bureau of Investigation (CBI) estimated that workers in POE offices illegally collect INR 64 crore, or over twelve million US dollars, every year.⁴⁹³ One result of the uneven application of power and the burdensome nature of document verification was that many workers chose to migrate “irregularly,” thereby bypassing official channels. The irregular path could be equally problematic, however, as lower level government officials helping to develop an alternative network for migration kept driving up the costs workers must pay. My point in this section is less about the structural violence caused by normal bureaucratic structures, but, rather, how the potential migrants learn to navigate and negotiate bureaucratic structures.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, *Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector*, (Dophin Printo Graphics, August 2007), p. 119.

⁴⁹³ The article that cites this also claims that the POE charges INR 60,000 for a set of fake documents. Banerjee, “The Clay Pigeons.”

⁴⁹⁴ Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 78-81.

In Mohammed's case, when he received the visa, he was told it was a work visa and he assumed he would go to Dubai and immediately find work. He went to Dubai and stayed with friends from his village. Unfortunately for Mohammed, the city of Dubai was suffering from the 2008 financial crisis and no one was hiring; in fact, most companies were sending workers home. In this climate, Mohammed was unable to find work or a more permanent living situation. After three months, he was arrested for overstaying his visa. Through some timely intervention by the Indian government, Mohammed only spent only a short period of time in jail and was then sent back to India. The man to whom Mohammed paid money for the visa was from a district near his home. While he did not know the man personally, Mohammed felt that the man's nice office and the fact that the man said he was from a nearby village made him trustworthy. When Mohammed came back from Dubai and tried to find the man he had paid, he was told that the man had "run away in the night with crores of rupees." I asked Mohammed if he would now go to Mumbai or Hyderabad in order to meet with a recruiting agent approved by the government and he told me "No. I only trust the ones I know." For Mohammed, the people that he knows did not mean the people that he had already met; it meant people from near his home and with whom he could relate based on language, place of origin, religion, or the spatial proximity of daily lives. Mohammed had a deep engagement with what he considered local, and local connections were central to his attempts to migrate.

When I met Mohammed, he was being harassed daily by the man from whom he borrowed the money to get the original visa. In order to repay this money, Mohammed was again trying to travel to the Gulf. However, repayment of the loan was not the only reason he wanted to return to the Gulf. When I asked Mohammed why he was attempting to go to the Gulf again, especially after going to jail, he told me, "My friends have gone. I also must go." He wanted to

join his friends and he also felt pressure to earn money to increase his “chances” and support his family. In order to travel, he had borrowed more money, becoming increasingly caught up in a cycle of debt. As Mohammed tried to travel again to the Gulf, he told me he did not care if he had to travel irregularly, he only wanted to go. He hoped that once he was in the Gulf he would find work as a driver or a cook and begin to repay his rising debts. For Mohammed, the regulations of the government – such as procuring a visa or getting permission to travel – acted as restrictions to his movement and produced barriers that he needed to negotiate, but these restrictions did not curtail his aspirations or plans. In part this was because he knew many other workers who had migrated without formal documentation and without clearance from the Indian government. The key to his travel, he felt, was finding the right man to facilitate it. Ideally, he would like to have a work contract before traveling to the Gulf, but he was willing to take risks again in order travel.

Another district in India from which many migrants travel is Siwan, Bihar. Wafadar, like Mohammed, was also the son of a farmer who hoped to work in the Gulf. I met Wafadar as he was interviewing at Mancom in Mumbai for work as an electrician (a semi-skilled position) in Oman at an oil project. Wafadar had worked in the Gulf before – in Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman – for a total of seven years. He was married and had two daughters and a son. Like Mohammed, Wafadar was a Muslim. His family had a small farm and his wife and children lived with his father. Also like Mohammed, Wafadar had borrowed large sums of money to pay agents in order to travel. Wafadar had returned to India four months before I met him from a one-year job he held in Bahrain. The last time he went to Bahrain, he paid an unregistered agent INR 70,000, or approximately \$1,400 USD in 2009. Unlike Mohammed, however, Wafadar’s agent had taken him to a registered agent who found him work in an oil company. Wafadar was now using the

resources and money he made while working in the Gulf to find another job. He told me that he had returned home when his contract ended and then came to Mumbai after three months in order to look for work again in the Gulf. He planned to look for work until a company hired him. Then he would “rest in Bihar” until it was time to leave for that job. While he was in Bihar, he would get the requisite forms filled out, such as a “No Objection Certificate,” from the police in his village. The rest of the paperwork he trusted would be completed by a recruiting agency so that he could simply arrive, pick up his passport with visa and plane ticket, and travel.

While Mohammed and his friends did not care if they travelled irregularly, other migrants, such as Wafadar, wished to travel legally. For workers like Wafadar, the legal process of migration was seen as involving less *parīshānī*, a term that could mean worry, stress, or harassment. Wafadar was able to rely on friends from his native village to host him in Mumbai while he looked for work. Additionally, Wafadar knew his brothers in Bihar would help support his wife and children until he began sending money from the Gulf again. These migrants’ differing networks led to differing negotiations with the state and differing processes of migration. These processes were highly dependent on local connections. Workers often began by meeting first with a local, unregistered recruiting agent, who would then introduce them to a recruiting agent registered with the Indian government. A man had brought Wafadar from his village to Mancom Recruiting Agency using contacts in Mumbai. According to the migrants with whom I spoke, there was wide variety in the quality of subagents. Some differences related to the experiences and ethics of the agent, but language and place of origin were also important factors for migrants.

The first subagent with whom Wafadar worked was Goopal, who, like Wafadar, was also from Siwan, Bihar. Goopal had worked as a subagent for three years, before which he had

worked in Oman as a laborer for six years. Now, Goopal told me, he was using the knowledge, experience, and connections he gained while working in the Gulf to help others from his district to migrate. Goopal told me he had “sent three hundred to four hundred men” to the Gulf and “all [the men] are happy.” He stressed that this was because he “sends them transparently.” To Goopal, transparency meant that he told the workers about every stage of the recruiting process and helped them find real jobs. Nonetheless, Goopal’s activities as a subagent were illegal because he was not registered with the Indian government. This illegality caused problems and drove up the fees he charged migrants. Goopal told me, “There is trouble, lots of pressure from police and they ask ‘where is your license?’ and so I have to give them money and they go – usually rupees 5,000 to 10,000 is given. And I drink, eat with the [policeman] and he is happy.” In these encounters low-level government employees and subagents interact in ways similar to the interactions between subagents and employees of the POE offices. The encounters serve as key moments in the migration process, during which workers, subagents, and low-ranking government employees interpret, translate, and work around policies that were (and continue to be) negotiated by recruiting agents and higher-ranking government officials.

After Goopal began helping Wafadar to find work, he introduced Wafadar to another subagent from Bihar named Jagdish. Jagdish had more experience than Goopal and had lived for thirteen years in the Gulf, working in offices in Muscat, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Dubai. Jagdish had many subagents, such as Goopal, working for him to “collect” workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. These subagents would send potential migrants to Mumbai. Once in Mumbai, the potential migrants, such as Wafadar, would be directed to meet with Jagdish, who would then take them to the larger recruiting agencies where he had contacts. Jagdish explained to me, “Once I get the requirement [from a recruiting agent] I call the [sub]agents and they start

arranging people. I must follow-up with this everyday ten times.” Jagdish then takes the workers to interviews. Once a worker is hired, the worker returns home to wait. Jagdish also waits and “when I get the visas [from the recruiting agent], I send copies to local agents and local agents go to locals and tell the people to be ready and then inform them when they are coming to Mumbai. Then they come, collect papers, and fly to the Middle East.” Jagdish’s role is that of “collecting” groups of workers together for interviews; he thus works as an intermediary between subagents located in villages and recruiting agents.

From the moment they decide to migrate to the moment they start work in the Gulf, migrants must develop and then effectively navigate a complex set of relationships – relationships that will often decide the success or failure of their efforts. Throughout the migration process, migrants encounter and engage with various bureaucratic apparatuses. Often migrants’ own understandings of the process are grounded in their home or natal village and shaped by local connections. Once away from their homes, however, migrants soon face different potential paths of migration, as well as various bureaucratic structures and processes – all of which employ and reinforce differing methods of scale-making. Through these processes of migration, Indians traveling to work in the oilfields helped give oil production in the Arabian Sea its specificity.

Conclusion: Bureaucratic Apparatuses and Migration

Growing mangoes can be so lucrative that farmers have referred to it as “growing gold on trees.” High unemployment and reliance on agriculture means migration to the Gulf has become another way to procure gold, so to speak, one that develops and shapes kinship relations, and can improve one’s social standing. However, in this chapter I have tried to complicate an

understanding of migration that relies solely on economic factors. Discussing the migration of workers from India to the Gulf in financial or social terms is common in much of the literature.⁴⁹⁵ These discussions tend to focus on the migrants' immediate community and the consequences of migration for the "sending" community. My analysis here differs in that I am attending to the circuits and structures through which migrants move. Attention to these actors and processes reveals which bureaucratic apparatuses attach themselves to workers, how, and with what consequences. Through an examination of the bureaucratic apparatuses, their historical depth, and the imbrication of processes and practices of migration, the production of labor for Gulf countries may be critiqued. Attention to how workers engage with these bureaucratic apparatuses then illuminates how workers' own logic influences businesses and government practices. Migrants often work in the spaces between government and business policies, mining the moments of disjuncture for opportunities to elude or expedite formal channels. In these spaces, low-level workers and migrants both inform and negotiate the processes that are meant to structure their movement.

The process of migration and circulation in the Arabian Sea is shaped by local social connections and hierarchies. As Wafadar's and Mohammed's experiences show, migration exists within overlapping networks of connections between South Asia and the Gulf. These connections inform how workers move. In addition, the deployment of structures used to move goods, such as mangoes, also shapes how workers move. The success or failure of a worker to migrate and how workers move are imbricated in a much larger network that includes oil companies, government, agents, migrants, and local communities. This chapter has considered how all of these actors interact with and inform the circulation of workers to the Gulf. In this

⁴⁹⁵ A C K Nambiar, *The Socio-Economic Conditions of Gulf Migrants*, (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1995); Rahman, *Indian Labour Migration to the Gulf*; Ali, "'Go West Young Man': The Culture of Migration Among Muslims in Hyderabad, India."

circulation, actors were motivated by differing understandings of history, locality, and the role of the government. These positions are constantly mediated and translated, with concepts such as brand and local. I traced the relationships between recruiters, bureaucrats, and workers and explore how the circuits that used to move mangoes now move migrants. This illustrates how the processes, connections, and negotiations give shape to the migration. In the next chapter, I look at how interviews for oil projects bring together recruiters, migrants, and oil company management.

Chapter VI

Testing Knowledge: The Role of Expertise and Networks in Hiring Decisions

Thirty kilometers outside of Abu Dhabi, on the way to Tarif, where the worker strikes occurred in the 1960s, is the large industrial town of Mussafah [Map 5: Mussafah, UAE]. This industrial area is home to large amounts of infrastructure related to the oil industry. The forty-kilometer-long, deep water port and the infrastructure available there – from workers’ living accommodations to roads – make the town a prime location for building large infrastructure projects related to the oil industry. People from all over the world work in Mussafah and what is built there is used by the oil industry in Abu Dhabi, the rest of the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf, and the world.



Map 5: Musafah, UAE

While conducting research in the United Arab Emirates, I went to Musafah in order to conduct participant observation at a work site where multiple companies were working to build a dynamically-positioned, semi-submersible rig [Image 4: An Operational Semi-Submergible Rig]. This rig, when finished, would be sent to South America for deep-water oil extraction. This type of drilling rig is used for oil collection in places where the water is deeper than 520 meters, as fixed structures are untenable in water that deep. Four sets of thrusters are used to dynamically keep the rig in position as it drills for oil. This rig is the same type as the Deepwater Horizon, the faulty or poorly maintained equipment of which led to the spilling of five million barrels of oil in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. My first visit to the rig construction project was only a few months after the Deepwater Horizon sank into the Gulf of Mexico and a few days before the oil spill was finally sealed.



Image 4: Operational Semi-Submersible Rig⁴⁹⁶

I was invited to visit the construction of the oilrig by management at Connex, a privately-owned energy services provider. A larger oil company had subcontracted out a portion of the rig construction to Connex. Over five thousand people worked on the construction of the rig, and approximately five hundred of these people worked for Connex. While speaking with Connex’s managers working at Mussafah, two topics came up repeatedly. The first was the importance of “delivering on their end of the contract,” or finishing their work on the rig, within the timeframe stipulated in the contract. Managers told me that a central part of finishing this work was ensuring that the quality of the work was high. With the debacle of the Deepwater Horizon spill very much in the front of everyone’s minds, the quality of the work at Mussafah took on new,

⁴⁹⁶ ©Can Stock Photo, Inc.

more pressing significance for management. The second recurring topic was safety, specifically that of the workers and equipment on the rig. Though the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that high quality work was finished safely and on time was theirs, managers saw and described workers as integral to this process.

On one of my first visits to Connex's worksite, Alex, a project manager, was upset due to a "near accident" that had recently unfolded. Safety was very important, he explained, but not all of his employees understood this. He told me, "because of ignorance of safety rules, lack of knowledge, or miscommunication we had a near accident." Alex was really upset about this near accident because he was worried about the safety of "his" men, and concerned that an accident would "ruin Connex's clean safety record." In order to ensure safe working conditions after this almost accident, he planned to have daily safety checks and begin sending memos to the worker supervisors who spent time on the rig overseeing the men. He told me he was going to "put pressure" on his staff, the same pressure he felt from his boss, so that there would be no safety violations.

Unfortunately, not all managers were as proactive as Alex and not all workers were as knowledgeable as the workers at Connex. Later that year, during one of my visits to Mussafah, a worker fell from the rig and died. Another subcontractor working on the rig had employed the man. When the worker fell, all work on the drilling rig immediately stopped and everyone waited for an investigation. I sat in the Connex trailer occupied by the project managers as reports trickled in. Staff came and told Alex that the man had been wearing his safety harness improperly. Another person later relayed that the man was employed by one of the companies that supplied laborers to projects on a daily contract basis. As gossip circulated through the various trailers management used as offices, the importance of both safety and knowledgeable

staff were reinforced repeatedly. Even though no one had met the man and he did not work for Connex, an air of sadness filled the office as the management reflected on the tragic and unnecessary loss of life.

This chapter considers how workers are hired and how their knowledge is evaluated. I focus in particular on the work of semi-skilled workers, such as pipefitters or electricians, and I consider their knowledge regarding their jobs and the relevant safety standards and practices. In order to supervise the construction of oil infrastructure, oil companies and their subsidiaries have developed managerial apparatuses. These apparatuses attempt to homogenize the work done to circulate oil so that it obtains a global form. However, much like James Ferguson finds in the oil industry in Africa, attempts at standardization are often territorialized instead of creating homogenization.⁴⁹⁷ As seen in the first half of this dissertation, the managerial apparatuses of oil companies emerged in sites of conflict over working conditions, but were also informed by the materiality of oil, neoliberal philosophies regarding development and management of markets, and the economics of oil rents. These managerial apparatuses were also developed in conjunction with bureaucratic practices that were used to manage migration by states and companies. These practices and apparatuses are not fixed but rather, by their very nature, are continually in formation. A central site of engagement in which these materials and ideas come together is the area of safety standards.

I examine the managerial apparatuses developed by the oil industry in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf in order to manage and evaluate workers. I argue these managerial apparatuses are key components in the spread of oil technologies and markets. Such apparatuses attempt to create a standardization of worker practices in order to allow for increased contracting

⁴⁹⁷ James Ferguson, "Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2008), p. 378.

and subcontracting by companies. In this chapter, I look not only at management techniques, but also at the ways in which workers and recruiting agents shape the processes of standardization and diversification. Furthermore, the development of managerial apparatuses is not limited to the companies and workers, but is also imbricated with the materials that shape the international oil economy. As discussed in the first half of this dissertation, the materiality of oil influences the political possibilities that emerge in sites of oil extraction. In this chapter, I look at how workers find jobs on oil projects and what tools are used to evaluate worker knowledge. In particular, I find that social networks are integral in hiring workers. I also find that in negotiating these networks and in spaces such as job interviews, managerial apparatuses and business techniques attempt to maximize regularization and standardization, even though these are often incomplete and uneven processes.

Building an Oilrig

Building an offshore oilrig takes time—three to four years, specifically—and money—at least USD \$600 million. The actual construction of an oilrig is contracted and subcontracted out to various companies that oversee different parts of the work. Connex specializes in electrical work and many of the Indian workers I met who worked for Connex pulled electrical wiring through the vast structure. In addition to electrical work, Connex also specializes in pipework and other workers I met at Connex worked as pipe fitters. Connex and the other companies working at the rig were working on a contract basis with one of the companies commonly referred to within the industry as “supermajors.” The supermajors are the six largest publicly traded companies that are not state-owned. While they trade globally under different names, they are commonly known as ExxonMobile, Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, and

Total S.A.⁴⁹⁸ The companies are the descendants of the “seven sisters:” Anglo-Persian Oil Company, Gulf Oil, Royal Dutch Shell, Standard Oil of California, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Standard Oil of New York, and Texaco. The seven sisters controlled the oil industry in the mid-twentieth century and, in particular, controlled Middle Eastern oil production. Today, their descendants, the supermajors, control six percent of the world’s oil, in contrast to OPEC countries, which control 88% of the proven oil reserves. In addition to their substantial control of non-state owned oil, the supermajors are vertically integrated, controlling both upstream and downstream aspects of oil production. However, upstream segments, including exploration and crude development, are often their largest revenue generators. Service and supply, such as the building of refineries or drills, are usually contracted and, often, subcontracted out.

When hiring Indians for the building of the rig, Connex wanted to hire people who had experience working on oil construction projects. Managers valued previous experience in the Gulf more highly than certificates from previous jobs or technical school degrees. Given the need to quickly evaluate large numbers of job candidates, managers used candidates’ past experience as a metric to evaluate their future work potential. In order to find the necessary workers for their projects, managers traveled to India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. In India, Connex contracted with local recruiting agents. These local recruiting agents gathered large numbers of job candidates for interviews. After recruiting agents had arranged for interviews, a project manager and human resource staff from Connex traveled to the sites, interviewed and tested interviewees, and hired candidates. Once the company decided which workers to hire, recruiting agents and human resources worked together to provide the necessary documents workers needed to travel abroad.

⁴⁹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the supermajors and the mergers that helped form them, see Daniel Yergin, *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011).

In Mumbai, India, I attended interviews held by Connex's project manager, Alex, as he searched for workers to fill positions as pipefitters or electricians on the oilrig being built in Mussafah, UAE. Connex, the recruiting agent, and the Indian government considered the jobs of pipefitter and electrician to be semi-skilled labor. Unlike an electrician in the United States who might troubleshoot problems or design solutions, the type of electrician being hired by Connex would primarily pull wires through the skeletal rig. One recruiting agent who had worked in the North America before joining his father's recruiting agency in India described the difference to me. He said, "Workers hear that electricians make \$30 an hour in Canada and they want to go there, but the bar is set very high [in Canada]. An electrician in Canada is at a different level. The Middle East has no exam requirement." The difference meant that most workers interviewing for positions as electricians had little or no high school and had learnt their trade informally, on the job, often in India.

In the Gulf, an electrician's work was highly repetitive and similar to jobs performed on other construction sites in the Gulf. By hiring people with previous experience as electricians and pipefitters, Connex, and companies like Connex, were able to avoid on-the-job training or the expensive hassle of firing workers and hiring new ones. For the construction of the oilrig, previous experience also meant that the job could be completed more quickly. Time was of the essence for Connex's supervisors. Their bonuses depended on finishing their portion of the project on time, but Connex was behind because the subcontractor in charge of welding was behind on their portion. In order to meet the demand, by the time I visited them in the UAE, workers were working overtime seven days a week. The workers' past experience and job skills allowed them to handle their jobs' long hours and pressure, without any accidents.

Expertise in the Oil Industry

In Timothy Mitchell's discussion of the oil industry, he describes how the materiality of oil frames its extraction and processing. He argues that, unlike coal, oil production locates expertise in the hands of managers and engineers: "Large firms depend on an extensive body of technical, political and economic expertise to support the discovery of new deposits."⁴⁹⁹ Crucially, oil requires expertise to make it useable. "Compared with coal companies, oil companies developed much larger and more extended networks for the production of expertise, which became increasingly involved in making of the wider world a place where its products could thrive."⁵⁰⁰ This understanding relies on the analysis of expertise that Mitchell developed in his previous work, *Rule of Experts*. There, he shows how experts delineate and define their areas of knowledge, and he points to the constitutive and violent nature of this knowledge production. He also demonstrates that nonhuman actors are not simply passive elements in the construction of an object over which expertise is developed.⁵⁰¹ Other scholars examine expertise in the oil industry in similar ways. Andrew Barry, for example, focuses on expertise by examining the production of political and social knowledge by oil companies.⁵⁰² This work on how expertise is developed by managers and companies elucidates how political and social knowledge are developed in oil and gas.

Expertise involves the ability to know a topic, solve problems based on this knowledge, and convey this expertise to others.⁵⁰³ Within the oil industry, expertise is most often

⁴⁹⁹ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (New York: Verso, 2011), pp. 192-193.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 291-298.

⁵⁰² Andrew Barry, *Material Politics: Disputes Along the Pipeline*, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), p. 6.

⁵⁰³ This knowledge, or what Michael Polanyi called 'tacit knowledge,' usually is confined to scientific knowledge. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

conceptualized and sought after in relation to upper-level engineers or geologists. I argue, however, that in addition to this form of expertise another form of knowledge is central to the oil industry. In particular, I focus on semi-skilled workers' knowledge and skills, and how potential employers evaluate job candidates on this basis.⁵⁰⁴ Here, I broaden the types of knowledge studied in the oil and gas industry to include safety, wire pulling, and pipefitting. I look at the ways in which managers and workers draw upon and negotiate personal connections in their declarations and evaluations of knowledge. In addition to these localized relationships, I also consider the implications of the increasing fragmentation of the oil industry as roles on oil projects are contracted out and as laborers are increasingly contracted from one company to another. I find that key elements of contemporary oil production include the fragmentation of worksites and the desire to standardize work so that employees may easily move between companies in the oil industry. Such trends highlight the restructuring of the oil industry in the era of decolonization, the increased logic of neoliberalism that pervades the oil economy, and the key role of networks, composed of workers, managers, oil, and electric wiring, in shaping the oil industry.

Workers' skill and knowledge are central to the proper functioning of worksites. At Connex's construction project in Mussafah, for example, workers from all over the world converged on the project for a short period of time, most with, on average, two-year contracts. Of the Connex employees at the project, approximately fifty percent were from India, ten percent were from Bangladesh, ten percent from Nepal, thirty percent were from the Philippines, and one

⁵⁰⁴ Sociologists, Kjeld Schmidt, in his discussion of the knowledge held employees at a company that manufactures large engines, suggests that instead of focusing on kinds of knowledge, we focus on the dialogical logics of workers. Here, I agree with Schmidt's move to take seriously the labor of worker. However, I continue to use the term "knowledge" in reference to semi-skilled workers as I think the specialization of these workers pertains. Kjeld Schmidt, "The Trouble with 'Tacit Knowledge'," *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)* 21, no. 2 (March 13, 2012): 163–225.

man was from Pakistan. On oil projects throughout the Gulf, issues of safety constitute a key arena in which workers and managers must all agree on the terms of work. The large numbers of workers for this project and other projects in the Gulf was one reason for the emigration of large numbers of Indians to the Gulf, and a factor that only highlighted the need for standardized work practices. Given the uneven quality of educational institutions and technical training centers in different countries and states, human resource managers at oil companies were often suspicious of accreditation. Instead, managers relied on social networks and testing in order to assess and choose employees. This process began long before managers even arrived in a given country for interviews; in the case of India, recruiting agents were often the first to evaluate workers.

Oil Networks: Materials and Relationships

During my visits to Mussafah, I met many workers who I had earlier met in Mumbai, India, when the men were looking for work. Mumbai is a dense transfer point on the Arabian Sea. Annually, millions of men arrive from all over India to find work in the city. Almost a million of these men will travel to work on oil projects or oil support industries in the Arabic-speaking Gulf. Because of Mumbai's close proximity to the Gulf and the large number of recruiting agents located in the city, most interviews for jobs in the Gulf are located in Mumbai. Other popular places for interviews in India included the city of Hyderabad and the states of Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat. Oil companies relied heavily on Indian recruiting agencies to find workers. One of the main agencies with which I spent time was Mancom. Mancom, a large recruiting agency located in Mumbai, had contracts with various oil companies and subsidiary companies based in the Arabic-speaking Gulf. When Mancom received a contract with a company, they would advertise the position in the paper, have preliminary interviews with

candidates, and then organize well-attended interviews between clients and the candidates who passed the pre-screening interviews.

In order to provide higher quality applicants, Mancom pre-interviewed workers in the week leading up to oil company interviews. These pre-interviews were held at the Mancom offices. At these interviews, two upper-level employees of Mancom, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya, asked workers basic questions regarding the type of work for which they were applying. Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony had each been managers at oil and gas projects in the Gulf for over twenty years. While they had little experience with the work of recruiting agents, they knew, by far, more about the running of oil and gas projects than any other people at Mancom. For lesser-skilled positions, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya conducted their interviews mostly in Hindustani or, occasionally, Malayalam. If workers only spoke Tamil, another member of the staff would translate. During these interviews, Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony asked candidates about their knowledge of basic tools, their ability to read technical drawings, and checked to see if the candidate knew common acronyms. For more skilled positions, these pre-interviews were conducted in English and involved more complicated questions related specifically to the job in question. Candidates who passed these pre-interviews would be short-listed and were supposed to be seen by the client prior to candidates who did not show up for pre-interviews at all. Candidates who did not pass these pre-interviews were ineligible to attend the client interviews. Despite the chance of not passing, some job seekers told me they thought it was better to attend pre-interviews because it meant they would most likely interview with the client. This was hardly guaranteed, however, even for pre-interviewed and passed candidates, given the large crowds and chaotic atmosphere of the interviews.

Sitting in on the pre-interviews was a surprising experience for me. I expected the questions to be tough and that Mancom would want to pass along only the highest caliber of candidate. In contrast, Mancom's management seemed to emphasize instead the need to pass as many applicants as possible in the pre-interview stage. Mr. Anthony was particularly successful in this respect, giving the green light to a large majority of applicants. Indeed, pre-interviews with Mr. Anthony often had a lecture-like quality, in which he anticipated what questions the client would ask the job seeker. Mr. Anthony would then tell the interviewee the correct answer to these questions. One afternoon I sat with Mr. Anthony as he conducted pre-interviews for a project in Kuwait. That day, he interviewed a man who had previous experience as a pipefitter. As they spoke, the man immediately confused inches and centimeters. Mr. Anthony stopped him, pointed out the error, and explained the difference. He passed the interviewee and told him to study for the interviews with the oil company managers. After the interview Mr. Anthony told me that the interviewee "didn't seem qualified," but he put him through to be interviewed by the client because he thought it best to "cast a wide net." Mr. Anthony said he would send many people to be interviewed with the oil company manager and then "see if anyone got picked up." Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony interviewed people in a very different style and, as a result, a candidate's success in the pre-interview stage depended largely on which of the two men performed the pre-interview.

Mr. Pandeya's approach to interviews stood in stark contrast to that of Mr. Anthony. For example, Mr. Pandeya looked over one candidate's CV and asked him, "What kinds of things did you do in Qatar?" The candidate replied by listing the types of tools he used on the job site. Satisfied with the answer, Mr. Pandeya showed the candidate a blueprint and asked him what it was. The candidate faltered and said he did not know how to read it, but could follow directions.

Unsatisfied with this answer, Mr. Pandeya asked the candidate additional questions about the blueprint. At the end of the interview, Mr. Pandeya rejected the candidate and told him he could not attend the interviews with the oil company representative. This rejection was despite the fact that the potential interviewee had the requisite experience. After the interview, Mr. Pandeya told me, “The candidate’s knowledge was not great. While [the candidate] had the skills, he did not have knowledge. The problem was [the candidate] showed no initiative to learn in his past experience. This means that he is not suitable for [this job].” Mr. Pandeya suggested to the candidate that he try to find a job at a company with lower standards and named some upcoming possibilities at Mancom. Overall, Mr. Pandeya passed very few people on to be interviewed by the company. One day, later in the year, Mr. Pandeya told me he had passed only three or four candidates and said he should “only send candidates that he believes will be selected.” He believed that if the worker did not answer immediately and with the correct information, then they did not have the necessary experience to work for a company overseas. But while Mr. Pandeya saw himself as acting in a responsible manner for both Mancom and future employers, the upper management of Mancom understood Mr. Pandeya to be “unconfident,” and this lack of confidence ultimately resulted in Mr. Pandeya’s termination.

Neither Mr. Anthony nor Mr. Pandeya received bonuses for passing workers, but, as demonstrated by Mr. Pandeya’s dismissal, assessments of their job performance were clearly tied to the number of workers they passed through to the next stage. Religion and region of origin were important additional factors in Mr. Anthony’s and Mr. Pandeya’s evaluations of potential candidates. An assumption commonly held by both recruiters and government bureaucrats working in the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs was that certain types of workers came from certain states of India. The mapping of skills according to state was surprisingly consistent and I

often heard, for example, that plumbers come from Orissa, carpenters come from Rajasthan, laborers come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and engineers and doctors come from Kerala. The result was that a politics of locality became paired with a notion of state specialization that was reinforced by recruiting agent practices. For example, if a recruiting agent needed to find plumbers for a project, he would go to Orissa, thereby reinforcing the stereotype.

In addition to hiring certain types of laborers primarily from certain states, agents also tended to recruit preferentially from the state or district that they, or their family, came from. For example, one agent from Gujarat who was based in Mumbai told me he preferred to hire workers from near his natal village. He told me this was easier and he would call up friends in his village and they would send workers to him in Mumbai. At a different recruiting agency, one employee, Rajendra, told me that when a client needed to hire laborers he liked to look first in Bihar. This was because Rajendra was from Bihar and he wanted to “help his state people. They don’t have jobs, families are dying.” Rajendra went on to tell me that helping Biharis find jobs in the Gulf “is a type of social work, because they are jobs with good salaries.” This preference for hiring workers from one’s state or district occurred even in hiring for skilled positions.

Yet, even with this preference for workers from certain states, recruiters were careful not to hire too many from the same area. Both recruiting agents and oil company managers told me that if a company hired too many people from the same place, the employees would cause a problem. One recruiter said, “They will make a strike and demand the management do impossible things. This is why company does not want one area people.” Indeed, some oil companies kept data about their workers’ region of origin to ensure that their workforce was diverse. As one manager in the Gulf told me, this data would be used to determine housing and work crews. I was told, “If too many people come from one area, then they will cause problems.”

Management's goal, then, was to split up the workers so that they did not have strikes or other problems on the worksite.

In the same vein, state of origin could also just as easily be a disadvantage when candidates were looking for work, and this depended on recruiters' attitudes or beliefs regarding a state of India and its workers. Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya, for example, both thought poorly of Muslims and also workers from northeastern India, in particular Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand. Stereotypes abounded and these assumptions informed hiring practices.⁵⁰⁵

Best Business Practices and the Surveillance of Safety

Of course, stereotypes were not the only model that recruiting agents relied upon in choosing candidates; formalized evaluations were also employed. These formalized metrics were often referred to as "best business practices." "Best business practices" or simply "best practices" is a phrase that globally circulates in business management circles and is used for anything that is seen to streamline processes and maximize profits. For recruiting agents, best practices were being hashed out in two key contexts. First, there was a question of how best to manage the relationship between the job seeker, the recruiting agency, and the oil company. While company management, especially European and American management, did not care about the candidate's state of origin or religion, Mancom's staff assumed that having too many Muslims and/or too many candidates from poor areas of India would reflect poorly on Mancom. This was because they assumed the negative stereotypes about Biharis or Jharkhandis or Muslim men as less desirable workers had international weight. Given the predominance of Indian human resource

⁵⁰⁵ Problems for Muslims in postcolonial India have been discussed by many scholars. See, for example, G Pandey, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 608–29.

managers at interviews, the assumption that companies cared about this may have been reinforced.

The second key area in which best business practices were determined during the interviews themselves was the testing and imparting of knowledge regarding safety. The pre-interviews were seen as a time to train the applicants and prepare them to respond to interviewers' questions correctly, thereby helping to normalize best business practices into a single strategy. Mancom managers attempted to improve the quality of the company's applicants by hosting classes on the day prior to the client interviews. At these classes, Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony would explain about basic safety equipment. This included showing the candidates work boots, helmets, and gloves; demonstrating the use of the equipment; and prepping the candidates on what to tell the interviewer when asked about safety equipment. By conducting pre-interviews and holding lectures on safety, Mancom was hoping that they could offer the best quality applicant to the client and, therefore, reach their goal of more accepted applicants. Furthermore, because Mancom charged each successful candidate to go abroad, the performance of individual candidates was something in which the company was invested.

One set of lectures concerning safety that I attended occurred immediately prior to an oil company manager arriving to interview workers for jobs as scaffold riggers. Scaffold rigging is a semi-skilled occupation and many of the people who interviewed for the jobs did not have high school diplomas.⁵⁰⁶ The candidates in attendance had passed the pre-interviews a week earlier. While the lectures were primarily supposed to cover safety equipment, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya also discussed the job requirements and the importance of how candidates presented themselves. Presentation was so important, in fact, that a discussion about personal protective

⁵⁰⁶ The lack of high school diploma meant that these men were considered vulnerable by the Indian Government and required additional documents to travel abroad.

equipment began with Mr. Anthony telling the candidates, in a mixture of English and Hindi, “*sab’ se ba’re bāt* is confidence,” or “the biggest thing is confidence.” From there, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya told candidates to speak correctly and with confidence to the interviewers. After stressing the importance of proper language, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya brought in helmets, goggles, facemasks, boots, gloves, and breathing operators. They showed the candidates how to wear the equipment and told them the names of the various parts of the safety equipment. Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya also told candidates what to do in an emergency. As they spoke, they underlined the importance of the equipment and the lecture itself by telling the candidates that international law “says that human safety is first.”

Throughout the lecture, Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony firmly placed the responsibility for safety with the candidates. “Make no mistakes,” Mr. Anthony said, and Mr. Pandeya agreed, “accidents don’t just happen, they are caused.” Communication, they told candidates, was the key to avoiding these accidents. Communication, they further added, was also key to finding a job abroad. This means, they told candidates, that you must go and “present your knowledge” at your job interview.

Safety training was directly related to the homogenization of labor within the oil industry. Through standardization of safety practices, workers were rendered both hireable and able to work for other companies once hired. Overall, the emphasis on safety has some positive effects for workers as companies take steps to ensure that there are safer worksites and compliance with international standards. After all, safety performance indicators are the standard by which companies’ safety records are evaluated. Fatalities and lost workday cases are all carefully recorded. These are then measured against the total number of hours worked in a company. The scale of this metric is huge and the fatal incident rate is measured against every one hundred

million man hours worked in a company, while lost time injury is measured against every one million hours worked. This generalized surveillance of labor is punctuated by fatalities or lost days. In these cases, blame is usually decided to be due to one of six causes:

1. Process (conditions): Organisational: Inadequate training or competence
2. People (acts): Inattention/Lack of Awareness: Improper decision making or lack of judgment
3. Process (conditions): Organisational: Inadequate work standards/procedures
4. Process (conditions): Organisational: Inadequate supervision
5. Process (conditions): Organisational: Inadequate hazard identification or risk assessment
6. People (acts): Following procedures: Improper position (line of fire)⁵⁰⁷

The importance of safety indicators were explained to me by a manager at Connex. He told me that every company had a clock that started counting and would restart as soon as an accident or fatality was recorded. How high a company could get the clock before it reset was a matter of pride for the management and this metric was one way companies were ranked and awarded contracts. The importance of hours without incident impacted managers' bonuses and their ability to negotiate additional work with their company. Finally, this clock also had an emotional aspect, reflecting to a certain extent the feelings of the managers in relation to their employees, those towards whom the managers felt a personal responsibility.

By giving job seekers a class on safety equipment, Mancom was trying to differentiate its job candidates from those of its competitors in India. The classes tried to convey to candidates the language of safety so that candidates could respond correctly to interviewers. In this process, Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony were normalizing the language of best business practices in order to optimize profits. The use of best business practice here is twofold. First, it involves the best practice of training workers in safety issues. Second, it is best practice for Mancom because it helps differentiate the recruiting agency from competitors and increase profits.

⁵⁰⁷ *OGP Data Series*, (International Association of Oil and Gas Producers, 2013), p. vii.

Interviews for Pipefitters and Electricians

Once workers passed pre-screening and attended a safety lecture (if one was offered), next up were the interviews with oil company representatives. These were always crowded affairs. There was some variation in who came to interview job candidates, but most often Indians working in the Gulf as human resource managers held these interviews. The presence of Indian human resource managers allowed for direct communication and avoided many problems with language. However, South Asian managers were also usually the most skeptical of applicants' credentials and degrees. In addition to South Asian human resource managers, occasionally Arab-speaking managers came for interviews. Usually these managers worked for smaller, Arab-owned oil companies. Often, these managers spoke only Arabic and English, making it hard for candidates not fluent in English to be successful in their interviews.

In order to staff the construction of the oilrig at Mussafah, Connex held three days of interviews in Mumbai. I arrived early for the interviews, which were held at a technical academy in a suburb of Mumbai, but not earlier than the hopeful job candidates who came from all over the city and state. The large campus of the academy usually offered a quiet respite from the crowded streets of Bombay. But instead of the usually empty paths connecting buildings, that day the walkways were lined with men waiting eagerly for a chance—a chance to be hired, to work abroad, to repay loans, to acquire dowry for sisters' weddings, and to save family farms. The cool and quiet of the office was a shock after the heat, the commute, and the crowds. Inside the office, there were workers from Mancom, but even more surprising, there was also Alex. I had never met Alex before and Mr. Anthony, quickly introduced us. Alex was a project head at Connex and originally from Ireland. He had worked previously in Norway and in most of the

countries of the Arabic-speaking Gulf. This was his first visit to India and he was there in order to hire hundreds of workers for the construction of the offshore drill in Mussafah, Abu Dhabi. In addition to hiring workers to build the rig, Alex was also hiring workers to be subcontracted out to other projects in Saudi Arabia and Oman. With Alex was the head of Connex's human resources (HR) in the Gulf, the head of HR's assistant, and one of Alex's site managers. All of these men were Indian nationals.

The participation of a European and a project head like Alex in the interview process was not completely new, but it was a rarity. I was apprehensive as I explained my research. Usually, expatriate Indians from oil companies came to interview workers and these managers allowed me to observe their interviews. However, there was one multinational oil company that sent either Americans or British to oversee all of their hiring and that company had expressly forbidden my presence at their interviews or any stage of their hiring process. Due to my experience with that company, I was worried that the secrecy of Alex's company would be similar and that Connex would have the same confidentiality concerns. Fortunately, my apprehension was for naught, and Alex was happy to have me shadow him for during his time in Mumbai.

There were three main reasons that Alex had come, in addition to the men from HR, to conduct interviews in Mumbai. First, and most simply, Alex had never been to Mumbai and wanted to see the city. The other two reasons involved expertise. Both the urgency of the need for additional workers on his project and the subcontracting of workers for other companies meant that there was little time for on the job training, so workers needed to be trained already in the jobs for which they were being hired. In the case of the subcontracted workers, this was even more important as workers who did not meet the contracting company's expectations would be

sent home. Sending undesirable applicants home usually cost the hiring company quite a bit, as they would lose all the money spent to “bring the applicant over” in the first place. These costs included the cost of plane tickets, visas, and fees paid to Indian recruiters. In addition, the hiring company would lose the money they were paid for the workers they subcontracted out.

In order to mitigate against this, Connex withheld a portion of the workers’ salaries for the first year of their employment. If the worker broke the contract or was unable to perform the duties outlined in his contract, then the worker was sent home and this fee was kept by Connex. This requirement for workers to pay a fee was a movement away from the worker rights the nascent Indian government had tried to gain for Indians in the Gulf in the 1950s. During that period, the Indian government had actively worked against companies charging fees to workers when the workers wanted to return to India before the end of their contract.⁵⁰⁸

Companies requiring workers to pay a deposit did not usually deter unskilled workers from applying for jobs, but the deposit did deter workers from leaving their contracts early once they were in the Gulf. An owner of a company that supplied parts to oil company construction projects in Ajman, UAE, told me, “If we don’t charge [employees] for a visa, then we lose money. They also come and don’t want to work hard. They have the idea that Dubai is the easy life and don’t want to work. Also [the employees’] homesickness increases and [employees] miss babies, mom, wife.” This, he told me, was why they needed to charge fees. Sometimes this fee was not charged up front, but was a fee the worker had to pay to leave a contract early. One oil company contractor included in their employee contract that workers needed to pay approximately \$900 USD if they wished to go home before their contract ended. As most workers were being paid approximately \$245 USD per month, this termination fee equaled

⁵⁰⁸ For example, see Letter to the Commission from the Ministry of External Affairs, 11 August 1953. NAI, MEA, Emigration. F. 23-9/52-Emi.

almost four months wages. Other companies, such as Connex, withheld a small portion of the paychecks that they repaid to workers when they completed the first year of their contract. One company owner told me these fees encouraged employees to work hard. Many workers told me that they had borrowed large sums to pay agents to help them find jobs in the Gulf. In addition, their families were in precarious financial circumstances. Fear of losing this money prevented workers from leaving their jobs early and safeguarded the money the company paid for visas, plane tickets, and training. Managers would sometimes “hide” or ignore a worker who was not as productive as others, but keeping this fee ensured that workers unhappy working in the Gulf would not leave the company. In this way, the costs of visas and airfare were a risk that the company placed firmly on the worker — the person least able to negotiate the contract or afford the lost money.

Contracting in the Oil Industry

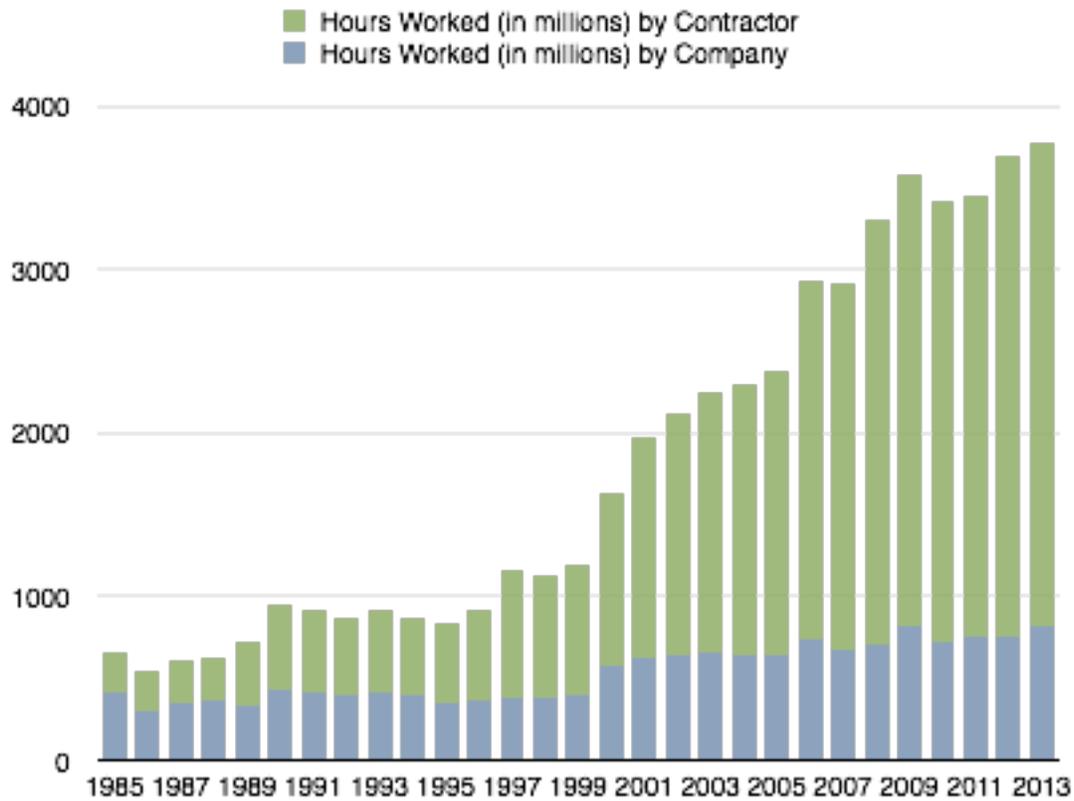
The dual urgency of Connex contractually needing to finish its work on the oilrig on time and the need to hire workers to be contracted out set the tone of the interviews. Contracting and subcontracting are integral to the history of the oil industry. With the exploration of oil in the Gulf in the first half of the twentieth century, contracts were characterized by traditional concessions in which the company had exclusive rights to search for and develop oil and gas in the countries in question. This model of contracting between the state that owned the land rents and the oil companies that contracted out the ability to exploit these rents did not survive the decolonization process intact. In particular, the New International Economic Order and the advent of the Organization of the Petroleum and Exporting Companies (OPEC) greatly shifted

relations to a more partner-based system.⁵⁰⁹ OPEC was formed by the five founding members of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, in 1960. Qatar joined in 1961 and the United Arab Emirates joined in 1967. In the 1970s, OPEC became increasingly significant as it raised oil prices in 1973 in protest of the United State's involvement with the Yom Kippur War. Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the war between Iran and Iraq that began in 1980, oil prices began a steady decline until the late 1990s. Despite this decline, the sudden increase of oil prices in the 1970s "transformed a comparatively stagnant business into one of the major international growth industries of that decade."⁵¹⁰

Contracting and subcontracting have increasingly become the norm in oil projects and serve to inform in many ways the development of the industry. One indicator of the increasing prevalence of contracting is the number of hours worked in oil and gas. Out of companies that participate in the International Association of Oil and Gas Producer's safety indicators annual report, total man hours working on projects has been increasing for at least the last thirty years. Of the increasing hours, contractors are supplying more and more labor on these projects [Graph 3: Hours Worked at Companies and Contractors].

⁵⁰⁹ Michael Likosky, "Contracting and Regulatory Issues in the Oil and Gas and Metallic Minerals Industries," *Transnational Corporations* 18, no. 1 (April 2009), pp. 3-4.

⁵¹⁰ Owen L Anderson, "The Anatomy of an Oil and Gas Drilling Contract," *Tulsa Law Review* 25, no. 3 (1990), p. 4.



Graph 3: Hours Worked at Companies and Contractors⁵¹¹

In 1986, 544 million hours of work were performed. Of these hours, workers employed directly by oil companies performed 306 million hours of the hours worked, or over fifty-six percent. The remaining time was done by contracted labor. In contrast, in 2013, 3.771 billion hours of labor were performed on oil and gas projects. Of these hours, oil company workers performed 821 million hours of work, or slightly more than twenty-one percent. Again, the remaining work was done by contracted labor.⁵¹² While some of the supermajors, for example British Petroleum [BP], only contracted out fifty-four percent of their work hours in 2013, the trend is definitely towards

⁵¹¹ *OGP Data Series*, p. B-19.

⁵¹² *ibid.*

greater fragmentation of the work performed in the industry.⁵¹³ Regarding these contracted hours, BP writes that it expects its contractors to comply with “legal and regulatory requirements” as well as BP’s own code of conduct.⁵¹⁴ However, the general trend among contractors is that they have higher fatality rates and higher rates of lost hours due to injury than do companies.⁵¹⁵

Subcontracting creates crowded worksites, and in the case of the rig in Mussafah, multiple companies each built a part of the oil derrick. In the 1960s, subcontracting led to strikes and general unrest throughout the Gulf. The British colonial authorities argued this was because subcontractors did not understand the culture of the workers and, therefore, committed cultural faux pas that upset workers. In contrast, British authorities believed that established oil companies understood the workers and experienced fewer disruptions due to worker unhappiness. Over the course of the twentieth century and despite worker resistance, subcontracting increasingly became the norm in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf.⁵¹⁶ After the initial upsets, the result of increased subcontracting was no longer increased worker unrest, but, in many ways, precisely the opposite: a greatly fragmented workplace with less power for collective action.

Many companies use subcontracting as a technique to be less responsible for their own workforce. The most drastic manifestation of this can be seen with companies that simply hire men out for day work. These men earn the least of all workers in the Gulf and lack many of the benefits that workers employed by larger multinational companies receive. The companies that specialize in temporary day laborers are often locally owned and do not have the standardization of holidays and overtime that large multinational companies observe. They also pay their

⁵¹³ <http://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/sustainability/bp-and-sustainability/how-we-operate/working-with-contractors-and-partners.html> Last accessed 1/2/15

⁵¹⁴ *OGP Data Series*, p. B-19.

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 1-5, 2-2.

⁵¹⁶ J.E.H. Boustead, Memo to H.M. Political Residency, Bahrain, 28 May 1963. *RE* (1963), 568.

workers less and it is widely perceived that they attract only the most desperate (or unlucky) laborers. Alex told me that workers with such companies often showed up hungry and with holes in their boots. The hierarchy of exploitation is perpetuated by a seemingly bottomless pit of exploited South Asians. Those that work as temporary day laborers may be contrasted with laborers hired by one multinational company (MNC) but working at another MNC. Those latter workers are often protected by the norms that regulate international labor for large companies based in Western Europe or the United States.

For Alex, the process of hiring workers that were to be subcontracted out was more stressful than hiring workers for his company's projects. He called the subcontracting of workers "selling" them. This commodification of labor has a slightly different history and articulation than the commodification of the laborer seen in the discussion of migrants and mangoes. As seen in the last chapter, for recruiting agents and government officials overseeing migration, workers could be easily slotted into the processes and forms that previously moved goods from India to the Gulf. The logic of subcontracting has a different genesis. As discussed by political scientist Christina Ewig in regards to the decentralization of government administrations in South America, subcontracting, in neoliberal thought, is a way to create mini-markets that are more efficient and better able to address their specific niche.⁵¹⁷

In the case of oil companies, subcontracting had complicated, often negative, effects on workers. These negative effects are found throughout the oil and gas industry. In Elana Shever's discussion of the privatization of Argentina's oil, she argues that subcontracting is a neoliberal governing technique that uses "regulatory, disciplinary, and *affective* techniques" to manage

⁵¹⁷ Christina Ewig, *Second-Wave Neoliberalism: Gender, Race, and Health Sector Reform in Peru*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), p.102.

worker and to encourage workers to manage themselves.⁵¹⁸ In the Gulf, hiring subcontracted employees allows large companies to avoid responsibility for workers. The restructuring of work relationships means that companies are neither directly responsible for workers when they are hurt, or worse, killed, on the job nor are they responsible for negotiating or enforcing contracts. This process, begun in the 1960s, has worked in conjunction with the ban on union formation to ensure that subcontracted workers are intensely vulnerable to exploitation by their employer and lack the means to address this exploitation.

Worker vulnerability was not the only effect of subcontracting; as a result of the practice of “selling” workers to other companies, workers were also able to develop collegial networks that helped them acquire future jobs. Alex told me workers were regularly “sold” to other companies. In this instance, Alex was hiring pipe fitters that would be Connex employees, but would be “sold” to a Middle Eastern energy services provider. Hiring these workers was more stressful, Alex told me, than hiring the workers for his own project or other Connex projects. This was because he felt these workers had to be a “better quality” than the workers for Connex projects. He told me there would be no “hiding” of the workers, as could be done on a Connex site. However, because this job was with an energy services provider and not one of the supermajors, the standards were slightly more relaxed. When I was with Alex at a later date and he was hiring workers for one of the supermajors, he was notably more stressed. This was because he felt the supermajors had unrealistic demands when it came to employees and were, in Alex’s terms, “too picky.” The reason I was given for selling workers was that some companies, and the supermajors, in particular, did not like maintaining their own workforce. Many I spoke with seemed to think it was obvious that subcontracting would be preferred. Some explained to

⁵¹⁸ Elana Shever, *Resources for Reform: Oil and Neoliberalism in Argentina*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 58, 68. [original emphasis]

me that subcontracting allowed supermajors to avoid the cost of employee benefits. Others argued that, without subcontracting, the size of the workforce would be unwieldy. Currently, supermajors hire hundreds of thousands of people; without subcontracting, my interviewees conjectured, company payrolls would have to include millions of people.

In many cases of worker subcontracting, the practice allows companies to have workers without being concerned about their pay levels and, to a large extent, without risking a decrease in “accident-free” hours. The language of “selling” labor was not limited to referring to the work of semi-skilled laborers, as Alex, himself, had been “sold” to other companies to work on various projects during his tenure at Connex. For Alex, being “sold” to work at other companies on short-term projects was beneficial when hiring in Mumbai. This is because when he was working at other companies, he developed a greater familiarity across companies. This rooted him in a network of management and employees, most from the United States and Europe, that moved through oil sites in the Arabic-speaking Gulf. There, management came into contact with workers from South Asia, the Philippines, and other areas of the Middle East. These actors, along with oil and the machinery used to extract oil, formed networks that shape the apparatuses developed to manage these networks.

Interviews and the Role of Emotional Appeals

Looming deadlines and other subcontractors waiting on Connex’s work contributed to an urgent need to fill jobs, but in doing so, Alex and the other members of his team needed to interview hundreds, if not thousands, of candidates. Despite the pre-interview process and the desire to show the client the best of candidates, Mancom also wanted to have a large crowd turn out for the interviews. For this reason, the project lead at Mancom would put advertisements in

the paper prior to the client interviews and draw candidates from all over the greater Mumbai area. This, in part, was the reason for the mobs of men that appeared on the day of the interviews; no matter how quickly the men from Connex interviewed, there was simply no way they could see all of the applicants who showed up. Nonetheless, the workers waited, hoping for an interview.

One Mancom employee ran each set of client interviews. Each employee had a slightly different format for how they presented applicants to clients, but regardless of the format, it was a well-thought-out strategy that included trying to sway the client so that he would choose many candidates from Mancom. For example, Ram, an employee at Mancom, described his strategy as follows: “I like to mix up the interviews – mix up the applicants so that the client gets confused. Also, I have the good candidates go first so that he [the client] thinks Mancom has good applicants. Then, later, the bad candidates [come] and he can reject these.” Such attempts at manipulation were common in the relationship between agents and oil companies and most agents relied upon “emotional blackmail” as a tactic to get his (or, rarely, her) liaison at the company to comply with his (or her) requests. This emotional blackmail, as agents themselves called it, included techniques such as making the client believe that the representative of the recruiting agency would lose his job if not enough of his candidates were accepted. Another recruiting agent employee, Jimmy, told me he would “push the candidate into a position by talking to the client, even if the candidate wasn’t skilled.” To clients, Jimmy would say that his boss would fire him if he did not have enough people hired; Jimmy would then push the candidates he wanted the client to take. Often, these candidates were friends of mutual friends. In this type of appeal, the recruiting agency employee was hoping the client would do what the

representative wanted because the client would not want to be responsible for the representative losing his job.

Emotional techniques were also employed by workers at interviews and seemed most successful with European managers. In the case of the interviews Alex oversaw, workers would plead with Alex to give them jobs and for him to “take a chance” on them. Alex was moved by these pleas and told me he would like to hire everyone. In order to hire as many as possible, he gave interviewees many chances to answer questions. These emotional requests were less effective with Indian human resource managers who worked in the Gulf. For example, the assistant to the human resources manager, Ahmed, was from India and he was much more harsh in his tone and demeanor, usually judging candidates with a standard rubric regardless of what the employees at Mancom said about the candidate.

During the time I spent doing ethnographic observation at Mancom their policy regarding bonuses for recruiting agents changed; instead of receiving RS 500 (roughly USD \$11 at the time) for every worker that was chosen, employees no longer received any bonus. The express reason for this change was the poor economy and its effects on Mancom’s business. This policy shift, however, also reinforced the bonds between subagents and the recruiting agents at Mancom, as employees inclined to pad their incomes without management knowledge needed to work with the subagents. The implication was that the applicants who arrived with subagents with a working relationship with the Mancom employees were likely to be seen before other applicants, regardless of how early they arrived or how long they waited. By working with subagents with whom they already had relations, employees of recruiting agencies were able to receive a cut of the money that the subagent charged the worker.

Testing Expertise

While representatives of the recruiting agency would push certain workers and some candidates would be hired even though they were not as skilled as others, for most candidates conveying knowledge of the job and the relevant safety standards was a key factor in the interviews. In the interviews conducted by Alex in Mumbai, relationships were a central factor in establishing this expertise. Similar to the importance of localized networks of affiliation that informed worker action historically in the Gulf, localized networks also structured the actions and evaluations of people working in the oil industry. Alex favored hiring workers who had worked in the GCC before. Workers who had been previously “sold,” or subcontracted, were immediately approved by Alex for employment with his company. He told me these workers “were probably ok, or else the company wouldn’t keep paying for them.” In addition to prioritizing previously contracted workers, Alex was particularly eager to hire workers who had worked for Connex or for his friends at other companies. Workers who could demonstrate having worked for a project manager personally known to Alex did not even have to go to the testing center but were immediately hired. If candidates claimed that they had worked for Connex or another company in the past, Alex tested this assertion by asking what project they had worked at, who the boss was, and if the worker could describe any of the managers on the site. Alex was familiar with many of the project managers currently working in the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf, except in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, when candidates could demonstrate knowledge of the right people and networks, Alex viewed this as more important than the length of time they claimed to have previously worked in the Gulf or any certificates they might include with their CV.

The HR managers from Connex and Alex's assistant repeatedly warned Alex that candidates were lying on their CVs and to his face and that the credentials were faked. Frequently, candidates' documentation of training was forged or made-up, as was their past work experience and biographical information. I attended one set of interviews for welders in Kuwait, during which one subagent brought in a group of men from Jharkhand, all of whom had the same exact CV with only the name, age, and passport number changed. The result of subagents creating CVs and documents for workers was a proliferation of paper forms that did not correspond to actual skill levels.

Mr. Anthony, as a staff member at Mancom, took a different approach. As Alex conducted interviews, Mr. Anthony sat with him and stressed the quality of each candidate. Mr. Anthony was there as a translator of both words and ideas. As in the pre-interviews, Mr. Anthony would often help candidates by translating in ways that either embellished their answers to be more correct, or simply supplied the answer for them. For example, he would sometimes interrupt a candidate in Hindi — a language Alex did not speak — to inform the candidate how to answer the question. As a result of this, Alex likely passed candidates that might not have passed had Mr. Anthony not been present. As I sat in interviews, I worried that once Anthony's creative translations were revealed, workers would already be in the Gulf and Mancom's reputation would be hurt. However, as demonstrated by Mr. Anthony's continued and successful work with the company, in contrast to Mr. Pandeya's firing, Mancom was apparently happy with Mr. Anthony's performance and the quantity (and, presumably, the quality) of the workers hired. When I met Alex in the UAE a year later, he seemed to confirm this by praising the quality of his employees.

Despite Mr. Anthony's creative translations and embellishments, the interviews were largely formulaic and repetitive and this was consistent across the interviews by all the companies that I observed. When personal networks were not present – in other words, if the men had not previously worked for Connex, a sister company of Connex, or a subcontractor already familiar to Alex – then the candidates were given tests. First, they would be asked to read technical drawings. Workers who could not demonstrate a personal knowledge of the sites but who could read the drawings were taken to a technical testing area. In this area, Mr. Anthony or Alex showed the candidates a task and asked them to perform it. For example, people applying to work as electricians were asked to pull and connect wires. The candidates were then evaluated based on their ability to complete the task correctly, as well as the speed with which they could complete the task. At this stage, roughly one-quarter of the candidates who were asked to take the technical test passed.

Usually only a small number of candidates were actually accepted by the client. It was not uncommon for a client to work with multiple recruiters. Most of these recruiters were in Mumbai, but there were also a number of recruiters in Kerala, Gujarat, and near the city of Hyderabad. In this way, Mancom was in competition with fellow recruiters. Mancom, and other recruiters, also felt they were in competition with other countries. In particular, the Philippines was a country that also sent many workers to the Gulf. Accordingly, Connex also conducted interviews in the Philippines, but Alex did not attend those interviews. Once workers were selected, Mancom went about arranging the candidates' paperwork and waited for Connex to send visas. At this stage, some selected candidates would not receive visas and they would be forced to look for a new job. The process, overall, was capricious and uneven in its outcome.

Conclusion: Managing Manpower and Fragmented Worksites

In hiring workers, managerial apparatuses were used to manage the circulation of carbon and these apparatuses were influenced by personal networks. Through deploying these apparatuses, managers at oil projects attempted to homogenize the skills of the workforce in response to the increasing fragmentation of the worksite. Industry standards, such as safety standards, were key in enforcing expectations and concern regarding safety permeated all levels — from the highest managers to the laborers. Especially in the wake of the Deep Horizon spill and the subsequent news coverage, safety standards were on everyone's mind as they built the oilrig. These standards were also significant to the daily operations of oil companies and contractors.

The migration of semi- and unskilled laborers to the Gulf often occurred as workers developed and negotiated multiple, overlapping networks. Workers used these networks in order to secure jobs. Workers often privileged local contacts in forming and maintaining these networks, but these contacts often took greater advantage of workers than did professional contacts. Managers, including human resources staff and technical experts, also relied on networks in order to evaluate workers. This evaluation of workers was important, as there were often inconsistencies between workers' stated knowledge and their actual skill levels. In the process of developing and negotiating networks, workers and employers came into contact with differing concepts of best business practices, expertise, hierarchy, and knowledge. These differing concepts converged at certain moments and spaces, such as job interviews for oil projects. The logic of the networks shaping oil production were not (solely) dependent on the requirements of the industry or of the participating nations, but also dependent on localized affiliations, past relationships, and the shape of worksites.

Chapter VII

Traffic in Migrants: The Dreams and Obligations of Migrants

During my time in Mumbai, I spent a few days most weeks at Mancom Recruiting Agency. Mancom supplies manpower to oil companies in the Gulf and was one of my main sites of ethnographic research in India. On days that I visited Mancom, I usually ate lunch with two employees – Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya. Both Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya are Indians who have spent the majority of their adult lives working in the Gulf. They were in their 60s during my time in India and many of their friends had retired. Mr. Anthony is a Christian and was born in Karnataka. His son and daughter are both married and have careers in Canada. Mr. Pandeya is a Hindu and was born in Uttar Pradesh, but his family is from Bihar. Though he is the same age as Mr. Anthony, Mr. Pandeya's two sons were only in college. The difference was that Mr. Pandeya had to delay his marriage until later in life in order to help finance his sisters' weddings. Both Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya were working at Mancom in order to provide extra income to pad the savings they had accumulated as project managers in the Gulf and to stave off the boredom of retirement. At Mancom, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya interviewed applicants to evaluate their technical expertise and then decided if the applicant ought to be passed on to the client.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁹ The reason for the need for this is because of the high levels of fake documentation used by applicants. Thus, it was necessary for Mancom to evaluate if applicants really did have the technical knowledge they

Most of our lunches were friendly, lively affairs; we ate rice and *sambar* (vegetable stew) that Mr. Anthony had delivered daily through Mumbai's vast tiffin system, as well as *rotī* (flat bread) and *sabzī* (vegetables) that had been prepared by Mr. Pandeya's wife. We discussed everything from current events to work, holidays, and our families. During one of our lunches, a group of young men who had recently returned from working in the Gulf arrived at the office to have pre-interviews with Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya. These young men clearly stood out from the other men who appeared for interviews, men who had not yet been to the Gulf. The young, returned Gulf workers were distinguished by their large, fake gold watches; button-up shirts made of shiny, iridescent material; and flashy new sports shoes. They displayed wealth and exuded a level of confidence unmatched by applicants yet to work in the Gulf or by many older, more conservative, returning workers. Both Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya felt as though these young men had not spent their money wisely and worried that they had been "seduced by the glitter of Dubai."⁵²⁰

The seduction of the Gulf and the poor money management of workers was a common trope among recruiters and migrant worker advocates in India and the Gulf. After Mr. Anthony and Mr. Pandeya shared with me their disapproval of how these returned migrants had spent their money, I asked another employee at Mancom about this. Ram was a recruiter at Mancom and had worked in the Gulf before. As a young, seemingly carefree young man, I expected Ram to disagree with Mr. Pandeya and Mr. Anthony, but instead he echoed their sentiments. Ram told me about often feeling the need "to lecture 'newbies' going to the Gulf about how they are going to earn and save – not to spend." When I asked him whether this was really a big problem, he

espoused prior to presenting the candidate to the client for interview or work in some cases. This process and Mr. Pandeya's and Mr. Anthony's methods for doing this work are detailed Chapter 6.

⁵²⁰ In this formulation, Dubai stands for the Gulf as a whole, but is also its own place to the speakers as well.

explained, “People think they are in the Gulf and they can spend” but then the workers return to India with nothing. I pushed him further, asking if the “newbie” who worked in an oilfield was as likely to spend money as the “newbie” working in a city like Dubai. Ram replied, “People have certain habits that they need to support.” I was confused by what he meant by “habits.” He clarified, “They also want to buy good clothes because they think ‘I am in the Gulf so I can spend money and I need nice clothes and to ‘get fat’ to show that they were in the Gulf.” According to Ram and the other Mancom employees, when young migrants returned from the Gulf flashing new clothes and other ostentatious displays of wealth, what they were displaying was their failure to spend their money wisely.

The Impact of Migration on Families

Every year, over a million men travel from India to work in the Arabic-speaking countries of the Persian Gulf. The vast majority of these men are semi-skilled and unskilled laborers who work in the Gulf’s oil industry.⁵²¹ In interviews I conducted in India and the United Arab Emirates, workers told me they traveled to the Gulf to support their families and to fulfill their dreams. Sometimes these two reasons were synonymous and, at other times, these reasons diverged radically. The migration of workers to the Gulf is a complex process that involves not only workers and the professional networks formed by workers, but also family ties, community networks, and gendered obligations. Often, anthropologists who study migration argue that

⁵²¹ Unskilled and semi-skilled are two categories used by the Indian Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs to classify workers. The term “unskilled workers” refers to manual laborers who, in my research, mostly worked in the construction jobs in the Gulf. “Semi-skilled workers” usually have some technical training or experience and their positions include pipe fitters, steel binders, electricians, plumbers, bar benders, pressmen, masons, welders, and drivers. Other categories used by the Indian government include skilled and professional workers - a category that includes doctors, engineers, and bank managers; service workers; trade and business migrants or migrants who start their own businesses abroad; and non-technical workers, including school teachers, typists, and clerks.

transnational migration destabilizes families and gender roles. Yet, during the course of my research, many migrants told me they migrated with the support of family and in order to fulfill their familial duties. This chapter examines the complicated relations between money, family, and gender. Specifically, it investigates how family relationships are formed by workers through their consumption of gold and the gendered nature of this consumption. It also explores how these familial obligations are often in tension with workers' dreams of modernity. This examination of obligations and dreams reveals how kinship practices in India and the forms of masculinity implied in these obligations also shape the oil industry in the Arabian Sea.

In anthropologist Michele Gamburd's discussion of migration from Sri Lanka to the Gulf, she explores how kinship and gender roles impact and are impacted by migration. One major effect of migration in Sri Lanka, she finds, is the destabilization of families and the gender roles therein.⁵²² This conclusion is also found in Janine Dahinden's discussion of Albanian migration from Kosovo and Cati Coe's examination of migration from Ghana.⁵²³ Studies examining migration's effect on families and gender roles often focus on women's roles specifically. The work men do to conform to and reconstruct gender roles as they migrate is relatively understudied in comparison. An exception to this is Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella's work on masculinity and migration in Kerala, India. They explore four styles of masculinity in Kerala and consider migration's potential to help men move along "culturally idealized trajectories," as

⁵²² Michele R Gamburd, "Milk Teeth and Jet Planes: Kin Relations in Families of Sri Lanka's Transnational Domestic Servants," *City & Society* 20, no. 1 (June 2008): 5–31.

⁵²³ Janine Dahinden, "Contesting Transnationalism? Lessons From the Study of Albanian Migration Networks From Former Yugoslavia," *Global Networks* 5, no. 2 (April 2005): 191–208; Cati Coe, "What Is the Impact of Transnational Migration on Family Life? Women's Comparisons of Internal and International Migration in a Small Town in Ghana," *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 1 (February 3, 2011): 148–63.

well as how practices associated with migration interact with masculine identity projects.⁵²⁴ In this chapter, I do not focus on the relationship between masculinity and identity. Instead, I look at the practices enmeshed with labor migration, how these are influenced by ideas of masculinity and family, and how these migratory practices shape families in India and oil companies in the Gulf.

In the course of my research, I found joint family structures allowed unskilled and semi-skilled male workers to travel to the Gulf and to direct money gained through migration. Through these men's transnational migration to the Gulf, gendered norms and kinship practices often considered "traditional" in India – in particular, dowry and joint families – were reinforced. Central to this entrenching and shaping of social practices and the expression of gendered norms are engagements with commodities and capital. Labor migration from India to the Arabic-speaking Persian Gulf is one of the ways Indian men procure goods for their sisters' and daughters' dowries. As a result, this transnational migration reinforces gender roles within families and allows for greater numbers of people to participate in the giving of dowry. Men make sense of their migration through the consumption of gold for dowries. In doing so, men construct and reinforce an idealized masculinity and family structure that is deeply imbricated in neoliberal policies, but also not reducible to these policies. Exploring these practices illuminates how kinship practices in India shape the oil industry.

Migration and Family Obligations

One person working in the Gulf at the behest of his family is Yogesh. I met Yogesh, a young man from Tamil Nadu, India, when he was living in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

⁵²⁴ Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no. 1 (March 2000): 117–33.

(UAE), and working as a technician at a factory that builds parts for oil rigs. His experiences offer one example of the kinship obligations that inform migration and the expectations of migrants and their families. Prior to living in the Gulf, Yogesh lived in an *ashram*, or monastic community, in Maharashtra, India. When Yogesh asked formal permission from his parents to become a monk, they refused. Instead, they insisted that he take a job through a cousin in Dubai in order to help his sister marry and allow for his father to retire. When I met Yogesh, he had been working in the Gulf for about three years and had no plans of moving permanently back to India, although that was what he wished to do.

During the week of Eid al-Adha, Yogesh, a few other Indian workers, and I were running around Dubai, doing errands, enjoying the time everyone had off from work, and helping Yogesh prepare for his trip home to his village. As we traveled around Dubai, our group went to the outlet malls and everyone, with the exception of Yogesh, took advantage of the sales and bought clothing, shoes, trinkets, and snacks.⁵²⁵ Yogesh did not shop with us because he was saving his money for the gold suq, or the large bazaar in the old city of Dubai that houses over 300 gold retailers. He told me repeatedly that his “primary obligation” was his sister’s marriage and he had to buy gold to meet this obligation. This gold was to be a part of his sister’s dowry, or gifts given by the bride’s family to the groom’s family at the time of marriage.

Even though it was November, on the day Yogesh and I went to the gold suq it was hot and humid. Despite the heat, Yogesh shunned the gold suq in the air-conditioned mall. The shop stalls in the mall were largely empty due to the global downturn in 2008 and they were advertising sales on the local television, but the mall was uncomfortable for Yogesh. This was

⁵²⁵ The freedom that Yogesh experienced to travel around Dubai and visit places such as the outlet mall are not always shared by young men who work in the Gulf as unskilled laborers on oil projects. In fact, unskilled laborers at oil projects often do not see the city at all and Yogesh, as a semi-skilled worker, felt freer to explore the city.

because the nicer malls in Dubai often refused entry to foreigners who appear to be working class. Instead, Yogesh and I ventured into the gold suq inside Deira, the historic commercial center of Dubai. As we walked through a shopping area that was being increasingly marginalized by the malls along Shaikh Zayed Road, Yogesh looked for a shop where the prices were the lowest. Finally, he decided on a little stall with some design pieces, but mostly ropes of gold. Yogesh did not want to spend money on design, as he felt unsure about what styles his sister and mother liked. Inside the little stall, one could hear Tamil, Malayalam, and Hindi being spoken by other workers buying gold to take home to their wives, sisters, and mothers. After much deliberation, Yogesh chose a plain chain, the price of which was determined by its weight. Yogesh, like many people with whom I spoke, stressed to me that it was important to buy the gold in Dubai, as the quality was purer than the quality of gold in India.

Yogesh was worried but also resentful about the amount of gold that his family asked him to bring home. On his annual trips home to India, he spent over three-quarters of his salary on gold for his sister's dowry. He said that he wanted to buy his mother some gold, but his mother had instructed him to focus only on getting gold for his sister's wedding. He also said that he disliked speaking to his sister on the phone, as she was always asking him to buy more gold and making demands regarding the quantity of gold that were impossible for him to meet. In order to try to meet these requests from his family, Yogesh lived frugally and shared a one-bedroom apartment with eight men. He felt "stuck" working in the United Arab Emirates and forced to spend all of his money on his sister's dowry. An especially large amount of gold was needed because his sister wanted to marry a man who worked in information technology (IT) and lived in Australia. This marriage would allow an upward mobility for his family that would be impossible without the income he earned working in the UAE.

Dowry in India

Most people in India practice patrilocal social organization and joint families are considered by many to be the ideal family structure. This family structure is found among Christians, Muslims, and Hindus in the country. Joint families are “a group of adult male coparceners [joint heirs] and their dependents ... wives and children.”⁵²⁶ For many poorer Indian migrants, the joint family is both an aspiration and a tool that allows workers to migrate.⁵²⁷ There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between joint families and migration to the Gulf: families borrow money so that sons may work abroad and the money earned abroad supports the family.

Migration is also a tool to help marry daughters and sisters. Money is needed for marriage because of the predominance of dowry in India – when a woman marries, her family gives the groom’s family gifts, or a dowry, of goods and money; often, these gifts take the form of gold. In Tom Trautmann’s analysis of kinship in India, he finds that this gift giving is a pan-Indian tradition with ancient Indo-Aryan roots. Even though the giving of dowry was outlawed in 1961, it is still a common practice today. Ideally, in most of India the bride’s family gives dowry and the groom’s family gives no return gifts. This is because the bride’s family receiving gifts would be “regarded as the sale of a daughter.”⁵²⁸ Instead, the cultural ideal is for families to give dowries when their daughters or sisters marry, and migration is one tactic families use to acquire the money needed for these marriages.

⁵²⁶ Jayati Lal, “(Un)Becoming Women: Indian Factory Women’s Counternarratives of Gender,” *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): p. 574; D Chawla, “I Will Speak Out: Narratives of Resistance in Contemporary Indian Women’s Discourses in Hindu Arranged Marriages,” *Women and Language* 30 (2007): p. 8.

⁵²⁷ For a longer discussion of the class aspects of joint families, see Lawrence Cohen, *No Aging in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵²⁸ Trautmann goes on to explain the religious nature of the gift and differentiates this gift from the gift described by Mauss in order to explain the particularity of the gift in the Indian context Thomas R. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) pp. 26-27, 277-285.

Almost all the workers with whom I spoke expressed to me the importance of gold and the necessity of buying gold for their sisters' or daughters' dowries. These workers also told me that they delayed their marriages and, even after marriage, lived most of their lives apart from their wives so that they could first help their sisters to marry and then support their extended families. Due to claims made upon them by their sisters, these men circulated to the Gulf in order to allow their sisters to move to other families in India.

While regional variations exist, the claims made on men to secure dowries cut across many class lines, caste groups, and regional distinctions. For example, Mr. Pandeya, my lunch companion at Mancom, had been a supervisor at an oil project. Because he was abroad so much and had extensive obligations to his natal family, Mr. Pandeya married later in life. He told me he had originally gone to the Gulf to help support his large family; Mr. Pandeya had seven sisters and needed to help them marry since his own father's health was poor. Like many of the men I interviewed, Mr. Pandeya saw it as his obligation to help his sisters marry before he, himself, married. Another worker, Mr. Ramchandra, was a farmer's son and worked as an unskilled worker at an oil project. He had studied in school, but only for a few years before he dropped out in order to help support his family. Mr. Ramchandra told me he decided to work in the Gulf because he had "two sisters and no money in India" and he believed he would "find" more money working in the Gulf. This money was especially needed to marry his sisters. When he first took the job he sent his entire paycheck home. His first "responsibility" was to assist his sisters to marry. Now that his sisters are married, he sends only "according to needs" and some extra money to his father to build a *pakkā* house, or a house made of concrete and bricks.

One day when he was on a break from work, I asked Mr. Ramchandra what was needed to marry his sisters and he looked at me as though I were a child and slowly said, "gold." Mr.

Pandeya also stressed gold when I asked what things needed to be given for his sisters' weddings. Mr. Pandeya, who is from Bihar in northern India and learnt English while working in the Gulf, told me that household goods were important, but, "in north Indian style of marriage, of course, THE GOLD is an important item for the marriage." As I wrote, Mr. Pandeya looked over my shoulder and offered corrections, insisting that I capitalize "the gold" in order to indicate its importance. He then continued, "but it is not as important as it's emphasized in South India. Say if it is 50 grams in North then it would be 500 grams in South Indian marriage. South Indians are more fascinated towards Gold. However, one thing is true in all Indians marriage, i.e., DOWRY, which a girl has to carry to [her] in-laws place."

In her seminal essay "The Traffic in Women" Gayle Rubin provides an analytic lens that can be used to understand dowry. Rubin examines how exchange establishes relations between people, and argues that men exchange female relatives in order to form a bond that includes both reciprocity and kinship. "If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the women being the conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it."⁵²⁹ Things and women circulate. In the case of India, the practice of dowry is built upon the giving of gifts – gifts that move with the bride from her natal family to her husband's family. Using Rubin's analysis, we can see that "kinship is a system of categories" given form by sex and gender relations.⁵³⁰ In order to help their sisters or daughters to marry, families in India go to great lengths, in some cases so far as to sell a kidney.⁵³¹ Nonetheless, less attention has been paid to how men acquire dowry or support joint families. In my research, I found that with the

⁵²⁹ Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayner R Reiter, (New York, 1975), p. 174.

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 169-177.

⁵³¹ Lawrence Cohen, "Accusations of Illiteracy and the Medicine of the Organ," *Social Research* 78 (Spring 2011): p. 139; Lawrence Cohen, "Where It Hurts: Indian Material for an Ethics of Organ Transplantation," *Daedalus* 128 (Autumn 1999): 135–65.

increase in workers traveling to the Gulf to work on oil projects or their subsidiaries, oil money is used to lend greater stability to joint families and purchase gold for dowries. In the case of transnational migration, joint families often work together to send a son abroad; then, once he is working there, they make claims on his labor and the products of his labor.

Transnational labor migration both provides dowries for daughters and drives a shift towards increasingly large dowries. In anthropologist Xiang Biao's study of the migration of IT workers from Andhra Pradesh (AP, now Telangana and Seemandhra) to Australia he finds that giving dowry is increasingly the norm.⁵³² Based on Srinivas's work in South India, Xiang argues that dowry was not historically found in southern India and is actually a relatively recent practice. He further observes that giving and receiving of dowry are linked and "cent[er] on the concept of *kutumba gowraavan* (family status), and the anxiety to protect, or more often to uplift, the family's status motivated young IT sons to contribute as much as possible to their sisters' dowries."⁵³³ The centrality of dowry helps explain the sense of pressure experienced by Yogesh, Mr. Pandeya, and Mr. Ramchandra. The giving of dowry is a middle-class practice that is becoming increasingly entrenched among both middle and lower classes as a method of securing family relations and improving family status.

The continuing popularity and increasing frequency of giving dowry in both northern and southern India is counterintuitive for many scholars of Indian transnational migration. The assumption would be that because Yogesh's sister was going to marry a well-educated young man who lived in Australia, then the fiancé's family would not ask for a dowry from her. My

⁵³² Biao Xiang, *Global "Body Shopping": An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 33; M N Srinivas, *Indian Society Through Personal Writings*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); M N Srinivas, *Some Reflections on Dowry*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵³³ Xiang, *Global "Body Shopping": An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*, p. 36.

assumptions on the matter had been influenced by my conversations with women who work for women's rights in India. These women had explained to me that dowry is a social evil. Women's rights workers argue that demands for dowry often escalate into mistreatment of women and this is so common that many anti-dowry advocates feel that dowry is a "euphemism for wife-battering."⁵³⁴ Additionally, it is argued, dowry contributes to and reinforces Indian preferences for sons and the higher value placed on male children.

Contrary to expectations, however, migration and increased participation in transnational, neoliberal economies does not seem to decrease the practice of dowry, but rather, has precisely the opposite effect. In Anisur Rahman's study of Bihari migration to the Gulf, he asks whether migration changes migrants' attitudes towards dowry and, in particular, whether migration helps workers to "leave behind" the institution of dowry. He finds that this was not the case: respondents in his study indicated that they felt they must give a dowry in order to allow their sisters and daughters to marry sons from "decent families." Contrary to his expectations, Rahman found that migration "increased dowry on account of inflow of remittances. Many families have become prosperous and are willing to give dowry."⁵³⁵ Thus, in both northern and southern India, dowry increases in frequency and size with transnational migration.

In his analysis, Rahman assumes that migration is a modern phenomena and that participating in this modern practice will change a traditional aspect of Indian culture. He presents modernization as linear and developmental and contrasts modernization with fixed traditions. Veena Talwar Oldenburg offers an alternative view on dowry. She finds that dowry

⁵³⁴ Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 116.

⁵³⁵ Anisur Rahman, *Indian Labour Migration to the Gulf*, (New Delhi: Rajat Publications, 2001), pp. 145-146.

and gold are linked with changes brought about during the British colonial period. Under the British Raj, property rights were altered:

The concept of property stood altered in the most radical way in that universe of swift changes brought about by the British, and on this central concept were predicated the new equations of rights of women and men. The fact that dowries gradually incorporated ‘movable’ liquid assets such as cash and gold made them exceptionally useful in acquiring productive and ‘immovable’ assets, and that this possibility of conversion was instrumental in changing the contents of a dowry and in shifting its control from a woman to either her husband or his father.⁵³⁶

The implication is that *stridhan*, or a woman’s property, no longer remained with the woman and was made accessible instead to both men and the government through taxes.⁵³⁷ Oldenburg demonstrates that giving gold in marriages has its roots in the colonial period, that the shift from land to gold coincided with women having less control over property, and that the meaning and consequences of dowry have changed over time. This shifting meaning of dowry coincides with new ways in which the gold for dowries is procured.

Gold Circulation in the Arabian Sea

Today, gold is the second largest import to India after oil. India’s high gold consumption is attributed to the prevalence of dowry in the form of gold and because people purchase gold as a way of saving money instead of putting it into banks. As Yogesh bought gold and we wandered through the gold *suq*, he was participating in an exchange of oil, gold, and labor that has historically traversed the Arabian Sea. The migration of workers to the Gulf to work in the oil fields began in the 1920s under the British. However, the relationship between India and the Gulf predates these efforts to extract oil, and gold has long played a role in this relationship. In the

⁵³⁶ Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 148.

⁵³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 147.

nineteenth century, India was a large exporter of gold. This shifted during the early twentieth century, with new economic policies during the 1950s leading to an increase in the smuggling of gold into India from the Gulf. Today, connections between marriage practices in India and India's consumption of gold mediate relations in the Arabian Sea. The relationship between oil, gold, and trade on the Arabian Sea has shifted as national policies have changed and as greater numbers of workers participate in this trade.

Prior to independence, India was one of the main exporters of gold in the world. At India's independence, Jawaharlal Nehru and, later, Indira Gandhi cultivated an economic policy with the aim of greater self-sufficiency. One feature of the new economic measures was greater control over the import of gold into India and the levying of duties on the import of precious materials.⁵³⁸ Increased restrictions were also placed on the export of Indian gold. The result was that, by 1961, the "price of gold in India [was] almost twice the price of gold on the world market."⁵³⁹ Due to these restrictions and the demand for gold in India, gold smuggling became a lucrative endeavor for merchants in the Gulf. Originally, merchants in Kuwait used smugglers based in Dubai to carry goods to India. However, in the early 1950s, coinciding with increased oil revenues in Kuwait, Kuwaiti merchants became less interested in smuggling and Dubai

⁵³⁸ Christopher Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 70.

⁵³⁹ From HBM Political Agency, Trucial States, Dubai, to Sir William Luce, British Residency, Bahrain. 19 January 1966. 1181/66C RE (1):1966: 841-846). Gold smuggling is a popular trope in Hindi movies, especially in the years before the neoliberal reforms to India's economy. *Jaal* (1952) is an early representation of this smuggling, but there are more popular examples, including *Deewaar* (1975).

merchants overtook the endeavor.⁵⁴⁰ In Dubai, the gold trade helped the economy recover from the effects of the Depression of 1929 and the collapse of the pearl trade.⁵⁴¹

Despite the self-sufficiency measures implemented by the Indian government, the smuggling of gold created an avenue for Indians to participate in global economies of trade. Gulf merchants purchased gold legally in London, Zurich, Paris, and New York.⁵⁴² This gold was then taken to Dubai and smuggled into India via dhows entering the port in Bombay. In Bombay, Indian agents paid either in dollars, pounds, or rupees (preferably rupee coins, as they were the same in Dubai and India) for the gold. In 1966, one British agent noted the complexity of this gold economy and the role of Indian migrants within it. He wrote, “It is interesting in this context that even, for instance, the Indian textile worker in Bradford [England] plays his part in the business by selling his sterling earnings at a high premium.”⁵⁴³ At times, textiles from Bombay were also taken in exchange for gold. These textiles were then sold in Iran, where there was a high demand.⁵⁴⁴

Some members of the British administration worried that the smuggling was hurting the Indian economy and, in turn, necessitating more British loans to India. These administrators feared that the result was an overall negative impact upon British currency.⁵⁴⁵ However, the majority of the British administration was reluctant to hurt the gold smuggling in the Gulf in any

⁵⁴⁰ From HBM Political Agency, Trucial States, Dubai, to Sir William Luce, British Residency, Bahrain. 19 January 1966. 1181/66C, *RE* (1966), 841-846. Kuwait began exporting oil in 1946.

⁵⁴¹ The collapse of the pearl trade in 1929 was connected to the Great Depression in the United States and Europe, and the industry had difficulty recovering after the Depression due to the invention of pearl cultivation by the Japanese.

⁵⁴² Report by Patrick Eyers to the Political Agency, Trucial States, Dubai. 9 April 1962. *RE* (1962), 515.

⁵⁴³ From HBM Political Agency, Trucial States, Dubai, to Sir William Luce, British Residency, Bahrain. 19 January 1966. 1181/66C *RE* (1966), 845.

⁵⁴⁴ Davidson, *Dubai*, p. 70.

⁵⁴⁵ Letter Bank of England to Lamb, 17 September 1962. BT 1181/3(c); Letter Political Agency, Dubai, Trucial States to the Residency, Bahrain. 16 October 1962. *RE* (1962), 524-5.

way, as administrators also recognized that such smuggling was the “staple of the economy.”⁵⁴⁶ These administrators argued that the trade was so ubiquitous it would be “impossible to stop.” They further argued that no law was being broken in the Trucial States, today the UAE, and it was only once the gold reached India and Pakistan that crimes were being committed. Therefore, the gold smuggling was out of British jurisdiction. Most important, from the British administration’s perspective, was the fear of “political repercussions which might well lead to the Ruler concerned denying us the various facilities we require and to increased demands for economic assistance.”⁵⁴⁷ For the British, access to oil came before the enforcement of smuggling laws. In 1962, Abu Dhabi began exporting oil and British companies had lucrative deals for both oil exploration and development. A central aspect of British interest in the Gulf was Britain’s increasing reliance on oil and, in turn, Britain’s dependence upon the cooperation of the rulers of the Gulf in order to access the oil reserves there. In the 1960s, British administrators were trying to extract as many oil concessions as possible without giving more economic support to the Gulf economies.

In addition to the importance of gold smuggling to the economies of the Trucial States, gold smuggling was also a concern to the Indian government. When India petitioned the British government to allow an Indian consulate in 1962 in Dubai, the British administration of Dubai immediately suspected it was because the Indian government wanted to “keep an eye on” gold smuggling and report on it to New Delhi.⁵⁴⁸ The British administration stated in letters that it valued India’s presence in the Commonwealth and that it understood there were around three thousand Indians living in Dubai that would benefit from the establishment of an Indian

⁵⁴⁶ From Bahrain to Foreign Office. 3 April 1962. BT1061/1(D). *RE* (1962), 531.

⁵⁴⁷ W.H. Luce, British Residency, Bahrain to A.R. Walmsley, Arabian Department, Foreign Office. 15 November 1962. BT1181/5. *RE* (1962), 526).

⁵⁴⁸ S.F. Given, Foreign Office, to Brown, Bahrain. 10 September 1962. BT1181/3. *RE* (1962), 522-3. A.R. Welmsley, Foreign Office, to William Luce, Bahrain. 5 December 1962. BT1067/7. *RE* (1962), 550.

consulate. Nonetheless, the British believed that the ultimate motive behind the proposed consulate was so that India could control the gold smuggling. The British had no interest in controlling this trade and, furthermore, wanted to maintain their own exclusive political control in the Trucial States. Therefore, they did not want to weaken the exclusive agreement that put England in charge of the Trucial States' external affairs.

When discussing the Indian government's desire to open a consulate, one official explained that "Indians love gold," both as an ornament and as protection against inflation. Additionally, one analyst predicted, "only liberalization of the imports of goods into Persia and of gold into Pakistan and India could entirely stop the trade, and it is unlikely that any of these countries will be able to afford liberalization in the foreseeable future."⁵⁴⁹ This prediction proved to be true in India, and despite a slowdown in the early 1970s when Indira Gandhi cracked down on smuggling in Bombay, gold smuggling continued until the early 1990s, when liberalization of India's economy included the lifting of trade restrictions and custom duties.⁵⁵⁰

Today, oil money is used by laborers to move gold into the country. The movement of gold and the way in which dowries are given all indicate emerging practices that were shaped in the twentieth century with the convergence of political maneuvering and family practices. The result is that neoliberalization and transnational migration impact the form that dowry, often considered a "traditional" practice in India, takes. This convergence of factors also helps define gender roles in the family, in part due to the restrictions placed on women's emigration from India.

⁵⁴⁹ Report by Patrick Eyers to the Political Agency, Trucial States, Dubai. 9 April 1962. *RE* (1962), 515-517. The idea of "affording liberalization" is an interesting one. It indicates a different position than the contemporary idea that liberalization of economies is always cheaper, more efficient, and leads to economic growth. For example, see *Benefits of Trade Liberalization, Global Trade Liberalization and the Developing Countries*, International Monetary Fund, 2008.

⁵⁵⁰ Syed Ali, *Dubai: Gilded Cage*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 16-19.

Migration to the Gulf as a Gendered Activity

The migration of Indian men to the Gulf allows men to define their roles as fathers and sons. I was repeatedly told that a “good man,” or a man fulfilling his familial duties, helps procure gold for his sisters’ or daughters’ dowries. This is particularly necessary because poor, uneducated women in India are unable to acquire this dowry for themselves through migration. Due to the restrictions set up by the Indian government, it is impossible for a woman under thirty years of age to migrate to the Gulf for work if she has not matriculated (i.e., passed Tenth Standard, or the second year, of high school).⁵⁵¹ The order that prohibits these women from traveling abroad for work reads: “Women below the age of 30 years may not be granted emigration clearance, who seek any kind of employment including employment as housemaids, domestic workers, hair dressers, beauticians, dancers, stage artist, labourers, general workers, etc., in any foreign country.”⁵⁵² The rule is framed as seeking to protect not only women, but also the reputation of Indians abroad. In large part, these policies were in response to reports that women working as domestic workers in the Gulf, and in particular in Kuwait, were being abused and articles in newspapers that claimed Indian women were working as prostitutes in the Gulf.

Recruiting agents in India repeatedly told me that Indian women face harassment when working abroad. According to the employees at the recruiting agencies with whom I worked, the ability to travel abroad in order to have more choice in the time and nature of marriage is a

⁵⁵¹ There is some disagreement as to what the correct minimum age is for women who have not matriculated to work in the Gulf. According to one Protector of Emigrants office the age was 40 and, according to one association of recruiting agencies, the age is 35. The fact that regional offices overseeing emigration had differing beliefs as to the age women could migrate further highlights the difficulties women face when trying to obtain visas to work abroad.

⁵⁵² S Irudaya Rajan, V J Varghese, and M S Jayakumar, "Overseas Recruitment Practices in India," background paper for *Regional Conference on Deployment of Workers Overseas: A Shared Responsibility*, (International Labour Organisation, 2008), p. 17.

highly gendered activity. Men can travel in order to seek the financial stability to marry and even find the funds to pay for themselves to live away from their parents. Families in India often told me of the expectations they had for their sons in the Gulf, and young men working in the Gulf told me their motivation in migrating was to support their families and fulfill their duties as sons. In general, daughters were not able to fulfill these obligations. These gendered expectations are not only held by families, but are also found in general stereotyping done by Gulf workers, recruiting agents, and Indian government policies. According to many recruiting agents in Mumbai, women who migrated for unskilled labor, in particular, were thought to be going to work as prostitutes. At every agency I visited, I asked if the agency helped to place women looking for work as housemaids, waitresses, and sales persons in the Gulf. With the exception of one very large company that supplied manpower to Saudi Arabia, I was told that the agency did not perform such work. The reason given was that women were “taken advantage of” in the Gulf and women who did want to work in the Gulf were “not the good type of girl.”

The questionable morality of women working abroad was also implied in news stories about women trying to work in the Gulf as entertainers. The *Times of India* frequently ran articles in 2009 and 2010 discussing “dancing girls” working in the Gulf and, in particular, Dubai. In these articles, reporters interviewed concerned patrons who claimed that the “girls ply the trade,” meaning the women worked as prostitutes. Patrons supported this claim by stating that the “girls” were not allowed tips and, therefore, the only reason they would dance well would be in order to entice clients. In these articles, Dubai was portrayed as a place where unskilled “girls” could make large amounts of money, but only by participating in prostitution.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵³ Patel, in her discussion of Indian women working in call centers, points out that educated women working non-traditional jobs in India has not led to greater gender equality. Reena Patel, *Working the Night Shift*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). The idea that women from the Global South are “trafficked” to the Gulf to work as sex workers is critiqued and the consequences of such a narrative are

The current policies regarding women migrating to the Gulf and the Indian government's interest in the moral position or virtue of women in the Gulf are not new. From the late 1950s through the mid-1960s, the Indian government dealt with a series of complaints regarding the "immoral traffic in women."⁵⁵⁴ Connecting these complaints and the contemporary moment are the fears for women's virtue, the assumed obligation of the Indian government to protect that virtue, and the subtle backdrop of class as an analytic space in which these gendered anxieties regarding virtue play out. Poor women have unequal access to migration and employment abroad, and this reinforces the inequalities they face in India due to both their gender and their economic position. This inequality is further highlighted when these restrictions are compared with upper-class women's movement. For example, upper class young women, such as daughters of recruiting agents, go abroad to England or the United States to study and I was never told of the immorality of this activity.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, India was represented as a mother and "written, recited, and pictured with filial affect."⁵⁵⁵ Such representations of India seem to have permeated the contemporary moment, as they continue to inform the restrictions on women traveling internationally. India's reputation is located in the body of women abroad and poorer women, in particular, are constructed as unable to protect themselves. The effect is that working class and

explored in further detail by Pardis Mahdavi. See, Pardis Mahdavi, *Gridlock: Labor, Migration, and Human Trafficking in Dubai*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁵⁴ One example comes from letters written by Rubiyabai, a Muslim woman from Mumbai, to the Indian Government in the late 1950s and early 19560s. In her letters, Rubiyabai was concerned because her daughter, Zuleka, had married a man she identified as "Arab" and she was afraid that Zuleka was forced into prostitution upon arrival in Bahrain. In this and in the other cases I found in the archives, neither the allegation of forced prostitution nor the allegation of the wife's ill treatment by her "Arab" husbands was substantiated. However, fears of the ill-treatment of women moving to the Gulf continued to be a pressing issue. Letters from Rubiyabai to Ministry of External Affairs and Counsel for India at Bahrain. NAI, PVI Section, 1962. VI/402/3(118)/62.

⁵⁵⁵ Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 9.

most middle class women are unable to enter into the oil economy. As a consequence, women must rely on their fathers or brothers to procure money for their marriages. While the stated purpose is the protection of women, the result is that young women who have not matriculated are unable to travel legally for work. This undermines the ability of these women to migrate in order to inform their marriage decisions or to access the larger salaries that are available in the Gulf. It also means these women are only able to work abroad illegally. The result is that women are put in positions where they may be imprisoned by Gulf governments, and they are vulnerable to violations of their labor rights, as they have no legal status in their host country. Neither Yogesh's sister nor Ramchandra's sisters could legally travel to earn money for marriage. As a consequence, most women must rely on their fathers or brothers to procure money for their marriages.

Muslims and Dowry

Middle class Indian women who live in the Gulf are also reliant on their fathers or brothers for dowry and this is true for both Hindus and Muslims. While dowry in India is often discussed in relation to Hindu marriage practices and the examples I give above concern Hindu men, dowry, and gold in particular, held importance for Muslims in India as well. The following examples illustrate the importance of dowry for Indian Muslims and the prevalence of dowry within an aspiring middle class.

In the summer of 2011, both American and European financial markets appeared volatile and, as a result, the price of gold rose higher and higher. During this time, Shabana, an Indian Muslim living in Ajman, UAE, and I were chatting frequently. Shabana's father and husband both worked in the Gulf. Because they were from an upper middle class family, Shabana was

able to live in the Gulf with her husband and his family. Despite the family's relative wealth, Shabana was very attentive to the price of gold as her sister, Asma, was preparing to marry in Kerala. As the time neared for the wedding, Shabana repeatedly expressed concern over the price of gold. In a group conversation, she asked, "Why is gold increasing at a skyrocketing pace? What has gold rates to do with US dollar or oil? Or is there no gold in the gold mines?" She added later that the increased prices "make people's life more miserable than it already is." Shabana's friends generally commiserated with her regarding the price of gold and the timing of her sister's wedding. One of her friends noted that "people don't trust any commodity but gold" and that this was because shares on the stock markets are "rubbish." Other friends blamed Indians for the high price of gold: "Maybe if Mallus (Malayalam speakers from the state of Kerala in South India) [and] Gujjus (people from the Indian state of Gujarat) stop buying so much it will probably drop." Another pointed to the link between marriage, gold, and India and commented that gold is so expensive because "more and more Mallus are getting married." Both Kerala and Gujarat are Indian states known for their trading and have a visible presence in the Gulf. The assumption of the speaker was that the wealthy from these states were getting married in higher numbers and thus driving up the price of gold. Shabana and Asma's family felt compelled to supply a large amount of gold for Asma's wedding. Their father had migrated in the 1960s to work in the UAE and through hard work and "some luck" he currently managed a small factory there. By providing a large dowry of gold for Asma's wedding, the family was attempting to assert their relatively new class position and ensure their daughter married a good man.

Earlier that year, I had also had a conversation about dowry with Shabana's sister, Asma. One day, as we were having tea, Asma looked at me and sighed. "Dowries are very important in

India,” she told me. This worried her as she prepared for her marriage. She said that for Muslims in Kerala, the rich are expected to give a house, gold, and a car. The poor are only expected to give a car and gold. I asked her about *mahr*, the gift given from the groom to the bride in Muslim marriages (*nikāh*). She replied that poor Indian Muslim grooms only give INR 100 (\$2 USD) and the rich give 100 AED (approximately INR 1,400 or \$27 USD). This is just a “menial” amount, she told me. Asma said that, according to religious beliefs, she felt no one should expect anything for *mahr*. However, due to the wealth of her fiancé’s family, she does expect a small amount of gold. Shabana and Asma both knew a girl who had studied in the US and they were surprised by how little a family gives here. She told me that in India, “A ring is not enough.” She also contrasted Indian practices with the *mahr* given in the Gulf and said that Arab girls expect houses and cars. However, in India, the *mahr* does not “even out” the dowry. She sighed again and said, “It’s not fair, the Arab girls can ask of anything.”⁵⁵⁶ While Arab girls may ask for anything, in India, grooms ask for gold. For Asma, she was reliant on her father’s and brother’s contributions to her dowry to secure her marriage.

Masculinity and Migration

The claims sisters and mothers made on men’s labor influenced many men’s choice to migrate to the Gulf. Migrating and purchasing gold for dowries became one way in which these men defined themselves as “men” and situated themselves in their families and communities. This manifestation of masculinity is articulated differently than are representations of masculinity in India that rely on a man’s status as married. The latter form of masculinity can create difficulties, especially when young men have difficulty marrying because of increasing

⁵⁵⁶ In this conversation, Asma contrasted Arab and Indian Muslim practices. She makes that claim that according to religion “one should not expect anything,” but later says that Arab brides (or their families) make high demands on grooms.

unemployment and lack of opportunities.⁵⁵⁷ High unemployment sometimes meant north Indian families would allocate resources so that a son's employment or marriage were prioritized at the expense of his sisters' marriages.⁵⁵⁸ Transnational migration, on the other hand, provided alternate routes through which men could express and define their masculinity. This masculinity and the inequalities inherent in patriarchal systems are reinforced by both men and by women, such as Asma's and Yogesh's female relatives.

This definition of masculinity must also consider how transnational migration affects the wife of the migrant. Mr. Pandeya's wife, Padma, told me that she often begged her husband not to travel overseas, as she wanted him home with her. She enjoyed her husband's companionship, but she also felt that she was mistreated by her in-laws when her husband was away. As opposed to Mr. Pandeya's sisters, who did little labor within the home, Padma said that when she was living with her in-laws and without her husband, she did a large portion of all household tasks. These patriarchal relations not only defined women and their femininity, but also defined men and their efforts to demonstrate their masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as the practices that allow for men's dominance of women to continue. Studies of hegemonic masculinity often consider it at three levels: local, regional, and global. R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt write, "Processes such as economic restructuring, long-distance migration, and the turbulence of development agendas have the power to reshape local patterns of masculinity and femininity."⁵⁵⁹ While not arguing for a hierarchical relation, some approaches assume that global practices restructure local practice,

⁵⁵⁷ Prem Chowdhry, "Crisis of Masculinity in Haryana," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 49 (December 3, 2005): 5189-98; Osella and Osella, "Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala."

⁵⁵⁸ Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Culture, and the Politics of Waiting in India*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 177-178.

⁵⁵⁹ R W Connell and James W Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): pp. 849-850.

with little movement happening in the other direction. What I would want to highlight here is the way in which a local form of masculinity – specifically, the way in which Indian men define their roles in families through supplying their sisters’ and daughters’ dowries – is actually defining the shape of global economic movements and practices. In the case of Indian men migrating to the Gulf, the practice blurs scholarly definitions of local, regional, and global boundaries and relations. Rather, we see the historically contextualized system of relations formed by dowry being reinforced and more people being able to participate in the practice of dowry through transnational migration. Similar to how these men shape economic exchange between India and the United Arab Emirates, migration also helps to reinforce practices that have been taking place since the British colonial period in India.

In addition to being a type of masculinity that does not rely on a man’s marriage or cohabitation with his wife and children, migrants’ masculinity while in the Gulf is often depicted as dangerous and policed. One weekend while I was at the beach in Dubai, a group of young Indian men arrived who were clearly out of place. These men were short and dressed in the clothes worn by laborers on oil projects on their days off – polyester pants and plastic flip-flops. In addition, they were slightly shorter and much thinner than many of the men from Europe and the Middle East who were relaxing or playing sports on the beach. The Indian men stood in a group and stared out at the crowded beach. As they did so, a group of young European men walked up and (to my horror) chased the Indian men off. Reminiscent of Yogesh’s discomfort in the mall because the space was socially policed to keep out laboring Indians (a category that was too close to his own), the public beach was also a space from which these men were excluded. The day following this encounter, I spoke about it to an Emirati man I knew. He explained to me that the men who had been chased off were dangerous and would have made women

uncomfortable with their presence. This reading of South Asian men as dangerous and lecherous provides yet another articulation of Indian migrants' masculinity – one imposed on them by others as a result of the migrants' socioeconomic position as foreign laborers.⁵⁶⁰

Migration both reinscribes and reshapes social practices and the expression of gendered norms that are related to the consumption of commodities and access to capital. For Indian laborers in the Gulf, gold and oil have value based on historical and cultural significance. Furthermore, gold and oil also exert a “structural form of compulsion” on these migrant laborers.⁵⁶¹ This means that gold and oil are commodities that may be approached, in a Marxian sense, not only as representative of class relations but also as objects that mediate historically situated social practices. As a result, the consumption and distribution of commodities and capital, in particular gold and oil, are practices used by Indian laborers in the Gulf to express family relationships and gender roles. In turn, gold and oil are constituted as socially meaningful objects through the making and expressing of kinship. Migrants make sense of their migration and cement their kinship relations through contributing to female family members' dowries by consuming gold and distributing it to future husbands or fathers-in-law. Many migrants felt obligated to do this by their parents and siblings. The result was that masculinity depended on migrants' acquiescence to familial pressures.

⁵⁶⁰ The segregation of space is neither unique to the area of the beach nor to Dubai. Andrew Gardner's work on South Asians in Bahrain tells many instances of spatial and social discrimination. In addition, other nationalities, including young men from Iran, also experience this spatial segregation. Andrew Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Behzad Sarmadi, “‘Bachelor’ in the City: Urban Transformation and Matter Out of Place in Dubai,” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3, no. 2 (December 2013): 196–214.

⁵⁶¹ Moishe Postone, “Deconstruction as Social Critique: Derrida on Marx and the New World Order,” *History and Theory*, (October 1993), p. 381.

Migrant Dreams and Modernity

By migrating in order to purchase dowry, men were often deferring their own dreams. Mr. Pandeya would have preferred to stay at home with his wife, and Yogesh wanted to live in India and study religion. Workers often told me how much they missed their homes, their wives, and their mothers. They also wanted to purchase goods for themselves, but felt pressure from their family, and sometimes friends, to send money home or to buy gold to take home. During a conversation with one older man who was returning to work in the Gulf, we found ourselves talking about food and how much he enjoyed the food his wife cooked for him when he was home. When I asked him about food in the Gulf he told me:

I am going only for work. My family needs the money. You can find jobs in India, but they don't pay as well. I will compromise to whatever food I have to, because I am sacrificing to go to make money for my family. So I will adjust, just like my family will need to adjust, because I am not at home.

This worker understood that both he and his family were sacrificing in order to send him to the Gulf. The goal of going to the Gulf was to provide for families and earn money. Conversations with this worker, as well as Yogesh, Ram, Mr. Pandeya, and Mr. Ramchandra, elucidated that helping sisters and daughters to marry was one of the primary ways in which many workers supported their families, and that this was often effected through the consumption of gold.

All of the workers I interviewed indicated that they were going to the Gulf to help supplement their families' daily expenses and the majority said they were also working in the Gulf in order to pay for their sisters' weddings. Only after noting these first two needs did workers identify other motivations for working in the Gulf, such as facilitating their own desire to marry, building a house, sending children to school, and/or buying new farm equipment. Such supplementary reasons for working in the Gulf still concerned providing for their families, but

more specifically, workers saw themselves as helping to improve their families' position and, in the case of Muslims or lower-caste workers, to stop being "backwards." A few workers told me, with sincerity and excitement, that they were going to "make India modern." This concept was difficult for me to define, as some workers understood modernity to mean helping their families' position. Clean water, electricity, or tractors were felt to have immediately tangible benefits for their families. But "making India modern" also implied other, more difficult to articulate dreams.

Mr. Sheikh, the head of an organization for the improvement of worker rights in the Gulf and a former semi-skilled worker there, explained to me his understanding of workers' dreams. With regard to workers traveling to the Gulf, Mr. Sheikh said, "The villagers don't know about where they are going and the 'middle man' sells dreams to him. Villagers only dream of going and flying in an airplane, because he has always dreamt of this." For Mr. Sheikh and the men with whom he worked, modernity meant clean water, consistent electricity supply, fast cars, and high-rise buildings. Modernity was far away, hard to reach, and not fully known. In conversations, as I sought to understand what people meant by "making India modern," I learnt that modernity was hierarchical and a process that involved several steps. Quite a few people explained to me that Dubai was more modern than India but still not as modern as the United States. This was because Dubai lacked certain freedoms and the international centrality of the United States. In my interlocutors' dreams, modernity involved living in the city; doing what you want; love matches, as opposed to arranged marriages; and having enough capital to buy the accoutrements they saw on TV shows and on display in malls. It also involved "getting fat" and wearing shiny shirts and large watches. For many young Indian men facing limited opportunities in their home villages, migration to the Gulf offered opportunities to fulfill their dreams and "move forward and up" in the graduated hierarchy of modernity.

Going abroad potentially allows a man to fulfill his dreams, but this must be weighed against his obligations to his family, community, and country. Buying gold for sisters' dowries and fulfilling other family expectations often clashed with the dreams of young men. However, in the case of the Gulf migrants with whom I spoke, the majority postponed their dreams and sent money back to their families as expected. In the stories told by migrant workers and recruiters, familial obligations and dreams were constantly being negotiated. Workers said they were going to the Gulf "to make India modern" but their understanding of this "modernity" seemed to be rooted in infrastructural features of modernity: airplanes, constant electricity, and clean water. Ambiguously connected to this are the other factors associated with modernity and neo-liberal reforms. Gold and oil were tangible commodities that could be used to critically engage with, question, and construct obligations and dreams. Deciding between dreams and obligations while working on oil projects to purchase gold is thus one way in which workers and recruiters locate themselves in this oil economy, reinforce kinship, and construct preferred family practices.

**Conclusion:
The Circulation of Men and the Exchange of Women**

The consumption of gold both structures and is structured by relationships. To return to the work of Gayle Rubin, which I discussed earlier in the chapter, Rubin notes the relational quality of inequalities and exchanges. She writes, "'Exchange of women' is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their

male kin.”⁵⁶² In the case of workers in the Gulf, women were not excluded from making claims on their brothers and women were not the only ones experiencing these inequalities. For men working in the Gulf, many stated that they would rather be at home, in their villages, and with their families than in the Gulf. Many also said they would rather work in the Gulf but have greater control over their money. Workers indicated that they found the work challenging, the hours long and tiring, and that they largely worked in the Gulf in order to help their families. For these unskilled and semi-skilled workers, the life they lived in the Gulf was not their first choice. The experiences of the workers with whom I spoke elucidate how kinship is relationally constructed through the circulation of men and women and claims made upon both based on their specifically gendered positions. For male migrants, this circulation is based on the need to help supply their sisters’ or daughters’ dowries, which often takes the form of gold acquired through working on oil projects. Men fulfill family obligations and define themselves as men by migrating abroad, and in doing so help shape regional oil practices and transnational economic activities.

⁵⁶² She also notes that when women are trafficked, they can be trafficked “simply as women.” In contrast, men are also contracted, but as “some other ... social status, rather than as men.” Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” pp. 175-177.

Conclusion: Migratory Pipelines

Every year a large oil and gas exposition is held in Abu Dhabi – the Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference (ADIPEC). ADIPEC takes over the huge Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre for a week, and it includes stalls of hardware vendors, human resource experts, oil and gas publications, the large oil companies, and contractors. Wandering through the conference in November 2010, I was overwhelmed by the scale of the oil industry and the size of the equipment used. Also at ADIPEC were panels and sessions of interest to people in the industry. Panels offered that year included, “New Frontier Challenges,” “Sustainability and the Development of Human Capital,” and “Carbon Management in the Oil Industry.” Additional, smaller sessions covered topics related to technology, geology, and management.

In addition to these panels and sessions, the oil company Total held a session for students who were interested in jobs in the oil industry. The session, conducted mostly in Arabic, but with some French and English also spoken, was geared towards encouraging young Emirati men and women to apply for training and possible jobs at Total. The woman leading the session outlined the history of Total in Abu Dhabi, which she dated back to 1939. Moving from the company’s historic presence in the UAE to the present, she discussed Total’s large, off-site projects in the Persian Gulf and the company’s move to diversify and expand into the gas industry as well. To

encourage citizens of the UAE to join the company, she mentioned the high salaries Emiratis make and that Total had two pay scales: one for expatriates and another for UAE nationals. She also noted that working for Total, or another large oil company, did not mean the UAE national had to leave their family for long periods of time. She explained that, after training, “expats tend to move on to international jobs, whereas UAE nationals tend to only go abroad for one to two years max, but they always return.” Attempts by Total to increase the number of Emirati employees were not unique. *Khalījīs* were almost absent from the oil industry, and oil companies, in response to pressure from Gulf governments, were attempting to increase the numbers of *khalījīs* working in the industry, especially in highly skilled positions. The reasons for the contemporary lack of Emiratis in the oil industry date back to the work done to evacuate politics from the oilfields in the 1960s and the nature of the distribution of oil rents to the population. The lack of Emiratis or other *khalījīs* in the oil industry and the historic relationships between the Gulf and South Asia are two reasons for the large numbers of Indian expatriates living in the Gulf.

The regional specificity of hiring locals for oil and gas projects is neither an accident of history nor is it a purposively constructed situation. Rather, the migratory networks developed historically and in the contemporary moment by workers, employers, agents, and government officials have given oil production in the Arabian Sea its specific character. From the strikes by Indians in the oilfields to the restructuring of emigration laws, Indian laborers and lawmakers have attempted to exert control over the labor conditions in the Gulf oilfields. Likewise, the strikes and political activities of *khalījī* workers have also been influential moments in the shaping of the *kafala*, or sponsorship, system. These moments were further impacted by the activities of merchants, oil companies, and the British administration in the Gulf. Today, the

result of all these combined factors can be seen in the contemporary *kafala* system in which workers have limited means to negotiate their working conditions.

As I sat in Total's recruitment pitch at ADIPEC, young Emiratis, both men and women, came and went. Sitting in the back of the room for the entire talk were seven young Indian students, six men and one woman. These students attentively took notes regarding the recruitment and training processes for Total. These students had lived in the UAE all their lives, but retained their Indian citizenship due to the restrictive nature of citizenship in the UAE. Only children born to an Emirati father automatically qualify for citizenship, and children who are born to Emirati women married to non-Emiratis may apply for citizenship. The process for people not from the Gulf to become citizens is difficult and it is rare for non-citizens to be granted citizenship even if all requirements are met.⁵⁶³

The Indian students at the information session were just a handful of the millions of Indians living in the Gulf. Children of Indian managers, business people, and professionals, these Indian students hoped to find jobs in the Gulf, they told me, because the salaries at oil companies are high and because they enjoyed living in the UAE. Having never lived in India, they still considered India their homeland, but wished to continue to make their homes in the Gulf.

⁵⁶³ Requirements to apply for citizenship include living in the UAE for at least twenty years, speaking Arabic, being a Muslim, having a good reputation and no criminal record, and having a legal means of support.

Key social spaces for Indians in the Gulf are Indian associations. These associations often



Image 5: Indian Association banner for Eid and Onam

host events in honor of Indian holidays. At these events, organizers often attempt to minimize the internal differences of India. For example, Muslim holidays and Hindu holidays are celebrated at the same time. At one event I attended, Onam, a Hindu festival celebrated by Malayalam speakers, and Eid al-Fitr, a Muslim holiday, were celebrated together. One member of the

association told me that celebrating together indicated “harmony” [Image 5: Indian Association banner for Eid and Onam]. This unity was further illustrated as children took turns performing songs and dances associated with each holiday. In addition, linguistic differences within India were minimized. At a celebration for the Hindu Diwali festival, the singer sang a song that made, as described to me by an attendee, a “loop of India. [The singer] was singing in all the people’s languages: Malayalam, Tamil, Orissan [*sic*], Assam language, Gujarati, Hindi.” Members of the Indian associations articulated this unity, and one Indian student who lived with her parents in the Gulf told me: “India is a combination of different cultures, religions, caste and system. These are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and many religions. But all comes under one unity, with one strength.” This strength and unity were further reflected by the fact that these diverse Indian were gathered together outside the actual boundaries of the nation.

An examination of Indian migration to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates offers a critical opportunity to examine the interactions of migrants,

the nation-state, and transnational institutions and actors. Most migrants to the Gulf understand their migration to be temporary, even if it, in fact, spans decades. In addition, questions of citizenship and belonging are not of central importance to the host society. As a result, many Indian migrants feel they are outsiders to Gulf societies and this experience is prevalent even among Indian citizens who have spent their entire lives in the Gulf and are Muslim (and, thus, share the religion of their host country). Many Indians find meaningful cultural and social grounding in Indian voluntary associations located in the Gulf States. Voluntary associations structure interactions between Indian citizens, the Indian government, and the UAE government and, in doing so, provide a space in which family, community, nation, and industry are defined and presented.

As Indians participate in the holiday celebrations at Indian associations based in the Gulf, they reconstruct the scale of the nation through their representation of it as an imagined whole, the centrality of which defines the membership for the association. Through these performances and events, India is produced as a locality in ways reminiscent of the scale-making done in the first years of India's independence by workers in the Gulf. Both historically and today, Indians define their nationality, make claims on their government, and push the meanings of citizenship while abroad. In addition, family structures and gendered obligations in India inform oil production on the Arabian Sea.

As explored in this dissertation, Indians have lived in the Gulf historically as laborers, skilled workers, and traders, and their presence continues today. The political activities of Indian workers in the oilfields and of Indian traders have impacted not only the politics of the Gulf countries and postcolonial India, but have also shaped regional oil production. These Indians did not migrate in a vacuum and the social associations and networks they formed with recruiting

agents, oil company managers, and government bureaucrats gave regional oil its particular shape. Also influential in regional oil production is the manner in which workers move from the village to the job site, negotiating relationships with subagents, agents, government bureaucrats, and oil company management along the way.

Examining the formation and development of oil production in the Arabian Sea through the lens of labor migration sheds light on governance in postcolonial nations, provides new approaches to global history, and critically examines the nature of commodities. Oil's materiality and workers' solidarities informed the political possibilities that emerged at historic and contemporary job sites in the Gulf. A historical genealogy of oil company staffing from the 1940s to the present shows that colonial administrators and oil company managers encouraged large numbers of Indians to migrate to the Gulf and that these administrators and managers helped shape the labor hierarchies at play in the Gulf today. The resulting labor circulations and transnational industries influence how postcolonial nations define sovereignty and citizenship. Tracing the circulations of labor and oil in the Arabian Sea encourages us to rethink the definition of regions. As goods, people, and ideas move transnationally, borders, both conceptual and geographic, are destabilized and redrawn.

The "migratory pipelines" Indian workers shape in order to arrive in the Gulf are similar to the pipelines of the industry. Labor circulations through the Arabian Sea are central to the production of oil and to shaping the place of the Arabian Sea. In this dissertation, I have used ethnographic and archival materials to investigate how workers move and illuminate not only the personal consequences of migration for workers and their families, but also how migratory pipelines shape and are shaped by oil practices and institutions. Using transnational history and multi-sited ethnography, I engaged critically with the themes of migration and labor by

evaluating how networks are formed; investigating the pipeline of labor migration, from the village to the job site; and including all parties involved in migration, from government officials to oil company managers to the workers themselves. I mapped the interplay between the materiality of oil, worker actions, and oil companies. I demonstrated the importance for analyses of labor to extend beyond the sites of production to workers' networks of affiliation. This extension challenges the boundaries of transnational organizations, nations, regions, and empires by recognizing that laborers, like oil itself, circulate on the Arabian Sea in dynamic, ever-shifting channels that are historically and politically constructed.

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