

Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf

**Edited by
Madawi Al-Rasheed**

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Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf

This volume presents a study of transnational cultural flows in the Gulf region and beyond. It combines an understanding of the region's historical connections with the outside world and an assessment of contemporary consequences of these connections.

In the context of current theoretical debates, empirical case studies are presented to demonstrate that the Gulf is not only an exporter of oil and capital, but also of culture and religion. As these travel to distant locations, they are transformed in ways not intended by those who initiated the process – at the same time, the Gulf remains an importer of labour, the latest technology, economic skills and ideas, whose roots are no longer possible to locate. *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf* challenges both the definition of globalisation and transnationalism as one way processes generated mainly by the Western World and the view that transnationalism is solely a twentieth century phenomenon.

The authors collected here analyse and map historical and contemporary manifestations of transnational networks within this region, linking them to wider debates on society, identity and political culture. This volume will interest students and researchers of politics, the Middle East, anthropology and transnationalism.

Madawi Al-Rasheed is Professor of Anthropology of Religion at King's College, University of London.

Transnationalism

Series Editor: Steven Vertovec

University of Oxford

'Transnationalism' broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states. Today myriad systems of relationship, exchange and mobility function intensively and in real time while being spread across the world. New technologies, especially involving telecommunications, serve to connect such networks. Despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), many forms of association have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common arena of activity. In some instances transnational forms and processes serve to speed-up or exacerbate historical patterns of activity, in others they represent arguably new forms of human interaction. Transnational practices and their consequent configurations of power are shaping the world of the twenty-first century.

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Contributors

Frederick Anscombe is Lecturer in Contemporary History at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar* (1997) and editor of *The Ottoman Balkans, 1750–1830* (forthcoming).

Jonathan Birt is currently doing a DPhil in Social Anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, on Islamic movements in Birmingham and London.

Mathias Diederich is a wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter in South East Asian Studies at Wolfgang Goethe Universität (Frankfurt). His research focuses on Islam, politics and migration in Indonesia and migration from the Philippines to Germany.

Nelida Fuccaro lectures in Modern Middle Eastern History at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. She is the author of *The ‘Other’ Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (1999), and several articles on the urban history of the Persian Gulf.

Roland Marchal is Senior Research Fellow at CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) and CERI (Centre for International Studies and Research), Paris. His research focuses on wars in Africa and dimensions of subaltern globalization. His publications include *Dubai: cité globale* (2001) and *Guerres et sociétés: état et violence après la guerre froide* (2003).

James Onley is Assistant Professor of History at the American University of Sharjah and an Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. He is the author of *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf* (forthcoming) and the recipient of dissertation awards from both MESA (2001) and BRISMES (2002).

Gaëlle Le Pottier holds an MPhil in Modern Middle Eastern Studies (University of Oxford), which led to research on the oral history of Lebanese pre-civil war student political activism. She subsequently did two years of research on contemporary media in the Middle East as part of the Economic

and Social Research Council's research programme on transnationalism and the Gulf and generated the publication of 'Le monde de la télévision au Moyen-Orient et le rôle du Liban et des Libanais dans son evolution'.

Madawi Al-Rasheed is Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at King's College, University of London. Her research focuses on history, society and politics in Saudi Arabia. Her books include *Politics in an Arabian Oasis* (1991), *Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London* (1998), *A History of Saudi Arabia* (2002) and *Counter Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen* (2003, ed.). She has recently conducted research in Oman focusing on transnational flows and Omani heritage.

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Introduction

Localizing the transnational and transnationalizing the local

Madawi Al-Rasheed

The oil boom of the 1970s was followed by an increase in academic interest in the Arab Gulf. The dependence of Europe, Asia and, to a lesser extent, the USA on the oil resources of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman (known as Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states) stimulated interest in these previously little-known countries. In the literature on the Gulf, questions relating to traditional political structures, internal stability, energy resources, processes of state formation and labour migration have dominated research agendas, ignoring a whole range of other topics. The inaccessibility of the Gulf, manifested in restrictions on field research, meant that most of the early literature was based on statistical analysis conducted outside the region and short fieldwork trips, under the sponsorship of local state-controlled research centres or the patronage of policy organizations based abroad.¹

In the 1990s, new research based on in-depth study of internal social and political developments began to appear, thanks to both the determination of researchers to capture grass-root dynamics and the loosening of controls in the Gulf itself.² Recent research has focused on urban development and ethnic diversity in Gulf cities; local debates on globalization; assertions of identity; citizenship and heritage; and the social and economic impact of migration in the Gulf.³ Gulf cities are increasingly drawn into the global economy as a result of their oil resources and the flux of labour migrants to the region. For a long time, the Gulf exported oil to the world and hosted multinational corporations, staffed by an expatriate international business elite. The oil boom was also associated with the recruitment of both skilled and unskilled labour. Expatriate labour, estimated to be over 70 per cent of the labour force in some GCC countries, was a feature of the Gulf population throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.⁴ In Dubai, for example, expatriates amount to more than 90 per cent of the population. As such, the Arab Gulf exhibits rather exceptional – some would say unique – features related to its demographic profile and labour force.⁵ The small size of the local population, combined with the low level of indigenous expertise, account for this uniqueness.

Today the Gulf is a hub of social, political and economic networks. New research is now capturing the ethnic diversity of the population, local politicized debates on this diversity and the region's economic connections with the outside world. While

historians trace the roots of these connections during the pre-oil period and highlight continuities and discontinuities in the region, social scientists focus on the contemporary manifestations of links with the outside world, dependence on foreign labour, and local cultural and political responses to such links. This volume is an attempt to combine an understanding of Gulf historical connections and an assessment of contemporary consequences of these connections.

More recently, a growing interest in Gulf-based religious networks began to surface in research agendas. Since the 1970s, the Arab Gulf in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, have used newly available economic resources – mainly oil revenues – to promote Islam, not only in the Muslim world but among Muslims in Asia, Africa, Europe and the USA. The Islamic obligation to perform the annual pilgrimage to Mecca remains one of the most obvious connections between Muslims all over the world and the sacred territory in Saudi Arabia.⁶ However, in the last few decades religious contact – ranging from the transfer of religious discourse to charitable funds and the building of religious institutions abroad – has been initiated in the Gulf, with Saudi Arabia playing a leading role, thanks to its oil wealth, which exceeds that of the smaller GCC states. These initiatives have reached out to Muslims as far as Detroit, London, Hong Kong and Jakarta. Some research, focusing on these issues, documents aspects of these religious contacts, drawing on the available published Gulf official statistical sources on funding overseas Muslim religious and educational institutions.⁷ Some of the chapters in this volume look beyond the funds underlying religious connections, examining both the rationale behind them and their impact on Muslim communities abroad, an approach facilitated by in-depth study of recipients of religious funding from the Gulf.

Theoretical debates on globalization and transnationalism

Research on the Arab Gulf is yet to contribute to the growing academic debate on globalization and transnationalism. Most existing literature on these two concepts draws on research conducted in the West (for example, among immigrants and diaspora societies and communities in third-world countries (Chinese, Korean and Indian). When Gulf studies are mentioned, it is usually in migration and demographic studies, which highlight dependence on foreign labour, legal and social restrictions on foreign workers, and local resistance to integrating expatriate communities in GCC countries. Some research identifies the importance of migration to the Gulf and its effect on the sending societies in Asia and the Arab world. Scholars have explored the impact of workers' remittances to their home countries, gender imbalance in the sending societies and the emergence of social and economic inequalities associated with migration to the Gulf.⁸ This research remains entangled in polemics relating to the transfer of human resources to the Gulf, workers' legal status and the future of labour migration in the region.

The fact that most Gulf states consider dependence on foreign labour as an unavoidable transitional phase, to be tolerated until the maturation of the local

labour force, prevents a balanced assessment of Gulf connections with the outside world.⁹ Local public discourse, now a regular feature of political speech, media coverage and indigenous research in the Gulf region, centres on the 'dangers of *al-awlamah* (globalization)', the 'loss of authenticity', and the 'creolization of local Arab culture', believed to be a consequence of dependence on foreign workers and increasing contact with the outside world.¹⁰ It is obvious that this debate reflects anxiety over local identity, increasingly defined as Arab.¹¹ This is a function of the consolidation of recently created nation-states in a region where tribal identities, kinship relations and sectarian affiliation remain basic organizational principles underlying membership in the community, entitlement and responsibilities.

Such local assertions are identified in anthropological literature as local manifestations of the 'pursuit of certainty' or 'nostalgic resistance to globalization'.¹² Others consider them a return to parochialism – itself a response to increasing cosmopolitanism and globalization – in societies where primordial identities, kinship relations, world-views and systems of knowledge are threatened by new communication technology, international commercial interests, global media and the rapid movement of ideas and people across national boundaries. Local Gulf discourse continues to portray globalization as a one-way process, describing it as both an onslaught on local tradition and an economic threat, leading to the transfer of wealth from the Gulf to the outside world.¹³ In the Gulf, behind the façade of the latest technology, the ultra-modern shopping malls, the mushrooming internet cafes and multinational fast-food chains, one encounters strong assertions of tradition rather than celebrations of hybridity and cosmopolitanism.¹⁴ Gulf states regularly pass legislation defining the differences between 'nationals' (*muwatin*) and 'expatriates'. Debate tends to be heated, especially in discussions of the role of foreign domestic workers, who are placed at the heart of Gulf society, the family.¹⁵ On the surface, categories defining social boundaries seem too rigid to account for the historical and contemporary manifestations of Gulf cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, on the one hand, and ancient economic connections with the outside world, on the other.

In the pre-oil era, the integration of so-called 'foreign communities' (for example, African slaves, Indian and Persian merchants, Zanzibaris, Baluchis, Yemenis, Hadhramis, Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese Arabs and South Asians) in the economic and religious domains was remarkable, though it has not yet been fully researched.¹⁶ Distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' have assumed greater significance with the discovery of oil and the consolidation of welfare states eager to distribute lavish benefits to those who are defined as nationals, in return for loyalty.¹⁷

While empirical research in the Gulf itself is yet to inspire academic theorizing on processes of globalization and transnationalism, the region harbours an anti-globalization discourse similar to that adopted by certain groups and movements in the West, South America, Africa and Asia. That local public Gulf debates have now identified connections with the outside world as a threatening process is a function of both the magnitude and rapidity of social and economic change in

the region. Nation building did not take place over a long historical period;¹⁸ it was only in the second half of the twentieth century – and in some countries only in the last thirty years – that political institutions, education, economic infrastructures and definitions of local heritage began to emerge in the Gulf. In the twentieth century the territorial boundaries of Gulf states reflected British interests rather than local traditions and histories in an area characterized by fluid territorial claims and shifting alliances. Today Gulf states strive to distinguish themselves not only from each other but also from a wider Arab region.

In 1981, six states came together to form a regional umbrella organization, the Gulf Cooperation Council, motivated by a perceived threat from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iran–Iraq War.¹⁹ While the prime focus of the GCC was security in the Gulf, its activities encompassed cultural, political, social and economic cooperation. Member states propagate *al-hawiyah al-khalijiyyah* (Gulf identity) as a common ‘unifying bond’, while at the same time each country within the GCC strives to consolidate a unique tradition and national culture. Not surprisingly, the newly created GCC states have had many border disputes among themselves in the last fifty years, reflecting not only the arbitrary nature of territorial claims but also the fuzziness of social and cultural boundaries between them.²⁰

Today there is a sense of urgency behind local attempts to consolidate political structures, inculcate tradition, forge a common identity, and define the physical and social boundaries of the newly created states. This is accompanied by an equally rapid incorporation in the world economy, brought about by the oil industry.

The study of Gulf connections, the subject of this volume, requires a dialogue with scholarly work in global and transnational studies,²¹ described as a highly fragmented emergent field, still lacking both a well-defined theoretical framework and analytical rigour.²² Given this fragmentation, some argue that the field of transnational studies runs the risk of becoming an empty vessel.²³ Moreover, scholars are in disagreement over whether global or transnational processes are old or new. It is clear, however, that connections between people, regions and world economies are well documented, albeit with different terminology – for example, network analysis, world systems and social and economic history.²⁴ What distinguishes contemporary manifestations of connectedness is the increasing speed, intensity and time–space compression brought about by post-modernity.²⁵ The originality of the new phenomena is the ‘high intensity of the exchanges, the new modes of transacting, and the multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts on a sustained basis’.²⁶

While the study of contemporary connections invokes terms such as globalization and transnationalism, both remain polemical and fuzzy concepts. Eriksen uses the term ‘transnational flows’ because ‘whether it is ideas or substances that flow, or both, they have origins and destinations, and flows are instigated by people’.²⁷ The earlier concept of globalization is, however, understood to refer to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. Robertson argues that globalization cannot be adequately defined as ‘simply the compression (or implosion) of the world as a whole into

singular entity'.²⁸ At the other end of the spectrum, it is thought of 'as a crisis of identity, a post modern blurring of boundaries, fragmentation, and decentredness which undermines the integrity and unity of the nation state'.²⁹ Paradoxically, globalization in the Gulf region has not produced homogeneity so much as familiarization with greater diversity and the extensive range of local cultures.

By invoking 'crisis of identities' and 'intensification of consciousness', globalization (in its economic, political, cultural and social manifestations) is linked to a state of mind, a kind of awareness difficult to measure. In some instances, such definitions tend to state the obvious: that we now live in a world of regular movement, intense exposure to the other and rapid communication to the extent that it has 'become a cliché that we live in one world'.³⁰

The empirical studies in this volume point to assertions rather than crises of identity in the Arab Gulf. Could these assertions be signs of an identity crisis, responses to increased connections with the outside world, as a result of which people retreat into primordial ties and essentialist definitions of the self? It is difficult to invoke a cause-and-effect argument here. Rather, highlighting historical precedents and contemporary responses and outcomes of the phenomenon will capture the complexity and diversity of responses to what we now call globalization. In this volume, the historicization of global process offers an insight into the phenomenon. Furthermore, if globalization is to be defined as a one-way process, the momentum for which lies in one geographical region (Europe or the USA), a global centre, a cosmopolitan city, the headquarter of multinational conglomerate, then Gulf realities represent a challenge to the received wisdom.³¹ To move away from the focus on 'identity' and consciousness, both of which are ambiguous sociological concepts, Robertson identifies four major components underlying modern globalization: 'national societies, individuals, the system of international relations, and humankind'.³² Such focus links so-called global actors to concrete social and international structures.

A second, more popular, term now is transnationalism, often used interchangeably with globalization. While globalization is a process from above, the concept of transnationalism embodies activities and process from below. As such, transnationalism has become 'something to celebrate, as an expression of subversive popular resistance "from below"'.³³ It is argued that three conditions are necessary to justify the use of this new concept: 'first, a significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe, second, their activities are not fleeting or exceptional, but possess certain stability and resilience over time and third, the content of these activities is not captured by some pre-existing concept'.³⁴ The processes described in this volume expand the field by offering examples of transnational activities that do not necessarily encompass these three conditions, yet they represent a kind of transnationalism which is a reflection of the historical and contemporary political, economic and social structures of Gulf societies.

Hannerz argues that the term transnationalism

is in a way more humble, and often a more adequate label for phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distinction, even when they do share

the characteristics of being contained within a state. In the transnational arena, the actors may now be individuals, groups, movements, business enterprises, and in no small part it is this diversity of organisation that we need to consider.³⁵

Transnationalism assumes that ordinary people engage in conscious and successful efforts to escape control and domination 'from above' by capital and the state.³⁶ This begs the question whether transnationalism is a form of resistance to the expansion of capital and structures of encapsulation generated by this expansion.

The Gulf material throws light on this question. The Gulf region has ancient connections with Africa and Asia.³⁷ The people of central Arabia and the ports of the Gulf from Kuwait to Muscat travelled to the east coast of Africa, India and the Far East as merchants and religious scholars.³⁸ At the same time traders from these territories established merchant houses in Gulf ports, which came under British influence in the nineteenth century.³⁹ Dates, pearls and horses were exported from Arabia to Bombay.⁴⁰ They appeared in markets as far away as London and New York. At the same time, the slave trade and the flourishing slave markets of Mecca, Muscat and central Arabia, which in some Gulf countries continued unofficially until early twentieth century,⁴¹ demonstrate the magnitude of Gulf connections and the commercial activities of its population.

These connections have also led to Gulf societies themselves consisting of diasporas seeking economic opportunities. Historically, economic connections (especially on the Gulf coast) and religious connections (especially in Mecca) led to the establishment of overseas diasporas in the Arabian Peninsula which reached a climax with the discovery of oil and the need for international labour. Today some of those defined as citizens in GCC countries include Indians, Persians, Baluchis, Zanzibaris, Yemenis, Javanese and Hadhramis, whose connections with the Gulf pre-date the oil boom of the 1970s.⁴² Such groups have been ignored in early research on the Gulf, but in recent times their histories and experiences in the Gulf have begun to attract academic attention.⁴³ The geographical location of the Gulf between the Indian subcontinent, Africa and Europe predisposed it to become a transit station for larger commercial flows in recent times.

After the 1970s oil boom, as Gulf states and actors systematically entered the global field, they operated within well-established political and international structures. With a very limited number of exceptional cases, Gulf economic transnationalism functioned under the patronage of the state.⁴⁴ The actors involved promoted localized economic interests. Dubai emerged as an international trading centre under the patronage of an indigenous political leadership and commercial elite, consisting of local Arab, Indian and Persian merchant families.⁴⁵ Only in the last decade have we seen the beginning of a process whereby local 'independent actors', for example, a growing entrepreneurial elite, is promoting commercial interests without direct state control, but with sanction from 'above'. GCC economies are still centralized and most sectors remain under state control. In such an environment, the state controls the distribution of franchises

and licences to import labour and commodities. It is difficult for independent actors to penetrate Gulf economies without strong connections with local government bureaucracies and important gatekeepers, often members of the political elite.

Systematic transnational connections were promoted in the religious domain. Gulf states encouraged religious transnationalism, including the transfer of funds and religious knowledge to distant Muslim communities. For example, GCC states engaged in religious transnationalism among Muslim minorities in the West, in response to local attempts to establish political legitimacy inside GCC countries and abroad. The unanticipated consequences of this kind of religious transnationalism have become controversial after the events of 11 September 2001, when Western policy makers and media specialists exposed links between religious transnationalism initiated in the Gulf, the Afghanistan-based al-Qaeda and terrorism.⁴⁶ These connections led to the intensification of religious debate among the recipients of Gulf religious transnationalism, and the emergence of counter-narratives, which challenge Gulf political discourse. The Gulf case demonstrates that it is not the agencies of transnationalism – both Gulf states and actors – who are predisposed to engage in ‘counter-narratives’, but the historicized recipients. The latter challenge Gulf political discourses and religious interpretations. Another factor complicates the scene, namely the proliferation of Gulf-based Islamic charities and grass-root religious activism, which in recent times has been difficult to control in the Gulf itself. While some Gulf Islamic charities appear to be independent of state control, the majority operate with strong support from important members of the ruling and commercial elite.⁴⁷

Today Gulf economic, cultural and religious transnationalism is a process heavily dependent on the mediation of other ‘hybrids’ and ‘Creoles’, both considered important actors in transnational flows. These are often members of the Muslim and Arab diasporas in distant locations. These findings, developed by some of the contributors to this volume, point to the fact that at present Gulf transnationalism is not necessarily dependent on Gulf diasporas, which do not exist in substantial numbers.⁴⁸ With the exception of the business elite, students, holidaymakers, a limited number of dissidents and political activists and other transit sojourners, citizens of the Gulf do not form immigrant communities outside the region.⁴⁹ However, economic resources, combined with advanced communication technologies, allow a new kind of transnationalism, which legitimizes state narratives while triggering off oppositional discourse among those it is meant to co-opt.

Localizing the transnational

Gulf societies have absorbed outside networks, agencies and traditions within their local historical, economic, political, cultural and social settings. Contributions by Frederick Anscombe (chapter 1), Nelida Fuccaro (chapter 2) and James Onley (chapter 3) are attempts to historicize transnationalism within the Gulf itself. Anscombe questions the applicability of the concept of transnationalism as

a useful tool to understand nineteenth-century eastern Arabia (Hasa), a region incorporated within the Ottoman empire in the 1870s. He invokes the concept of an anational society to analyse how 'transnational' networks, brought about by Ottoman imperial expansion, led to an ethnic and religious diversity in this area. Imperial encroachment was associated with increasing commercial penetration by outside forces. This case study highlights the interconnections between officialdom, trade and travel. Ottoman governors, themselves belonging to a cosmopolitan imperial elite, played an important role as representatives whose activities led to the consolidation of an ethnically and religiously diverse society in Hasa.

Fuccaro discusses the meaning of transnational community in Bahrain, where in recent times Persian migrants have downplayed their roots in the pursuit of social and economic integration. Fuccaro highlights a novel dimension in the analysis of transnationalism, namely the processes of negotiation and contestation over urban space. Flows of people and commodities converge to contribute to the development of a multicultural society responding to local sources of authority and social legitimization. Such processes have resulted in the emergence of discourses that do not celebrate 'hybridity', but insist on uniformity and homogeneity under the influence of a nation-state eager to promote national consensus by overlooking external influences and internal ethnic and religious divisions. Under changing socio-political circumstances, people invent new categories of hybridity.

Fuccaro's conclusions are confirmed by Onley's study of the Persianized Arab Safar merchant family, whose transnational connections spread across frontiers – reaching Hillah, Basrah, Bushehr, Manamah, Muscat, Mocha, Hudaydah, Bombay and Manchester. Drawing on their educational and cosmopolitan background, members of this merchant family served the British government as political agents and assistants. As vulnerable merchants in the Gulf, people took up such jobs in return for protection. Their transnational connections were of great value to the British government. However, contemporary descendants downplay their transnational connections. In the Gulf context, genealogy remains a charter for identity and belonging, but is also subject to reinvention and manipulation. Successful merchant families whose genealogy lies elsewhere respond to local cultural traditions, which celebrate Arab descent as a vehicle for citizenship, by localizing their transnational connections.

In this volume historians point to the processes whereby localizing the transnational becomes a strategy, a response to Gulf political and social contexts. Transnational communities in Bahrain do not engage in the celebration of their 'hybrid identities', which by definition undermines their integration. A historical approach allows us to appreciate the changing local responses of people with transnational links.

The case of Indonesians in Saudi Arabia (chapter 6, by Mathias Diederich) illustrates the point. Indonesian religious scholars residing in Mecca for generations gave themselves Arabic-sounding names to mask their 'foreignness', which resulted in their contributions to religious scholarship remaining unrecognized. Islamic transnationalism, which brought religious scholars to the holy city of

Mecca, itself a hub of connections, had to be localized in response to an indigenous system of signs which privileged local Arab culture, language and tradition. In the contemporary period, Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia face locally produced suspicion and discrimination against the background of state rhetoric which celebrates Islamic unity. The experience of Indonesian immigrants is entangled with structures of power both at home and in the host society and socio-economic conditions, which reproduce vulnerability and marginality in both Indonesia and in Saudi Arabia.

Roland Marchal (chapter 4) examines the concept of the 'global city' and its usefulness in analysing the transnational connections of Dubai, which is increasingly showing common characteristics with other successful city-states, for example Singapore. Dubai's commercial success is especially dependent on two factors: first, the rapid appropriation of new information and communication technologies; and second, the incorporation of diverse diaspora communities in the city. Unlike Bahrain, Dubai's political elite capitalizes on these two factors to promote the city as an international free-trading zone, connecting Western, Asian, African and Arab economies. Here Dubai's prosperity is not linked to the homogeneity of a business class, but to the diversity of the actors who engage in commercial activities. Localizing the transnational is a strategy adopted by the political elite to enhance the city's commercial success, and promote further its role in both regional and international settings.

Transnationalizing the local

To understand the complexity of Gulf transnationalism beyond the Gulf itself, the volume demonstrates processes whereby local traditions within specific Gulf historical contexts are exported to the outside world. Locally produced traditions undergo a transformation as they travel to other destinations. Sometimes it is difficult to argue that these traditions are anchored in a specific locality, as many of these are themselves products of interpretations and diverse influences. The historical contributions in this volume demonstrate that invoking the 'local' in the Gulf is itself a problematic concept. Gaëlle Le Pottier (chapter 5) examines transnational media exchanges between the Gulf and Lebanon, a country whose nationals have played a major role not only as immigrants in the Gulf but also as mediators of Gulf economic interests abroad. Lebanese-based media industries (satellite television, advertising agencies and music and visual productions) are mostly financed by Gulf capital, but such industries continue to be geared to the tastes and demands of the Gulf consumer audience. The Gulf-financed media industry creates 'regional markets' for the consumption of Gulf culture, produced by non-Gulf actors. The increasing availability of Arab *fadaiyyat* (satellite television channels) worldwide and the growing Gulf capital involved is more likely to transnationalize local cultural products, values and norms beyond the Gulf, a region which has so far been associated only with the export of a highly valued commodity, oil. Local Gulf culture is now a second commodity, entering the transnational field. Its transmission is financed locally, but its scope is now

reaching communities in the Arab world and in the West, where Arab and Muslim diasporas remain eager to maintain links with a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic culture.

In the last decade, systematic religious connections entered the transnational field, represented in the activities of Gulf states which aim to enhance credibility and legitimacy not only locally but also internationally. Madawi Al-Rasheed (chapter 7) considers the consequences of transnationalizing Saudi local religious tradition in the pursuit of legitimacy. Examining Saudi religious outreach programmes in London, Al-Rasheed highlights the dependence of such links on the mediating role of both Arab and Muslim diasporas. Funding religious institutions and knowledge abroad generates intense debates, which not only challenge Saudi religious interpretations but also question Saudi political decisions and foreign policy on important issues. Here transnationalizing the local leads to unanticipated responses, which are themselves a product of the new locality's social, political and economic conditions. Al-Rasheed concludes that juxtaposing the local on the transnational is a complex process not subject to the logic of a monolithic interpretation, but is a function of the interaction of several factors.

Jonathan Birt (chapter 8) follows this line of analysis in his ethnography of British Asian Muslims, who maintain close connections with Saudi Arabia through religious educational programmes and the transfer of funds from both the state and Saudi charitable organizations. Through an analysis of the neo-Salafi movement in Birmingham and London, Birt argues that the Gulf War of 1990–1, itself an international event, led to schisms within the movement. Divisions between those who support Saudi Arabia and those who oppose its policies, regarded by many British Muslims as detrimental to Muslim interests, have increased over the last decade. An outcome of the Gulf War in 1991 was the politicization of theological debates and the increasing blurring of boundaries between religion and politics. Both Al-Rasheed and Birt highlight that transnationalizing the local, i.e. propagating Saudi religious interpretations overseas, can now threaten the status quo in Saudi Arabia and undermine the country's credibility in the West, especially in the post-11 September period, and among diaspora Muslims.

Three conclusions are drawn from the contributions to this volume. First, increased transnationalism within the Gulf leads in some instances to asserting the authority of the state (Bahrain and Saudi Arabia). In specific contexts, there is a retreat from the 'threat of cultural disorder' into the security of localized identities, and homogenized national culture, heritage and tradition. At the same time, there are instances of transnational connections used to promote commercial and entrepreneurial activities, benefiting a wide circle of the local political and economic elite. Second, there are unanticipated consequences of transnational movements. The latter are anchored in local contexts, but as they flow beyond these contexts they tend to develop their own momentum. As such they escape the control of those initially engaged in their promotion. At worst, such forays into the wider world can turn into embarrassment, leading to international crises, which threaten to destabilize foreign policy, inter-state alliances and

contemporary international relations. In addition, such phenomena can either undermine internal stability in a particular country (Saudi Arabia) or create new grounds for legitimacy and new opportunities for economic and social development (Dubai). Third, although terms such as 'local', 'global' and 'transnational' are used throughout this volume, I hope that the text attests to the complexity of the meanings behind them, the multiplicity of definitions given to them by local actors and academics, and the difficulties involved in delineating them as clear-cut categories.

The study of Gulf networks can sharpen the emerging theoretical literature on globalization and transnationalism. The above conclusions point to the importance of the historical moment in which both globalization and transnationalism take place and the uniqueness of the sites we call 'local' and 'global' in our search for fixed terminology with which to grasp fluid processes. A monolithic model grounded in current polemics between those who generalize global economic patterns to account for other aspects of these interconnections – for example, the flow of social, religious, and political trends – and those who question their rationale does not fully encompass variations in scope, magnitude and consequences of the phenomenon. Moreover, if globalization is a top-down phenomenon and transnationalism is bottom-up, the Gulf material helps to revise a dichotomy, which is perhaps grounded only in geography. Those who prematurely celebrate the end of the nation-state in an age of increasing global connectedness will be disappointed, because most connections are still not free-floating. They take place within established structures – for example, state bureaucracy, legislation, power relations and socio-economic hierarchies not easily dismantled or resisted. In fact, such structures themselves can promote global and transnational connections, while at the same time prohibiting their full realization.

Methodology

It is increasingly common practice in ethnographic research to locate data in different sites, especially on the part of scholars of transnationalism, globalization and other related fields (e.g. the study of immigrants and diasporas). Travelling cultures require travelling researchers, according to Clifford. The 'multi-sited ethnography' is now celebrated as a genre in early twenty-first-century ethnography.⁵⁰ Limited time and research funds may slow the process whereby such an endeavour becomes a methodological requirement. Some researchers capitalize on new information and communication technologies to overcome practical problems, including access, time, and coming to terms with understanding more than one location. Fortunately, teamwork within a large research project allows several academics to address a common theme in different localities. The conference on which this volume is based brought a wider circle of academics to share their findings. The common thread was the flows and connections within the Gulf and beyond. This volume has allowed project participants to share their findings with a wider circle of academics, working on similar topics in the United Kingdom, Asia and Africa. The common thread is flows and connections within the Gulf and beyond.

This volume is an attempt to overcome the difficulties of in-depth study in several locations. The contributors have conducted their research either in the Gulf or in settings in which Gulf transnationalism manifests itself. Only a few have been able to move between the Gulf and other sites for the purpose of ethnography. Bringing their contributions together in one volume allows an understanding of the movement of economic, cultural, political and religious networks, without the actual burden of dislocation, both physically and intellectually. Furthermore, this volume results from an interdisciplinary dialogue not only among Gulf specialists (anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists) but also between scholars working in different times (historians) and spaces (Lebanon, London, Birmingham, Indonesia).

While not all GCC countries are represented here, I hope that this volume stimulates further research and cooperation among scholars working in a region that still assumes international significance because of its oil wealth and location at a crossroads between Asia, Africa and Europe. Today the image of the Gulf as an oil-producing region does not fully capture the rapid transformations within this locality. Equally, its image as an exporter of radical theology fails to capture the complexity of transnational exchanges within and beyond the Gulf. In addition to oil, which is still a valuable commodity, the Gulf is an exporter of capital, culture and religion. As these travel to distant locations, they are transformed in ways not intended by those who initiated the process. At the same time, the region remains an importer of immigrants, the latest technology, economic skills, and ideas whose roots are no longer possible to locate.

Notes

- 1 G. Okruhlik, 'Bringing the Peninsula in from the Periphery: From Imagined Scholarship to Gendered Discourse', *Middle East Report* 27/3 (1997): 36–7; J. Peterson, 'The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey', *American Historical Review* 96/5 (1991): 1435–49.
- 2 The oil embargo of 1973, the Iran–Iraq War of 1980–8, the Gulf War of 1990–1 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 exposed the region to outside scrutiny. Academic research on the Gulf followed international interest in this lesser-known part of the Arab world. See M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 3 Since the early 1990s, scholars have been asking whether Gulf cities are truly Arab, reflecting the region's ethnic diversity. See G. Beauge and F. Buttner (eds), *Les migrations dans le monde arabe* (Paris: CNRS, 1991). Others focus on the diversity of the indigenous population (N. Fuccaro, 'Visions of the City: Urban Studies on the Gulf', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 35/2 (2001): 175–87; R. Marchal, *Dubai: cité globale* (Paris: CNRS, 2001); M. Al-Rasheed, 'Transnational Connections and National Identity: Zanzibari Omanis in Muscat', paper presented at a conference on Connections and Identities: Understandings of the Arab Gulf, Oxford, September 2001) and debates relating to citizenship (P. Dresch, 'Debates on Marriage and Nationality in the United Arab Emirates', paper presented at a conference on Connections and Identities: Understandings of the Arab Gulf, Oxford, September 2001; A. Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder: Westview, 1997)).

- 4 A. Kapiszewski, *Nationals and Expatriates: Population and Labour Dilemmas of the Gulf Cooperation Council States* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2001); P. Fargues, *Généralisations arabes: l'alchimie du nombre* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); O. Winckler, 'Syrian Migration to the Arab Oil-Producing Countries', *Middle Eastern Studies* 33/1 (1997): 107–18; O. Winckler, 'The Challenge of Foreign Workers in the Persian/Arabian Gulf: The Case of Oman', *Immigrants and Minorities* 19/2 (2000): 23–52; O. Winckler, 'The Diminishing of the Gulf Rentier System? The Challenge of GCC Labour Policies in the late 1990s', paper presented at a conference on Gulf Connections, Oxford, September 2002; J. Birks, I. Seccombe and C. Sinclair, 'Labour Migration in the Arab Gulf States: Patterns, Trends and Prospects', *International Migration* 26/3 (1988): 267–86.
- 5 Migration patterns in the Gulf are compared to those in Israel, Canada and Australia. See Winckler, 'The Gulf Rentier System?.'
- 6 J. Piscatori, 'Managing God's Guests: The Pilgrimage and the Politics of Saudi Legitimacy', paper presented at a conference on Connections and Identities: Understandings of the Arab Gulf, Oxford, September 2001.
- 7 Saudi Arabia in particular documents its aid to Muslim countries, which is part of its legitimacy narratives. See Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*.
- 8 See F. Eelens, T. Schampers and J. Speckmann (eds), *Labour Migration to the Middle East: From Sri Lanka to the Gulf* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1992); and K. Zachariah, E. Mathew and S. Rajan, 'Social, Economic and Demographic Consequences of Migration on Kerala', *International Migration* 39/2 (2001): 43–71.
- 9 The indigenization of the labour force, known as Saudization, Omanization etc., is part of all GCC states' development plans. See Winckler, 'The Challenge of Foreign Workers'.
- 10 M. al-Mutawa, 'UAE Newspapers and the Issue of Cultural Globalisation', paper presented at a conference on Connections and Identities: Understandings of the Arab Gulf, Oxford, September 2001; P. Ouis, 'Islamization as a Strategy for Reconciliation between Modernity and Tradition: Examples from Contemporary Arab Gulf States', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13/3 (2002): 315–34. See also D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (London: Hurst & Co., 2003), pp. 268–78.
- 11 This is manifested in the increasing number of publications on Gulf folklore, bedouin heritage and tribal culture. More recently, tribal festivals – for example, the *janadiriyyah* event in Saudi Arabia – celebrate Arab bedouin heritage, manifested in bedouin poetry and material culture.
- 12 W. James, *The Pursuit of Certainty: Religion and Cultural Formulations* (London: Routledge, 1995); and R. Robertson, 'After Nostalgia? Wilful Nostalgia and the Phases of Globalisation', in B. Turner (ed.), *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 45–61 at p. 57.
- 13 In recent years, the transfer of migrant remittances outside the Gulf is increasingly defined as problematic by Gulf states. Saudi Arabia tried to tax foreign workers, but its attempt was met with resistance, especially by the Western expatriate elite working in the country. See Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p. 150.
- 14 Among other things, this is manifested in the uniformity of dress in the Gulf (M. Yamani, 'Evading the Habits of a Life Time: The Adaptation of Hijazi Dress to the New Social Order', in N. Lindisfarne-Tapper and B. Ingham (eds), *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (London: Curzon, 1997), pp. 55–66) and attempts to define heritage (S. Khalaf, 'Globalization and Heritage Revival in the Gulf: An Anthropological Look at Dubai Heritage Village', paper presented at a conference on Globalization and the Gulf, Exeter, July 2001).
- 15 The Qatar-based Al Jazeera television channel discussed foreign domestic workers in a daring programme (*The Opposing Views*, 5 September 2001). It was clear from the heated debate that there were two opposing views: those who accepted domestic

- workers and those who regarded them as a threat to the socialization of children and the values of the ideal Arab family.
- 16 N. Fuccaro, 'Understanding the Urban History of Bahrain', *Critique* 17 (2000): 49–81.
 - 17 The welfare state in the Gulf is discussed with reference to the rentier state model. See F. G. Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994).
 - 18 The modern state of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, Qatar and the UAE were created in 1970. Modern unified Oman dates to Sultan Qabus's coup in 1970.
 - 19 Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p. 155.
 - 20 There have been regular border disputes between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman and Saudi Arabia and the UAE; not to mention disputes with non-GCC states, such as Yemen, Iran and Iraq.
 - 21 For a review of the literature on globalization and transnationalism, see S. Vertovec, 'Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22/2 (1999): 447–62; and M. Kearney, 'The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 547–65.
 - 22 A. Portes, L. Guarnizo and P. Landolt, 'The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22/2 (1999): 217–37, at p. 218.
 - 23 L. Guarnizo and M. Smith, 'The Locations of Transnationalism', in M. Smith and L. Guarnizo (eds), *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), pp. 3–34, at p. 3.
 - 24 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); E. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).
 - 25 D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).
 - 26 Portes *et al.*, 'The Study of Transnationalism', p. 219.
 - 27 T. H. Eriksen, 'Introduction', in T. H. Eriksen (ed.), *Globalisation: Studies in Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), pp. 1–17, at p. 4.
 - 28 Robertson, 'After Nostalgia?', p. 50.
 - 29 M. Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalisation, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 12.
 - 30 M. Featherstone, 'Global and Local Cultures', in J. Bird *et al.* (eds), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 169–87 at p. 169.
 - 31 Both Islamists and nationalists in the Gulf contribute to the debate on globalization. For opposition to globalization, see *al-Sharq al-awsat*, 4 April 2002. Interview with Dr Abdullah al-Turki, Director of Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami (Organization of the Islamic Conference). For a critical but informed opinion on globalization, see H. al-Turki, *al-Thaqafah al-arabiyyah fi asr al-awlamah* (London: Saqi Books, 1999).
 - 32 Robertson, 'After Nostalgia?', p. 57.
 - 33 See M. McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
 - 34 Portes *et al.*, 'The Study of Transnationalism', p. 219.
 - 35 U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 6.
 - 36 Guarnizo and Smith, 'The Locations of Transnationalism', p. 5.
 - 37 U. Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); D. Lombard and J. Aubin (eds), *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); C. Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947, Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
 - 38 See G. Steinberg, 'A Trade Diaspora in Arabia: The Merchants of Unaiza (Qasim), 1850–1950', paper presented at a conference on Gulf Connections, Oxford, September 2002, on contact between central Arabia and India.

- 39 See H. Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) for connections between the Gulf coast and India.
- 40 See J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Government Print House, 1908) on Indian (Hindu, Khojah and Muslim) merchant houses in eastern Arabia.
- 41 See A. Hutson, 'Enslavement and Manumission in Saudi Arabia, 1926–38', *Critique* 11/1 (2002): 49–70 on the slave trade in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s.
- 42 In Saudi Arabia in the 1920s several Arab notables played an important role as state functionaries. They were given Saudi nationality. See Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p. 87. Similarly, in Oman, Hindu merchant families controlled revenues from the port of Muscat for the sultan. See C. Allen, 'The Indian Merchant Communities of Masqat', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 4/1 (1981): 39–53. Both Qatar and the UAE depend on Baluchi, Hadhrami and Zanzibari communities for their armies and police forces. From the 1970s, it became difficult for such groups to acquire nationality and citizenship rights in the majority of Gulf states.
- 43 Al-Rasheed, 'Transnational Connections and National Identity'; F. Barth, *Sohar: Culture and Society in an Omani Town* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1983); Allen, 'Indian Merchant Communities'; Steinberg, 'A Trade Diaspora in Arabia'; Fuccaro, 'Urban History of Bahrain'.
- 44 Saudi al-Walid ibn Talal created an international global business as an independent actor, but he continues to operate under state sanction. See I. Awn, *Qisati ma natih al-sahab al-Walid bin Talal* (London: al-Rafid, 2000). Another exception is Osama bin Laden, whose genealogy is rooted in Yemen, but was well integrated in Saudi Arabia. See M. Al-Rasheed, 'Deux prédécesseurs de Ben laden', *Critique Internationale* 17 (2002): 35–43.
- 45 See F. al-Sayegh, 'Merchants' Role in a Changing Society', *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (1986): 87–102 for the role of merchants in the UAE.
- 46 See Centre for Defence Information: <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/saudi-pr.cfm>.
- 47 A. Ghandour, *Jihad humanitaire. Enquête sur les ONG islamiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), p. 248.
- 48 C. Salamandra, 'Gulf Transnationalism and Arab London', unpublished report, ESRC project on Connection and Imagery: Transnational Culture Flows and the Arab Gulf, 2001.
- 49 Since the 1980s, London has hosted a small number of Gulf exiles, for example Bahraini and Saudi Shi'a, supporters of the imamate in Oman and recently Saudi Sunni Islamists. British statistics on Gulf exiles demonstrate that only a handful of political activists asked for political asylum in the UK over the last decade. Notwithstanding their small numbers, Gulf exiles resort to advanced communication technology (for example, the internet and satellite television) to reach a wide audience at home and abroad.
- 50 J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 19. See also U. Hannerz, 'Several Sites in One', in Eriksen (ed.), *Globalisation*, pp. 18–36.

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Part I

Historical reflections on Gulf transnationalism

1 **An anational society**

Eastern Arabia in the Ottoman period

Frederick F. Anscombe

To label eastern Arabian society of the late nineteenth century as ‘transnational’ would be rather misleading, because the term implies the existence of ‘national’ sentiments and barriers which must be overcome. If any such identities and limits existed in that place and time, they were neither widespread nor deeply rooted. As is the case with any population, the residents of Hasa, Qatar and Kuwait carried an array of identities, but ties of blood, religion, economic pursuit and locality generally came far above nationality (whether Arab, Saudi, or anything similar) in the hierarchy of allegiances. This was, thus, an anational society.

It is difficult to imagine such a society in the contemporary world, so dominant has the ideal of the ‘nation’ become in the global political system. Yet it is easy to ignore today the degree to which full membership in the ‘imagined community’¹ of any nation depends upon learned behaviour. No genetic code impels anyone to believe that his well-being depends upon that of a specific, large group of people, the vast majority of whom will never meet each other, and who in most cases supposedly share a history or descent of which none can claim any personal experience. The propagation of such an odd belief demands the extension of literacy and common access to schooling according to a standard curriculum, among other things, in order to persuade the initiates to discover and adopt the principles of the community. These are basic tools needed to spread, in effect, nation-building propaganda. To some degree regular lectures by a critical mass of preachers can be an effective substitute means of incorporating people into the imagined group, as happened most notably in the pre-national age in keeping alive for centuries the idea of the community of believers in the three great monotheistic faiths.

Eastern Arabia in the late Ottoman period was a land of the latter type of imagined, or imaginable, communities. With exposure to the new creed of nationalism and to the mechanisms of its propagation severely limited, religious faith held firmly to its venerable place in the overall hierarchy of identities among the population. That the anti-nationalist Ottoman empire itself had not become a truly secular state, in spite of decades of modernization schemes, only reinforced this aspect of Arabian society.² The strongest elements of identity in eastern Arabia, however, were naturally those that came from each person’s daily experiences: blood ties of clan and tribe, defined through the well-developed,

arcane lore of genealogy; bonds of social, economic or political patronage; economic activity, based upon commercial partnerships and the quasi-guild structure of trades; and locale, be it a village, a quarter in Hufuf or a port town such as Qatif. Among these various bases of identity there was little need or room for the national – and hence no place for transnationalism.

While it would be preferable to avoid use of the term ‘transnational’ on these specific grounds, such a choice should not suggest that Arabian society was thoroughly atomized, insular or insulated. Under the Ottoman flag, the population of eastern Arabia increased in religious and ethnic diversity, as imperial rule brought both officials and fortune-seekers from afar. Such diversity was indeed practically inevitable in any territory incorporated directly into the Ottoman system, which had survived for six centuries by applying to imperial interests resources offered by each segment of its extraordinarily varied population. Since those interests in eastern Arabia were relatively limited (maintaining peace in the province, raising revenues and preventing the extension of European, Iranian and Wahhabi influence), the Ottoman administration permitted free movement within the bounds of the empire and generally allowed the inhabitants of Arabia to maintain their strong ties with lands and peoples throughout the region – lands and peoples which have since been transformed into foreign states and nations.³ Trade, in particular, bound eastern Arabia to Iraq, Iran, Bahrain, Oman, the Red Sea, East Africa, Baluchistan and India, as well as to Najd in the Arabian interior. Growing Ottoman concerns about security threats eventually led the government to play a more intrusive role in trade, however, and towards the end of the Ottoman period in Arabia, the population faced growing difficulties in maintaining their meaningful links to other lands. These old ties would then be hard pressed to survive intact the growing global dominance of the nation-state system after the First World War.

Sketches of society

Ottoman records in Istanbul provide the most detailed information available about many facets of eastern Arabian history in the pre-First World War period, but the documents nevertheless rarely give more than occasional hints about the minutiae of daily life in ordinary society (although references to trade matters are a little less uncommon). This is hardly surprising, because issues of parochial importance were naturally addressed at the local level. The routine records kept by the administrators of the *sancak* (sub-province) of Necd⁴ (which comprised Hasa and Qatar) unfortunately have not survived or are not readily accessible. This paucity of documentation gives those few sources that are available an extraordinary value. The examination of Arabian society presented here draws heavily upon an unusual, bulky dossier preserved in the Istanbul archives.⁵ This file details charges of official misconduct levelled by the military commander of Necd, Abdülhamid Bey, against the *mutasarrıf* (*sancak* governor), Said Pasha, around 1900.

Said Pasha had twice served as *mutasarrıf* of Necd before this unfortunate tour of duty, and he had also had extensive administrative experience in other districts. A native of Mosul, schooled in a *medrese*, fluent in Arabic, Turkish and Persian, he had held a series of posts elsewhere in Basrah and Baghdad provinces, in Hawran, and in a number of Anatolian provinces over the course of five decades.⁶ He seems to have done well in most of these positions. Said was something of a relic from an earlier age, an Ottoman official who was not completely averse to ignoring administrative rules in situations where they seemed to offer little practical benefit. This got him into trouble on occasion. His previous appointment to Necd had ended in dismissal on charges of maladministration, but he was subsequently vindicated, as those provincial officials who made the charges failed to deliver any meaningful evidence of harm done. Those vague charges, however, paled in comparison to the detailed accusations made by Abdülhamid Bey in 1900.

Among the charges the most serious were that Said had permitted gun-smugglers to flourish, thereby increasing the ability of bedouin tribes to defy government attempts to keep the peace, and that he had divulged state secrets to Qasim al-Thani, the troublesome administrator of the Qatar district. Lesser charges included nepotism, tampering with the justice system and malfeasance in taxation. These could be considered lesser issues only because they did not immediately threaten the state's ability to keep both unruly tribes and such external threats as the British at bay. The Istanbul dossier, however, includes material related to the investigation of all allegations. Within these papers lie hints of variegations present in society and in relations between different groups and the government. While bedouin vs. settled was one obvious marker of differentiation in society, more interesting for the purpose of sketching the obscure outlines of society were identifications by place of origin and religion.

Religious groups

On the topic of religion in what is now Saudi Arabia, even well-read members of the general public today would be surprised to hear that the people were not always (and indeed are still not) monolithically Wahhabi (as the followers of the Sa'udi form of extreme Hanbalism are termed).⁷ Even those aware of the continued existence of a significant Shi'a population in the Eastern Province would probably not know of any further significant religious divisions or classifications within the population. Yet, in the Ottoman period, society appeared to have a relatively cosmopolitan, ecumenical flavour.⁸

When Midhat Pasha, the *vali* of Baghdad and the driving force behind the Ottoman reoccupation of eastern Arabia, visited the region following its reconquest in 1871, he noted for Istanbul's benefit the religious make-up of Hufuf-Mubarraz and Qatif, the two main oasis areas of the Necd *sancak*. The overwhelming majority of people in Qatif were Shi'a, as were many in and around Hufuf. According to Midhat, the majority of the villagers living outside Hufuf and Mubarraz were either Shi'a or Hanafi. In the towns, however, the

majority were Hanafi, Shafi'i or Maliki, with a few Wahhabis remaining after the Sa'udi withdrawal.⁹ While Midhat seems to have exaggerated the presence of Hanafis in order to stress the potential natural linkages between the Ottoman government and the Hasawi population, hints of the general accuracy of his report are found in the Said Pasha investigation records.¹⁰

In its investigation of a case of smuggling guns from Qatar, an ad hoc council of local officials interrogated a number of Ottoman officers and Hasawi civilians. Some of those questioned, in particular those of modest status, were asked not just for name, place of residence and employment, but also for *madhhab*. Several agents of the customs tax collector, for example, were Shafi'is from Hufuf, while another agent was a Maliki from the same town. Their employer, the customs collector himself, was a Ja'fari Shi'i from Qatif, as were his partner and his chief assistant. The shaykh of one village north of Hufuf was also a Ja'fari, while the shaykh of another east of the town was a Maliki. Several Hanbali shop-owners and porters from Hufuf were also among those interviewed. The investigators seem to have had some suspicion, moreover, that there might have been collusion in the gun-smuggling between a Hanbali merchant and the Shi'i customs collector, Ali Mansur – perhaps a significant change from the pre-Ottoman Wahhabi period, when the strict Hanbali Sa'udis appear to have made life very difficult for Hasa's Shi'a.¹¹

The Ottoman government itself, while also certainly having little reason to trust the Wahhabis, seems to have tolerated them to a surprising degree. Said Pasha's accuser, Abdülhamid Bey, claimed that the judge in Hufuf under Said, Seyyid Mehmed Sabit, was a Wahhabi, ignorant of both the *shari'ah* and Ottoman secular law. Mehmed Sabit was a member of the Alusi family of Baghdad, which indeed produced several noted *salafi* 'ulama' in this era.¹² Whether Abdülhamid's allegation was accurate or not, it is notable that his reference to the judge as a 'Wahhabi' seemed to arouse so little official interest. When officers questioned Said formally about Abdülhamid's charges, they did not raise this point, although they did ask about other affairs involving the judge. Perhaps this relaxed attitude resulted from the apparently minimal Wahhabi-Sa'udi threat to Ottoman authority at the time. That other members of the Alusi family were known not to have overclose dependence upon, or allegiance to, the Sa'udis may also have aided Mehmed Sabit's reputation, even if he were indeed *salafi* or Hanbali.¹³

Ottoman rule in Hasa brought not just judges and other officials from distant lands, it encouraged immigration by foreign fortune-seekers, including some who added a distinctly new flavour to society.¹⁴ At least a few Jews lived in Hufuf by the end of the 1870s, perhaps having come initially as government employees. One reason why Hasa's accounts were so muddled in the early 1880s, for example, was that the *sancak's* paymaster kept his records in Hebrew, which effectively prevented any auditor from checking them without his assistance.¹⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century some 34 Jews had settled in Hasa, most having moved from Baghdad.¹⁶ The Jewish community formed a fairly recognizable and distinct group, but it nevertheless appeared to fit well into Ottoman Hasa's society. A certain Yahudi Hoca Davud Şantub from Baghdad owned a bakery which

supplied the troops in Hufuf with bread – and may well have been one of the places in the town where those so inclined might find a drink. Another person from whom one could get alcohol was the local *meyhaneci*, who bore the unlikely name of Yahudi Murad.¹⁷

Davud Şantub, however, was the leading figure among Hasa's Jews. Not only did he own the bakery, in which he employed at least several other Jews, but he also had won the *iltizam*, or tax-farming right, to collect excise and other taxes during the year preceding the gun-smuggling incident. This in itself gave him a high profile in the community, but his public life apparently extended beyond taxation. At 3.00 a.m. on 8 December 1899, Davud reportedly appeared with a group of men outside the house of a perfumer and merchant, 'Abdullah Abu Julayja, calling literally for blood. His followers included not just four or five other Jews but also a sergeant of the gendarmerie. Davud thought (mistakenly) that 'Abdullah had killed another member of the Jewish community who had disappeared that day shortly after being seen with 'Abdullah, and Davud was demanding blood for blood, in the old tribal tradition.¹⁸ It was an overreaction to a fairly ordinary occurrence, but perhaps Davud was influenced by the disappearance of two of his bakery employees, also members of the Jewish community, who had been arrested the previous night for threatening with a revolver the watchmen who had refused to open one of Hufuf's gates for them after hours.¹⁹ Be that as it may, it seems that Davud in this case was acting as the spokesman and protector of the Jews of Hufuf.

Perhaps more eye-opening than this evidence of a thriving Jewish community in what is considered a bastion of conservative Islam is a hint of some Christian presence in Hufuf. Davud Şantub built his bread bakery on the property of a certain Christian (Armenian?) named Altun, who had died some twenty years earlier. Said's administration allowed Davud to seize and develop it, because Altun had no heirs; the property had since entered clearly into a state of decay, and the local administration had no relevant records on it.²⁰ The absence of such records is lamentable, because this evidence of a Christian presence in Hufuf in the 1870s is both unexpected and intriguing. Occasionally Ottoman officials sent rather vague warnings to Istanbul that Christian missionaries, backed by the British in India, were at work along Arabia's coast, but those claims generally could be attributed to officials' desire to catch Istanbul's attention by raising such a sensitive topic.²¹ In this case of Davud Şantub's bakery, however, we have less suspect evidence that, indeed, Hasa was not completely isolated from contact with Christianity.

In addition to the various religious groups that were represented among the permanent residents of Hasa, both local and foreign born, there were of course followers of other religious traditions who visited eastern Arabia for shorter periods. The most important of these would be the Hindu and Zoroastrian traders from India who tried to establish communities on the Arabian side of the Gulf. They had their longest-lasting success in Bahrain, but for a time Indian traders attempted to maintain residences in Qatif, Doha and other ports on the mainland where the pearl trade flourished.²² Other visitors may have included Zaydi Shi'a

from Yemen, who reportedly sent emissaries to establish contacts among the leaders of Qatif's Ja'fari Shi'a community during the early twentieth century, when the Ottoman government faced determined resistance to its administration in Yemen.²³ Although such politically charged contacts were no doubt of relatively limited scope, they were reinforced regularly by trade contacts and, in the case of the Zaydis, through the *hajj* to the Hijaz.

Geographic horizons of society

Throughout the Ottoman period, trade, travel and officialdom offered frequent opportunities for Hasawis to maintain a network of links to peoples and lands bordering the Gulf, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The *hajj* was the most obvious route to contact with other Muslims, both in the Hijaz and in eastern Arabia, through which pilgrims passed from the east on their way overland to Mecca. In addition to the *hajj*, however, there existed other paths of contact between native-born Hasawis and other Muslims who, although perhaps not differentiated by any significant divide of religion, did come often from distant lands in this pre-national age.

One of the largest foreign-born groups in Hasa was one that often tended to be overlooked: slaves. It has long been known that Ottoman efforts to end slavery and the slave-trade in the empire in the nineteenth century did not extend with much vigour to the Arabian territories, and that the population of eastern Arabia included a significant number of slaves, primarily of African origin.²⁴ It is surprising, however, to discover that Ottoman officials themselves owned slaves. In the gun-smuggling incident that led to Said Pasha's dismissal from office, he was implicated by the presence of his black slave, Surur, during the crucial hours in which the recently discovered contraband weapons disappeared, never to be seen again. When asked about the guns, Surur denied all knowledge of them. During his interrogation, he was asked not only to identify himself but to define his relationship to Said Pasha. Surur claimed to be 27 years old but had no idea of his father's name, which suggests that he perhaps had been enslaved as a child. He had come to Arabia as Said Pasha's slave, but Said had just given him his freedom. He continued to live in Said's house, although he now worked as a salaried secretary to the excise tax *mültezim*, Ali Mansur.²⁵

That Said knew of the empire's efforts to restrict slavery is shown in another case. A female slave or concubine born in Habeş, opposite Yemen on the Red Sea, petitioned the government for aid. She had been the property of the late *müdir* of the town of Mubarraz, who had procured her some eighteen years earlier. Following his death during a fight in Qatar, she continued to work for his three sons. She claimed that they had recently begun to abuse her most foully, and she asked the government for help. The administrative council of Necd, which served as a court of first instance, declared her a free woman, in accordance with rules on African slave-girls/concubines issued by Istanbul in an imperial decree, or *irade* – a decision with which Said seemed perfectly comfortable.²⁶

Yet Said himself continued to participate in the active slave-trade which survived throughout Arabia. Hasawis who went on pilgrimage often bought goods in the Hijaz to sell upon their return,²⁷ and in 1899 one such *hajji* brought back two female slaves. Before the man departed for the Hijaz, Said Pasha had commissioned him to bring back a slave-girl, either on Said's own behalf or at the wish of a member of his family. Said Pasha's nemesis, Abdülhamid Bey, later accused the *mutasarrıf* of trying to cheat the *hajji* of the price of the slave. Said disputed Abdülhamid's charge of getting the girl without paying, but he readily admitted to having bought her for the price demanded, 250 riyals (c.£22.50), even though it was considered to be rather high for the slave in question.²⁸ That slave concubines were very common and thus relatively inexpensive seems to be confirmed by a case involving another concubine, whose owner was a poor, unemployed former servant of the judge Mehmed Sabit, who was thrown in prison for attempted burglary.²⁹ The Habeşi slave-woman, estimated to be worth approximately £36, must have been quite valuable by comparison, which might explain why the deceased owner's sons were so upset over the court's award of manumission. The taking of slaves from any sector of eastern Arabia's native population would arouse strong emotions, as indeed happened in 1874, when tribal levies sent from Muntafiq in Iraq to put down a revolt in Hufuf carried off daughters of townspeople to be concubines.³⁰ Yet the presence of slaves and former slaves born in distant lands was so common that it stirred little comment, even when the highest local representatives of the state condoned or participated in a practice which the government was trying to restrict.

In this, as in other ways, Said seemed able to adjust easily to Hasawi practices, which might not have been radically different from those found in Mosul during his youth. Hasawi society itself was no doubt changing, becoming accustomed to the practices and attitudes of a constant stream of officials coming from other Ottoman provinces. The greatest number of both high- and low-level government representatives appear to have come from the provinces of Baghdad, Basrah and Mosul (which for reasons of brevity we can call collectively Iraq). There were two good reasons for this predominance. First, the *sancak* of Necd was incorporated into either the Baghdad or the Basrah province throughout its time under direct Ottoman rule, and the provincial capitals had many of their own locally recruited men who could fill positions, from those of great importance, such as that of judge (the Baghdadi Seyyid Mehmed Sabit), to those of much more modest, local importance (such as Halaf Efendi, a Tayy tribesman from Basrah, who before 1893 was *müdür* of 'Udayd in Qatar, a position which existed only on paper, and then served as chief secretary on the Necd court of appeals³¹).

The second reason for the common presence of Iraqis in Hasa was that the military detachments in Arabia were part of the Sixth Army Corps, which was headquartered in Baghdad and drew most of its troops from Iraq. The Necd gendarmerie was a particularly interesting organization, because from the early 1870s it relied heavily on Kurdish recruits, who were deemed more reliable than the Afghans and Baluchis who dominated the Basrah gendarmerie.³² Once sent to Hasa, volunteer gendarmes tended to stay for open-ended tours of duty, unlike

the drafted soldiers of the regular army, as the 25 years served there by one officer involved in the Said–Abdülhamid dispute attests.³³ In the gun-smuggling case the investigators interviewed as a witness a mounted gendarmerie private named Kerkuklu Mahmud, whose name and rank suggests that Kurds were continuing to volunteer for service in Hasa 30 years after the re-establishment of Ottoman control.³⁴

Although Ottoman rule thus brought an influx of people from Iraq, they did not enjoy any monopoly on postings to Hasa. At least a few of the Afghans, Baluchis and other ‘unreliable’ types from Basrah managed to find a place in the Necd gendarmerie. In 1876, for instance, a British naval officer met a gendarmerie sergeant in Doha who was a native of Peshawar.³⁵ Among civil officials a number came to Hasa from posts elsewhere in the Mediterranean and Red Sea Arab provinces, Anatolia and the Balkans. For a few of these there is indisputable information available regarding birthplace and career. İbrahim Fevzi Pasha (*mutasarrıf* 1894–6) was born in Sivas in Anatolia, and had held civil and military appointments in Sivas, Syria and Yemen before arriving in Hasa.³⁶ The *mutasarrıf* in 1908–9 was Mahmud Mahır Bey, a native of Berat in Albania. He had served in a series of teaching and administrative posts, moving from the Balkans to Anatolia to Lebanon, where he sharpened his command of Arabic. He was dismissed from practically every post, however, for various misdeeds. He did not last long in Hasa but, while he was there, he no doubt brought a wealth of foreign experiences and attitudes with him.³⁷

These and other non-Hasawi administrators represent an important feature of life in the Ottoman empire which still tends to be ignored today: the state was not the monopoly of ethnic Turks. Both government service and the experience of living under Ottoman administration promoted a certain cosmopolitanism in officials and provincial populations alike. The nineteenth-century reform programmes undertaken to stave off imperial collapse under external pressure and internal ferment attacked particularism and provincial isolationism, since they weakened the central state and created fresh opportunities for foreign intrigue and dangerous domestic -isms, of which nationalism was the most noted example. Future bureaucrats received a ‘modern’ education which was much more ‘worldly’ than that offered in traditional schools, such as the *medrese* attended by Said Pasha. The most promising students from throughout the empire completed their studies in the elite schools of Istanbul, entered government service, and were then dispatched to every province to apply newly standardized laws and regulations.³⁸ Even those who did not study in Istanbul could expect to serve in a geographically diverse series of posts, as in the case of Said Pasha. Some of this cosmopolitan training and outlook had to affect the local populations with which civil officials dealt every day.

Whereas the civil officers of the state in Arabia inevitably had continuing contact with a wide array of Hasawis, it might be imagined that the military men coming from other parts of the empire lived in relative isolation from the local populace, but there were indeed ample opportunities for interaction. Their policing duties, for example, brought them into regular contact with the trading

community, in particular. On a more basic level, interaction occurred in the barracks, as Hasawis entered the gendarmerie (just as others entered the civil administration³⁹), especially during Said Pasha's tenure in office. One incident brought to the attention of those investigating Said was an unresolved violent assault upon a local recruit, Ahsali Abdullah – whose sergeant had the distinctly non-Arab name of Ghulam.⁴⁰ As is well known from studies in nationalism, service in the military is one of the most effective means of breaking down local particularism or parochialism, and the gendarmerie certainly must have played that role in Ottoman Hasa. In this and so many other ways, the settled population of eastern Arabia had constant reminders of strong official and social links with people of different backgrounds from throughout the empire and the western Indian Ocean littoral.

Trade ties with a wider world

Dependence on long-distance trade for the Hasawi community's fundamental well-being reinforced the idea that it was a full participant in an economic and cultural network extending far over the horizon. Although Hasa's plentiful water supplies made it far more self-sufficient – indeed, wealthy – than many other parts of Arabia, it was generally poor in other useful natural resources. Hence its dependence on trade. Imports consistently exceeded exports. Basic goods, including rice, sugar, coffee, textiles, metals and weapons, had to be imported. The main exports from Hasa were dates, pearls, horses, camels, donkeys, hides and *'abab* cloaks.⁴¹ Because of the importance of trade to Hasa's well-being, merchants were among the wealthiest and most influential members of society.

An accumulating body of published work has sketched out basic outlines of this regional commerce, and the importance of long-distance trade for the Gulf cannot be doubted now.⁴² It is also true that our knowledge extends only as far as the sources permit it to go. It is difficult to determine accurately the volume or value of trade in eastern Arabia, because so little of the commerce was subject to the authority of states which have left detailed, accessible records. The British records are the best for the Gulf waters as a whole, but no British consuls or other recording observers resided in Hasa in the Ottoman period. It is probable, moreover, that relatively few of Hasa's imports or exports were exchanged directly with India, where customs officers could record goods, without being trans-shipped in Bahrain. Ottoman records are patchy, at best, at least in part due to the devolution of customs collection to *mültezims* who held their authority for only one year. One of the very few estimates of the total annual income from the sale of Hasa's produce given by an Ottoman official is c.£225,000 in the late 1880s.⁴³ Ottoman government documents do contain a number of such passing references to trade which can be used to elaborate on the local features of the system sketched by other researchers.

Overland commerce was continuous, and high in volume, but difficult to regulate or measure. Large caravans were relatively easy to control to a degree, because they took time to assemble. With so much merchandise spread around as

the caravan took shape, the threat of bedouin raids made it much safer for the merchants to prepare their loads under the walls of one of the gendarmerie's guardposts. Before the caravan set out, the excise *mültezim* and a few gendarmes would inspect the loads, looking for contraband.⁴⁴ Yet given the impossibility of patrolling adequately all of the surrounding land and the coasts, the smuggling of smaller loads was easy.

Hasa had two ports which were monitored closely, 'Uqayr and Qatif, through which most of Hasa's seaborne imports and exports passed.⁴⁵ Doha and Kuwait supplemented these ports in significant ways, but both of them were too far from Hufuf to be used for trade in bulky goods. In the late 1880s the residents of Qatif owned an estimated three hundred boats, used for pearling and trade.⁴⁶ No estimate of the number of boats at 'Uqayr is readily available but may have been roughly comparable. 'Uqayr had once been a booming town but had never really recovered from a series of bedouin attacks before the arrival of the Ottomans in 1871. Lacking Qatif's water resources, however, the town's remaining inhabitants had to depend directly on the Gulf waters for their survival, through pearling and trade. In this sense it was much like Doha, for which one relatively detailed set of statistics exists, dating from 1891 (see Table 1.1). It gives a total of pearling boats of 335 and of general trading boats of 133 (33 owned by Qataris, 100 by foreigners).⁴⁷ These three entrepôts traded extensively with ports throughout the Gulf and to a lesser but still steady degree with more distant lands, such as India, Yemen, the Hijaz and East Africa.⁴⁸

In its assessment of the value of trade passing through Qatar, once again the valuable statistics sheet of 1891 gives specific examples, at least of annual imports.

Table 1.1 Imports through Qatar, 1891

<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Value^a (£)</i>	<i>Place of origin</i>
Rice	48,000	
Wheat	9,600	
Sugar	4,800	
Barley	2,000	
Coffee	1,200	
Tobacco	800	From Oman and Iran
Petroleum oil	600	
Clarified butter	320	Two-thirds from Iran, the remainder from Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatif
Wood and paper		From India
Firewood and charcoal		From Iran
Grains, fruits, vegetables, livestock		Primarily from Iran
Textiles/clothing/boat oils		

Note

a The values given on the statistical sheet are in Persian krans, which have been converted according to the formula 25 krans = £1.

It is unfortunate that no exports are listed, presumably because there was little to trade beyond pearls. A statistical sheet for Qatif or 'Uqayr would differ from this list of imports in some details, but the overall picture of distribution of trading partners and the products most in demand would probably apply to them too, in spite of Qatif's greater ability to grow its own food. General information from British Indian sources confirms this, suggesting that dates from Qatif and Hufuf were exported to the Hijaz, Basrah, Oman, Iran and India, as well as to Bahrain.⁴⁹

As might be expected, there are occasional references in Ottoman documents to those who managed this import-export trade, both the expatriate merchants in eastern Arabia and the numerous Hasawis who made their livings through commerce. Merchants from Baghdad, Basrah and other places lost goods worth £1,500 in the riots in Hufuf in 1874.⁵⁰ During Said Pasha's last term five traders from Iran, described as 'gypsies', were imprisoned on charges of making and distributing foreign and counterfeit coinage in Qatif.⁵¹ Another Iranian trader ran into trouble in Doha in 1898, falling into a fight with an Arab tribesman, which prompted an Ottoman gendarmerie patrol to beat both men.⁵² Among the Hasawis Mansur Pasha, the manager of Sultan Abdülhamid II's properties around Qatif, was an extremely wealthy Shi'i trader who on more than one occasion was regarded with suspicion, and even physically harassed, because of his widespread and 'dangerous' foreign contacts.⁵³

The presence of foreign traders in eastern Arabia and the wealth of Hasawi merchants such as Mansur give some signs of the great value of commerce in the region, but one of the striking features of the documents concerning the investigation of Said Pasha is their evidence of participation in trade by so many Hasawis of quite modest background. In the weapons-smuggling case, the gun-runners included one Bani Hajir tribesman who was employed by the state as a postal courier, another who owned a camel and hired himself out as a guide for *hajjis* or for goods transport, an elderly camel-driver from Hufuf, and from the Hufuf bazaar a muleskinner-turned-trader and several shop-owners. The excise agents who found the guns included a sometime camel-man and greengrocer, two former peasants and a man who had had many jobs, including camel-man and peasant.⁵⁴ Even such men of modest means who arranged the procurement and sale of the weapons had connections stretching across great distances: they had a brother or other relative who resided in an unsupervised landing spot, such as any port in Qatar or Kuwait, or they had family connections among the tribes and in the Najdi interior (in this case Kharj), where the demand for modern guns was insatiable.⁵⁵ Some of the reputed weapons-smugglers themselves travelled great distances, going either into the Arabian interior or offshore, to Bahrain or as far as Bombay.⁵⁶ These small traders were probably typical of others who dealt with more legitimate goods. Economically, as socially, it was a networked region.

The beginning of the end

This interconnected region saw the structure of its networks begin to break down in the first decades of the twentieth century. This change was probably inevitable,

as the rapid evolution of technology and political order brought tremendous pressures upon more traditional structures of life throughout the world. The breakdown of the anational linkages of the nineteenth century was already under way at the close of the Ottoman period and was speeded up by the First World War and the establishment of a nation-state in Saudi Arabia.

From the onset of renewed Ottoman rule in eastern Arabia, the main concern of the government was the security of the state. This is hardly a novel idea, for any state or sentient being's first priority is self-preservation. What was different in the Ottoman Gulf territories was the state's oversensitivity to threats. It was absolutely convinced that Britain and Iran were working assiduously to gain control over Ottoman land and population, and that the tribes of Arabia were too ignorant to do anything other than play into the foreigners' hands.⁵⁷ In the investigation of the gun-smuggling incident, it is striking that one question the authorities posed to all the Hasawis interviewed was, 'Of what state are you a subject/citizen?' – a sign, perhaps, both of their sensitivity to external threats and of their recognition of Hasa's links to foreign lands.⁵⁸ They tried to restrict entry to eastern Arabia for anyone travelling from a British-controlled territory. They also naturally monitored the border with Iran closely, and Ottoman citizens from Arabia had to apply for passports in order to visit Iran.⁵⁹ The government's never-ending efforts to control trade around the Gulf were an integral part of this campaign to secure sensitive border regions against perceived outside threats. The desire to tap the wealth flowing from trade was undoubtedly an important consideration, but it certainly was not the only compelling reason for the state's interest.⁶⁰

The tax system in Hasa supports the idea that the state wanted security as well as money. The excise tax *iltizam* quickly became one of the main pillars of the treasury. The Ottoman government was reluctant to move away from the regime designed and proclaimed by Midhat Pasha in 1871, under which the state would levy only the canonic tithe, or *öşür* (Ar. *'ushr*), and *zekât* (Ar. *zakat*) – although it did give in to the temptation to define the meaning of 'tithe' to its own benefit. Those too poor to pay were not formally excused but were permitted to arrange payment by instalment.⁶¹ The government also refused to accept proposals to create and sell a concession for the pearl trade in the Gulf, in spite of the large sums that could be raised, because it would harm the interests of the local population and thus arouse opposition.⁶² The excise tax *iltizam*, however, was maintained in the teeth of strong opposition and in spite of the likelihood of unfair application. A merchant importing goods from India, for example, might have to pay customs in Basrah, to which the deeper-draft Indian Ocean ships might sail instead of to the shallow Hasa ports. He would then have to pay an excise tax on bringing them to Hasa – or indeed might have to pay the same customs charge again, in spite of holding a tax receipt from Basrah. If a trader were caught trying to avoid the excise agents, the penalty could be high: the agents who found the smuggled weapons in 1899 confiscated many, even most, of those discovered. (The normal duty on legal goods imported from abroad was 10 per cent, and on cargo coming from an Ottoman port 1 per cent.⁶³) Such a system stifled rather than promoted

trade. Yet the state could not abolish it, not only because it could ill afford the financial loss, but because it offered the only hope of controlling the smuggling of contraband.⁶⁴ With both Kuwait and Qatar unsupervised by any customs agent, and with most of the Hasa coast similarly unobserved, some developed system of internal checks was necessary. The best way to do that was to give the responsibility to Hasawis who knew the country and the people best.⁶⁵ Customs revenue was important, but over time the state also felt an ever-greater need to stop the weapons trade.⁶⁶

By the last decade of Ottoman rule in eastern Arabia, the state had come to fear the well-armed tribes of the interior greatly. With the forlorn hope of keeping the interior quiet, the authorities tried to impose an embargo on trade with Najd in 1904. When that proved ineffective, the army occupied Qasim – but that, too, ended in failure. Trade did not rebound thereafter.⁶⁷ With Ottoman control over other territories in crisis, Istanbul seemed to give up on eastern Arabia in the years leading up to the First World War. The region was left woefully undermanned, both by the military and by the civil administration.⁶⁸ Less than four hundred troops and gendarmes remained in Hasa by 1913.⁶⁹ As violence increased in extent and severity, the local economy and society suffered. When the Sa'udis conquered Hasa in 1913, it must have been a relief to have the fighting come to an end, in spite of the likelihood of the imposition of more restrictions on society.

It would have been hard for the Sa'udi dynasty, which came to power in the name of an activist, even militant, ideology (manifested in fighting other Muslims to assert a particular view of proper Islamic practice), to incorporate the relatively cosmopolitan population of Hasa into a new state centred in Najd. The tensions between Sa'udi rule and non-Wahhabi population could be illustrated graphically by the reported execution of the wealthy Shi'i merchant and sometime Ottoman functionary Mansur Pasha of Qatif during the First World War.⁷⁰ In large part because of such aggressive actions, previous Sa'udi attempts to rule in the east had not been unqualified successes. Ibn Sa'ud was in the midst of learning how to correct some of the weaknesses in control and defence which had led to the downfall of previous Sa'udi rulers; in short, he proceeded to create a national basis for the state. The means by which Ibn Sa'ud hammered out a more enduring 'nation-state' have been explored by others, and thus there is no need to go into them in detail here.⁷¹ An important element of Sa'udi nation building, however, was to inculcate acceptance of the principle that the state and its institutions existed to give the Al Sa'ud the most effective means to support the Wahhabi ideal. The principle was useful in controlling zealotry among the *ikhwan* and later ideologues – but it also could not allow that state to administer a heterogeneous area in as relaxed a manner as the Ottomans had adopted. Key to modern nation-state building, moreover, is not only the reduction of sharp divisions within the imagined community but also the raising of barriers against outsiders. In practice, after all, national solidarity grows strong only through alienation from others – a real or conjured threat from neighbours works wonders in building group identity. In this case, Hasa saw the loosening of cross-border ties

to populations tainted by the corrupted religions of the Ottoman empire and Iran, and their replacement with bonds to the new 'national' heartland, Riyadh and Najd. In today's world, when the marvels of technology have knit intimately together many once-disparate parts – indeed, made transnationalism a strong force – it could be argued that the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is relatively less open to outside influences than it was in the anational era of Said Pasha. The expansive trade network of a century ago was long since largely displaced by ARAMCO, and dissatisfaction with the close check kept upon those parts of the population that diverge significantly from the dominant type of the Sa'udi national always has the potential to break through the surface tranquillity. The unrest among the Shi'a in 1980 was the most visible sign of this discontent.⁷² If Said Pasha were remembered today in the Eastern Province, he would probably be missed by many.

To conclude on a less pessimistic note: the Council of State investigation of Said Pasha ended with his exoneration on the most serious charges levelled against him, although he failed to win reinstatement in office. He died in retirement in Baghdad in 1905.⁷³

Notes

- 1 This most apt term achieved renown through Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).
- 2 For the endurance of Islam in Ottoman education, an area crucial to any nation- or community-building project, see Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 3 For further information on Ottoman aims and policies in the Gulf, see Frederick Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
- 4 Names and terms associated with the Ottoman state appear according to a slightly modified version of modern Turkish, while others are rendered from their Arabic forms. Thus, '*sancak* of Necd' rather than '*sanjaq* of Najd', but 'Al Sa'ud' instead of 'El Suud'.
- 5 BBA, Şura-yi Devlet (ŞD) 2184/6.
- 6 BBA, ŞD 2185/18, Said Pasha's service record (*terciime-yi hâl*), 15 Teşrin-i evvel 1318/28 October 1901.
- 7 F. S. Vidal, 'al-Hasa', *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), vol. III, p. 237, notes the presence of Shi'a and all Sunni *madhahib* in Hasa, although the Hanbali 'has increased in importance in recent times'.
- 8 On the relaxation of social and religious limits following the Ottoman displacement of Sa'udi rule, see Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, pp. 55–6.
- 9 BBA, Irade Dahiliye 44930, enclosure 2 (Midhat's report to the Sublime Porte giving details of geographic, military, administrative and economic conditions in Hasa, 22 Kânun-i evvel 1287/3 January 1872), pp. 2–3.
- 10 BBA, Yıldız – Mehmet Kâmil Pasha (Y – Kâmil) 86-38/3790, Necd *mutasarrıf*'s undated report (probably from 1886–7) generally confirms Midhat's assessment but admits the presence of fewer Hanafis.
- 11 BBA, Irade Dahiliye 44930, enclosure 2, p. 2; BBA, Y – Kâmil 86-38/3790.
- 12 Bashir M. Nafi, 'Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi: An Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur'an', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34/3 (August 2002): 465–94.

- 13 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 47, Necd commander Abdülhamid to Basrah *vali*, 4 Kânun-i evvel 1315/16 December 1899; ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 120, interrogation of former Necd *mutasarrıf* Said, 5 Mart 1317/18 March 1901, pp. 28–33.
- 14 Eugene Rogan details the striking changes that the onset of direct Ottoman rule brought to Transjordan, another arid frontier district of the empire. He found the transformation of society in Salt particularly remarkable. See Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 6.
- 15 BBA, ŞD 2157/22, report by Necd treasurer and Income Registry secretary, 13 Kânun-i evvel 1298/25 December 1882.
- 16 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 48, Necd commander Abdülhamid to Basrah *vali*, 4 Kânun-i evvel 1315/16 December 1899. J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), vol. II, p. 645, also notes the presence of a few Iraqi Jews in Hasa.
- 17 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosures 47, 48.
- 18 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 43, Necd commander Abdülhamid to Necd *mutasarrıf* Said, 4 Kânun-i evvel 1315/16 December 1899, enclosures 102, 103, Ottoman Turkish and Arabic copies of petition for justice from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘İsa Abu Julayja to Basrah *vali*, 12 Kânun-i evvel 1315/24 December 1899.
- 19 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosures 48, 120, p. 26.
- 20 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 120, p. 20.
- 21 See, for example, BBA, Yıldız – Bab-i Asaî Resmî (Y – A Resmî) 27/19, reform proposal of Basrah naval commander Rıza Ali, 25 Kânun-i evvel 1299/6 January 1884. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), chap. 5, explores the empire’s deep concern about missionaries, particularly during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909).
- 22 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. I, pp. 994–5.
- 23 See, e.g. BBA, Yıldız – Perakende Arzuhal ve Jurnal (Y.Prk.Azj) 50/80, reports of Medina resident Şeyhane İbrahim and Egyptian journalist/newspaper owner Mehmed Safa, dated by archivists to 1322/1904–7.
- 24 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. II, p. 645, alludes to the presence of African slaves in Hasa. For excellent studies on the Ottoman empire and the slave-trade, consult the works of Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) and *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression 1840–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).
- 25 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, pp. 38, 41.
- 26 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 92, petition of Hasaniye to Court of First Instance, 13 Mart 1315/25 March 1899, enclosure 14, Necd *mutasarrıf* Said to Basrah *vali*, 17 Şubat 1315/1 March 1900, enclosure 112a, petition of Derviş ibn Mehmed Ali, 16 Teşrin-i evvel 1315/28 October 1899.
- 27 BBA, İrade Meclis-i Mahsus 4301, Necd Administrative Council to Basrah Administrative Council, 12 Temmuz 1304/24 July 1888, for example, refers to a bedouin menace to a caravan returning to Hasa with various trade goods, bought by pilgrims who had performed a *Rajabîyyah* visit to Medina.
- 28 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 38, Necd commander Abdülhamid to Basrah *vali*, 22 Kânun-i sani 1316/4 February 1901; statement of former Necd *mutasarrıf* Said, 8 Mart 1317/21 March 1901; statement of former Necd *naib* Seyyid Mehmed Sabit, 29 Mart 1317/11 April 1901.
- 29 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 71, Casim to Necd commander Abdülhamid, 1 Nisan 1316/14 April 1900.
- 30 BBA, ŞD 2149/40, former Necd *muhassebeci* Seyyid Mehmed Cavid to Council of State, 15 Ağustos 1291/27 August 1875.

- 31 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 24, Necd Court of Appeals to Necd *mutasarrıf* Said, 26 Haziran 1316/9 July 1900.
- 32 BBA, ŞD 2149/23, Minister of War to Council of State, 20 Şubat 1288/4 March 1873.
- 33 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, p. 43.
- 34 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, p. 28.
- 35 John B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 768.
- 36 BBA, Irade Dahiliye 1311-Ş/48, İbrahim Fevzi Pasha's service record (*terciüme-yi hâl*), 4 Receb 1311/11 January 1894.
- 37 BBA, Dahiliye Nezareti – Muhâberât-i Umûmiye İdaresi 50–1/21, Mahmud Mahır Bey's service record.
- 38 The system of elite schools which specialized in training future state officers extended beyond the famous Mülkiye and Harbiye to include such institutions as the Tribal School, which catered to the sons of influential men in heavily tribal areas of the empire, including Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Kurdistan and Albania. See Eugene Rogan, 'Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28/1 (February 1996): 83–107.
- 39 Hasawis frequently filled positions of local authority such as district *müdür* or head of municipality. They also served on the *sancak* administrative council.
- 40 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 3, medical and assault investigation report, 19 Teşrin-i sani-5 Kânun-i evvel 1315/1–17 December 1899, enclosure 63, interrogation of Ahsalâ Abdullâh ibn Hasan, 30 Kânun-i sani 1315/11 February 1899; J. A. Saldana, *Precis of Turkish Expansion on the Arab Littoral of the Persian Gulf and Hasa and Qatif Affairs* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1906), p. 60.
- 41 *Basra Vilayeti Salnamesi* (Basrah: Basrah Matbaası, 1308/1890–1), pp. 132–3.
- 42 For this period, see Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).
- 43 BBA, Y – Kâmil 86-38/3790, Midhat Pasha had estimated the produce of Hasa to be worth £400,000–£500,000 (BBA, Irade Dahiliye 44930, enclosure 2, p. 3).
- 44 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, p. 8, head of Hufuf municipality Mehmed to Necd commander Abdülhamid, 22 Haziran 1316/5 July 1900.
- 45 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 79, 'Uqayr gendarmerie lieutenant Yusuf to Necd commander Abdülhamid, 20 Haziran 1316/5 July 1900, for report that not all freight coming into 'Uqayr was being checked properly.
- 46 BBA, Y – Kâmil 86-38/3790.
- 47 BBA, Irade Askeriye 1310-M/16, survey of Qatari statistics, 26 Teşrin-i evvel 1307/7 November 1891. Another copy of this survey is in BBA, Y – A Resmî 60/12.
- 48 BBA, Irade Dahiliye 44930, enclosure 2, p. 1 mentions these distant destinations, albeit in relation to Kuwait rather than Hasa's ports.
- 49 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. II, pp. 657, 1544.
- 50 BBA, Bab-i Ali Evrak Odası Ayniyat 849/195, 7 Şaban 1292/8 September 1875.
- 51 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 53, Necd commander Abdülhamid to Basrah *vali*, 16 Kânun-i evvel 1315/28 December 1899, enclosure 89, prisoners' petition to Necd commander Abdülhamid, 13 Kânun-i evvel 1315/25 December 1899, enclosure 168.
- 52 BBA, Yıldız-Bab-i Asafi Resmî 93/21, Council of Ministers memorandum, 27 Mayıs 1314/8 June 1898.
- 53 BBA, Y.Prk.Azj 50/80; BBA, Y – A Resmî 120/92, Minister of Internal Affairs to Grand Vezir, 16 Mart 1319/29 March 1903; BBA, ŞD 2186/35, petition of 'Abd al-Husayn Salih Hamad, 20 Mart 1319/2 April 1903.
- 54 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, pp. 4, 14, 17, 22, 24, 29, 31, 64.
- 55 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, pp. 43, 50, 56, 57, 61, 66.
- 56 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, enclosure 119, pp. 43, 44.

- 57 For a typical report on British and Iranian designs on the Ottoman Iraqi provinces, see BBA, Y.Prk.Azj 4/49, report of Abdullah to Yıldız Palace, 18 Şubat 1296/2 March 1881; BBA, Y.Prk.Azj 47/58, anonymous report on the Iraqi provinces submitted to Sultan Abdülhamid II, dated by archivist to 1320/1904–7; BBA, Y.Prk.Azj 47/70, anonymous report on the Iraqi provinces, dated by archivist to 1320/1904–7.
- 58 It is worthy of note that all of those so questioned readily admitted to being Ottoman citizens/subjects, which suggests that the legitimacy of Ottoman rule was broadly accepted. It is unlikely that they were all dissembling in their answers, since a number of them seemed to have few qualms over admitting that they were in some way involved in arms-smuggling, the other very sensitive question for the state.
- 59 BBA, ŞD 2177/7, Interior Minister to Grand Vezir, 12 Ağustos 1314/24 August 1898.
- 60 Fatah, *Politics*, for example, generally overstates the revenue interest at the cost of recognizing the security issues.
- 61 BBA, Meclis-i Vükela Mazbataları (MV) 113/87, 26 Rebi el-evvel 1324/20 May 1906.
- 62 BBA, Yıldız – Perakende Umumiye 20/5, Basrah *vali* Hidayet to Yıldız Palace, 2 Kânun-i evvel 1306/14 December 1890; BBA, MV 68/2, 16 Teşrin-i evvel 1308/28 October 1892; BBA, MV 70/15, Mayıs 1308/May–June 1892.
- 63 BBA, Hariciye Siyasi 96/13, opinion on customs question of Sublime Porte legal adviser, 2 Temmuz 1329/15 July 1913.
- 64 BBA, ŞD 2149/40; BBA, BEO Ayniyat 851/258–9, 29 Rebi el-âhir 1294/13 May 1877.
- 65 For an interesting appeal to the state to revert to a form of *iltizam* in collecting the tithe because locals could do it so much more efficiently, see BBA, Y.Prk.Azj 6/77, telegram from merchant Yusuf Ya‘qub to Yıldız Palace, 21 Nisan 1299/3 May 1883.
- 66 BBA, ŞD 2184/6, Necd commander Abdülhamid to Basrah commander, 7 Haziran 1315/19 June 1899.
- 67 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. II, p. 747. On this last phase of Ottoman rule, see Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, chap. 7.
- 68 BBA, MV 112/1, 3 Receb 1323/3 September 1905.
- 69 Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, p. 162.
- 70 I am indebted to Guido Steinberg for this information.
- 71 Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia, 1916–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Joseph Kostiner, ‘Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia’, in Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 226–51. See also Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Madawi Al-Rasheed and Loulouwa Al-Rasheed, ‘The Politics of Encapsulation: Saudi Policy towards Tribal and Religious Opposition’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 32/1 (January 1996): 96–119.
- 72 Al-Rasheed, *Saudi Arabia*, pp. 146–8, 199–200; Al-Rasheed and Al-Rasheed, ‘Politics’, pp. 109–16.
- 73 BBA, ŞD 2185/18, Former Necd *mutasarrıf* Said to Council of State, 13 Haziran 1318/26 June 1902.

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2 Mapping the transnational community

Persians and the space of the city in Bahrain, c.1869–1937

Nelida Fuccaro

Of religious controversy I have never heard one word. In short, instead of Zelators and fanatics, camel-drivers and Bedouins, we have at Bahreyn [Manamah] something like ‘men of the world, who know the world like men’, a great relief to the mind; certainly it was so to mine.

W. G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862–3)*¹

When I was a very young child... I used to believe... that there were two Gods: the Big God, or as I was naming him *khodaheh bozorgh* in Persian, the Big God was the God... God, the second God was the Small God, or the *khodaheh kocheh*. He was the Shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza Shah.

‘Ali A. Bushehri, ‘Struggle of [sic] National Identity’²

These two quotations, written some 130 years apart by an English traveller and by a member of the Persian community of Bahrain, capture two snapshots of the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan society of the port city of Manamah before the radical demographic transformation of the 1960s. Palgrave’s description of Manamah’s coffee-houses in the mid-nineteenth century portrays them as cosmopolitan venues in contrast with the ‘closely knit and bigoted universe of central Arabia’, which he had just visited. Despite conveying somewhat stereotypical orientalist images, Palgrave invokes the notion of ‘men of the world’ as individuals socializing in open-minded milieus who developed ways of thinking and relating to the ‘other’, able to overcome communal bonds, beliefs and cultures of origin. In contrast, Bushehri’s autobiographical narrative provides a communal perspective on Bahrain in the early 1960s. His sense of place and self is filtered through strong political and religious loyalties which blend together under the banner of Pahlavi nationalism. As Bushehri explains in his unpublished memoirs, the majority of the Persian Shi’i population of Manamah looked at Iran as their homeland until 1967–8, when the United Nations sent a special commission to Bahrain to ascertain the views of the local population regarding its political future. Most Persians opted for Bahrain’s independence under its historical Arab rulers, the al-Khalifah family, and by 1971, when Bahrain was released from British control, Iran had relinquished her historical claim over the islands.³

In Bahrain, nationalist sentiments and the sense of belonging to a modern political community began to be voiced in the 1920s as a result of the ideological influence of neighbouring Arab countries, India and Iran. British colonialism and the political and socio-economic change brought about by oil wealth functioned as powerful catalysts for political mobilization in the country.⁴ The exclusive nature and translocal character of modern nationalism is particularly evident in the case of the local Persians, who had close historical connections to the Qajar and Pahlavi governments. The political particularism expressed by Bushehri seems to be at odds with the universalist conception implicit in the 'historical cosmopolitanism' noted by Palgrave, which attested to the economic success of port settlements such as Manamah, Dubai and Kuwait city before the discovery of oil. As historical processes cosmopolitanism and nationalism are by no means exclusive and diachronic.⁵ It can be argued that processes of 'Bahrainization' which started with the consolidation of a modern administration in the 1920s relied on historical traditions and lifestyles which were syncretic and attempted to operate a new synthesis under the notion of a 'modern Bahrain'. Looking back, the project has not been entirely successful. The contested national culture and political loyalties which were promoted by Bahrain's Sunni elites of tribal origin has left room for the cyclical resurgence of particularistic and sectarian identities. In the twentieth century the frequent resurfacing and reshaping of categories of individual and communal definition such as 'Arab (Arab Sunni of tribal origin), Baharnah (Arab Shi'i) and 'Ajam (Persian) suggest that indigenous political discourses were dominated by what can be defined as the 'politics of primordialism'.⁶

Bahrain's communal divisions were the kernel of the policy of divide and rule which was enforced by Great Britain as the supreme arbiter of regional politics for 150 years or so. The political reforms carried out by the British in the 1920s aimed at empowering large sections of the impoverished Arab Shi'i population and at keeping the political activities of Iran among the local Persian communities in check while creating a suitable framework for the continuation of the rule of the al-Khalifah family.⁷ Outbreaks of violence triggered by economic and political grievances generally led to sectarian or communal confrontation. The long-standing antagonism between the Persians and the Najdis resulted in armed clashes in the *suq* of Manamah in 1903–4 and in 1923. Intransigent Wahhabi beliefs, feelings of bedouin superiority and the protection granted to the Najdis by Ibn Sa'ud made the Shi'is, particularly those of Iranian descent, the focus of bitter resentment and contempt. In 1938 and 1942–3 Baharnah activists mobilized against the Persians employed by BAPCO, the American company in charge of oil exploitation in Bahrain, as they bitterly criticized the employment and better treatment of foreigners, particularly non-Arabs.⁸

In the 1950s the development of political and labour movements inspired by Arab nationalism partially succeeded in bridging the Sunni–Shi'i divide. Among many Bahraini Arabs political activism acquired strong anti-British and anti-imperialist overtones and provided the platform for the emergence of protest movements with a nationalist base which opposed the oil and security alliance

between the British and the government of Bahrain.⁹ The majority of Persians remained politically silent in this period. The Shi'is continued to nurture family, religious and political links with Iran, which they could visit with almost no restrictions until 1970. Popular protest and elite mobilization became increasingly constrained by the community's position as an endangered minority which large sections of the local Arab population continued to perceive as aloof and untrustworthy outsiders.

The *longue durée* of Bahraini history, which written sources confine to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggests that cosmopolitanism, communalism and nationalism are frames of reference which can be clearly related to translocal, transregional and transnational contexts. Yet the existence of 'transnational communities' in the region implies the existence of nations whose boundaries are 'violated' by movements of peoples and ideas. In other words, only by contextualizing the study of the Persians within the formation of a 'local' and 'national' arena as interconnected political, cultural and socio-economic fields will it be possible to grasp the meaning of 'transnational' and relate it to the community's experience of historical change. The terms of this debate are provided by the gradual evolution of the tribal/modern state under British control and its relations with the traditional maritime economy based in the city of Manamah.

Unlike other metropolitan states of the Persian Gulf Bahrain is an island society with a long history of agriculture and sedentary settlement before the discovery of oil. The coastline has provided stable political boundaries which defined the sphere of control of empires and tribal dynasties. The mobility of the tribal society which dominated the Arabian Peninsula and southern Iran, and the dynamic maritime networks that connected the Persian Gulf to the Middle East, India and East Africa consistently affected the make-up of the population of the islands. The coastline of Bahrain was indeed a permeable border which nurtured the coexistence of diverse religious and ethnic communities under local tribal rulers who enjoyed the protection of foreign powers: the Portuguese, the Persians, the Omanis and, since the early nineteenth century, the government of British India. As was the case for the al-Khalifah family, which conquered the islands in 1783, both rulers and large sections of the urban population were immigrants. They brought in different material cultures, political loyalties and legal traditions which continued to function as independent yet interrelated sources of communal life and organization while gradually shaping the contours of the island polity. From this perspective state building under the al-Khalifah shaykhs should not be considered exclusively as the result of Britain's informal empire in the Persian Gulf. In fact, it was a long process of strategic negotiation with different sections of the local population in order to establish the pre-eminence of their particularistic Sunni/bedouin tradition of family rule.

The city of Manamah offers a unique insight into the creation of the island polity. This port provided a space for cultural and socio-economic exchange, fostering linkages between local, regional and international flows of people and commodities. At the same time it became an arena of communal conflict and political mobilization. In what follows migratory movements from Iran and the

spatial, socio-economic and political reconfiguration of family and economic networks in the city are discussed to highlight the role played by transnational connections in the development of the urban environment. This narrative stops at the beginning of the oil era in 1937 with the promulgation of the Nationality and Property Law, which represented a watershed in the modern history of the Persian community.

Manamah and the political economy of al-Khalifah rule

The city of Manamah was the centre of the maritime economy of the islands, which relied on pearling and transit trade. The history of this settlement cannot be dissociated from that of its fort, *qal'at al-bahrayn*, built by the Portuguese between 1515 and 1521. After Bahrain came under Persian rule following the Safavid conquest of Hormuz in 1621, the centre of Persian military and political authority gradually shifted inland. After 1736 Nadir Shah built a new fort located in the southern outskirts of twentieth-century Manamah.¹⁰ The city developed east of the Portuguese fort on a natural harbour which was easily accessible to both commercial and naval ships. The absence of walls and of a permanent defence system favoured the mercantile development and open socio-economic structure of Manamah, which expanded as a cosmopolitan immigration unit. The separation between the fort and the city can be taken as the spatial referent of the rulers' detachment from urban society, a feature which is crucial in understanding the nature of the al-Khalifahs' rule over Manamah after their conquest of Bahrain in 1783. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the seat of tribal power was established in the town of Muharraq, located on an island east of Manamah port.¹¹

The control of Manamah gave legitimacy to the rule of the al-Khalifah family. As a political space it brokered relations between the tribal conquerors of the islands, its diverse ethnic and religious communities and the representatives of Great Britain after the 1830s. Customs collected in the port, particularly on transit trade, represented an important resource base for the rulers, who also relied on the exploitation of the agricultural hinterland of Manamah. In 1873–4 land revenue, agricultural taxation and maritime trade represented approximately 98 per cent of the total income of the Shaykh of Bahrain. In 1904 the same receipts decreased to 85 per cent, probably as a result of the introduction of fees on inheritance transfers which added considerable revenue to the personal treasury of the ruler.¹²

The relationship between the ruling family and the mercantile communities of Manamah was affected by the different administration of the urban and rural areas. As a result of military conquest and according to bedouin custom, Shaykh 'Isa b. 'Ali al-Khalifah, the ruler of Bahrain between 1869 and 1923, inherited permanent rights over the agricultural districts of the island. He routinely distributed land and entire villages as *hibah* or personal gifts to members of his family. It was a coercive system relying on taxes and corvées imposed on peasants and date farmers by the armed retinue of the al-Khalifah shaykhs (*fidawiyah*),

who came to control large agricultural estates and date gardens.¹³ In Manamah the ruler appointed a member of his family as governor of the city but revenue was collected only in the customs house and in some sections of the central markets through local intermediaries. Between the early 1890s and the reorganization of the customs in 1923, Shaykh 'Isa farmed out the collection of taxes on goods entering and leaving Bahrain to Indian merchants. The rulers controlled the infrastructure of the central markets and rented out land, shops and warehouses to the merchants. They were able to impose direct taxation only on local produce, particularly vegetables, fruit, fish and meat, which were sold in specialized markets controlled by relatives of Shaykh 'Isa as a result of the distribution of family property.¹⁴

Although dependent on the goodwill of the shaykhs for their business premises, the trading community, particularly merchants with transnational connections, often had the upper hand in their dealings with the tribal government. Not only did they increase the volume of overseas and transit trade passing through customs, they were also a source of cash loans. For instance, between 1894 and 1899 the British 'Native Agent' Muhammad Rahim Safar, a member of a prominent Persian family which will be discussed below, lent a considerable sum of money to Shaykh 'Isa, part of which was claimed back by Muhammad Rahim's son in 1939.¹⁵ The development of an increasing monetary economy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century brought considerable benefits to wealthy international merchants who, unlike the case of Muhammad Rahim Safar, generally received full compensation from the ruler for their loans, usually with land grants or particular trade concessions. In 1905 payments to secure loyalty of members of the family, powerful tribal allies and *fidawiyah* accounted to more than two-thirds of Shaykh 'Isa's total expenses.¹⁶ Merchant elites were instrumental to the maintenance of family rule, and effectively supported the coercive apparatus of government established by the al-Khalifahs in the rural districts of the islands.

Before the succession of 'Isa b. 'Ali al-Khalifah in 1869 family strife and political instability had disastrous effects on the economy of Manamah. Bahrain was occupied by the Imam of Muscat in 1800 and ruled by the Wahhabis in 1810–11. During the civil war of 1842–3 when Manamah became the theatre of military operations between the two main contenders to the rulership, 'Abdullah b. Ahmad al-Khalifah and Muhammad b. Khalifah, the port was closed and commercial activities were paralysed. Many of Manamah's merchants fled to Kuwait and to the Persian coast to await the cessation of hostilities. Soon after the end of the war, as 'Abdullah took shelter in Kuwait, Muhammad blockaded the ports of 'Uqayr and Qatif which functioned as major distribution centres of goods from Bahrain to the Arabian Peninsula. In 1862 Palgrave described an impoverished city with a few ruined stone buildings whose landscape was dominated by the huts of poor fishermen, skippers and pearl-divers.¹⁷

With the accession of Shaykh 'Isa in 1869 a new era of prosperity and stability was inaugurated under the aegis of the Pax Britannica. In the following decades Manamah became the focus of British commercial activities in the Arabian Gulf and the world centre of pearling. Regional and long-distance trade

had recovered fully by 1873, and between 1873 and 1900 the value of pearl exports increased sevenfold.¹⁸ Manamah's booming economy relied mainly on capital, commercial expertise and manpower coming from neighbouring regions which supported the demographic and physical expansion of the city. Labour from Bahrain's agricultural villages continued to supply manpower for the boat-building and pearling industries. The first available breakdown of the population of the city in 1904 suggests that approximately half of its 25,000 residents were originally from Basrah, al-Ahsa', Qatif, Kuwait, Najd and Iran, with small communities of Indians, Jews and Europeans.¹⁹

While British protection consolidated the political foundations of Shaykh 'Isa's rule and ensured the maintenance of peace at sea, the imposition of British extra-territorial jurisdiction on immigrant communities had important repercussions on large sections of the population of Manamah. Although the courts of the British Political Agency were established formally in 1919, British 'native agents' had acquired judicial power over all those groups that did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Shaykh of Bahrain in 1861. These courts applied British Indian law and operated in parallel with local Sunni and Shi'i religious courts, and with the tribal councils controlled by the ruler. As the criteria of jurisdiction became the subject of bitter disputes, most cases were remanded to the Agency court after referral to the British Agent and to the ruler.²⁰ By providing new sources of arbitration and mediation in commercial, civil and criminal disputes, British extra-territorial jurisdiction empowered Manamah's mercantile communities whose members could resort to the Agency to further their communal and individual interests. One of the earliest documented instances of appeal to the British Agent dates back to 1905 when 'Ali Kazim Bushehri, a Persian merchant, became involved in a land dispute with a member of the powerful Dawasir tribe which belonged to the close entourage of Shaykh 'Isa. The land in question was located in Laki, one of Manamah's Persian neighbourhoods, and 'Ali Kazim complained to the Agent that Shaykh 'Isa's arbitration in favour of the Dawasir was unfair. Although there is no evidence of action taken by the British representative, the property was officially registered in the name of the Persian merchant 18 years later.²¹

The gradual transfer of real estate to merchant elites is another indication of the steady erosion of the rulers' control over the city. Although Shaykh 'Isa donated land to rich merchants in exchange for cash loans, by the end of the nineteenth century the practice by his relatives of selling properties in the residential districts of Manamah and in the outskirts of the city became widespread. As beneficiaries of *hibah* the shaykhs could not in theory alienate land through sale, as it ultimately reverted to Shaykh 'Isa as part of the family *dirah*. In practice, the accumulation of merchant capital prompted them to seek alternative sources of income in order to establish independent bases of financial support.²² Many close relatives of the ruler were also dissatisfied with Shaykh 'Isa's grants, which had reduced as a result of the increasing number of family members he had to support. Furthermore, despite the general increase in revenue from trade and pearling, it seems that the Indian merchants who farmed the customs continued

to pay yearly advances to the ruler which had little relation to the expansion of the volume of trade.²³ Many urban notables also acquired permanent property rights after the enforcement of official land registration in 1925. The fixing of property rights, alongside the establishment of municipal government in 1919 and the reorganization of the customs in 1923, marked the beginning of widespread political reforms and provided the foundations for the modern administration of the city. After 1925 the creation of a property market regulated by modern institutions considerably weakened the monopoly over the central markets of Manamah held by the al-Khalifah shaykhs, as merchants increasingly bought land and immovable property located in the *sug*.

Persian migrations and family networks

The islands of Bahrain and the city of Manamah were the natural destinations of immigration from Iran. The movement of tribal populations and merchant communities which intersected the Gulf waters facilitated the exchange of populations between Bahrain and the coastal regions between Kuwait to the Straits of Hormuz. Although it can be surmised that Persian rule encouraged the settlement of Arab and Persian groups, it cannot be documented historically. The earliest acquisition of property in Bahrain by a Persian dates back to the early al-Khalifah period. In 1828 a member of the Safar family bought a date plantation near the village of Bilad al-Qadim, an old Shi'i religious centre located to the south-west of Manamah.²⁴ During the reign of 'Isa b. 'Ali the Qajar ruler Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–96) and his successor Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896–1907) gradually imposed direct control over the coastal regions of southern Iran previously under semi-independent chiefs of tribal origin. In 1900 a Persian customs administration was established in the ports of Bushehr, Bandar 'Abbas and Lingah, managed by Belgian officials from the new Department of Imperial Persian Customs based in Tehran. Many mercantile communities relocated to the Arab coast to avoid the new fiscal regime which was detrimental to their business. The majority of the population of Lingah left the city between 1894 and 1904. By 1900 the regional currency had switched from the Persian kran to the Indian rupee as an indication of the shifting balance of trade in favour of mercantile centres such as Manamah, Dubai and Kuwait.²⁵

The expanding economy of Manamah after the end of the civil strife of the 1840s was supported by a considerable inflow of labour and commercial expertise from the coastal regions of southern Iran. Family histories and British records suggest that large groups of Persian immigrants arrived in Bahrain between the 1860s and the early 1920s. The majority of them were Shi'is, almost half of them from the district of Dasht, whose capital Bushehr was the seat of the British Resident in the Gulf and one of the largest ports in the region. The history of Bushehr in the late nineteenth century can be aptly summed up as a litany of disasters. The scarcity of rain provoked severe food shortages in the periods 1870–2, 1888–92 and 1897–8, which were followed by sharp rises in crime and urban insecurity. As the city was dependent on its agricultural hinterland for basic food

provisions such as wheat, barley and meat, locusts and cattle disease had a cumulative effect on prices in the central markets of Bushehr. Famine and disease were cyclical and cholera and smallpox ravaged the city in 1870–2 and in the 1890s. The precarious conditions of the urban and rural population were worsened by the tariff barriers placed by the Persian government on food imports which impoverished large sections of Bushehr's wealthy merchant communities. The unstable Qajar administration added to the general chaos: in 1898–9 alone five different governors were appointed to the Bushehr district.²⁶

Given the absence of detailed population figures before 1904 we can infer the presence of new Persian immigrants in Manamah from patterns of consumption of particular goods. Imports of tea, Persian cloaks (*abas*), shawls, rosewater, liquors, books and shoes increased sharply between 1873 and 1905. Persians, known throughout the Arab Gulf as 'Ajam, were keen drinkers of tea and spirits. As recorded in contemporary accounts their clothes and headgear set them apart from the local Arab population: following the Bushehr fashion at the turn of the century, well-to-do Persians in Bahrain would wear an *aba*, waistcoat, pantaloons, woollen socks and imported shoes.²⁷ Literacy and numeracy were widespread among traders and entrepreneurs, who imported books from Iran and India, particularly for the education of their children. British observers who were generally familiar with the population of the southern Iranian cities took for granted the more refined taste and superior material culture of the 'Ajam immigrants. A British report on Bahrain trade compiled in 1902 noted that 'the influx of Persian settlers during the past two years are creating demand for a better class of prints, woollen cloths, cheap velvets and silks'. By 1904 the business of merchants from Bushehr was thriving, to the detriment of the local Indian community.²⁸

Despite enjoying a reputation for high standards of living, the majority of Persians who left Bushehr were in search of a new life and trade opportunities in Bahrain. They were economic migrants who moved in relatively small groups, often joined in the host country by relatives and neighbours. The arrival of larger communities which included impoverished peasants and labourers escaping rural insecurity was also common. The dislocation of entire families, urban neighbourhoods and villages shaped Persian migration flows to Bahrain which continued to follow lines of kinship and locality. In 1951 half of the members of the council of the Ma'tam al-'Ajam al-Kabir, a funeral house located in Manamah which functioned as the religious and social centre of the community, belonged to families originally from the Dashti quarter in Bushehr.²⁹ As the first or second generations settled in Bahrain they maintained strong family links with their city of origin, and invested in houses and landed properties in their old neighbourhood. While the new family line was often established under the name of the first settler in Manamah, larger groups which included different households continued to be identified with their places of origin in Iran, as was the case for the Bushehris, Shirazis, Farsis, 'Ahwazis and Bastekis.³⁰

Marriage with first cousins and relatives in Iran contributed to the continuity of family ties across the Gulf waters. Persian localist identity was also reinforced

by the creation of new family blocs which included households of the same social standing. For instance, the Kazimi and Muniri branches of the Bushehr family started a troubled family history in 1881 when 'Ali Kazim from Bushehr, who arrived in Manamah in 1860, married Zahra bint Ahmad Bushehri, the sister of 'Abd al-Nabi Ahmad, an 'Ajam immigrant from the same urban neighbourhood. The daughters of Baqir Isfandiyyar, a very rich merchant from Fars who established his business in the *sug* of Manamah in 1904, married into the Beder, Dawani and Beljik families, all from the same district in Bushehr.³¹

Different matrimonial alliances suggest the progressive integration of some members of the community into the cosmopolitan society of Manamah. Social standing was primarily dictated by mercantile wealth but was also acquired through religious connections and through privileged access to the British agency and to the rulers. The Kazruni family capitalized on the religious networks and patronage politics associated to the popular Shi'i neighbourhoods of Manamah. 'Abd al-Nabi Qalawwas, the first member of this group to settle in Manamah in the 1890s, kept social distance from other Persian immigrants. As the first leader of the Ma'tam al-'Ajam al-Kabir since 1905, he married two Arab women whose families had established the Hajj 'Abbas and Bin Sallum *ma'tams*, two funeral houses located in central Manamah. 'Abd al-Nabi's *ma'tam* and his new family connections contributed to placing the 'Ajam community of Manamah on the urban map, fostering links with similar religious organizations controlled by the Arab population of the city.³²

The family histories of the Safar and Sharif families, the wealthiest and most influential 'Ajam Shi'i groups of the pre-oil era, merged in Manamah under the umbrella of British protection and international trade. As a result of the political connections of his family, Muhammad 'Ali Safar settled in Bahrain in 1833 as the 'Native Agent' for the British Resident in Bushehr. By acting as local agents for Great Britain in Arabia, Yemen and Bushehr, members of the Safar family acquired a prominent position in the international trade of a wide range of goods: weapons, coffee, rice, dates and tea. The family had extensive land holdings in southern Iraq and urban properties in Bombay and the Gulf. In Bahrain the Safars held the position of Native Agents almost uninterruptedly until the establishment of a British Political Agency in 1900. 'Abd al-Nabi Safar and his son Muhammad Rahim, Native Agents from 1872 to 1884 and from 1893 to 1900 respectively, enjoyed an exceptionally privileged relationship with Shaykh 'Isa as the local representatives of Great Britain. Some time after 1869 the ruler granted 'Abd al-Nabi Safar a very favourable concession on customs duties, later transferred to his son, and gave him control of the islands' pearling fleets. 'Abd al-Nabi Safar married the aunt of Muhammad Tahir Sharif, a Bushehri who settled in Bahrain as the agent for the British firm Gray, Paul & Co., which had been the main trading company in the islands since 1873. Their son Muhammad Rahim Safar, the last British Native Agent in Bahrain, inherited the large Sharif/Safar fortune.³³

Members of the Safar and Sharif families kept close connections with Bushehr and Iran, and used Farsi, English and Arabic in their private and commercial

correspondence. Muhammad Rahim used the Persian honorific title *aqā* but claimed Arab descent from Hillah in southern Iraq. Both families publicized their links with the Iranian Bakhtiyari tribe but changed their names to al-Safar and al-Sharif, at the beginning of the twentieth century and in the 1960s respectively.³⁴ Contestations over ethnic origins are not uncommon in Bahrain, particularly among *hawalah* groups, powerful merchant elites from southern Iran who have been extremely keen to publicize their Arab and tribal descent.³⁵ The Safar and Sharif families are unique among the 'Ajams of Bahrain in that despite inter-marriage they generally maintained an ethnic and linguistic identity separate from that of the Arabs. These two families were the only Persian groups that acquired formal political authority in nineteenth-century Bahrain as representatives of the government of British India. Claiming Arab/tribal descent was a pragmatic device which legitimized their status vis-à-vis the ruling family, whose support was essential for the maintenance of their privileged position as British employees.

Persians in the city

As a developing cosmopolitan city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Manamah had community-based socio-political organizations. Migrations were the major catalyst of urban expansion and articulated overlapping networks whose members were linked by family, locality, ethnicity, religious loyalties and economic interests. In 1904 the Persians were the largest foreign group established in the city on a permanent basis with approximately 1,550 individuals, of whom only 50 were Sunni.³⁶ As Manamah's political blocs followed sectarian lines, Shi'i and Sunni 'Ajam remained separate. By the 1920s the small Sunni community was relatively wealthy and included merchants from the Bastak district who had intermarried with Arab families. It was among the Shi'is that migrations from Iran had a more visible impact on the development of the city and on the formation of wealthy entrepreneurial groups who enlarged their business by granting patronage to the newcomers. Between 1889 and 1910 the Bushehri and Kazruni families brought to Manamah under their protection approximately 20 per cent of the total 'Ajam population of the city.³⁷

Unlike the Safar and Sharif families, whose involvement in high politics meant that their power base was not so close to the popular quarters of Manamah, the Kazruni and Bushehri families were true representative of the urban notability. They provided leadership and maintained their local clientele by supporting the Ma'tam al-'Ajam al-Kabir, as these religious institutions structured the socio-religious organization of the Shi'i neighbourhoods of the city. Al-'Ajam al-Kabir was established in 1892 as a specialized building for the celebration of *'ashura* and for the organization of the *tamthiliyyah*, the procession, ceremonial flagellation and passion play commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Like other funeral houses which mushroomed in Manamah in the 1890s, the Persian *ma'tam* was supported by merchants. The Bushehri and Safar families contributed as much as two-thirds of the initial capital, although the Safars did not maintain

their interest in *ma'tam* affairs in later years. Members of the Muniri branch of the Bushehri family headed this institution from 1927 to 1967, taking over from 'Abd al-Nabi Qalawwas Kazruni, the first recorded leader. The *ma'tam* was supported by yearly donations from rich and poor members of the community and by *wagf* revenue, particularly rents from houses and shops which were known by the name of the individual who had endowed them. Bayt 'Ali Zalu and Hasan Zalu were donated to the *ma'tam* between 1898 and 1913 and in 1924 respectively, by two brothers originally from Bushehr who had shops in the Manamah *sug*. By 1917 Mirza Hasan Husayn Shirazi, who was among the original founders of the *ma'tam* with the Zalu brothers, donated a piece of land with huts known as Hawtah Shirazi which gave the *ma'tam* a monthly rent of 30 rupees in 1930. Located in the 'Ajam district, Bayt Baqir Isfandiyar was the largest property owned by the Persian *ma'tam*. It was a large, two-floor stone building, a grand and luxurious merchant house by Manamah standards, originally owned by one of the wealthiest foodstuff dealers of the city. In 1952 the *ma'tam* was supported by the rent of three houses, six shops and one *hawtah*. Al-'Ajam al-Kabir also had a special budget for poor and for needy individuals who claimed *sayyid* descent. This institution provided relief and shelter to increasing numbers of dispossessed people during the harsh economic crisis that followed the collapse of the pearling industry in the early 1930s.³⁸

'Ali Kazim Bushehri, the head of the Kazimi branch of the family, was a self-made man, originally a day labourer who became an international trader in household commodities, particularly foodstuffs. He became rich by capitalizing on food shortages in Iran. He bought large quantities of provisions from Bushehr and resold them at an inflated price when famine and epidemics struck the city. By 1902 'Ali Kazim had expanded his business by establishing trade relations with Lingah, Bandar 'Abbas and Bombay. He was one of the largest food suppliers in Manamah and with his brother Isma'il ran a ferry service to Nabi Saleh Island which sold provisions to the local population. 'Ali Kazim established credit lines with many of the Persian immigrants who flocked to the city, often catering for their immediate needs. The oral history of the Bushehr family recounts a number of episodes which show the extent to which patronage represented an investment for the Persian notability. 'Ali Kazim helped a poor 'Ajam immigrant for 15 years by giving him food and cash. In 1923 he was eventually paid back by his son with the transfer of their family house in Bushehr.³⁹ Ahmad, the head of the Muniri branch of the family, arrived in Bahrain in 1890 under the protection of 'Ali Kazim who employed Ahmad's son 'Abd al-Nabi in his shop in Manamah *sug*. Ahmad was housed in one of 'Ali Kazim's properties which was bought by 'Abd al-Nabi in 1906 when he became the business partner of 'Ali Kazim and started a spectacular career as building contractor. Reza Banna', a member of the Ruyan family, sold his house in Bushehr to 'Ali Kazim in 1909 while 'Ali Kazim's partner 'Abd al-Nabi Bushehri took Reza's son Zar Haydar under his protection.⁴⁰

The careers of 'Abd al-Nabi, the son of Ahmad Bushehri, and of 'Abd al-Nabi Qalawwas Kazruni, the two most influential 'Ajam notables of their generation and leaders of the Ma'tam al-'Ajam al-Kabir, show the ways in which patronage

networks along ethnic lines contributed to the accumulation of merchant capital and to the development of the infrastructure and built environment of Manamah. In the first three decades of the twentieth century the two 'Abd al-Nabis became the wealthiest building contractors in the city and supported a steady inflow of skilled labourers from Iran, who were employed in the construction industry. Many master builders (*ustadhs*), builders (*bannas*) and carpenters (*najjars*) started their careers under their protection. 'Abd al-Nabi Bushehri built the British Political Agency in 1900 and renovated the Khamis Mosque and the British base in 1927, while Kazruni became involved in the construction of the Victoria Memorial Hospital in 1902/3. At the beginning of the twentieth century 'Abd al-Nabi Bushehri brought to Bahrain the Ruyan, Shekib, Husayn Banna', Sa'ati and Ariyan families, all of whom were involved in the building profession. The most successful group was that of the Ruyan, whose head, Zar Haydar Banna', started his career under 'Abd al-Nabi, as mentioned above, and contributed to the building of famous pieces of Bahrain's traditional architecture such as the house of Shaykh Khalaf al-Asfur and the Sakhr Palace.⁴¹

The settlement of patrons and clients in the residential districts of Manamah can be followed through the development of new residential districts. The oldest neighbourhoods of Manamah were Kanu and Fadhil, which were located east of the *sug* and the port. By the mid-nineteenth century the popular districts of Hammam and Mukharaqa were still in the making, as suggested by the presence of many *hawtahs*, empty spaces which defined the boundaries between the city and its hinterland. The first wave of Persian immigrants settled in Kanu and Fadhil, which were occasionally referred to as *farig al-'Ajam* (the Persian quarter) in the commercial and legal documents of the early twentieth century. By the 1890s many of them had moved to the expanding residential districts of western Manamah, particularly to Mukharaqa, Mushbir, Laki and Bu Sirra as a result of the need to accommodate extended families and clients. By 1888 a new district named 'Ajam had developed close to Mukharaqa, which became overpopulated. In the 1920s the two Persian neighbourhoods of Mushbir and Bu Sirra were still expanding.⁴²

Following a general trend among the mercantile elites of Manamah, Persian notables started to invest in *hawtahs* and immovable property in the residential areas of the city. As they were unable to buy properties in the *sug* (which was under the control of the relatives of Shaykh 'Isa b. 'Ali) they directed their wealth towards the development of the popular neighbourhoods. Building contractors such as 'Abd al-Nabi Bushehri and 'Abd al-Nabi Kazruni acquired land to build houses and hut compounds. 'Ali Kazim's fortune was partly invested in houses. In 1932 and 1934 he donated a large number of properties located in Bu Sirra and in the neighbouring village of Na'im to his children Amina, Husayn, Abu Qasim and Bomoni.⁴³ Ownership of real estate represented important political capital which assured the continuation and enlargement of patronage networks. It constituted a direct source of income from rents as the control of housing, food and services became in itself an important market in the urban economy as a result of the growth of the city and, after the 1930s, of the oil industry.

While the study of Persian mercantile elites suggests the development of residential units around patron–client alliances (protégés often residing close to their patrons), the settlement of impoverished peasants and unskilled labourers highlights different modes of community implantation in the city. These immigrants could not acquire property or enter a mutually beneficial relation with established notables. They joined the dispossessed urban masses, a proto-working class employed mainly in the pearl industry and in menial jobs which included Baharnah, Baluchis and freed slaves. In 1929 the majority of day labourers and dock workers in Manamah were ‘Ajam Shi‘i and were what the British Political Agent contemptuously called ‘the Persian cooly class’, a turbulent group which in 1903–4 and in 1923 was involved in the disturbances against the Najdis. Despite the imposition of strict inspections on cargo ships coming from Iran, their numbers increased throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Only in 1941 did the municipality of Manamah intensify efforts to keep in check the flow of illegal workers by enforcing a system of licences in conjunction with the passport office.⁴⁴

Often employed as day labourers by Persian merchants and building contractors, they did not enter the patronage cycle by settling within the precincts of the city. They concentrated in ‘informal’ housing, hut compounds locally known as *barasti* or *‘arish*, which developed as tightly knit ‘ethnic clusters’ in eastern Manamah on marshland of no agricultural value. Unlike most neighbourhoods in central Manamah, which were named after prominent notables, these localities were known by the geographic and ethnic origin of their settlers. The ‘Awadhiyyah district was established in the 1890s by impoverished Sunni peasants from the ‘Awaz village of southern Iran. The area, which had appalling sanitation and living conditions, was dotted with straw huts in 1899, and in 1904 there was only one stone building. ‘Awadhiyyah expanded through successive waves of migrations, which intensified in the 1910s and 1920s. It eventually became an upmarket district when its residents started to acquire permanent land rights and rich notables built their houses there. Other informal settlements inhabited by Persians were the districts of Minawiyyah and Suqayyah, which expanded around the Shi‘i cemetery and housed peddlers and petty shopkeepers by the 1930s.⁴⁵

The history of the district of Zulm ‘Abad, which housed Persian Shi‘i immigrants from Bandar ‘Abbas, illustrates the precarious position of these urban communities. Originally settled on empty land in the Kanu district, the inhabitants of Zulm ‘Abad were resettled by the Manamah municipality south of ‘Awadhiyyah in 1923. The district was a major source of epidemics, and its gloomy and depressing aspect spoilt the image of Manamah as a modern city. Although the name of the new neighbourhood was changed from Zulm ‘Abad (the land of oppression) to ‘Adl ‘Abad (the land of justice) in 1938 the community was still extremely poor and had not yet acquired occupancy rights. In the same year Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalifah, head of the municipality of Manamah, attempted several times to evict the residents from their new homes by claiming ownership of the whole area.⁴⁶

Political loyalties

The political loyalties of the inhabitants of Manamah were divided. In the same way as the city had developed economically and demographically through patronage networks and translocal flows, its political configuration was shaped by fragmented patterns of protection politics which often linked communal leaders to centres of power located outside the islands. Arab Sunnis, generally wealthy pearl merchants and families of tribal origin, recognized the authority of the rulers. The Najdis, a fluctuating and turbulent group, operated mainly through the local representative of Ibn Sa'ud, the powerful merchant 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Qusaybi. Although subjects of the Shaykh of Bahrain, the Baharnah appealed to the British Political Agent and to their religious leaders, given their long-standing grievances against the tribal government. As 'foreigners' the Persians fell under the protection of the British Political Agent, but the community was divided. Sunni merchants accepted British protection but at the same time they could successfully appeal to the tribal rulers. The Shi'is were extremely reluctant to accept the imposition of British extraterritorial jurisdiction, and looked at Iran as their protector long before the consolidation of the dynastic nationalism of the Pahlavis.

The Persian *ma'tam* was instrumental in fostering religious links with Iran. The merchants often hired respected mullahs from Bushehr, Shiraz and Qum as teachers of Shi'i theology in the holy months of Muharram, Safar and Ramadan. Although not a political event in itself, the presence of these mullahs as educators, particularly in the context of a politically charged event such as the celebration of the martyrdom of Husayn, created a very close identification between the community and the political centres of Shi'ism. Between 1913 and 1915 a primary school was established as an offshoot of the educational activities of al-'Ajam al-Kabir. The beginning of this school is linked to the threat of 'Indianization' felt by the Persian community of Manamah after the issue of the 1913 Order in Council which ushered in British direct intervention in the administration of Bahrain. After 1915 the National Union School (al-Ittihad, as it became known in 1931) moved to the Fadhil district but continued to be supported by the same merchant families associated with al-'Ajam al-Kabir. In the 1920s it became a hotbed of Pahlavi propaganda, the venue where pupils and their families were exposed to the new nationalist discourse coming from Iran. In 1927 the school appointed 'Ali Akbar Pakrowan, a teacher from Abadan, as headmaster. During his tenure of office the Pahlavi government started to contribute to the school budget and students received Iranian diplomas. Textbooks were imported directly from Iran, and curriculum and educational policies were extremely progressive. English, Arabic and mathematics were taught alongside Shi'i theology. Classes in Persian language, history, geography and literature, taught as primary subjects, instilled 'love for the homeland' into the pupils. After 1926 the school uniforms were modelled on the military uniforms of Pahlavi Iran and an Iranian flag was displayed at the front of the school building. Order, discipline and loyalty to the Shah became key moral values in the education of the children. Students

marched every day in their uniforms with an Iranian flag in front of the procession on their way to the football playground, often arousing protests from Arab residents. Until the 1950s rich Persians sent their children there, which shaped the political outlook of at least two generations of Manamah's 'Ajams.⁴⁷

While modern education through the activities of the Persian school started to shape the boundaries of the modern transnational community, the Bahraini government issued a proclamation in 1929 to the effect that all persons born in Bahrain of foreign parents would be considered Bahraini subjects unless registered at the British Political Agency.⁴⁸ Given the reluctance of most 'Ajams to register as British protégés, this was a clear attempt to bring the Persian community under the Shaykh's jurisdiction. Following repeated official complaints from the Tehran government, which considered the Bahraini 'Ajams as Persian subjects, the administration issued the Nationality and Property Laws in 1937, which introduced modern notions of citizenship and restricted the right of ownership of immovable property to Bahraini nationals.⁴⁹ The extent of the amount of property owned by the 'Ajam community became apparent after the enforcement of compulsory registration in 1930. The presence of a rich and influential group with representatives on the municipal council of Manama, the police force and in the commercial court (*majlis al-ʿurf*) heightened fears of direct Iranian interference in Bahrain. Fuelled by the public display of loyalty to Iran by the pupils of the Persian school, in the tense political climate of the 1920s and 1930s large sections of the Arab population of the islands increasingly saw the 'Ajam community as the *longa manus* of Iran. In this connection the 1937 legislation was conceived as the solution to what was widely perceived as 'the growing Iranian problem' in Bahrain.⁵⁰

The Persians were asked to renounce their political allegiance to Iran in exchange for the maintenance of their assets in Bahrain. The new legislation created a sensation within the community: many applied for naturalization, others attempted to retain their properties without adopting Bahraini citizenship by transferring them to their sons, who were considered Bahraini nationals according to the 1929 provisions.⁵¹ Those who maintained close contacts with Iran auctioned their properties and went back to their homeland. Iran did not recognize Bahrain as a sovereign state until independence from British control in 1970. Until then, Bahraini 'Ajams held both Bahraini passports and Iranian identity cards which allowed them to travel to Iran. For many Persians the adoption of Bahraini nationality in the late 1930s represents a landmark in the history of the community as 'the single most important event which started to alienate those strong historical links between the *Ajam* of Bahrain and Iran'.⁵²

Notes

- 1 W. G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862–63)*, 2 vols. (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865), vol. II, p. 219.
- 2 'Ali A. Bushehri, 'Struggle of [sic] National Identity', unpublished typescript, 1995, 47 pp., p. 6.

- 3 'Ali A. Bushehri, 'Struggle of [sic] National Identity', unpublished typescript, 1995, 47 pp., pp. 13–15.
- 4 See M. G. Rumaihi, *Bahrain: Social and Political Change since the First World War* (London and New York: Bowker, 1976), pp. 161–235; F. H. Lawson, *Bahrain: The Modernisation of Autocracy* (Boulder: Westview, 1989), chaps. 2 and 3; J. E. Peterson, 'Bahrain', in *The Arab Gulf States: Steps towards Political Participation* (New York and London: Praeger, 1988), pp. 62–70.
- 5 See R. Meijer (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999) for a discussion of cosmopolitanism in relation to both nationalism and Islam.
- 6 N. Fuccaro, 'Understanding the Urban History of Bahrain', *Critique* 17 (2000): 49–81, at pp. 60–3; and I. A. Schumacher, 'Ritual Devotion among Shi'i in Bahrain' (PhD thesis: University of London, 1987), pp. 50–74.
- 7 On the reforms see F. I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain. The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 85–117; Rumaihi, *Bahrain: Social and Political Change*, pp. 167–92; and M. 'Abdallah al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920–1945. Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), chaps. 3 and 4.
- 8 See India Office Records (British Library, London) (hereafter IOR), files R/15/2/101, R/15/1/341 and L/P&S/10/81, on the 1923 and 1904–5 disturbances; and Tajir, *Bahrain 1920–1945*, pp. 173–80 on oil and labour relations.
- 9 Khuri, *Tribe and State*, pp. 194–217; Lawson, *Bahrain*, pp. 47–72; W. A. Beiling, 'Recent Developments in Labour Relations in Bahrain', *Middle East Journal* 13/2 (1959): 156–69.
- 10 C. E. Larsen, *Life and Land Use on the Bahraini Islands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 98; J. H. D. Belgrave, *Welcome to Bahrain* (Manama: Stourbridge Mark & Moody Printers, 1960, 4th edn.), p. 89; Muhammad 'A. al-Tajir, *'Aqd al-lal fi tarikh awal* (Manamah: Mu'assasah al-Ayyam, 1994), p. 105.
- 11 M. Kervran, *Bahrain in the 16th Century. An Impregnable Island* (Manamah: Ministry of Information, 1998), pp. 35–77; T. Wali, *al-Muharrag: 'umran madinah khaliyyiyah, 1873–1971* (Manamah: Banurama al-Khalij, 1990).
- 12 J. G. Lorimer, *The Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908, republished Farnborough: Gregg International, 1970), vol. II: *Geographical and Statistical*, p. 251; 'Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1873–1874', in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1949*, 10 vols. (Gerrards Cross: Archive Editions, 1986), vol. I, p. 66.
- 13 IOR, R/15/2/807, 'A Note on Land Tenure by the Ruling Family in Bahrain', by Charles Belgrave, 23 December 1931; Khuri, *Tribe and State*, pp. 41–53.
- 14 On customs see IOR, R/15/1/315 and R/15/1/331, particularly text of agreements between Shaykh 'Isa and Indian merchants, 5 Jumada al-Thani 1315/31 October 1897 and Jumada al-Thani 1317/October–November 1899, R/15/1/315. The meat market was in the hands of Shaykh Salman, nephew of Shaykh 'Isa; *hibah* document from Shaykh 'Isa, Jumada al-Thani 1330/May–June 1912, R/15/2/806. The fish, fruit and vegetable markets were controlled by Shaykh Hamad b. 'Isa who in 1923 took over the rulership of Bahrain from his father after he was deposed by the British.
- 15 Bushehri Archive (Manamah) (hereafter BA), letter to Shaykh Hamad b. 'Isa al-Khalifah dated Jumada al-Awwal 1358/June–July 1939.
- 16 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. II, p. 251; also quoted by J. Onley, 'The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century Gulf', *New Arabian Studies*, vol. 6, 2004.
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- close of the year 1853 by Lieutenant H. F. Disbrowe, in 'Selections from the Records of the Government of India 1849–1937', fiche 1094, pp. 362, 367–8 and 383 ff; 'Memoranda on the resources, localities, and relations of the tribes inhabiting the Arabian shores of the Persian Gulf, 1845' by A. B. Kemball, Assistant Resident at Bushire, in 'Selections from the Records of the Government of India 1849–1937', fiche 1090–1, p. 106; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. I: *Historical*, pp. 841–3 and 866–72; Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey*, vol. II, p. 209.
- 18 From 118,000,000 rupees in 1873–4 to 774,990,000 rupees in 1899–1900: Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. I, p. 2252.
- 19 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. II, p. 1160.
- 20 For the history of British extraterritorial jurisdiction in the Gulf see H. M. Albaharna, *British Extra-territorial Jurisdiction in the Gulf, 1913–1971* (Slough: Archive Editions, 1998). On the history, administration and records of the court of the Political Agent in Bahrain see IOR, catalogue of the series R/15/3 ('Political Agency, Bahrain: Political Agent's Court, 1913–1948') and its introduction (pp. 107–22); J. Onley, 'The Infrastructure of Informal Empire: A Study of Britain's Native Agency in Bahrain, c.1816–1900' (DPhil thesis: University of Oxford, 2001), pp. 166–75.
- 21 BA, letter no. 113 of 1905 from Political Agent to 'Ali Kazim Bushehri; author's conversation with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Manamah, 22 April 2000.
- 22 Evidence on the sale of land to Manamah merchants by members of the al-Khalifah family is often fragmentary but well documented in local archives and in the archives of the Department of Land Registration (Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, Manama). See also IOR, R/15/2/807, memo from Belgrave to Political Agent, 19 November 1931.
- 23 Official complaints started to be put forward in 1899 by the cousin of the ruler Shaykh Hamad b. Muhammad al-Khalifah to the British Resident in Bushehr. See IOR, R/15/1/316 and R/15/2/10. On customs R/15/1/317, 'Note on an Interview between His Excellency the Viceroy and the Shaykh of Bahrain', 27 November 1903; R/15/1/315, correspondence from Assistant Political Resident in Bushehr to Political Resident, 28 May 1899.
- 24 Conversation with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Manamah, 15 June 1998.
- 25 Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. I, pp. 2049–67, 2096–7, 2128–36 and 2595–6, vol. II, p. 1095. I am indebted to James Onley for having drawn my attention on the shift of currency in this period. By 1901 new krans and nickel coins were put in circulation by the Persian government in an attempt to energize the local currency. See 'Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1898–1899', in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1949*, vol. IV, p. 7 and 'Administration Report for 1901–1902', in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1949*, vol. IV, p. 1.
- 26 See 'Administration Reports on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency from 1873 to 1905', in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1949*, vol. I, p. 5; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. I, pp. 2052 and 2132.
- 27 Value of tea imports: 1873 200 Rs, 1880 18,500 Rs, 1904 31,400 Rs; Persian cloaks: 1873 4,500 Rs, 1880 15,000 Rs, 1901 21,900 Rs; rosewater: 1873 5,800 Rs, 1880 3,100 Rs, 1904 10,500 Rs; liquors: 1873 500 Rs, 1880 650 Rs, 1904 3,000 Rs; books: 1880 1,000 Rs, 1904 11,350 Rs; shoes: 1877 1,125 Rs, 1880 1,750 Rs, 1904 7,570 Rs. 'Administration Reports for the Years 1873–1874, 1880–1881, 1901–1902 and 1904–1905', in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1949*, vol. I, pp. 54–61, vol. II, pp. 134–43, vol. V, pp. 107–13 and 152–3; Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey*, vol. II, pp. 211–12; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. II, p. 345.
- 28 'Administration Report for the years 1902–1903', in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1949*, vol. V, pp. 35 and 180.
- 29 They were 'Ali Haydar Banna' Ruyan, Mahmud Bushehri, Husayn 'Ali Kazim Bushehri and Khalil Dawani. BA, handwritten minutes of first meeting of the committee, 15 Shawwal 1371.

- 30 I am extremely grateful to 'Ali Akbar Bushehri for having shared with me information and documentation on his family and other 'Ajam groups of Bahrain.
- 31 'Ali A. Bushehri, 'The Struggle of a Family', BA, typescript, n.d., 222 pp., p. 114, 'List of Persian merchants – Shi'i' and BA, 'Family trees of Beder, Dawani and Beljik families'.
- 32 BA, 'Kazruni family tree'.
- 33 Onley, 'The Infrastructure of Informal Empire', pp. 191–227 and 238.
- 34 Onley, 'The Infrastructure of Informal Empire'; 'Safar family tree by Aqa Muhammad Rahim Safar, 1898', 'Safar Family tree' and 'Sharif family tree', appendix E 4 (a), (b) and 5.
- 35 As in the case of the powerful Kanu family. See K. M. Kanoo, *The House of Kanoo: A Century of an Arabian Family Business* (London: London Centre of Arab Studies, 1997).
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- 37 'Ali A. Bushehri, 'Bahrain Population', unpublished typescript, 1999, 7 pp., p. 4.
- 38 BA, 'Daftar ma'tam al-'ajam al-kabir, 1342–1372 (1929–1951)'. Information on *wagf* properties in BA, 'Daftar buzur (1 Muharram 1351–10 Muharram 1352/7 May 1932–5 May 1933)'; 'Ilan amin al-sunduq ('Ali Kazim Bushehri), 19 Dhu al-Hijjah 1371/9 September 1952'; 'A. Seyf, *al-Ma'tam fil bahrayn* (Manamah: Matba'ah al-Sharqiyyah, 1995), pp. 108–11.
- 39 Bushehri, 'The Struggle of a Family', pp. 115–19 and 121.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 124–5.
- 41 Oral history of the Bushehri family, Manamah, June 1998; 'Ali A. Bushehri, 'The Master Builder of Bahrain', *The Gulf Mirror*, February 1987, issue no. 8.
- 42 Fuccaro, 'Understanding the Urban History of Bahrain', pp. 66–72; Bushehri, 'The Struggle of a Family', p. 111.
- 43 BA, *hibah* documents dated 10 Shawwal 1350 and 18 Ramadan 1353/17 February 1932.
- 44 Confidential despatch from Political Agent Bahrain to Political Resident Bushehr, 7 April 1929, no. C-50 of 1929, IOR, L/P&S/10/1045; R/15/2/1925, Jalsat baladiyyah al-manamah', 10 Jumada al-Thani 1361/11 October 1932.
- 45 There are no written historical records on the development of these neighbourhoods. See sketch attached to letter of S. M. Zwemer to American Board of Foreign Missions, 28 November 1899, Historical Documentation Centre (Rifa', Bahrain). While in the 1930s and 1940s 'Awadhiyyah became a quarter of modern Manamah, Minawiyyah and Suqayyah were integrated in the new residential district of al-Hurah.
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3 Transnational merchants in the nineteenth-century Gulf

The case of the Safar family¹

James Onley

Mixed with the indigenous population [of Manamah] are numerous strangers and settlers, some of whom have been established here for many generations back, attracted from other lands by the profits of either commerce or the pearl fishery, and still retaining more or less the physiognomy and garb of their native countries. Thus the gay-coloured dress of the southern Persian, the saffron-stained vest of 'Oman, the white robe of Nejed, and the striped gown of Bagdad, are often to be seen mingling with the light garments of Bahreyn, its blue and red turban, its white silk-fringed cloth worn Banian fashion round the waist, and its frock-like overall; while a small but unmistakable colony of Indians, merchants by profession, and mainly from Guzerat, Cutch, and their vicinity, keep up here all their peculiarities of costume and manner, and live among the motley crowd, 'among them, but not of them'.

W. G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia* (1865)²

In taking leave of the Persian Gulf, let me describe the last recollection that is imprinted upon the retina of the traveller's memory. The fore deck of a Gulf steamer presents one of the most curious spectacles that can be imagined. I have seen many quaint conglomerations of colour, race, language, and religion, but rarely any more diversified than this. Arabs in their soiled silk *kefieh*s and camel's-hair head-bands...; a Persian dealer carrying horses to Bombay, and awaking bubbles from his eternal *kalian*; Mussulman pilgrims from the holy places of Sunni or Shiah, saying their prayers...; orthodox Hindus conducting their ablutions in a corner, or cooking the food which no one else may defile by contact; a fat Turk sipping his gritty coffee; ...Parsi merchants decked in Bombay-made clothes of doubtful English cut; Indian Buniahs in preternaturally tight white cotton pants, and with daintily-embroidered caps, stuck sideways on their heads; bearded Beluchis; an Afghan with unkempt black locks curling upon his shoulders, ...a *poshtin* (sheepskin) waistcoat, ...and voluminous white pantaloons; Portuguese half-castes...; one or two negroes, with shining contrast of skin and teeth; men black, copper-coloured, slate-coloured, dust-coloured, and white; men with silver rings round their big toes and pearl buckles in their ears; men wholly dressed, half dressed, and almost naked... – surely a more curious study in polyglot or polychrome could not well be conceived.

George Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (1892)³

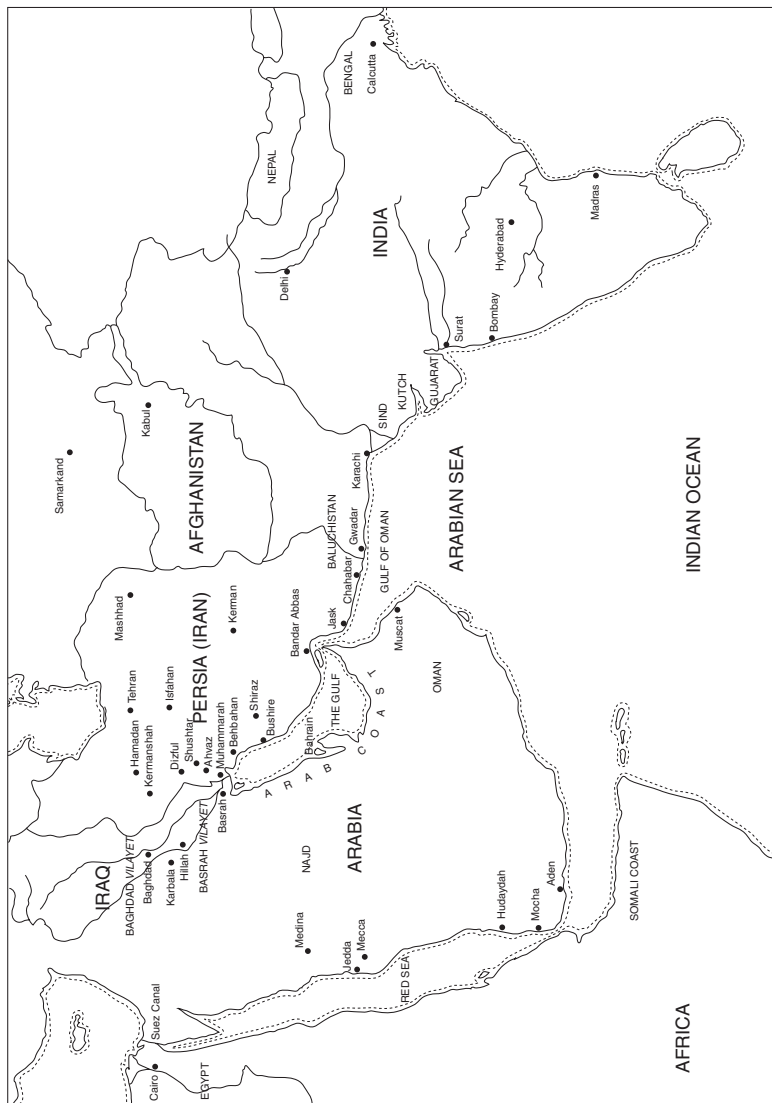
Introduction

The nineteenth-century Gulf was a remarkably transnational space, as the quotations above vividly illustrate. Foremost among the Gulf's transnationals were the merchants who, more than any other group, connected eastern Arabia to the wider world. They lived dual lives, speaking two or more languages and keeping homes in two or more countries. They dominated the import–export sector of the region. Some managed the customs administrations in a number of Gulf ports. Some came to play a central role in regional politics by acting as intermediaries between foreign governments or companies and local rulers and their subjects. This chapter examines the transnational connections, culture and activities of one Gulf merchant family in the nineteenth century: the Safar family of Hillah, Basrah, Bushehr (Bushire), Shiraz, Manamah, Muscat, Mocha (al-Mukha), Hudaydah and Bombay.

Transnational merchant studies and the Gulf

Transnational merchant studies is an emerging sub-field within Middle Eastern and South Asian studies. Exciting new works by Patricia Risso (1995), Ulrike Freitag and William Clarence-Smith (1997), Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (2000), Claude Markovits (2000) and others – building on the pioneering works of Ashin Das Gupta (1960–92), Calvin Allen (1981) and Philip Curtin (1984) – have greatly expanded our understanding of the historical transnational connections between the Middle East and Asia.⁴ The closest we have to a study of transnational merchant families in the Gulf is Hala Fattah's 1997 book on regional trade in Arabia and Iraq, in which she discusses nine families in the space of seven pages, but without the use of local archives.⁵ There have also been some recent articles exploring the transnational connections of Gulf Arab ports and their merchant communities, but merchant families per se are not their focus.⁶ Those studies of Gulf merchant families that do exist give little or no attention to the transnational aspects of these families.⁷ One of the reasons for this is the desire of Gulf Arab families today to downplay or deny their transnational heritage in response to the Arabization policies of the Gulf Arab governments. This desire is well illustrated by an introductory passage from the autobiography of the present Emirati Ambassador to Britain, Easa Saleh al-Gurg:

Where do I begin? Before I was born, certainly, because much of my early life was influenced by the fact that in my grandfather's time my family crossed the waters of the Gulf from the coastal plains of Iran, from the region known as Fars, and returned to our ancestral Arabia.... At the time, the decision to return to Arabia must have represented a considerable surrender of much of what made life pleasant. Thus, for my own family, life in Lingah, the town on the Iranian coast in which my forefathers had settled, was evidently good. Though it was located on the Persian coast, Lingah was an Arab town, occupied and governed by Arabs, whose language and culture determined its



Map 3.1 The Gulf in its wider geographical context.

character My immediate forebears were pearl merchants and landowners and enjoyed the products of that life abundantly; I still retain the title deeds to the lands which we owned in Dishgaan and Lingah. The distinctly Arab character of Lingah and of my own background is evidenced by the fact that every one of these deeds is in Arabic, not Persian.⁸

Al-Gurg goes on to emphasize his Arab heritage and to downplay the fact that his family name is not Arab at all, but Persian.⁹ Gulf Arabs with a transnational heritage such as al-Gurg are sensitive about their genealogy because identity is a political issue. The Gulf Arab states have become preoccupied with cultural autonomy and the maintenance of a purely Arabian, Islamic national character, as their national constitutions make clear:

Kuwait is an Arab State, independent and fully sovereign The people of Kuwait are a part of the Arab Nation.¹⁰

The Kingdom of Bahrain is a fully sovereign independent Islamic Arab State whose population is part of the Arab nation and whose territory is part of the Arab homeland.¹¹

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion.¹²

Qatar is a sovereign and independent Arab state, Islam is the official religion of the country and the *Shariah* is the principal source of legislation The official language is Arabic and the Qatari people are part of the Arab nation.¹³

The Federation [of the UAE] is a part of the wider Arab homeland, to which it is connected by a shared religion, language, and destiny. The people of the Federation are one and are a part of the Arab nation.¹⁴

The Sultanate of Oman is an independent, Arab, Islamic, fully sovereign state with Muscat as its capital.¹⁵

The ruling families themselves have set an example by erasing all evidence of their transnational connections from their national histories. In the Gulf today, public discussion about the Persian, Indian and African mothers of past shaykhs and shaykhas is strongly discouraged. Gulf nationals unable to claim Arabian ancestry and tribal affiliation are normally barred from senior positions in government, while Gulf nationals with no Arab ancestry whatsoever are barred from all but the most junior positions. The only exceptions appear to be Oman and, since 2000, Bahrain.¹⁶ Shi'i Arabs are also discriminated against, but to varying degrees from state to state.¹⁷ A historian relying on accounts of a Gulf Arab family provided by the family itself is, therefore, likely to be presented with a tailored past serving present-day interests.

Another reason why there have been so few studies of Gulf merchant families, let alone those with transnational connections, is the scarcity of sources. Historical records of families such as the Kanoos, al-Zarbs and Safars are few and far

between. Countless collections have been discarded since the 1950s by uninterested family members. Khalid Kanoo – the Group Managing Director of the Kanoo Group of Companies, Chairman of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and caretaker of the Kanoo family archive in Bahrain – tells a dramatic story of how he rescued his family's historical records from destruction. In 1989, the family decided to replace its historical home in Manamah with a modern building. The day before the building's scheduled demolition, the contractor who had been hired to demolish the building casually mentioned to Khalid that some old papers had been left in the house. Khalid raced to the house, which he found locked and boarded up. He broke in and found 46 boxes of company and family records dating from 1899 to 1955. These records had been long neglected: they were covered in dust and cobwebs, and infested with insects. Khalid carted the records home and had them cleaned and treated with insecticide. They now form the bulk of the Kanoo Archive at Khalid's private residence in Bahrain.¹⁸ 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, the caretaker of the Safar family records in Bahrain, tells yet another rescue story. Unfortunately, he can tell you far more about the destruction of historical collections, including the loss of his own family records in 1973 while he was away from Bahrain reading for a degree in history.¹⁹ The government of Bahrain's destruction in the early 1980s of the tens of thousands of Dilmun burial mounds, which contained a treasure-trove of ancient artefacts dating from 2000–600 BCE, is symbolic of this widespread and ongoing destruction of historical documents, artefacts and buildings in the Gulf Arab states. Had it not been for Akbar's preservation of the Safar family records, the Safar family might well have discarded them and I would not be writing about the Safar family today.

The Safar family

The Safars were prosperous general merchants in the nineteenth century, importing, exporting and shipping goods of every description throughout the Gulf region and beyond.²⁰ They maintained an extensive business network with merchant houses in Bushehr, Manamah, Muscat, Mocha, Hudaydah and Bombay, and possibly Hillah and Basrah.²¹ These merchant houses operated as a loose conglomerate – sometimes engaged in joint ventures with each other, sometimes operating on their own. Members of the Safar family typically moved from one house to another as their careers progressed, initially working with their fathers, later working on their own or with an uncle. In the nineteenth century at least three members of the Safar family ranked as Grade I merchants – the wealthiest and the most influential men in the Gulf after the local ruling elite.²² The family's prosperity is reflected in their substantial property holdings: date plantations near Basrah and Manamah, and houses and property in Bushehr, Shiraz, Manamah, Muscat, Mocha, Hudaydah and Bombay's prestigious Fort district.²³ Land-owning was, and still is, a considerable status symbol in the Gulf. Although the family was dispersed throughout Arabia, Iraq, Persia and India, Bushehr was at the centre of the family's activities in the nineteenth century. The family's

principal Bushehr residence was a large, impressive building located on the waterfront in the Kutī district of town next to the residences of the Governor of Bushehr and Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf.²⁴ The size and prestigious location of the house, known as Bayt Safar (Safar House), symbolized the family's great affluence – see Figure 3.1.

The ethnic identity of the Safar family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is difficult to establish because the Iranian and Bahraini branches of the family do not agree on this aspect of their history. The Safars of Bushehr believe that the family originates from Hamadan in western Iran and is, therefore, Persian – possibly Bakhtiyari (a tribal group from western Persia that speaks a dialect of Farsi).²⁵ This belief is supported by a detailed genealogical account of the family written by a traveller who visited the Safars in Bushehr in 1896.²⁶ Many of the Safars were Persian subjects, and a photograph taken in the late 1890s of the head of the family, Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar, clearly shows him wearing a Persian-style turban – see Figure 3.2. Further evidence of a Persian origin is the fact that virtually all members of the family spoke Farsi as a mother tongue and that most had Persian titles such as *agha* (which they pronounced 'au' as only the Bakhtiyari do), *mirza* and *khan*.²⁷

The Safars of Bahrain, however, believe that their male ancestors were Shi'i Arabs from southern Iraq.²⁸ This claim is supported by none other than Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar himself, who once explained, 'I am of Arab descent, but my family has been many years resident in Persia.'²⁹ The family tree drawn by him shows him to be the great-grandson of Hajji Safar, a Shi'i Arab born in Hillah, 35 miles south of the Ottoman provincial capital of Baghdad.³⁰ Although Hajji Safar later moved to Persia, his nineteenth-century descendants maintained



Figure 3.1 Bayt Safar (left), the Governor of Bushehr's residence (centre), and the Gulf Residency headquarters (right), Bushehr, c.1970 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).



Figure 3.2 Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar (centre) and his Arab staff, Bahrain, c.1898–9 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).

Table 3.1 Known Safar spouses, 1778–1900

Persian	21 (10 from the Sharif family)
Arab	10 (6 from the Safar family)
African	4 (all Abyssinian slaves)
Indian	1

a strong connection with Iraq and Arabia: many were born there, many lived there, many owned property there, many were buried there, and many spoke Arabic. A closer inspection of the photograph of Muhammad Rahim reveals that, although he is wearing a Persian-style turban, he is also wearing an Arab *‘abah* or *bisht* (cloak).³¹ All things considered, it seems that the best description of many of the nineteenth-century Safars is that some of them were Persianized Arabs or Persians of Arab descent (similar to the *hawalah*³²) and some of them were Arabized Persians. In this study, ‘Persian’ refers to the indigenous inhabitants of Persia who speak Persian (Farsi) as their mother tongue, rather than to all the peoples of Persia (pre-modern Iran) such as the Persians, Arabs, Kurds, Shahsevans, Turkomans, Azeris, Qashqa’is and Baluchis.³³

The Arab–Persian hybridity of the Safar family is evident from their marriage patterns, summarized in Table 3.1. In the twentieth century this hybridity gradually disappeared. The Safars of Bahrain today have an Arab identity – they were born in Bahrain to a Shi’i Arab mother from Karbala in southern Iraq; speak Arabic as their mother tongue; and think of themselves as Arabs.³⁴ The Safars of Bushehr today have an Iranian identity – they claim Persian roots; speak Farsi as

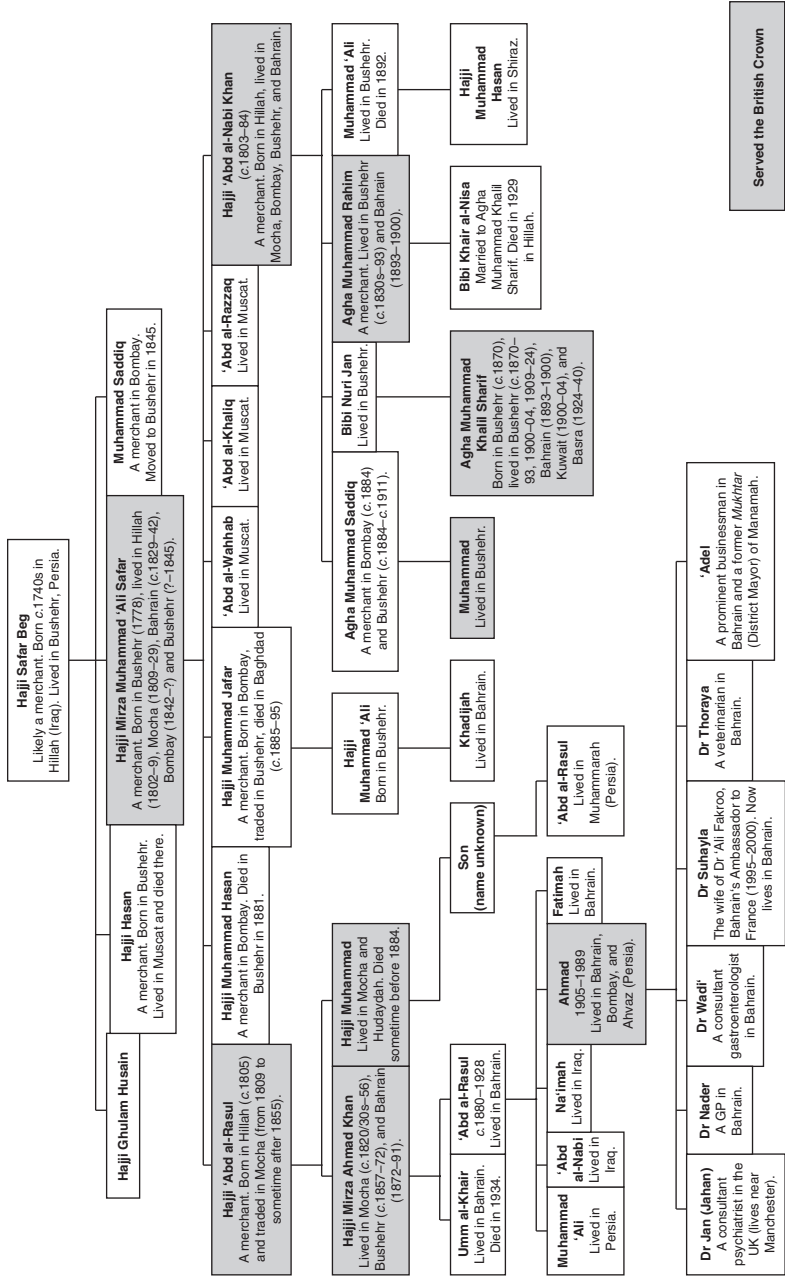
a mother tongue; and think of themselves as Iranians.³⁵ The Iraqi, Yemeni, Omani and Indian branches of the family, which are no longer in touch with the Bahraini and Iranian branches, may similarly define their identity in relation to their locale.³⁶

Hajji Safar was probably born in the 1740s and appears to have been a man of considerable status and wealth. On the Safar family tree drawn in the 1960s, he is given the title of *beg* (chief), a title used both by the Ottomans and the Bakhtiyari. He was married to the sister of Shaykh Hajji Jabir Khan al-Muhaisin, who was the Shaykh of Muhammadarah in south-western Persia (r. 1819–81) and a Shi'i Arab.³⁷ At some point before 1778, he moved to Bushehr, Persia's principal port in the Gulf, which suggests that he was a merchant. He had four sons, Hajji Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Safar, Muhammad Saddiq, Hajji Hasan and Hajji Ghulam Husain, three of whom became merchants – see the family tree in Table 3.2.

The eldest son, Hajji Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Safar, was born in Bushehr in 1778. In 1802, at the age of 24, Muhammad 'Ali moved to his father's hometown of Hillah. He lived there for six or seven years, during which time he purchased two large date plantations near Basrah. These estates remained in family hands for over a hundred years and were worth nearly a quarter of a million rupees by the late nineteenth century.³⁸ In 1809, Muhammad 'Ali moved to Mocha, where he established a merchant house, known locally as Bayt al-'Ajami (the Persian's House).³⁹ After trading for 20 years in Yemen, he handed the business over to his second eldest son, Hajji 'Abd al-Rasul (b. c.1805), who remained there for the rest of his life. From Mocha, Muhammad 'Ali moved to Bahrain where he established another merchant house, Bayt Safar. One can estimate the degree of his affluence during this time from a loan he made to the East India Company for Rs 7,000,⁴⁰ which was about three times the monthly salary of Britain's highly paid Political Resident in the Gulf.⁴¹ At some point between 1835 and 1839, Muhammad 'Ali took leave of his post to go on *hajj* to Mecca. He continued to live in Bahrain until 1842, when he moved to Bombay where his brother Muhammad Saddiq lived. He may have purchased his substantial properties in Bombay's Fort district at this time.⁴² In the last year or two of his life, Muhammad 'Ali moved back to his hometown of Bushehr, having established an extensive family business network with sons in Bushehr, Mocha, Bahrain and Bombay. Hillah and Basrah may have also been included in this network, as was Muscat, where another merchant house was managed by Muhammad 'Ali's brother Hajji Hasan.⁴³

After Muhammad 'Ali's death in 1845, his son in Mocha, Hajji 'Abd al-Rasul, carried on as before; his two sons in Bombay, Hajji Muhammad Jafar and Hajji Muhammad Hasan, looked after the family's business interests in India; and his eldest son, Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan, took over the family business in Bushehr. Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan had been born in Hillah around 1803 and had worked under his father in Mocha, Bahrain, Bombay and Bushehr. By the 1850s, 'Abd al-Nabi had become one of the principal merchants of Bushehr.⁴⁴ One can estimate the degree of his affluence from a loan he made in 1863 to the Commander of HMS *Clyde* for Ks 8,000 (Rs 3,200), a loan which enabled the *Clyde* to return

Table 3.2 The Safar family tree (abridged)



Note
The family changed its name to al-Safar in the 1960s.

to India after the British Political Resident in the Gulf (headquartered at Bushehr) had refused to pay any funds out of the Residency treasury.⁴⁵ This sum was about one-and-a-half times the Resident's large monthly salary.⁴⁶ 'Abd al-Nabi maintained substantial business interests in Bushehr, Bahrain and Bombay.⁴⁷ He resided mainly in Bushehr in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, but in the 1870s and 1880s he also lived in Bahrain for a large part of every year. In Bushehr he was assisted by his son, Agha Muhammad Rahim, and in Bahrain he was helped by his nephew, Hajji Ahmad Khan (son of Hajji 'Abd al-Rasul in Mocha), who had moved to the Gulf from Mocha many years before.

When 'Abd al-Nabi died in 1884, Ahmad continued to run things in Bahrain while Muhammad Rahim took over the family business in Bushehr. When Ahmad himself died in 1891, Bushehr's economy had begun to decline while that of Manamah was prospering. In 1893, therefore, Muhammad Rahim decided to move to Bahrain and make the island the new centre of the family's business operations in the Gulf. He left affairs in Bushehr in the hands of his Christian business partner, John Zaytun,⁴⁸ and moved into Bayt Safar in Manamah, where his cousin, father and grandfather had lived before him. Bayt Safar commanded a prominent position on the waterfront and was reputedly large enough to have accommodated a thousand safety-seekers during the battle of Manamah (1842) in the first Bahraini civil war.⁴⁹ As with any building of note in Manamah at the time, it was most probably constructed in what William Palgrave called 'the Persian style of architecture', which he described as 'elegant and spacious, with ogival arches, balconies, terraces, porticoes, and latticed windows'.⁵⁰ These buildings, in which dwelt 'the nobler and wealthier inhabitants, merchants, proprietors, and men of government', were typically two storeys high, with a large inner courtyard and deep verandas, onto which opened many slim double doors surmounted by semicircular stained-glass windows.⁵¹ They stood in sharp contrast to the 'mere palm-leaf cottages', known as *barasti* huts, which accounted for the majority of dwellings in Manamah until the 1920s.⁵² When Muhammad Rahim died in 1900, the family returned to Bushehr and later sold Bayt Safar for Rs 22,000 (£1,466-13-3) – eight times the Gulf Resident's monthly salary of Rs 2,750 – a vast sum considering the now dilapidated condition of the house.⁵³ Muhammad Rahim's nephew 'Abd al-Rasul bin Ahmad remained in Bahrain. His descendants still live there, but they have long since lost touch with their cousins in Bushehr, Shiraz, Basrah, Hillah, Muscat, Mocha, Hudaydah and Bombay.⁵⁴

The Safar family's great mobility in the nineteenth century had a demonstrable influence on its members. Hajji Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Safar (1778–1845) was born in Bushehr; lived in Hillah, Mocha, Bahrain, Bushehr and Bombay; was a Persian, Ottoman, and possibly British Indian subject; wrote his letters in Farsi and Arabic; and spoke Arabic and Farsi. His title, *mirza* (a Shi'i title indicating that one is descended from the Prophet through one's mother), is a common one in Persia, suggesting that his mother or maternal grandmother was Persian. His eldest son, Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan Safar (c.1803–84), was born in Hillah to a Persian mother from Bushehr; lived in Mocha, Bushehr, Bahrain and Bombay;

was a Persian subject; used the Persian title of *khan* (esquire, gentleman),⁵⁵ kept his business records in Farsi; and spoke Farsi, Arabic, English and possibly Hindi. His brother, Hajji Muhammad Jafar, was born in Bombay to a Persian mother from Shiraz; lived in Bombay and Bushehr; was a British Indian subject; dressed in the style of an Indian merchant in Bombay; and most likely spoke Farsi, Arabic and Hindi – see Figure 3.3. ‘Abd al-Nabi’s son Agha Muhammad Rahim (c.1830s–1900) was born in Bushehr to a Persian mother; lived in Bushehr and Bahrain; was a Persian and Ottoman subject; used the Persian title *agha* (commander, gentleman); dressed in a hybrid Persian–Arab style (see Figure 3.2); wrote in Farsi and Arabic; and spoke Farsi, Arabic, English and possibly Hindi.

Hajji Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Safar’s second eldest son, Hajji ‘Abd al-Rasul (b. c.1805), was born in Iraq to a Persian mother from Bushehr; grew up in Hillah; lived in Mocha; wrote his letters in Farsi and Arabic; was described by the British as ‘Persian’;⁵⁶ and was most probably a British Indian subject. Hajji ‘Abd al-Rasul’s eldest son, Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan (c.1820/30s–91), was born in Mocha to a Persian mother from Bushehr; lived in Bushehr and Bahrain; was a Persian and British Indian subject; wrote his letters in Arabic; spoke Arabic and Farsi; and used the Persian titles *mirza* and *khan*.⁵⁷ Ahmad’s eldest son, ‘Abd al-Rasul (c.1880–1928), was born in Bushehr to a Persian mother; lived in Bahrain; wrote his letters in Arabic and Farsi; and dressed in the style of a Yemeni



Figure 3.3 Hajji Muhammad Jafar Safar, Bombay, c.1865 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).

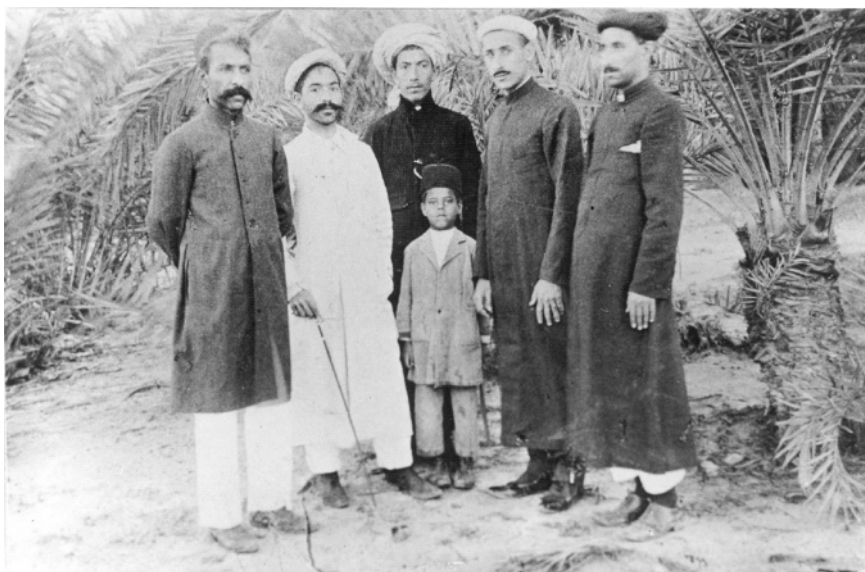


Figure 3.4 'Abd al-Rasul Safar (centre) and his son, Ahmad, Bahrain, c.1910 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).



Figure 3.5 Agha Muhammad Khalil Sharif (centre) – the nephew and son-in-law of Agha Muhammad Rahim Saraf – seated with Major Francis Prideaux (Political Agent at Bahrain 1904–9), Bushehr, c.1909 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).

merchant (possibly in the fashion of his father) – see Figure 3.4. ‘Abd al-Rasul’s son Ahmad (1905–89) was born in Bahrain to a Persian mother from Behbahan in south-western Persia; spoke Farsi as a mother tongue; dressed in a Persian style in his youth; was educated in Bombay; lived in Iran and Bahrain; and was a Bahraini citizen – see Figure 3.4. Ahmad’s children were all born in Bahrain to an Iraqi Arab mother from Karbala; speak Arabic as a mother tongue; and are Bahraini citizens. Ahmad’s eldest son, Jan (Jahan), now lives near Manchester. Jan’s four children were born to British mothers; speak English as a mother tongue; live in Britain; and have a British–Arab identity.⁵⁸

One of the natural results of the Safars’ close connections with Iraq, Persia, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, India and Britain was their intermarriage with local families. The most notable connection through marriage was with the Sharif family of Bushehr.⁵⁹ The Safars intermarried with the Sharifs at least ten times between the 1770s and 1890s, creating a close bond between the two families – see Table 3.1.⁶⁰ Sharif family history explains how the Safars and Sharifs are really branches of the same family. Members of the two families in Bahrain today still regard themselves as distant cousins, although they no longer behave as a single family – see Figure 3.5.⁶¹

The Safars’ relations with the rulers of Bahrain and Kuwait

The Safars exercised considerable influence with Shaykh ‘Isa al-Khalifah (ruler of Bahrain 1869–1923) and Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah (ruler of Kuwait 1896–1915), but this was not unusual. Before oil, most affluent merchants enjoyed some degree of influence with local rulers. Jill Crystal and Fatma al-Sayegh have studied this sphere of influence in Kuwait, Qatar and Dubai, but the patterns they identify can be seen in other Gulf shaykhdoms as well.⁶² Crystal argues that merchant influence stemmed from the Gulf rulers’ economic dependence on the merchants. A substantial portion of the rulers’ revenues came from the merchants through the customs duties and other taxes that flowed from a prosperous entrepôt economy. Gulf rulers also depended upon occasional loans from the wealthiest merchants. Beyond this, pearl merchants also had economic control over large portions of the local population through employment and indebtedness. All this gave the wealthiest merchants considerable political influence with the rulers. The rulers could not afford to ignore the opinions of powerful merchants within their shaykhdoms. A wealthy merchant’s status ensured him regular, predictable access to his ruler’s *majlis* (court) and gave him input into decision making. The merchants’ access to decision making, Crystal notes, ‘was primarily informal. Their influence on the policies of the ruler was casual and left no written record. The most common kind of informal influence was proximity: the influence of those with everyday access to the ruling family through marriage, friendship and court presence.’⁶³ The political dynamics of a given issue could see a merchant united with his ruler against other merchants, or united with other merchants against his ruler. Politically, the power relationship between the rulers and the merchants

was one of counterbalance; economically, it was one of interdependence.⁶⁴ The result, says Crystal, was a political structure consisting of 'a ruling Shaikh, whose pre-eminence was secure, but constrained by the merchant élite, tied to the economy of pearling and trade'.⁶⁵

The Safars' close relations with the al-Khalifah date from 1869, when Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Safar and his son Agha Muhammad Rahim helped Shaykh 'Isa assume the rulership of Bahrain in the wake of the shaykhdom's second civil war.⁶⁶ One account states that when Shaykh 'Isa returned to Bahrain in early December 1869, he found his late father's house in Muharraq in ruins and the government treasury empty. Muhammad Rahim, acting on his father's orders, handed over the use of Bayt Safar in Manamah and presented the Shaykh 'with a gift of about 100,000 Muhammed Shahi Riels [Rs 40,000] for the purpose of providing the preliminary requirements of the Emirate'.⁶⁷ In appreciation for this support, Shaykh 'Isa granted the Safars a concession on customs duty in perpetuity and gave them some control over the island's pearling fleet.⁶⁸ Relations between Shaykh 'Isa and the Safars were very close for the next 25 years, although the al-Khalifah never intermarried with them – possibly for political reasons (to limit the Safars' influence with the ruling family) and possibly for religious reasons (because the Safars were not Sunni). Shaykh 'Isa was especially good friends with Hajji Ahmad Khan Safar (c.1820/30s–91); in the 1880s the Shaykh presented him with a horse and two date plantations south-west of Manamah. One of the plantations remains in the Safar family to this day.⁶⁹ When Shaykh 'Isa's son Shaykh Hamad visited the British Resident in Bushehr in November 1897, he stayed at Bayt Safar, next to the British Residency – see Figure 3.1.⁷⁰

Muhammad Rahim Safar also enjoyed a close friendship with Shaykh Mubarak of Kuwait.⁷¹ During the winter of 1898–9, Britain's Gulf Resident, Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm Meade (1897–1900), took advantage of this by asking Muhammad Rahim to assist him in the negotiation of the Anglo-Kuwaiti Exclusive Agreement of 1899.⁷² The Exclusive Agreement, though kept secret at the time, brought Kuwait into the British fold by placing the shaykhdom's foreign relations under British control – at least in theory. The Agreement was the shaykhdom's first step in its transformation into a British-protected state like the coastal shaykhdoms of the lower Gulf. The Resident reported to India that Muhammad Rahim had been 'of considerable assistance' to him during these negotiations.⁷³ Muhammad Rahim was even made a signatory to the Agreement, his name appearing just below Shaykh Mubarak's.⁷⁴

The Safars' collaboration with the British

Protection was one of the greatest concerns of Gulf merchants before the twentieth century. Transnational merchants trading in the Gulf had to be constantly on guard against pirates and bedouin raiders. If they fell out of favour with the local ruler, their property might be confiscated by members of the local ruling family. To gain protection for themselves, their businesses and their families, therefore, members of merchant families such as the Safars frequently allied

themselves with European governments or companies. Membership on the staff of an American, Belgian, British, French, German or Russian consulate or company in the Gulf usually carried with it the much-sought-after status of 'protected person'. All non-Britons in the employ of the British government or British companies, for example, were known as 'British-protected persons' and were entitled to the protection and 'good offices' (diplomatic representation and mediation) of British civil and military officers around the world. If an injustice occurred against a British-protected person or his family in the Gulf, the Gulf Resident was obligated to intervene on his behalf. This practice discouraged harassment of British employees and protected their private businesses as well. Their ships, goods, families and staff were all protected, giving them the same advantages British merchants enjoyed in the Gulf. They had a right to the Resident's good offices if their goods were seized and were entitled to the protection of the Indian Navy and Royal Navy in times of trouble. In Bahrain, they were also entitled by treaty to receive 'the treatment and consideration of the subjects and dependants of the most favoured people', including the right to pay no more than 5 per cent *ad valorem* on imported goods.⁷⁵

Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar once explained how his family 'originally took up the work to get British protection'.⁷⁶ As shown in Table 3.3, six members of the Safar family served the British Government of India as Political Agents between 1829 and 1900. Five of the men had held the posts of Political Assistant (*munshi*), Confidential News Agent or Deputy Agent prior to their appointment as Political Agent. A seventh member of the family, Muhammad Safar (the grandson of Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan), served as a *munshi* at the Gulf Residency headquarters in Bushehr in the 1900s, while an eighth member of the family, Ahmad Safar (the grandson of Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan), served as a translator with the Royal Navy's Gulf Squadron in the 1930s. Two patterns emerge from this list. Four members of the family served as British Agents in Bahrain; in effect, they ran the British Agency as a family business for 34 years between 1834 and 1900. Five of the Agents were themselves the sons of British Agents – a reflection of the practice by some Gulf families of closely associating themselves with a particular European government or company, generation after generation. This echoes the tradition of family service with the East India Company and British Government of India found in many British families.

Unlike the Safars, however, the closely related Sharif family tended to stay out of the political limelight. As Table 3.4 shows, four members of the family worked for the British Government of India as *munshis* and one served as Deputy Agent, but none ever held the post of Political Agent. A fifth member of the family, Agha Muhammad Tahir al-Sharif, served as the Shipping Agent for Gray, Mackenzie & Co. (the Gulf Agent of the British India Steam Navigation Company) from the 1920s to the 1950s. Sharif family history tells how they were Grade I or II merchants in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ By the twentieth century, however, their fortunes had declined significantly. Even Agha Muhammad Khalil, who inherited half of Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar's fortune in 1900 – including Bayt Safar in Manamah and the two Safar family estates near Basrah – lost everything by the

Table 3.3 Britain's agents in Arabia and Persia from the Safar family

<i>Name</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Period</i>
1. Hajji Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Safar	<i>munshi</i> (Political Assistant) Political Agent	Bahrain Bahrain	c.1829–1834 1834–1842
2. Hajji 'Abd al-Rasul Safar	Broker/Political Agent	Mocha	c.1829–?
3. Hajji Muhammad Safar	Deputy Political Agent	Mocha	c.1829–?
	Political Agent	Hudaydah	c.1875
4. Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan Safar	Deputy Political Agent <i>munshi</i> and Confidential News Agent	Bahrain	c.1834–1842
	Political Agent	Bushehr	c.1842–1871
5. Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan Safar	<i>munshi</i> ?	Bahrain	1872–1884
	<i>munshi</i>	Mocha	c.1829–1856
	Deputy Political Agent	Bushehr	1857–1872
	Political Agent	Bahrain	1872–1884
6. Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar	<i>munshi</i> and Confidential News Agent	Bahrain	1884–1891
	Political Agent	Bushehr	c.1860s–1893
		Bahrain	1893–1900

Note

The family changed its name to al-Safar in the 1960s.

Table 3.4 Britain's *munshis* in Arabia and Persia from the Sharif family

<i>Name</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Period</i>
1. Agha Muhammad Karim Sharif	<i>munshi</i>	Bushehr	c.1890s
2. Agha Muhammad Khalil Sharif	Deputy Political Agent	Bahrain	1893–1900
	Dragoman (chief <i>munshi</i>)	Bushehr	1900–1904
	<i>munshi</i> /Deputy Political Agent	Kuwait	1904–1909
	Dragoman	Bushehr	1909–1924
3. Agha Muhammad Muhsin Sharif	<i>munshi</i>	Bahrain	1893–1896
	<i>munshi</i>	Bushehr	1896–1924
4. Agha Muhammad al-Sharif	<i>munshi</i>	Bahrain	c.1920s–1940

Note

The family changed its name to al-Sharif in the early twentieth century.

1930s. This might explain in part why the British never appointed the Sharifs as Political Agents. By the time they entered Crown service in the 1890s, they were no longer the sort of extremely affluent and influential men the British were looking to recruit as agents. It would also explain why Safar–Sharif intermarriage did not continue past the 1890s. Safar family history records how Zainab Behbahani, the status-conscious daughter-in-law of Hajji Ahmad Safar (Agent 1884–91), forbade her children to marry into the Sharif family, despite the fact that the two families were related.⁷⁸

The Safars' and Sharifs' local knowledge, networks of merchant houses and extensive social contacts throughout the region were of tremendous value to the British, as indicated by this letter of commendation from a British political officer in Bushehr:

As I am shortly proceeding to India, I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Agha Mahomed Rahim ibn Hajee Abdun Nabee [Safar], who has repeatedly proved of great use in obtaining correct information, the securing of which required much tact, delicacy of management, and personal influence. I have found him trustworthy, sincere, zealous and ever willing to carry out any work entrusted to him to the best of his ability. He is well informed about local matters and, having a large circle of friends at Bushire, Busreh, & other ports in [the] Persian Gulf, correct information can always be obtained through him, & I feel quite certain that as a Confidential Agent his services are indispensable to the Bushire Residency. The influence which he has acquired locally makes him a very useful person in certain negotiations of delicate nature. I do, therefore, with pleasure bear this testimony to his worth, expressing my sense of esteem and sincere regard for him.⁷⁹

The Safar and Sharif family manuscripts in the Bushehri Archive in Bahrain include many statements and letters of this nature from British political officers attesting to the high social status, transnational connections and political influence

of many members of the two families. Just as the Safar family's affluence was evident from the size of Bayt Safar in Bushehr, their close connection with Britain and the Gulf Residency was symbolized by the house's location beside the Residency headquarters – see Figure 3.1.

While the Safars already enjoyed status, influence and wealth, association with the dominant power in the region offered prospects for further improvement. A Safar's privileged status was symbolized by the Union Jack, which flew outside his house to proclaim that he was the local representative of the British Government of India. The Union Jack stood for imperial power, and its presence would have reinforced the impression that the British Agent was the most influential man in a ruler's domain outside the ruler's family. He represented the dominant power in the region, Britain, and had regular, direct access to the most powerful men in Arabia, the local rulers and shaykhs. If Britain's Resident in Bushehr was 'the Uncrowned King of the Persian Gulf', as Lord Curzon dubbed him,⁸⁰ then his locally recruited agents were the Gulf's uncrowned princes. This would explain why the Safars were willing to run the British agencies at what at first appears to be a financial loss to themselves. The Agency-related expenses of Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan Safar (Bahrain Agent 1872–84), for example, were over four-and-a-half times what he received from the British Government of India.⁸¹ But this loss was a small price to pay for the protection and enhanced status, influence and contacts he enjoyed as a British agent. These benefits profited his business, enabling him to recoup the Agency operating expenses as part of his larger business profits.

Transnational merchants such as the Safars were highly effective as British agents in the Gulf. Britain's Resident in Bushehr was responsible for maintaining contact with the dozens of rulers, chiefs and governors in Arabia and Persia, enforcing Britain's treaties with the local rulers, staying informed about events throughout the region, and protecting British interests. Transnational merchants were not only willing to work for small salaries, totally incommensurate with the value of their services, they were also well suited to help the Gulf Resident with these duties. They generally had extensive social and business contacts throughout the Gulf and beyond. Most had relatives, with whom they were in regular touch, handling the family business in many of the region's ports and market towns: Baghdad, Basrah, Muhammarah, Bushehr, Shiraz, Isfahan, Lingah, Bandar 'Abbas, Manamah, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, Hudaydah and Bombay. The Safar family had members in eight of these towns in the nineteenth century. The top transnational merchant families in the Gulf still operate in this way.⁸² Merchants such as the Safars were well placed to be the eyes and ears of the Gulf Resident. They knew the region better than the British, spoke the languages of the Gulf better, and had better local and regional intelligence networks. They also enjoyed a high status within Gulf society and a resulting influence with the Gulf rulers that was independent of their association with the British Government of India. It was only by tapping into the transnational mercantile networks of the Gulf that successive Gulf Residents were able to maintain political contacts, stay informed and protect British interests as well as they did in the nineteenth

century. By employing wealthy transnational merchants such as the Safars as political agents, Gulf Residents were also able to take advantage of the political relationship between the merchants and the rulers. Today, such locally recruited agents are known as honorary consuls, but their role is now confined, for the most part, to non-political duties.⁸³

There were a number of disadvantages to employing merchants as agents instead of British political officers. The most obvious was the possibility of a conflict of interest between their official duties and their private business pursuits. But there would have been little incentive for the merchants to continue working for the Resident if their association with the British Government of India did not benefit their business interests. The British admitted that the salaries they paid these merchants did not reflect the true value of their services.⁸⁴ One Resident, writing about Agha Muhammad Rahim Saffar (Bahrain Agent 1893–1900), explained how

He has the reputation of being a well-to-do merchant, and it would, I may say at once, be difficult to get a man of his position to carry on the duties he performs on the pay of the post, Rs 100 per mensem, if he were not allowed to trade. Mohamed Rahim and his predecessors no doubt have only held it because it gave them prestige and assisted them in their private commercial undertakings.⁸⁵

Because the Gulf Residency was always run on a tight budget, Residents could not afford to pay these merchants the same salaries as British officers. By both permitting them to engage in trade and allowing their businesses to benefit from their association with the Residency, the Resident compensated them for their inadequate salaries. Whatever conflicts of interest there were in mixing trade with politics, most of the Residents and their superiors in India seem to have considered this a price that had to be paid for the services of such well-connected and influential men as the Safars.

Transnational connections in the Gulf, then and now

Nineteenth-century eastern Arabia was closely linked to Persia and India through trade. Gulf Arab merchants such as the Safars resided in Persian and Indian ports, and Persian and Indian merchants resided in Arabian ports. This commercial connection naturally resulted in a strong Persian and Indian cultural influence on eastern Arabia's ports and people – clearly evident in the styles of architecture, clothing and cuisine. Persian- and Indian-style buildings, often built by Persians and Indians, dominated eastern Arabian ports. Arabian dhows were built with wood imported from India. Kashmiri shawls adorned the heads of the ruling families of Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Dubai; white Persian-style turbans, such as those in Figure 3.2, were worn by Shi'i Arab elites such as the Safars throughout the Gulf region; and colourful Indian-style turbans were favoured by Omanis, northern Emiratis, Qataris and Bahrainis – especially the *hawalah*

(see the man standing in Figure 3.2).⁸⁶ Many in the Gulf Arab elites had Persian or Indian wives, whose children spoke Farsi, Urdu, Baluchi or Hindi, in addition to Arabic. Many were graduates of Bombay schools, as was Ahmad Safar (1905–89). Gulf Arabs ate their lamb and fish with curry and rice from India. In these and countless other ways, eastern Arabia's ports and people were as much a part of the Indian Ocean world as they were a part of the Arab world. Gulf historians have much to learn, therefore, from the work of Indian Ocean historians such as K. N. Chaudhuri.⁸⁷

Twenty-first-century eastern Arabia remains a transnational space, but the nature of that transnationalism has changed. Iranians and Indians still live in Gulf Arab ports, but few Gulf Arabs have connections with Iran or India today. The predominant foreign influence is now British and American. Most Gulf Arab elites have strong ties with Britain or America, or both: they spend their summers there and have degrees from British and American universities. Many in the small Gulf states became Westernized in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s or 1970s – speaking English, adopting some Western ways and wearing Western attire (from the popular blazer-and-*thob* combination to the full suit and tie). Buildings constructed during this time were often designed by Western architects and built along Western lines. This process of Westernization was reinforced by the presence of large Western expatriate communities in the Gulf.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Gulf Arab states underwent a further cultural reorientation. During this time most Gulf Arab elites abandoned Western attire and adopted Gulf Arab national dress in an assertion of regional Arab identity. One of the reasons for this was the perception that Westernization had begun to threaten their cultural identity.⁸⁸ Another reason was the growing need to distinguish between themselves and the ever-expanding number of expatriates in the Gulf, especially the Arab expatriates.⁸⁹ National dress became the hallmark of citizenship in the Gulf. The oil wealth of the 1950s and 1960s (and, in the case of Bahrain, of the 1930s and 1940s) had released the ruling families from their dependence on the merchants and enabled them to build a modern state infrastructure. To consolidate their new power base, the rulers granted the vast majority of government positions to members of their own families or to other Sunni Arabs (and Ibadi Arabs in Oman) of similar Najdi descent and tribal affiliation – often from elite merchant families. They also promoted a Gulf Arab national identity as a necessary prerequisite for participation in government and a desirable identity for all citizens, especially the elites. With the sole exception of Oman, Persian- and Indian-style headdress was replaced with a purely Arabian headdress: the Najdi '*agal*' (head rope), worn with either the Nadji *shimagh* (the red-and-white chequered headscarf of central Arabia) or the white *ghutra* indigenous to eastern Arabia.⁹⁰ Since the 1980s, the ruling families have strongly emphasized the importance of Gulf Arab culture, tribal lineage and Sunni Islam (Ibadi Islam in Oman). The results of this can be seen everywhere: in the wearing of 'traditional' Arabian bedouin clothing for all but the most junior members of government, in the creation of national museums celebrating the heritage of Sunni Gulf Arabs (Ibadi Arabs in Oman), in the construction of vast Sunni

mosques (Ibadi mosques in Oman) and in the Arabesque design of new buildings. Persian- and Indian-style buildings continue to dominate the historical districts of the port cities, but their architecture is now described as 'Arabian'. At the Portuguese fort in Bahrain, one finds a large sign greeting visitors to 'Bahrain Fort' with an explanation of how the fort is not Portuguese, but Arab. Multi-culturalism among Gulf citizens is everywhere downplayed and intermarriage between Gulf Arabs and non-Arabs is discouraged. One now rarely sees the Arab-Persian or Arab-Indian hybridity and blending of cultures that once characterized transnational Arab merchant families in the Gulf. This explains why Gulf Arabs with historical transnational connections, such as Easa Saleh al-Gurg whose story began this chapter, have begun to downplay their non-Arab heritage, and why, in an ironic reversal of the transnationalism of the past, some Gulf citizens of Indian and Sunni Persian descent have begun to Arabize – speaking Arabic, adopting Arab ways and wearing Gulf Arab national dress – although still speaking Baluchi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu or Farsi at home.⁹¹

The case of the Safar family thus offers us a rare glimpse into nineteenth-century Gulf society, long before the politicization of Gulf Arab identity, revealing a far more transnational elite culture than that now promoted in the Gulf Arab states. In contrast to Gulf merchant families today, a nineteenth-century transnational family did not have to Arabize to gain acceptance and become influential. Family members did not merely reside in the ports of Arabia, Iraq, Persia and India; they were connected to these places through culture, language, marriage and birth. The result was a blending of cultures into a complex transnational family identity. The case of the Safar family also illustrates the ways in which transnational merchant families operated in the Gulf before oil. These families had an intimate knowledge of local languages and politics, as well as extensive social and business contacts, throughout the Gulf and beyond. Many had considerable influence with local rulers. Because they could provide both intelligence and influence, senior members of these families made the best possible intermediaries between foreign powers and local rulers. By employing the Safars and others like them as representatives, the British were able to operate within the indigenous political systems and intelligence networks of the Gulf. Men like the Safars, who constituted the vast majority of British agents in the nineteenth-century Gulf, connected the region to that most transnational entity of all, the British empire.

Abbreviations

Asst.	Assistant
EIC	East India Company
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
For.	Foreign
Gov.	Governor
Govt	Government
HMG	Her/His Majesty's Government

HMS	Her/His Majesty's Ship
Ks	Krans (principal unit of currency of Persia)
n.	footnote
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London
PRPG	Political Resident in the Persian Gulf
reg.	register
Rs	Rupees
Sec.	Secretary
SNOPG	Senior Naval Officer in the Persian Gulf

Notes

- 1 This chapter could not have been written without the invaluable assistance of 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, caretaker of the Safar family manuscript collection and Bahrain's foremost historian of its national history. Research for this chapter and several other works was generously funded by the Bahrain–British Foundation, which paid for a year of fieldwork in Bahrain, and partially funded by the Society for Arabian Studies, which covered some of the expenses of a year of archival work at the British Library in London. I would also like to thank Gloria Onley, 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Jan al-Safar, James Piscatori, Nelida Fuccaro, Mandana Lambert and Gabriele vom Bruck for their helpful comments on this chapter.
- 2 W. G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862–63)*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1865), vol. II, pp. 211–12.
- 3 G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1892), pp. 467–8.
- 4 P. Rizzo, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview, 1995); U. Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); D. Lombard and J. Aubin (eds), *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); and C. Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). These authors are building on the pioneering works of Ashin Das Gupta, Calvin Allen and Philip Curtin. See Das Gupta's collected essays 1960–92 in *Merchants of Maritime India, 1500–1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Allen's much-quoted article 'The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44/1 (1981): 39–53; and Curtin's famous book, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Also see J. E. Wills, 'Maritime Asia 1500–1800: The Interactive Emergence of European Domination', *American Historical Review* 98/1 (February 1993): 83–105.
- 5 H. Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 77–83.
- 6 F. Broeze, 'Kuwait before Oil: The Dynamics of Morphology of an Arab Port City', in F. Broeze (ed.), *Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th–20th Centuries* (London: Kegan Paul, 1997), pp. 149–90; N. Fuccaro, 'Islam and Urban Space: Ma'tams in Bahrain before Oil', *Newsletter of the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM)* 3 (July 1999): 12; N. Fuccaro, 'Understanding the Urban History of Bahrain', *Critique: Journal of Critical Studies of the Middle East* 17/2 (2000): 49–81; N. Fuccaro, 'Visions of the City: Urban Studies on the Gulf', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 35/2 (2001): 175–87; F. al-Sayegh, 'Merchants' Role in a Changing Society: The Case of Dubai, 1900–90', *Middle Eastern Studies* 34/1 (1998): 87–102; and K. McPherson, 'Port Cities as Nodal Points of Change: The Indian Ocean, 1890s–1920s', in L. T. Fawaz and

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- 7 J. R. L. Carter, *Leading Merchant Families of Saudi Arabia* (London: Scorpion, 1979); J. R. L. Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait* (London: Scorpion, 1984); M. Field, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1984); K. M. Kanoo, *The House of Kanoo: A Century of Arabian Family Business* (London: London Centre for Arab Studies, 1997); S. Mahdavi, *For God, Mammon, and Country: A Nineteenth-Century Persian Merchant, Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb* (Boulder: Westview, 1999); and G. Naulleau, 'Islam and Trade: The Case of Some Merchant Families from the Gulf', in Lombard and Aubin (eds), *Asian Merchants and Businessmen*, pp. 297–309.
- 8 E. S. al-Gurg, *The Wells of Memory: An Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 1998), pp. 2–3.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 3–4.
- 10 Article 1, Constitution of the State of Kuwait, 1962.
- 11 Article 1(a), Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2002.
- 12 Article 1, Basic Law of Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1992.
- 13 Article 1, Provisional Basic Statute of Rule of the State of Qatar, 1972.
- 14 Article 6, Constitution of the UAE, 1972.
- 15 Article 1, Basic Law of the Sultanate of Oman, 1996.
- 16 In 2000, the Prime Minister of Bahrain appointed three Persian Bahrainis and one Indian Bahraini to the country's *majlis al-shurah* (Consultative Council), followed by another three Persian Bahrainis in 2002. In 2001–3, the King of Bahrain appointed three Persian Bahrainis to senior positions in government, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Muhammad 'Abdul Ghafar. This inclusion of non-Arabs in government has a recent constitutional basis: 'There shall be no discrimination among them [the citizens of Bahrain] on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion, or creed' (Article 18, Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2002).
- 17 G. E. Fuller and R. R. Francke, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 54, 136, 167, 185–6.
- 18 Interview with Khalid Kanoo, 23 July 1999, Bahrain; correspondence, 12 Apr. 2003.
- 19 Interviews with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Oct.–Nov. 1998, Bahrain.
- 20 For an explanation of how general merchants in the Gulf operate, see Field, *The Merchants*, pp. 292–310.
- 21 Interviews with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Mar.–Aug. 1999, Bahrain.
- 22 A Grade I merchant was an international wholesale trader who maintained a large fleet of cargo ships, employed an international network of commercial agents and had a minimum annual income of Ks500,000. For more details, see J. Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2004), appendix c.
- 23 Declaration by Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar (will of 'Abd al-Nabi Safar), 20 Apr. 1886; voucher by Muhammad Rahim Safar to N. D. Fracis, 3 Aug. 1892; Muhammad Rahim Safar to Meade (PRPG), 13 Oct. 1898; note by Muhammad Khalil Sharif, 26 Dec. 1918; and Sir P. Cox, London, to Muhammad Khalil Sharif, Basrah, 10 Sept. 1934 (all documents in the Bushehri Archive, Bahrain). Interviews with Nader al-Safar, June–Aug. 1999 and 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Mar.–Aug. 1999, Bahrain.
- 24 Interviews with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Mar.–Aug. 1999, Bahrain.
- 25 Ibid. For more about the Bakhtiyari, see G. R. Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 26 M. A. Sadid al-Saltanah (Kababi), *Safar Namah-i Sadid al-Saltanah* [Sadid al-Saltanah's Book of Travels], ed. A. Iqtidari (Tehran: Behnshire, 1983).
- 27 Also written as 'aqa'. See Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*, p. 39 and interviews with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Mar.–Aug. 1999, Bahrain.

- 28 Interviews with Nader al-Safar, June–Aug. 1999, Bahrain; Jan al-Safar, 7–10 Apr. 2000, Altrincham, Cheshire.
- 29 Statement by Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar, 11 Nov. 1898, reg. no. 364/1899, L/P&S/7/112 (OIOC), p. 21.
- 30 Safar family tree by Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar, *ibid.*, and Safar family tree by Ahmad Safar (Jan al-Safar collection, Altrincham, Cheshire).
- 31 For details, see B. Ingham, 'Men's Dress in the Arabian Peninsula: Historical and Present Perspectives', in N. Lindisfarne-Tapper and B. Ingham (eds), *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (London: Curzon, 1997), pp. 47–8 and p. 6 (Figure 3.1).
- 32 The *hawalah* (sg. *holi*) are Sunni Arabs from southern Persia who link themselves genealogically to one of the tribes of Arabia. Many could be described as 'Persianized Arabs' in the nineteenth century. See J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. II: *Geographical and Statistical* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1908), pp. 754–5; F. I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 2, 4.
- 33 For the complexities of the term 'Persian', see M. Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), pp. 67–70.
- 34 Interviews with Nader al-Safar, June–Aug. 1999, Bahrain; 'Adel al-Safar, 23 July 1999, Bahrain; and Jan al-Safar, 7–10 Apr. 2000, 20 July 2000, 26 Aug. 2000, 14 Apr. 2001, 18 Apr. 2001, 9 Apr. 2003, 16 Apr. 2003, Altrincham, Cheshire.
- 35 Interviews with 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Mar.–Aug. 1999, Bahrain.
- 36 Gabriele vom Bruck has made the same observation of big Sunni merchant families in Yemen. See 'Kinship and the Embodiment of History', *History and Anthropology* 10/4 (1998): 263, 287–8.
- 37 Safar family tree by Ahmad Safar (Jan al-Safar collection, Altrincham, Cheshire).
- 38 Voucher by Muhammad Rahim Safar to N. D. Fracis, 3 Aug. 1892; Muhammad Rahim Safar to Meade (PRPG), 13 Oct. 1898; power of attorney by Louisa Fracis (widow of N. D. Fracis) to Percy James Fracis, 14 Oct. 1909; note by Muhammad Khalil Sharif, 26 Dec. 1918; and Sir P. Cox, London, to Muhammad Khalil Sharif, Basrah, 10 Sept. 1934 (all documents in the Bushehri Archive, Bahrain). Interviews with Nader al-Safar, June–Aug. 1999 and 'Ali Akbar Bushehri, Mar.–Aug. 1999, Bahrain.
- 39 Telephone interview with Jan al-Safar, 26 Aug. 2000.
- 40 EIC bill of exchange for Rs 7,000 in favour of Hajji Muhammad 'Ali Safar for 30 days at 1.5 per cent interest, 15 Oct. 1839 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).
- 41 J. A. Saldanha, *Précis of the Affairs of the Persian Coast and Islands, 1854–1905* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906), p. 69. The Resident's monthly salary in the 1830s was Rs 2,400.
- 42 Declaration by Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar (will of 'Abd al-Nabi Safar), 20 Apr. 1886 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).
- 43 Family tree by Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar, 11 Nov. 1898, reg. no. 364/1899, L/P&S/7/112 (OIOC).
- 44 Statement by Jones (PRPG), 15 Nov. 1856 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain).
- 45 Statement by Comdr. J. Sedley (SNOPG), 4 Apr. 1863 (Bushehri Archive, Bahrain). The exchange rate at the time was roughly 1 kran = 0.4 rupee (26 pice), 1 rupee = 2.5 krans. L. Pelly, *Report on a Journey to Riyadh in Central Arabia (1865)*, repr. edn., Cambridge: Oleander Press, n.d., appendix 8: 'Riyadh Currency', p. 84.
- 46 Saldanha, *Précis*, p. 69. The Resident's monthly salary in the 1860s was Rs 2,400.
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Part II

Global and local networks

4 **Dubai: global city and transnational hub**

Roland Marchal

In the pre-oil days, camel races were held in small local communities on festive social occasions such as religious holidays, weddings, circumcisions, or the visit of a prominent shaykh. These informal events were characterized by a relaxed set of rules, and performances varied according to the locality. From the mid-1980s, however, the situation changed radically as camel racing became a way of reasserting bedouin culture against global values and praising the leadership of the United Arab Emirates. Since the mid-1990s, more than 4,000 camels have been taking part in the finals of the camel-racing season at Nid al-Shiba track in Dubai and in al-Wathbah outside the city of Abu Dhabi. Some of the racing camels are selected for transportation to other Gulf countries to participate in more races.

An explanation of this phenomenon goes beyond the revival of cultural heritage in Dubai or the UAE. It must be contextualized within the broader processes of the oil economy, the building of modern nationhood and of global cultural processes. As Khalaf explains in his seminal analysis,¹ this process is not simply the duplication of a once-weekend tradition. It is, rather, an ‘invented’ tradition² that has undergone a dramatic process of rationalization, involving workers from Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, India and Oman, generating a flow of money for funding and for rewards. Racing itself is not simply an expression of bedouin culture (supposedly shared by all of Dubai’s natives), of the nationhood of the UAE and of a privileged affinity with other Gulf societies; it has become a metaphor for the nation’s rush towards greater modernization.

Along the same line of thought, it is interesting to consider the way football competition took shape in the Gulf. As soon as an Arabic Gulf Cup was established, a Persian Gulf Cup came into being. Coastal populations and rulers were uneasy with this semantic confrontation. It did not reflect their interests or the way they wanted to construct their identity. Coast Cup was therefore organized. Moreover, migrant communities are also part of this narrative since teams from their home countries visit the UAE, players or coaches from their homelands are recruited and deserve special mention in their media.

Indeed, sport is a fruitful, if incomplete, way to assess the way globalization is taking place: not as a unifying process as is so often claimed by economists, but as a way to recapture differences³ that are more than a reiteration of the past.

Instead of using those cultural practices, we can use other ways to assess the process of globalization and transnationalization which has been taking place in Dubai for the last two decades.

For instance, Dubai's fame as a commercial centre has increased tremendously over the last decade. In 1999, imports reached 65 billion dirhams and re-exports were officially valued at 15 billion dirhams. However, an educated guess is that about 80 per cent of the goods were re-exported, mostly towards the other emirates of the UAE, Oman, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, Kuwait and other countries beyond the region. This gap between official and non-official figures is actually a good indicator of Dubai's success: exporting is basically free and informal trade is a major dimension of this activity, especially when Iran, Iraq, Central Asian and African countries are considered.

Dubai's success is attributed to a host of factors, as well as special attributes. These include excellent infrastructure (ports, airports, roads, telecommunications) managed by a skilled administration; free zones that attract international firms which are reluctant to invest under the sponsorship regulations enforced in most of the Gulf countries; accessibility to trade in all kinds of items in significant quantities; the lowest taxation on imports in comparison to other countries in the region; quality of services; ease in obtaining visas; and the diverse nationalities of the business community (Iranian, Arab, Indian), which allow visiting traders easier access to the market and the opportunity to enlarge commercial contacts well beyond the region (in 1999, re-exports from Dubai reached 120 countries over all continents). Although this description is fairly accurate, one could argue on the basis of reasonable evidence that such processes are not rooted in the current modern or postmodern era, but refer back to earlier periods. In this sense, Dubai could be one case that corroborates the view that, contrary to the assumption of many scholars of international relations, globalization started long before the early 1980s.⁴

This chapter limits itself to describing only some aspects of this current trend and addresses one specific example, which is too rarely taken into account by academics: the role Dubai plays with regard to Africa, beyond the traditional (often colonial) linkages that exist with some countries such as Egypt and Sudan. First, it highlights a few parameters that explain the growth of Dubai as a global city, focusing more on external than on internal factors.⁵ Next, it provides some food for thought on the way that Africa has become a new frontier for the development of Dubai. In conclusion, questions will be asked about the ability of Dubai to continue playing such a role beyond its immediate region.

Dubai as a world city

The notion of 'world city' refers to at least two schools of thought. The first, which has been consistently used by some authors, refers to the scholarly description of the world economy between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries by the French historian Fernand Braudel. In his view, world cities basically are the sites where world economies interconnect. Although globalization essentially means

the unification of economic systems and flows at the global level, such an approach still appears meaningful in the case of Dubai since it puts an emphasis on the mercantilist dimension of its economic development and world function: a significant node in the global trade network (exemplified by the container-ship or airline routes and re-export figures as well as the growing ability to deliver market services beyond its neighbourhood). The figures provided above are only part of a massive set of evidence of the role Dubai plays for the Gulf as well as the Indian subcontinent and other parts of the Arab and African world. It is therefore worth bringing into the discussion some elements of comparison using this framework.

There is another concept of the world city, which was developed mostly from the 1980s, after a first attempt by Hall⁶ in 1966. Friedmann and Sassen,⁷ among others, played a major role in refining the notion into the concept of 'global city' nowadays used by urban theorists, socio-geographers and economists. The key meaning is that the spatially dispersed global economy requires locally based and integrated organization, and this takes place in global cities. Although many transnational companies no longer keep their headquarters in central areas of these major cities, the specialized firms which they rely on to produce the capabilities and innovations necessary for command and control of their global operations have remained or chosen to establish themselves there. This attempt has generated a great amount of academic discussion and criticism.⁸ First, according to this definition, one has only to measure the attributes of global cities while ignoring the critical importance of understanding the mutual relationships between individual members of this system of cities.⁹ Parameters used for these measurements have been criticized as over-Westernized (major companies were mostly US and Canadian) and as reproducing an ideological difference between Western cities (urban theory) and third-world cities (urban development).¹⁰ Without going further into this conceptual debate, which raises very challenging questions about the current emergence of the 'global city-region', it is possible to note some characteristics underlined by this approach in the case of Dubai.

A Braudelian approach

Many analyses rightly emphasize the internal dimensions of Dubai's development as the main elements for its success. It is worth trying to compare this dynamic with that of other city-states in order to emphasize the conditions that enabled the emergence of Dubai as a global city.

It is important to reiterate here the four dimensions that allow reflection on the constitution of such entities. Since this is only a short chapter, descriptions and justifications will be brief, but the author believes that they could provoke reflection in terms of historical economic sociology. The four points are: the relatively weak political status of Dubai; the role of the state; the long duration of *cités-entrepôts* ('warehouse cities') linking Asian, African and Western economies; and the aggregation of business classes from different backgrounds.

The status of power

Dubai can hardly be seen as a major player in regional or international politics. Despite huge spending on military hardware, there is no doubt that, both before and after 11 September, its security has depended mostly on defence agreements with Western powers, including the USA and France. Its foreign policy, if any, is shaped under the tutelage of Abu Dhabi. Should this apparent lack of political aura be seen as a weakness? The answer appears to be 'no'. One may provide two justifications for this view.

The historian Fernand Braudel¹¹ noted that many city-states that have played a comparably significant role in history actually lacked the instruments of power.¹² At the end of the fifteenth century, Venice was a strategic economic player though it did not have any major industries or a vibrant banking and financial sector (the latter was limited to its close vicinity). Antwerp was one of the main trading centres in northern Europe despite not even owning its own ships (which were considered to be a strategic asset at that time). Genoa was a leading banking hub but could not be considered a prominent trading centre. Only Amsterdam and London achieved economic power, from the control of trade routes to the expansion of commercial and industrial capacities, including all varieties of credit facilities and banking. At a strictly political level, again, differences are very meaningful: Venice was a strong city-state, while neither Antwerp nor Genoa had any political influence at all. Amsterdam was part of the United Provinces, and this provided protection. Only London had all the instruments of political and economic power.

Under present-day conditions, one might be tempted to view this weakness as more of an asset than a liability. This lack of prominence allows a form of strategic opportunism by which politics and economics could be handled with a loose consistency and without too much interference. Two very typical examples are the relationships Dubai has developed over the last two decades with Iran and Iraq.

Despite the ongoing conflicting territorial claims over some islands by Tehran and Dubai, the latter should be considered 'the economic capital of Iran', to quote Fariba Adelkhah.¹³ Most analysts are keen to point out that although official re-exports from Dubai to Iran represent around 20 per cent of total re-exports, the truth is that they may actually reach over 50 per cent. One should also remember that 70,000 Emiratis are of Iranian background. Today, Iranian migrants in the UAE number about 100,000 and Iranian companies there 3,000 (half being in Dubai). The apparent weakness of Dubai in backing up its sovereignty claims over a territory therefore has advantages that a politically powerful Dubai would lack.

Along with most of the Gulf and the Arab world, there was very little sympathy in Dubai for the Ba'ath regime in Baghdad. Nonetheless, in 2000, exports and re-exports from Dubai to Iraq reached US\$176 million, four times the amount of 1999.¹⁴ This figure does not take into account the informal trade in smuggling goods into Iraq in contravention of UN regulations. Figures from 2002 indicated

that the value of exports and re-exports reached a peak of more than US\$550 million.

The role of the state

Dubai's state plays a great role in the economy. This is justified by the claim that the building of trade and service infrastructure should be achieved before oil revenues decline significantly by the 2010s. This command economy is attempting to build the cornerstones of a post-rentier Dubai, whose subsistence will be strategically linked to the success of new industrial and commercial activities. This situation raises a number of questions, which can be difficult to answer because transparency is not a major feature of Dubai's economic management, although most analysts are inclined to believe that it is slightly better than in other Gulf states.

Dubai actually shares more similarities with Singapore than with Hong Kong.¹⁵ Many initiatives taken over the last decades by Dubai's rulers have in fact been copied from Singapore – for example, the famous Dubai Shopping Festival, until 2002 in March¹⁶ (this is also the period of *nowruz*, which attracts many Iranian tourists to the small emirate). This should not be surprising, as the two share a colonial history and the presence of a large British community in the administration as well as in the main trading houses.

As in Singapore, the state in Dubai is, by definition, highly interventionist. In Singapore, the state nationalized the port in 1905 and regulates the job market. As in Singapore, Dubai benefits fundamentally from foreign direct investment (FDI – in Jebel Ali and other free zones) and the involvement of international corporations, though at a much lower level.¹⁷ In both cases, the port's economy has been a crucial factor for economic expansion: both Dubai and Singapore are hubs for global container transport, and this has boosted their commercial growth.

In this sense, Dubai's strategy is not as close to Hong Kong's as is often thought. Hong Kong was, from the very beginning, the interface between the continental Chinese market and the outside world. By 1880, 21 per cent of China's imports and 37 per cent of its exports went via the British colony. In the 1920s, Hong Kong's port was more important than that of London or New York. Although its expansion suffered after the Communists came to power in Beijing, its importance was re-evaluated after the Korean War and subsequent events in continental China. The state in Hong Kong has been much less interventionist and the industrial fabric is quite different from that of Dubai: rather than international firms, the key economic actors have been small and medium enterprises which settled there after the Communists took over (mostly from Shanghai).

Nevertheless, this comparison with Singapore cannot be taken too far. There are major differences that may play quite a significant role over the years. Two of these differences are of note. First, Singapore is an industrial outlet in a major sense while Dubai is not. The rate of exports over re-exports reaches 30 per cent in Singapore while it is only about 10 per cent in Dubai (even taking into account

the industrial output from Sharjah's quite significant industrial sector). It must be seen in the future whether the free zone of Jebel Ali will be able to change this situation dramatically. Second, Singapore has a vibrant banking and financial sector, while Dubai, despite the presence of many banks, is still far behind. In 2000, stock exchanges were set up both in Dubai and Abu Dhabi but the success is not yet as great as had been expected, and in any case is far below that of Singapore.

A permanent hub linking world economies

Although this could hardly be considered a reason for Dubai's success, one should emphasize the permanence in the greater region of trading hubs connecting Western, Asian and Arab economies. The most significant was certainly Surat,¹⁸ a Gujarati port which gained prominence from the time that the Mughal dynasty took over India in 1573, up to the first decades of the eighteenth century. Surat was then a major interface between Asian economies from southern China and Malacca up to the Gulf, the Arab countries and East Africa. Later on, when the Dutch took over the Indonesian archipelago, Surat connected Mocha, Jeddah and Asia, though more goods were coming from its hinterland (Ahmadabad) than Asian supply markets.

This permanence also highlights the role of certain trading communities which have been crucial in the development of international trade networks over the centuries and are still significant in the economic setting of contemporary Dubai. They include the descendants of some Gujarati groups such as the Bohra and the Khojah, and also the Hadhrami and Omani (whose communities still exist in Singapore and Indonesia),¹⁹ and still represent a significant share of local business community. It is not surprising to see elements of those groups economically active in East Africa. As mentioned in the previous section, business people of Iranian origin constitute a significant share of the business community at all levels and are key actors in various ways in connecting Iran with the world (including the USA, despite the embargo) through formal and informal networks passing through the Iranian free zone of Kish or through other ways.

It is also worth mentioning that the decline of Surat is not strictly linked to internal events. It is certain that geo-politics, more than economics, played a major role in its recession. Westerners, who had played a subaltern role in those trade networks for decades as pirates or traders, took over the networks with the support of European governments. This historical occurrence emphasizes another pattern worth considering. Those international trade networks were not ethnically homogeneous: far from it. Throughout the eighteenth century, Indian Banians, Dutch, British and Arab merchants were involved in them.

The aggregation of business classes from different backgrounds

As mentioned earlier, the successes of the trade hubs were not linked to the homogeneity of their business classes, despite the relative prominence of some groups compared to others. Dubai fits very much into this group of city-states.

At different times, Dubai's rulers have been eager to attract segments of the foreign business community.²⁰ With hindsight, the decision to welcome Iranian traders at the beginning of the last century may appear to have been the most successful strategy. Moreover, room was also given to Indian merchants over the last few decades, in addition to the Hadhrami and other Arab business people.

Last but not least, Dubai did its best to benefit from the troubles in the region. The civil war in Lebanon brought a significant community of skilled workers and entrepreneurs, either Lebanese or Palestinian. The Islamic Revolution in Iran and its subsequent war with Iraq pushed many wealthy Iranians either to migrate to the emirate or to use it for business purposes (such as trading with the USA despite an official embargo which was less than enthusiastically endorsed by US firms). Later, business people and companies that had settled in Kuwait moved to Dubai and stayed there in the aftermath of the 1990–1 Gulf War, as business opportunities were growing. Another contributing factor was the war in Chechnya, which disrupted traditional commercial routes and created a window of opportunity for Dubai, whose representatives had already travelled to Central Asia to assess markets and find counterparts. The Afghan Taliban were disliked by the international community even before 11 September, but their regime was recognized by the UAE, and Afghanistan was ranked tenth in re-exports from Dubai in 2000.

The recognition that trading networks are a strategic asset cannot be dismissed, though the status of those business people is often different, and never equal to that of the autochthonous business community. Nevertheless, what is relevant is comparative advantage, and Dubai still has more to offer than many states in the greater region. India has been involved for years in an attempt to liberalize its economy; Iran had to cope with the consequences of the Islamic Revolution and, in other states, political or economic predicaments never constituted an incentive to stay home or to return.

This sketchy description, as far as it is correct, raises two questions, the answers to which elude the author. The first question is: to what extent is there a single business class in Dubai? The way the society seems to function at the grassroots level indicates that it is organized as an archipelago of communities whose contacts and interactions are clearly limited to the market and the mosque. Does this correspond to a fair description of the relationships among the business community? A second question, in line with the first, concerns the issue of cultural expression. Because of the huge heterogeneity of the people living in Dubai, an outsider has difficulty in envisioning the constitution of a common culture shared by everybody. On the contrary, the feeling is that cultural expressions are very stratified, along with the livelihood of most of the population.

A partial answer – more an element for discussion – is provided by Fernand Braudel, who underlines the fact that cultural and economic dynamics have been quite separate in the rise of the city-states in Europe during the classic period. While Genoa and Venice were key economic centres, the place where major cultural trends were evolving was Florence: its dialect became prominent in Italian

literature, and the Renaissance started there. In the sixteenth century, while Amsterdam was economically triumphant, the cultural centre was Rome.

A global city approach

In order to avoid overlapping arguments, this section will be shorter. Taking into account what has been said previously, the global city approach allows emphasis on at least three aspects, linked to cultural and demographic heterogeneity; the trend to constitute a region; and economic polarization.

Heterogeneity

Global cities experience considerable cultural and demographic heterogeneity as a result of large-scale migration. This is associated with both explosive dangers and creative new opportunities for social mobility, but can be detrimental to social justice.

Dubai more than anywhere else in the UAE is illustrative of this heterogeneity, with more than 90 per cent of the workforce made up of migrants from the West (Britain, America, South Africa (whites) and other European countries) and Arab countries (Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen) or from the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent (including Kerala, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal and, increasingly, Chinese people of various origins).

Being such an obvious melting pot, Dubai has generated a number of security concerns that have been taken more seriously, though sometimes reluctantly, by the state since 11 September. Dubai could be easily used for money laundering and, though no expert wants to go public with figures (for reasons of political correctness), concerns are often raised off the record. Central Asian, Indian and Russian mafias try to develop their activities in competition with older, settled groups of a similar nature. Local media tend not to report such events, except when incidents occur in a public place, as happened recently.²¹ Drug trafficking is a problem that is more openly addressed by officials and local newspapers. But these are only examples of the 'dark side' of this heterogeneity and should not be seen as especially surprising. If globalization is a meaningful phenomenon, then crime and trafficking should also be affected by it.

More interesting and challenging are the discourses of the migrants coping with a state which provides them with a better living than they could expect at home but still far from the cosy livelihood of a welfare state. One example of the many potential studies is that of the 'urban legends' of Dubai, in which poor migrants get rich overnight.

In more theoretical terms, one may have to consider the many different ways a foreign community is organized, the way it shapes its activities against the prevailing clichés and so on. One should also mention the social division of labour that loosely delineates each community within a range of specific activities and sectors.

Polycentrism

There is a pronounced change in the spatial morphology of the global city towards what might better be called the global-city region. While in the past most metropolitan regions were focused mainly on one clearly defined centre, the new city regions of today are becoming increasingly polycentric and multi-clustered agglomerations.

In the case of Dubai, this dimension points to different phenomena. To a large extent, with the current project to develop a residential area near the Jebel Ali free zone, Dubai and its neighbour, Sharjah, can be increasingly seen as a conurbation in which dwellings are mostly continuous from one city centre to the other. Moreover, this is more than a move from a home in Sharjah to the more expensive office environment of Dubai. Although in competition, both emirates have complementarities in the industrial sector, where Sharjah had pre-eminence during the colonial period, as well as in the commercial realm, where Sharjah provides hospitality to most visitors from the former USSR, including their favourite commodities.

But one should look beyond that and take regionalization more seriously, at least as a trend. Informal trade networks boosted by access to easy and cheap travel and cargo services (either with old Russian aeroplanes or dhows) have for a long time created dense interconnections between regional sites, as a look at travel statistics clearly demonstrates.

The achievements of the Gulf Cooperation Council also offer some food for thought since it is moving slowly towards better regional economic integration. But it would be premature to build on these first achievements. At the beginning of 2003, a common taxation system was set up and should develop further. Without putting much emphasis on the institutional dimension, one should note that some industrial dynamics, related to what economists call 'industrial districts',²² are also taking root among various countries of the region and Dubai. The best examples are Sharjah and the current regionalization of the gas sector in the area.²³

Of course, this goes with competition rather than pure consensual planning. Bahrain and Dubai are squaring up for a conquest to decide which of the two states is the region's international banking centre. In order to challenge the supremacy of the Bahrain Monetary Agency, the fledgling Dubai International Financial Centre has recruited a 'dream team' (from the UK and Hong Kong) to attract international operators. Of course, key issues will be the regulatory framework and the final agreement with a reluctant UAE Central Bank.²⁴

Social and economic polarization

A key effect of globalization and economic restructuring on the social geography is even more challenging in its direct political and policy implementation. It is becoming apparent that globalization and its associated forms of economic change tend to widen the gap between the wealthy and the poor in economic, social and spatial terms.

Dubai, along with other Gulf states, is actually trying to develop policies to tackle various challenges. For decades, the question of poverty was mostly seen as relevant to the migrant workers. The welfare state, which was built through oil revenues and the rigid distinction between autochthonous and foreign communities, as mentioned in the introduction to this volume, does not fill the gap between the wealthy natives and the others. For the older generations, improvements in daily life were such that no grievances resulting from the economic polarization were raised. Today, the situation is radically changed, as the youth, who have always lived in such a world, cannot find employment and face a rather gloomy future compared to the previous generation. On the other hand, Dubai's rulers are under increasing pressure to accommodate foreign investors and, for instance, have opened up the possibility of foreigners buying land or houses in the small emirate.²⁵ One can therefore imagine how wealthy foreigners bringing a cosmopolitan culture could sooner or later be made into scapegoats by deprived sections of the native population.

The nationalization of the workforce is therefore a very complex issue which raises questions about the way the end of the oil rent will be managed, or the education policy will be framed. How will the meritocracy, which is basically supported by foreign companies, be enforced? Will it be in all sectors, or in specified ones, as is the case today? What will be done in response to the need to provide a future for a growing section of the native youth?

While Bahrain, for instance, has embarked on major political and economic changes, including the establishment of a parliament with real powers, regular cabinet reshuffles and wider distribution of wealth, Dubai's rulers seem to adopt a less proactive set of behaviours, and substantial political reforms do not yet seem on the agenda. Dubai therefore offers the view of a highly segmented population in terms of social class, income and racial conditions.

This double approach of looking at Dubai as a global or world city has not considered other important indicators, including the changing international challenges to which the Gulf region has to respond. Nevertheless, it allows us to define some of the greatest challenges this emirate will have to face in coping with globalization. Dubai's rulers²⁶ have been keen to define the role of their country not only as a node in the global trade network but also as a key place in the greater region encompassing the Gulf, India, Pakistan and Africa. The second section deals with this latter dimension.

Subaltern globalization:²⁷ Africa as a new frontier for Dubai?

Two events that were in the headlines in the last two years could highlight the new importance of Dubai for African economies and people. The first occurred on 7 November, when the assets of a Somali money-transfer company, al-Barakat (not to be confused with the Saudi-owned Islamic Bank), whose headquarters were in Dubai, were frozen by the UAE authorities in response to a request made by the USA and endorsed by the United Nations. This company, the major one

in the Somali market, was also operating in many Western states and in the Arab world. Customers were of many nationalities and included Somalia UN agencies, international NGOs and the European Commission. The second event was the allegation that one of the bloodiest armed movements in Africa, the Sierra Leone-based Revolutionary United Front, was financing its activities through the sale of diamonds to less-than-reputable middlemen in Dubai, who were also operating for al-Qaeda.²⁸

Although no hard evidence has yet been provided by the US law-enforcement services to substantiate their cases against al-Barakat, these events attest to a phenomenon that can be seen by anyone walking into the markets in Dubai. Although marginal at the beginning of the 1990s and mostly confined to people from the Horn and East Africa (mostly Kenya and Tanzania), the African presence in Dubai nowadays is significant.²⁹ In this section, an attempt is made to explain why and how this dynamic is taking place.

It should be noted that contacts between Dubai and parts of Africa are not new, and pre-date even the British colonial era. Historically, Indian Ocean trade has connected the Arab Peninsula with India, eastern and southern Africa. Trading communities as well as migrant workers settled on the African coast and played a strategic role in developing commercial relations between those regions.³⁰ The colonial period also had an ambivalent impact. To some extent, it reduced relationships with the Indian economy through a reorientation of economic flows towards the European (and British) markets, although these connections were never severed completely. Moreover, the British colonial authorities moved staff from one colony to another and this also allowed networks to be rebuilt, even though their commercial dimension was not always prominent for years, or even decades.

Although rooted in history, the current situation is heavily influenced by economic and social transformations that have taken place over the last two decades. One of these factors concerns the internal changes that reshaped the economic profile of Dubai. Others include links to the transformation of the African economic setting, the end of the Cold War and globalization.

The 1980s are usually considered a lost decade for African development. Formal economies in most African states either collapsed or weakened dramatically. The apparent vacuum was filled by the 'second' or informal economy and the emergence of new economic operators who, to a certain extent, challenged state regulations and opened new trading routes. Globalization in Africa also framed new narratives on wealth accumulation and on distant societies. These *imaginaires du lointain* should be understood as one outcome of the way globalization is perceived by African societies.

Without going into details (which are, in fact, very important dimensions of this change), it should be noted that the informal, or second, or grey, economy has become, over the years, a crucial dimension of the economic and social African settings. In a country such as Senegal, where the state is still functioning in a decent manner according to African standards, this informal economy represents more than 30 per cent of the GDP. In what journalists call failed states,

it could represent more than 80 per cent, as in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)) or Somalia before the civil war.³¹ This trend developed further in the 1990s as a result of the structural adjustment policies undertaken by indebted African states that had to endorse IMF policies. Also notable was the emergence of new entrepreneurs and new traders.³² It would be wrong to assume that those actors were always medium or small scale and were unable to generate significant commercial capital. What is true is that most of them did not have access to the normal banking system, and had to deal in cash and function via illegal methods.³³ Because of the increasing predicament of their societies and the poverty of their potential customers, those traders had to look for cheaper products than those available to the traditional European markets.

The end of the Cold War has also reshaped the situation in many ways. Two very different examples illustrate the huge range of implications it had on African countries. Since the communist threat was over, aid to African regimes diminished rapidly, and this enhanced the development of an informal economy by the collapse or weakening of the formal one. The case of Zaire at the beginning of the 1990s is paradigmatic. At a quite different level, the dissolution of the Soviet bloc created many new opportunities. For instance, Aeroflot split up and many aircraft initially flying to small Central Asian republics could be chartered at very low prices. Those aircraft fly weekly to Eritrea, Rwanda and Chad. Moreover, Aeroflot and other Eastern European airline companies employed Africans who had acquired expertise which they could use in the new business realm framed by privatization and the deregulation of air transport.

Globalization of the markets and of the flow of people also became a matter of change. In the 1950s and 1960s Afro-Asianism was a utopian project that had, at most, a political dimension. At the economic level, both African and Asian economies were too undeveloped to offer ground for any meaningful cooperation. Both had mostly agricultural outputs to exchange, technology was hardly developed and needs were shared. This was no longer the case in the late 1980s and 1990s.³⁴ Dubai took on a strategic role as the interface between those countries. It has been eager to capitalize on these transformations and dynamics and to mobilize its comparative advantages. A few are given here.

First of all, although not so important to Westerners, visas are fairly easily accessible to Africans, while Europe has practically closed its doors. This may seem trivial, but it is actually an essential feature of this process. Many participants in the informal economy were unable to get through the tough procedures established in Europe from the early 1980s, and had to re-orient their search for markets. Dubai authorities do provide a transit visa for a maximum of 14 days, long enough to strike a deal and conclude a commercial operation. Moreover, at least up to 11 September 2001, no questions were raised by customs officers while checking huge amounts of cash – they might only check that the banknotes were not fakes – transported by people in transit.

This relative ease of movement is due to the fact that the trade networks are framed in such a way that some key problems have been taken care of. For instance, visas are applied for through a hotel, and are often supported by an

African national involved in a freight company; they are provided under the assumption that the informal traders would use the services of this company. It is true that some travellers do try to extend their stay illegally, but the penalties are such that very few Africans, under normal circumstances, who are settled and conducting business in Dubai would take the risk of allowing their visitors to stay.

This also encourages repeat business and a growth in customer numbers. The relatively low prices and the ease of trade encourage people to come back, often accompanied by friends or associates. For instance, at the beginning, Chadian traders³⁵ focused on Jeddah because they had access through *hajj* and *ʿumrah* pilgrimages to the well-supplied Jeddah market. Then interest in Dubai grew as some traders compared the two markets, their access and the way the merchants were dealing with them. The balance seemed to favour Dubai. Trade networks were therefore partially re-oriented.

A second strategic asset of Dubai is easy access, either by ship or by plane. As mentioned earlier, many freight companies were set up in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Others came into being as a result of the privatization of state monopolies – the airline sector was one in many African countries. Dubai struggled to cope with the logistics, but Sharjah wanted to play a role. In 2000, more than 743,500 'tourists' landed at the Sharjah international airport and more than 550,000 metric tons of cargo was taken out of the country.³⁶ Goods may be sent directly to their destination market or, quite often, to a neighbouring country where customs officers are known to be flexible. The additional transportation costs are less than what would be paid as duty or bribes if sent directly. For instance, many goods bound for Kenya transit through Somalia where customs are as notional as the state apparatus. Items ordered by people from the DRC may take a number of routes, depending on their destination inside the country, the political allegiance of the trader (i.e. his political patronage network) and the like. Nigerian traders, increasingly active in Dubai, may send their commodities directly to Lagos or Port Harcourt, but many would prefer to use Porto Novo in Benin,³⁷ which basically plays the role of a free port for its hinterland. The logic, therefore, is not based purely on economics but takes into account transaction costs at different levels of the trade networks.

A third advantage of Dubai that might be challenged by the post-11 September new security arrangements is the lack of control at the border. The very low taxation of imports makes the smuggling of most goods irrelevant, and exports are basically free of any control. That could explain why gold, gems, ivory and other more dubious items are traded in Dubai. A subject of allegations and concern is, of course, money laundering, since traders may reach Dubai with hundreds of thousands of US dollars.

The last advantage of Dubai is its status as *cité-entrepôt*. A great spectrum of goods is immediately available for any traders at interesting prices. Where the supply of certain products is discontinued in their home countries, informal traders can make a profit in buying such goods in quantities that can be sold in a market facing absolute shortage. Benefits can be high and cover the cost of air transport. This kind of business is typical of war-torn societies whose economies

function as scarcity economies. In another case, when a trader does not have commercial capital that is significant enough or his potential share of the market is too small, he might prefer to diversify the goods he is buying to be able to get them sold as quickly as possible.

Does this mean that Dubai has captured or will capture a great share of the African economy? The answer is clearly no, though trade with African destinations has increased over the past years, and this trend is likely to be sustained for quite a while. This statement needs qualification, which is linked to different parameters.

On the one hand, Dubai offers many dimensions of modernity as envisioned by its African visitors, offering above all security and freedom to conduct business without significant interference from the authorities (as long as it is legal, of course). This contrasts greatly with their situation at home.³⁸ But one should not dismiss other aspects: social labelling of Africans (as opposed to Arabs and Muslims) is not positive, and interactions with other communities are far from easy outside the market.

Moreover, the success of Dubai is first of all based on the African economic context. Despite all international commitments and rhetoric, it is very unlikely that growth and development have become strong enough to modify the current trends in Africa. Informal economies may flourish for years, and Dubai may benefit from that.

Nevertheless, one may underline two potential 'weaknesses' that characterize Dubai as a trading centre for Africans. The first one is that Dubai is not that cheap, and many informal traders, when they have enough money, travel to Asia nowadays, where goods are manufactured and available at lower prices. There are already significant African communities in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Jakarta and Bombay, and the market opportunities are good there.³⁹ The second one is that those Asian states are not so eager to use intermediaries. China, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan are developing aggressive commercial policies towards Africa and one may believe that some results will come from this.

Conclusion

It would be presumptuous, at this stage, to draw definite conclusions as to Dubai's chances of lasting success. Despite the optimism of its rulers and its financial situation, Dubai as a global trade hub faces a number of challenges that once operated in its favour.

Dubai used to benefit from political instability in the region. As new tensions arise, it is not yet clear whether this could be the case again. On a short-term basis, oil prices will pick up but no one wants to predict the longer-term impact. A drastic regional reconfiguration following the war against Iraq may have ambivalent effects on the functions Dubai fulfils at present. What would be the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia in a radically new political setting as envisioned by the current US administration?

Countries of the region are not indifferent to the success of Dubai. Iran is certainly the best example of this challenge but, beyond it, one should emphasize the growth of Turkey and Syria, which have become key economic players in Central Asia, competing with the once dominant Dubai-based business interests. Salalah and Aden might also become significant challengers in the region. Despite a strong increase in international and regional trade, the amounts of re-exports from Dubai have changed little in comparison, indicating that its relative share of the regional trade has probably declined.

Parts of Dubai's success have been linked to money laundering and loose banking regulations. The post-11 September period has already raised concerns about this state of affairs. It is difficult to assess whether the changes in the banking regulations, if rigorously enforced, will significantly affect this situation. Clearly, Dubai will not continue to play such a function without altering its ambition to become an international financial centre.

Dubai has a command economy in which the state is the crucial economic player. There have been no major setbacks so far, because oil revenues were there to pay for mistakes and overambitious projects. The fact that these revenues should drastically decrease in the next 20 years raises questions about the profitability of many infrastructures and the sustainability of others. Whatever diversification Dubai has achieved, its core GDP assets remain linked to the oil and gas industries.

Regional integration and the UAE's adhesion to the WTO may also imply a number of changes, which may have contrasting impacts on the development strategy of Dubai. However, this element cannot be isolated from those already mentioned.

Increasingly, at the internal level, there are tensions on many key issues such as the widening of participation in the decision-making process (up until now the preserve of wealthy families) to include more plebeian technocrats. There is also a need to develop job opportunities for local people and diminish the role migrant workers play at all levels of the economy.

Notes

- 1 Suleyman Khalaf, 'Poetics and Politics of the Newly Invented Traditions in the Gulf: Camel Racing in the United Arab Emirates', *Ethnology* 39/3 (Summer 2000): 243–61.
- 2 E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–14.
- 3 J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- 4 A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Random House, 2002).
- 5 For the internal dimensions of Dubai's development, one can refer to F. Heard-Bey, 'Le développement d'un état-cité maritime dans le Golfe: l'exemple de Dubayy', in Paul Bonnefant (ed.), *La Péninsule arabe aujourd'hui*, vol. II (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1982), pp. 523–57; Fatima al-Sayegh, 'Merchants' Role in a Changing Society: The Case of Dubai, 1900–1990', *Middle Eastern Studies* 34/1 (1998): 87–102; R. Marchal (ed.), *Dubai, cité globale* (Paris: CNRS-Éditions, 2001).
- 6 P. Hall, *The World Cities* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

- 7 J. Friedmann, 'The World City Hypothesis', *Development and Change* 17 (1986): 69–84; S. Sassen, *The Global City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- 8 For a recent assessment, see A. Scott, *Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory, Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 9 See the research of P. Taylor and his colleagues and visit the website www.loughborough.ac.uk/gawc
- 10 J. Robinson, 'Global and World Cities: A View from Off the Map', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26/3 (September 2002): 531–54.
- 11 Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XV^e –XVIII^e* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1993).
- 12 Or, to put it in another way, the difference between soft and hard power, a distinction currently raised by the new US foreign policy. See J. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power. Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 13 Fariba Adelkhah, 'Dubai, capitale économique de l'Iran', in Marchal (ed.), *Dubai, cité globale*, pp. 39–65.
- 14 DRRE, *Les exportations et réexportations de Dubai vers l'Irak en 2000 et 2001*, <http://www.dree.org/emirates> (May 2002).
- 15 S. W. Chiu, K. C. Ho and T. Lui, *City-States in the Global Economy* (Boulder: Westview, 1997).
- 16 In 2003, for the first time, it took place from 15 January to 15 February. Officially, this change was proposed by the local traders who wanted to offer discounts at the same period as the Western markets (globalization of time and consumption!). One may be inclined to believe that it was also influenced by the prospect of a war against Iraq.
- 17 According to UNCTAD, the stock resulting from FDI in the UAE is still fairly limited: only 0.04 per cent in 2000, and mostly directed to the oil industry where French, US, British and Japanese companies are key players.
- 18 A. Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c.1700–1750* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1979); A. Das Gupta, 'Indian Merchants and the Indian Ocean', *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 407–33.
- 19 U. Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750–1960* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).
- 20 For instance, Dubai recruited City of London star Ian Hay Davison, former Chief Executive of Lloyds and former Managing Partner at Arthur Andersen, to head up the regulatory body of the new Dubai Investment Finance Centre as an attempt to woo the global banking community in the same way that it has brought the big names of the information technology world and media to its new free zones. This is only one example of a consistent practice of appointing well-known managers to increase the credibility of its economic policy (see www.ameinfo.com/fin, 15 April 2002).
- 21 'Dubai businessman Sharad Shetty was shot dead as he entered the India Club in the city last night, reported local newspapers. Sources told the newspapers that the owner of two Dubai hotels had fallen out with the southern Indian mafia. Dubai Police commander Major General Dhahi Khalfan Tamim said the crime was not an ordinary incident but an action of organized gangs. He pledged very tough action', *Gulf News*, 25 January 2003.
- 22 G. Benko and A. Lipietz, *La richesse des régions. La nouvelle géographie socio-économique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000).
- 23 Especially with Qatar, which owns the world's third-largest proven gas reserve. Technological progress and a huge demand for energy explain the move made by Dubai in a pioneer project.
- 24 N. Dudley, 'Bahrein and Dubai: Competition for Centre Stage', *The Banker*, 1 January 2003.

- 25 Despite the fact that, years ago, they pressured other emirates to stop doing so and respect the federal regulations.
- 26 See the speech of the Dubai Crown Prince, General Shaykh Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktoum, at the Dubai Strategy Forum in November 2002.
- 27 In reference to the point made by Mohamed Ayoob, 'Subaltern Realism: When International Relations Theory Meets the Third World', in Stephanie Neuman (ed.), *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 31–54.
- 28 D. Farah, 'Al Qaeda Cash Tied to Diamonds Trade. Sale of Gems from Sierra Leone Rebels Raised Millions Sources Say', *Washington Post*, 2 November 2001; D. Farah, 'Report Says Africans Harbored Al Qaeda Terror Assets Hidden in Gem-Buying Spree', *Washington Post*, 29 December 2002.
- 29 Data and examples are available in Marchal (ed.), *Dubai, cité globale*, chap. 4.
- 30 See for instance Bill Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders. The Indian Working Class of Durban, 1900–1990* (London: James Currey, 1995).
- 31 V. Jamal, 'Somalia: An Unconventional Economy', *Development and Change* 9 (1988): 203–65.
- 32 J. MacGaffey, *Entrepreneurs and Parasites: The Struggle for Indigenous Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). A good introduction also is S. Ellis and Y. Fauré (eds), *Entreprises et entrepreneurs africains* (Paris: Karthala, 1995).
- 33 B. Hibou, *L'Afrique est-elle protectionniste? Les chemins buissonniers de la libéralisation extérieure* (Paris: Karthala, 1996).
- 34 J. Coussy and J. Lauseig, 'La renaissance afro-asiatique?', *Politique africaine* 76 (December 1999): 5–94.
- 35 K. Bennafla, *Le commerce frontalier en Afrique centrale* (Paris: Karthala, 2002).
- 36 Most of this traffic is routed to the ex-Soviet Union. But costs are lower in Sharjah than in Dubai.
- 37 K. Igue and B. Soule, *L'Etat entrepôt au Bénin. Commerce informel ou solution à la crise?* (Paris: Karthala, 2001).
- 38 'The Road to Hell is Unpaved', *The Economist*, 21 December 2002, which is one of the best journalistic accounts of this pattern. In a more academic vein, introducing the discussion on 'real governance', see Janet Roitman, 'The Garrison Entrepôt', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 150–2 (1998): 297–329.
- 39 Research in progress by the author. A book is forthcoming in 2004.

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5 The emergence of a pan-Arab market in modern media industries

Gaëlle Le Pottier

The rise and intensification of professional and investment transnational media activities throughout the Middle East today may very well be bringing this region closer to becoming a true pan-Arab market than ever before. The degree of cross-border activities among media professionals at the turn of the twenty-first century is indeed fostering a remarkable degree of interconnectedness among the peoples of the Middle East, from North Africa all the way to the Gulf states. The effects of new technologies, media and increasingly easy travel have already excited much interest in the so-called ‘globalization process’. In the Middle East, however, the exceptionally low levels of outside foreign investment and the use of a shared language have encouraged the emergence of one regional market, increasingly integrated into a global system while at the same time distinctly inter-Arab in nature. This chapter will show that this trend is noticeably true in the case of the culturally influential modern media industries, in particular those related to the satellite industry. At the same time, a detailed analysis of this trend will also highlight the persistently distinct roles played by various locations and nationals in the region – most noticeably Saudis, who finance most region-wide media ventures, and Lebanese, who continue to play a crucial mediating role in the emergence of this pan-Arab market.

This is not to say that these increasing transnational exchanges are leading to the formation of one homogeneous region. On the contrary, the study of professional activities, locations of operations and investment strategies of individuals and companies in the media industries will highlight patterns whereby countries and nationals persistently, if not increasingly, play complementary yet distinct roles. In simplistic, preliminary terms, this chapter argues that these industries are mostly financed by Gulf investors, geared to the taste and demands of a Gulf consumer audience and most often operated and controlled creatively by Lebanese and Egyptian professionals.

The choice of the satellite television, advertising, advertising representation (*régies*),¹ music and visual production industries presented here is not intended to provide a comprehensive view of modern media operations in the Middle East, since the internet and the print media and publications are admittedly important missing pieces. The selected satellite-related industries, however, are so intricately interconnected that their study in conjunction with one another becomes

essential to our understanding of their recent evolution. No doubt each one of these industries deserves a separate and more detailed study.² Yet their interdependence at a financial, professional and strategic level also helps better to identify and explain patterns of broader relevance. Hence, the examples used for each of these industries should be viewed as a representative illustration of findings based on over one year of field research in the Middle East³ and some 150 interviews with media professionals mainly based in Lebanon and Egypt. In other words, the focus of this chapter is on an analysis of samples illustrating the overall rationale behind investment deals, on the nature of interaction between key professional regional players and on the logic behind the various strategic decisions made throughout the evolution of these increasingly pan-Arab industries.

Integrating into a global system

As mentioned earlier, the evolution of a more pan-Arab market does not preclude the region's integration into a global system adhering to international (mostly North American and European) trends and professional standards. On the contrary, the Middle East has obviously also been greatly affected by the introduction of new technologies which make cross-border information exchanges increasingly cheap and easy. Owing in great part to the recent introduction of satellite television, the people of the Middle East are now also more aware of the outside world than ever before. The equipment used and the way business is run leaves little doubt as to the region's growing integration into a global economic system.

Among the various industries of interest to us, the evolution of the advertising industry in the past 20 years provides the most obvious example of this growing integration. Today, nine out of ten of the largest advertising agencies in the Middle East are either fully or mostly owned by large American or European firms. From the late 1980s, the existent regional networks – almost all Lebanese – were progressively bought out by the largest international advertising agencies.⁴ For instance, the Lebanese agency H&C became H&C–Leo Burnett in the 1980s, and is now simply known as Leo Burnett, despite the fact that its managers and its basic local structure have remained unchanged. And Lebanon's successful bid to host the International Advertising Association congress in May 2002 is in great part due to its active participation in the IAA, one of the largest advertising associations in the world, represented in 95 different countries. The current world president, Jean-Claude Boulos, is Lebanese, and in fact the third Lebanese to be elected to this position in the 64 years of the existence of this US-based institution.⁵ More importantly, the way the industry is evolving shows the degree to which it follows international trends. Over the years, the quality of advertising has considerably improved, at times meeting the highest international standards, although many will admit that most creative directors still tend more or less simply to emulate what is being done in the West. Product advertising is slowly evolving towards the building of brand loyalty. The latest structural changes from 'full service' agencies to the creation of separate companies specializing in the various media services (public relations, corporate identity, advertising, media

content etc.)⁶ are even more telling of the extent to which current regional trends are influenced by the local industry's integration into a global network. Indeed, if media professionals openly admit that these new entities – and in particular the introduction of media buying units – are the direct consequence of their international associations, or partnerships, they also generally recognize the fact that the Middle Eastern market does not yet produce enough advertising revenue to make them profitable. Only markets producing large advertising revenues could financially justify the creation of specialized companies that would generate real economies of scale to compensate for the added intermediary and the cost of creating new entities. But as one of the media directors puts it:

It would not be very wise to try to stop or fight trends because we are dealing with one global economy. Furthermore, we work with multi-nationals that are now accustomed to a new way of working and it would be very difficult to convince the same clients, working with the same groups in the US, Europe and the Middle East, that things should be different here.

Although the production companies in the Middle East have remained locally owned, the style and quality of production by now mostly meets international standards. Today, production houses in Beirut, Cairo or Dubai produce the majority of the large-budget advertising productions, which in the past would most probably only have been entrusted to their Western counterparts. Pre-production meetings are almost always conducted entirely in English, and in Beirut in particular, the make-up of production teams is remarkably international. For example, Talkies, one of the largest production houses in Beirut, provided a detailed breakdown of its last eight productions: seven directors were foreigners (Belgian, Italian, French and South African) and only one was Lebanese; the same proportion was true for their directors of photography. As is the case in all other Beirut-based production companies, the agencies and actors were almost all based in the Middle East, while directorial expertise was mainly brought in from Europe. Until very recently all film development and post-production work was also done in Europe.

In satellite television, some of the largest pan-Arab stations and television networks are, or were until recently, headed by Western general managers, hired for their Western know-how in the management and restructuring of large telecommunication companies. So, for example, Ian Richie, MBC's CEO from 1998 to 2000, spearheaded the channel's drastic structural and strategic changes, positioning it as the most popular station in the Middle East today. Alexander Zilo, a US national, was until recently head of the ORBIT network, having held that position since its beginnings in the early 1990s. John Tydeman (an Australian national) was first involved in the Middle East as the CEO of Showtime (the fastest-growing pay-TV network in the region) and now heads ORBIT's most direct competitor, Arab Digital Distribution (ART network). Peter Einstein replaced him as Showtime's president. It goes without saying that each of these individuals also brought along with him a few close Western associates to help him

implement his own vision and strategies. Meanwhile, the most popular entertainment programmes in the Middle East today are adaptations of Western programmes, such as MBC's version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* – by far one of the most popular and financially rewarding programmes on air. News and political programmes are also often adaptations of Western formats, both in the way the news is presented and in the way auditors are invited to participate in live programmes and debates.

Although the vast majority of non-Lebanese satellite stations are either publicly owned or in the hands of officials close to state authorities, they are also acting and thinking more and more as private enterprises operating in a competitive market, in search of market-share gains and greater profitability. While media professionals, for good reason, continue to lament the poor quality of research in the region, we are beginning to see advertisers and television stations emulating the type of viewership and audience analysis that is now systematically performed in North America and Europe. Market research in the Middle East has for instance started to examine the differing tastes and aspirations of a multi-layered consumer base, dissecting it into different age, sex and occupational groups.⁷

...But still operating within a distinctly Arab market

Yet, as Sakr eloquently argues, it may not be fitting simply to view 'the spread of western media as one-way cultural imperialism'.⁸ It would be difficult to dispute the growing presence and influence of Western managerial styles, know-how, professional and technical standards. However, the Middle Eastern media world is essentially and almost exclusively managed and financed by Arab citizens. In spite of their real integration into a wider international – essentially Western – context, the media industries remain fairly isolated or exclusively regional in terms of their market reach and the nationality of their employees, managers and investors.

The importance of cultural insight and language may have limited Western presence in industries where these skills matter most. The limited revenues and low profitability of the media world in the region, however, provides a more convincing argument. The Middle Eastern market is not only an unfamiliar market, which has still not sufficiently evolved to be able to contribute creatively or professionally to Western professional developments, but the levels of advertising revenues generated throughout the region – and upon which these industries rest – are also and above all remarkably low, in both absolute and relative terms. Depending on sources, the figures vary considerably and remain unreliable. The broad comparison of yearly advertising expenditures per capita between the Western world and the Middle East, however, is an insightful one: according to the Lebanese advertising monthly *Arab Ad*, in the USA almost \$400 is spent per capita, in comparison to about \$16 in the Middle East.⁹ Total media revenues for the whole region amount to about \$1.3 billion for a population of about 150 million people, while in Israel, for example, almost the same amount (\$1.2 billion) is spent on a population of some 4.5 million people.¹⁰

Western acquisitions of regional advertising networks should therefore be viewed in the light of the market's limited financial rewards. In her paper on the Middle Eastern advertising world, Leïla Vignal points to the fact that large international agencies basically extended their network to the region mainly for global strategic reasons, in order to service their clients wherever those clients' products are sold. In other words, 'the establishment of international advertising agencies in the Middle East is more a way for them to secure their multinational clientele in other regions of the world than a strategy for the conquest of new markets'.¹¹ This point is relevant inasmuch as it confirms the limited degree of the involvement of the multinational agencies in the daily running of local affairs and in the actual creative process of their Middle Eastern representatives or partners. Arab advertising agencies essentially manage their own affairs with, interestingly, an overwhelming majority of Lebanese in the positions of managing directors and creative directors. In the 1980s and 1990s the largest Arab networks saw their absorption into global networks as an opportunity. Benefiting from the logic of international brand allegiance, their Western partners or buyers practically guaranteed them the handling of important accounts for some of the largest global spenders. Both parties, Western and Middle Eastern advertising networks, had concrete yet differing reasons for close collaboration. The logistics of their alliance, however, also explains why little has changed at the regional level in terms of who runs the industry, and why international firms have very limited direct involvement in the management of the region's advertising industry.

The aforementioned Western managers are also in fact exceptions in the satellite television industry. Western professionals in television are even rarer than those in the advertising field. These managers were essentially brought in as professionals with Western know-how who would implement large structural changes and share their expertise of the more experienced Western world.¹² The owners of these channels and networks remained, and still remain, the ultimate decision makers. As we will see later, the industry of advertising representation remains an exclusively Arab domain, following a logic and structure particular to the Arab world. Production houses are also all locally managed. Foreign directors, brought in for the duration of the filming (usually a couple of days), bring foreign prestige, but essentially have as much decision-making power as local directors as far as the final execution of advertisements is concerned.¹³

Investing, acting and strategizing on a pan-Arab scale

The limitations of Western involvement in the Middle Eastern media world are especially relevant to the argument of this chapter inasmuch as they help to explain why regional players are thinking and acting more and more at the regional level, beyond national borders and within the confines of a pan-Arab market. Low revenues are not only keeping Western investors at bay, but essentially leave the market in the hands of Arab media professionals and investors who are reaching beyond their home territory to seek revenues, skills and local assets in order to achieve higher quality and profitability. But because television stations,

centre stage of all satellite-related industries, are essentially non-profitable, the region is also witness to the emergence of a few state players or wealthy financiers (mostly Saudi, some Egyptian), who are willing and able to finance television stations and invest in various media activities in exchange for greater prestige and influence at the regional level, if not at the international level within the Arab diaspora.

In search of a pan-Arab market and revenues

There are several reasons why television stations, advertising representatives, production houses and advertising professionals are reaching outside their home markets. Not only has technology allowed media to reach regional audiences, for an increasingly low cost, but a pan-Arab market reach has also become the obvious and essential means of achieving the required higher revenues. Between 1986 and 1999 alone, pan-Arab advertising revenues went from generating \$52 million to \$518 million, jumping from a 20 per cent to a 40 per cent market share and becoming the type of advertising dissemination with the fastest revenue growth by far.¹⁴ So, for example, even if the Saudi state station is the most watched in Saudi Arabia (clearly the most important national advertising market in the Middle East), advertisers still prefer spending their money on pan-Arab press and television stations, such as MBC, LBC or Al Jazeera, which have a much larger cumulative audience.

Television

Private stations such as Future TV and LBC were among the first to reap the benefits of the rising popularity of satellite television when they began broadcasting on free-to-air satellite between 1995 and 1997. Based in a saturated Lebanese home market, with too many stations and too little aggregate revenue, they became the first and only television stations in the whole area, along with MBC, to break even or even generate profit. So, for example, in 2001, LBC (satellite) generated an estimated revenue of \$45 million, as opposed to \$23 million on LBCI (terrestrial), while Future TV made about \$5 million at home compared to a much higher \$23 million on its satellite channel.¹⁵ Their early entry into the popular pan-Arab satellite market, now temporarily accessible only to those with a C-Band,¹⁶ allows them to use most of the programmes they are already producing for their home territory for their pan-Arab station. So basically, with very little added cost, they were suddenly able to generate much higher income. Today, the importance of their non-Lebanese audience is such that Future TV and Future Sat, for example, changed the timing of their popular early-morning programmes to suit the schedule of their Gulf audience in the summer of 2002, beginning one hour earlier and on Saturdays instead of on Mondays. Other stations, such as MBC of course, also reaped the benefits of pan-Arab advertising revenues, becoming a truly pan-Arab enterprise and the most popular and profitable station in the region. This is even more so in the case of Al Jazeera

(at times the most widely watched Arab channel in the Middle East and abroad as well), since its home base, Qatar, remains too small a country to generate any substantial amount of advertising revenue. New stations, such as Zen TV (a Dubai–Future TV joint venture, aimed at the youth market), were also recently created with no home target market in mind but clearly for a Gulf-wide or generally Arab audience. Even the Egyptian government has made concerted efforts to revamp the programmes of its satellite stations in order to attract greater outside viewership.¹⁷

Media representation

Media representation today is an area of activity basically dominated by two major pan-Arab players, one Saudi – al-Khalijia – and one Lebanese – Antoine Choueiri's group. Both have a strong home-market base but have become pan-Arab media giants, clearly dominating, and to some extent controlling, much of the flow and distribution of advertising revenue throughout the region. Antoine Choueiri benefited from the increasing popularity and regional expansion of the Lebanese media and other key pan-Arab players such as Al Jazeera,¹⁸ while al-Khalijia (fully owned by the Saudi Research Media Company), considerably helped from the outset by its privileged ties to a wealthy home market, mostly grew through the expansion of its activities outside strict national borders.¹⁹ The case of a lesser yet nevertheless true pan-Arab player, Najah Abi Assi, confirms this growing and general propensity towards region-wide representation.²⁰

Najah Abi Assi, with offices in Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Paris, mostly represents Lebanese and Kuwaiti newspapers and magazines, as well as ORBIT, the large pay-TV pan-Arab television network. Although a relatively small player, Abi Assi explains that in order to operate as a media representative, he needs to be physically close to the media he represents, as well as to the advertisers who want to buy advertising space, and that this is only feasible if one is present in multiple locations. Indeed, independent media representatives (neither state-controlled nor in-house representatives such as ARA, MBC's representative) also need to build a solid pan-Arab client base in order to represent each one of them efficiently. The wider its clientele, the easier it is for them to successfully secure revenues for each medium. These exclusive intermediaries are, for example, to some extent in a position to require advertisers to place advertisements in several other media to be able to use the one they really want. Hence, television and magazines have clear reasons for choosing representation from an agent with a wide pan-Arab network and operational base, even if their audience is localized. At the same time, this is also why media authorities in Egypt, which still maintains strong state control over its television industry at the national level, opted for a private agent, Antoine Choueiri, to represent their satellite channels.²¹ Apart from a few private, pan-Arab players, we are therefore left with only a small number of successful in-house representatives who represent sufficiently large or important media such as MBC (ARA) or the ART Network (AMC).

Production houses

Region-wide operations and professional exchanges are an obvious trait in the production of advertisements in the Middle East. Helped by the wide and early spread of Lebanese advertising agencies and professionals throughout the region – those that commission the productions – the business of advertising production in Lebanon boomed from the latter part of the 1980s to the mid-1990s. Indeed, all the major Lebanese production houses now produce between 70 and 80 per cent of their work for a Gulf-based clientele. Owing to relatively high production budgets, a competitive and technical edge and varied local scenery, these production houses were even able to compensate for the added cost of producing outside the Gulf states, and in particular Dubai, the advertising hub of the Middle East. A growing number of production houses are now opening in Dubai, some of them Lebanese owned, but the industry there is still nascent and much less experienced.²² A Saudi advertising agent who came to Beirut to attend a pre-production meeting explains: ‘The degree of professionalism and the quality of production, pretty much guaranteed in Beirut, is worth the cost, in time and money, for us. We require the best and they can give it to us. So we come here.’²³ Egypt, of course, also has an important number of production houses but they work almost exclusively for their home market, generally unable to attract outside commissions for a non-Egyptian audience.

Advertising agencies

When the Lebanese advertising agencies began their regional spread in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were actually pioneering a professional regionalization process, locally servicing a much wider clientele wherever they happened to be, while at the same time offering them regional know-how and infrastructure. Most representative offices now focus their operations on their local market and act fairly independently from one another. However, for large bids – usually for large international clients and/or big-budget campaigns – agencies may compete internally against one another. When the multi-million-dollar Marina Towers project in downtown Beirut decided to launch an advertising campaign, they invited several regional agencies to pitch a creative marketing campaign. Thereafter each agency had its main offices throughout the Middle Eastern network compete to produce a full campaign, so that eventually only the strongest work would be presented to the client. Professionals themselves also compete for positions at the regional level. The advertising labour market is indeed highly mobile, frequently interchanging creative directors and managers between agencies and/or across borders. There are actually almost no advertising managers who have not worked in several locations, usually moving between Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Beirut. These individuals also frequently, of course, travel outside their home base to meet with clients, attend conferences and training sessions or participate in pre-production meetings.

In search of regional skills and talent

The high degree of mobility and interconnectedness of advertising professionals across the region is in great part due to the fact that a large proportion of these individuals are Lebanese nationals. It is difficult to estimate the exact proportion of Lebanese, but their overwhelming presence is quite obvious to any observer. Jean-Claude Boulos, the World President of the IAA, estimates that 70–75 per cent of the budgets in the Arab countries ‘are in the hands of either Lebanese companies or Lebanese affiliates of international companies’.²⁴ This Lebanese dominance, however, is not simply due to the identity of the companies themselves. If a large proportion of the managers and creative agents are Lebanese, it is also due to their level of qualification. Lebanon is home to a proportionally large number of universities which offer specialized degrees in graphic design, fine arts, advertising, filming and marketing taught in foreign languages (English or French),²⁵ while also offering their students the opportunity to carry out practical training in a relatively active private local media market. Their graduating classes are obviously too large to be absorbed into the local market; so the majority are expected to look for jobs at the regional level, where their technical skills and linguistic abilities, including their ability to communicate in Arabic, provide them with a marketable competitive edge. The labour market in the advertising world is therefore not locally supplied, but largely represented by one national group spread across the region.²⁶

When it comes to the production process, Egyptian actors remain the most abundant and qualified group in the region, while, as mentioned earlier, Lebanese producers maintain a relatively strong regional presence. It is also worth mentioning that in the music industry, talent is also sought out and marketed on a region-wide basis, even if, as in advertising, the largest markets remain those of the Gulf. As we will see later, Egyptian and especially Syrian and Lebanese singers in fact base their financial success on a regional – and particularly Gulf – market audience. Those with talent pools who have been successful at the regional level are the Egyptians, with their popular and experienced film industry, and the Lebanese in satellite television. The success of Lebanese presenters and entertainment professionals is interesting inasmuch as their regional success has grown out of a cultural and social distinctiveness, rather than their similarity to the audience to whom they owe their popularity. Gulf viewers in particular have been watching Lebanese television programmes as both a curiosity and a window into a much more liberal Arabic-speaking world which introduces subjects and dress codes not allowed in their home countries. A look at the distinct Lebanese lifestyle is itself a source of entertainment, as it is dissimilar while being geographically distant enough not to represent a threat to their own values.

In search of local assets

In the businesses of advertising and advertising representation (*régies*), operators are required to have local offices wherever their clients are based. In the case of

satellite television, however, the customer (the audience) and the provider (the stations) do not need to be close to one another. Television stations are therefore free to operate from whichever location best suits their strategic needs and financial means. For this reason, Gulf financiers behind MBC, ORBIT, ART and some of the most recent specialized stations are now operating on a transnational and regional basis, choosing to open offices in several locations in order to maximize on distinct yet complementary economic, social and strategic assets. When MBC decided to relocate in the Middle East, the setting up of its new headquarters in Dubai was accompanied by a noticeable increase in production activities in Cairo and Beirut as well. ORBIT and ART, by far the largest spenders in satellite television, have also diversified and intensified their operations in key locations such as Egypt's Media City, Beirut, Dubai and, to a lesser extent, Kuwait and Syria.

What we have witnessed in the past few years is in fact the emergence of multi-centres, each offering a combination of assets for media productions, which no one location is able to supply fully. Dubai and its Media City offer the convenience of modern, cheap locales and an efficient and investment-friendly bureaucratic set-up. Beirut, on the other hand, the base of a large number of competitive private channels, supplies a valuable pool of qualified human resources and a distinct cultural cachet within a relatively creative and free socio-cultural environment. Cairo and its nearby media free zone provide access to a modern infrastructure and studios as well as a large number of experienced and talented actors and technicians. More interesting is the fact that channels and networks behind the emergence of these regional production centres are all Gulf owned and financed. Egyptian and Lebanese stations by and large produce all of their programmes at home, while the newer Gulf stations operate on a multi-location basis, invariably initiating collaborations and partnerships with non-Gulf audiovisual partners.²⁷ The truly transnational stations, therefore, in terms of production and investment, are the Gulf stations, and not the Lebanese or the Egyptian ones, which typically stay put in their own national territory.²⁸ So if the Lebanese typically export their know-how – acting as the region's quintessential facilitators of transnational professional and cultural dissemination – it is mostly Saudi investors who have been exporting the capital that finances and strengthens transnational Arab media operations.

The emergence of a few omnipresent pan-Arab media financiers

In fact, this latest pattern can, by and large, be attributed to the few Saudi owners of Gulf stations who also head the largest, most regionally spread out and financially powerful media groups in the Middle East today. A relatively more modest player among them is Prince Khalid bin 'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-Rahman, because he is only really present on the media stage through his network, ORBIT. Yet this network is still reported to have so far spent close to \$1 billion in operation costs:²⁹ a particularly large investment considering its meagre advertising revenues and its relatively small subscription base. Walid bin Ibrahim was the

principal player behind MBC when it was created in 1991 but is also and above all the owner of the larger ARA group International Holding Company, active in various sectors of the media industry. Prince Khalid bin Sultan is the owner of the most widely respected pan-Arab newspapers, *al-Hayat*, and also officially owns Tihama, which used to be one of the largest, if not the largest, media representative in the Middle East – now managed by Antoine Choueiri.

The most noticeable and omnipresent players among them, however, are Shaykh Saleh Kamel (owner of the Dallah al-Baraka group of companies) and Prince al-Walid bin Talal bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (head of Kingdom Holding). Walid bin Talal’s involvement in the media and in telecommunications around the world is remarkably high, but in the Middle East alone, he owns 10 per cent of MTV, and is a major co-shareholder of ART (AMC), LBC (satellite) and Rotana, the largest and most powerful Arab music production company in the region. In media alone, Saleh Kamel is the majority owner of Arab Media Company, which according to one of its directors, Muhammad Yassine, holds some 50 media-related companies, ranging from newspapers to advertising businesses and representatives, film production, Arab research media and ART and its platform for diffusion in Avenzano, Italy. As one of its co-founders, Saleh Kamel at first held a large percentage of MBC’s shares before selling them a few years later. Along with Walid bin Talal, he now owns 60 per cent of Rotana and 49 per cent of LBC. He also recently offered to buy Télé Liban, Lebanon’s national television station.³⁰

Gulf owners’ involvement in the arts and the media does not stop there, however. Through Rotana and its involvement with the Arab Holding Company for Arts and Publishing (AHCAP), they are now also involved in an increasingly active, if not aggressive, campaign for ownership and/or distribution rights in the music industry, films, cinemas and publications throughout the Middle East. AHCAP is the important exception to the predominantly Gulf-based pan-Arab investment patterns mentioned above, since it is principally owned by Egyptian investors.³¹ Walid bin Talal and Saleh Kamel’s involvement with AHCAP (they are now board members) should not come as a surprise, however, since Rotana has dominated the music-production business in the Middle East, representing a large portion of the most popular singers in the region³² and recently purchasing important (though relatively small) record companies such as Sawt Lubnan (Lebanese) and Sawt El Fan (Egyptian) – now therefore owning the rights to classic performers such as Abdel Halim Hafez and Farid El Atrash. Meanwhile, through Ibrahim El Moallem and Dal El Shrouq, AHCAP has indirectly secured exclusive deals with Sawt El Fan (which owns the rights to a large number of Umm Kalthoum’s songs), Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali and future Al Nahar publications.³³ AHCAP also recently purchased Sawt Lubnan’s rights.³⁴ Admittedly, its ambitions reach far beyond the music world, having by now also, for example, purchased a very large collection of Egyptian films, arguably the most important Middle Eastern cultural heritage of the twentieth century.³⁵

The recent alliance of these Saudi investors with this large private Egyptian company is especially relevant to our analysis of current transnational trends in

the media industry of the Middle East, in so far as it points to an overall entrepreneurial and strategic approach, reaching far beyond the borders of any given state. These private investors' choice of location, partners and products also considerably contribute, in themselves, to the region's globalization and regionalization process. Yet, contrary to what may be assumed from private investors, they are still operating in an industry which is by and large non-profitable. While MBC may now finally boast of its very recent financial viability, individuals such as Saleh Kamel and many others, including AHCAP's shareholders, are far from being able to reasonably expect the same. Presumably, the reason they remain involved in the media is the all-important element of prestige they gain from it, especially since there are few other reasons that could help explain the huge financial losses they incur. Professionals working closely with individuals such as Saleh Kamel, Walid bin Talal or even Khalid bin Sultan all attest to this.

From a cultural and political standpoint, the impact of these transnational capital investments and business alliances should nevertheless not be overstated. It is true that this relatively small group of individuals alone has permitted the emergence of true regional media operations and basically hired most of the non-Gulf citizens working outside their home country. Financial investments, however important, could not and did not give them actual control over media content (in television programmes, films, advertisements and music productions) especially at a time when viewership ratings are increasingly what matters most. Channels such as Al Jazeera and the Hezbollah-owned al-Manara stand out in so far as their political agendas continue to dominate content, but these remain exceptions in a media market marked by a growing demand for entertainment. For instance, even if Rotana dominates the music industry, few Gulf singers have succeeded in capturing the interest of audiences outside the GCC states. On the other hand, thanks to the growing number of pan-Arab distribution channels and operations, there now is a rising appetite in the Gulf for Arab singers from outside the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, the above-mentioned wealthy individuals or even Gulf states financing popular pan-Arab productions may have gained personal or state prestige while facilitating cross-border investments and cultural exchanges, but, by and large, this does not mean that they have by the same token succeeded in truly widening the audience for Gulf culture or inculcating Gulf-based political and social views in the rest of the Arab world.

To understand this phenomenon, the investments of the key Gulf individuals also need to be put in the context of the changing yet enduring role of the state in the media. These individuals all maintain close ties to their home states – even Saleh Kamel, who needs to stay in the good graces of the Saudi authorities if he is to preserve his much larger financial interests in his home country, where almost all of his business is based. Much has already been said and written about the weakening hold of the state over what people see in the media following the regional inception of satellite television. Viewers are now exposed to an array of information channels, all presenting different views and interpretations of social and economic events. With the ability to choose from a variety of international channels, viewers have become increasingly sophisticated and demanding as

'consumers', forcing channels to compete with one another to an unprecedented degree. Yet, in a world where television stations remain by and large non-lucrative, the state still plays a very important role, since it acts either as a direct financier and/or exerts a great deal of authority over the stations' principal private financiers.³⁶ The states have, in fact, themselves begun to act as competitive regional players while seeking to grasp the attention of audiences beyond their own borders. They too seek to gain greater prestige and influence abroad. While keeping the required degree of control and socio-political censorship at home, they are also playing by the new rules of the regional satellite market. Three examples clearly illustrate this phenomenon: Al Jazeera, Egyptian satellite and MBC. While still keeping a close watch over the airing of issues of domestic relevance, Al Jazeera³⁷ has clearly succeeded in capturing the attention and the recognition of large regional audiences, thereby indirectly increasing the fame and power of its home state of Qatar. The Egyptian government, while also keeping much of its traditional state control over the domestic information channels, has recently made concerted efforts to increase the popularity of Egyptian channels abroad. In attempting to do so, it has given Egyptian satellite channels a much greater degree of freedom.³⁸ It even recently gave one of its precious state-owned C-Bands and preferential access to cinema archives and studios in order to help the new privately owned station, al-Mehwar, to compete at the regional level. MBC, although financed by a member of the Saudi royal family (and unofficially by King Fahd himself), has by now become the regional channel par excellence. To increase its advertising revenues and popularity, the channel revamped its whole identity and programme grid, becoming an entertainment rather than a news channel. It opened offices throughout the Middle East, hired employees from across the region and introduced new programmes to compete aggressively with its direct rival, the private station LBC. In an effort to reduce its operational costs and further increase its advertising revenues, MBC even decided to merge with the private Lebanese station Future Sat, in December 2001. Before that, the Dubai authorities had decided to basically finance the new channel, Zen TV, letting its private Lebanese partner manage most of the operations in Lebanon. States therefore now show increasing willingness to finance media operations outside their own territory (almost always at a loss) and associate themselves with private, foreign partners in order to compete better at a regional level. Egypt and Dubai even proved willing to minimize censorship and state control considerably in their media free zones in order to attract stations, which now rent both studios and equipment in those areas for production purposes.³⁹

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis of media industries, the nature and mode of cross-border activities undertaken by the various participants have confirmed the articulation of an increasingly pan-Arab market. Region-wide operations, alliances, market expansion and investments all point to modes of thinking and strategizing that reach far beyond a state's own borders. The nationalities of investors and

professionals and the location of operations have lost considerable relevance in the face of new possibilities and priorities. Both private and public players now focus their attention in the direction of achieving region-wide income and/or influence.

However, while adopting international professional standards and formats as part of the globalization process, and allowing for a regionalization of audiences, investment and professional activities, modern media industries are nonetheless still marked by persistently clear sub-regional or nation-based patterns. On the one hand, we have Gulf investors who finance most pan-Arab operations and Gulf viewers who motivate the larger part of investments in pan-Arab media. Gulf viewers and investors have therefore mostly allowed for the financing of media production and dissemination outside national state borders. On the other hand, however, the actual content of these pan-Arab media productions and the nationality of those working in the various modern media industries remain of a predominantly non-Gulf Arab nature. In fact, when it comes to television, Egyptian and Lebanese productions found their competitive edge abroad, particularly in the Gulf, through disseminating and exporting their own particular brand of cachet. The Lebanese, and above all those working in advertising, advertising representation, music and visual production industries today, can more easily than ever before export their know-how and manpower as the pan-Arab market continues to grow. In media, transnational cultural flows, most often directed at Gulf audiences (perhaps more eager than others to consume media products from outside their own borders) are therefore now predominantly facilitated by non-Gulf Arab media professionals, even if mostly financed by Gulf investors.

Notes

- 1 Advertising representatives, also often called *régies* from the French, are not to be confused with advertising agencies. They act as intermediaries between the media they represent and the agencies that need to go through them in order to book advertising space. In the Middle East, advertising representatives operate differently from anywhere else, including France, since they enjoy exclusive representation rights over each medium.
- 2 For a more detailed study of the satellite television industry and more specifically the role of Lebanon and the Lebanese within, see Gaëlle Le Pottier, 'Le monde de la télévision satellitaire au Moyen-Orient et le rôle du Liban et des Libanais dans son évolution', in F. Mermier (ed.), *Mondialisation et nouveaux médias dans l'espace arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003), pp. 43–72.
- 3 The research was mostly conducted in Lebanon between August 2000 and December 2001, as part of a research project on transnationalism and the Gulf states under the auspices of the British Economic and Social Research Council.
- 4 For a detailed and insightful description of the history and 'internationalization' of these advertising networks see Leïla Vignal, 'Géographie de la publicité au Moyen-Orient: entre échelle mondiale et échelle locale', in F. Mermier (ed.), *Mondialisation et nouveaux médias dans l'espace arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003), pp. 349–78; and Alain Battégay, 'La publicité au Moyen-Orient: recompositions régionales et discours professionnels' in *ibid.*, pp. 379–408.
- 5 Previous Lebanese world presidents were Samir Fares (1988) and Moustafa Assad (1992).

- 6 Saatchi & Saatchi in Beirut, for example, is part of Quantum, a newly formed group servicing its clients through separate companies providing complementary yet distinct services: Cordiant United (public relations); Brand Central (corporate identity); Saatchi & Saatchi (advertising); Bates (advertising geared towards the building of brand loyalty); and Zenith-Net.com (media content). This new 'communication group' is in fact a direct reflection of what happened to the mother company abroad.
- 7 Dani Richa, Creative Director, Impact – BBDO. *Arab Ad*, July–August 2002, p. 16.
- 8 Naomi Sakr, 'Channels of Interaction: The Role of Gulf-Owned Media Firms in Globalisation', paper presented at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, July 2001, p. 11.
- 9 *Arab Ad*, January 2000. See also Gareth Smyth, 'The Rise and Fall of Lebanese Advertising', *Arabes Trends*, November 1999, pp. 32–6.
- 10 Battegay, 'La publicité'.
- 11 Vignal, 'Géographie'.
- 12 Al-Jazeera also benefited from foreign expertise inasmuch as the core of its professional staff was from the start made up of Arab professionals (mostly Lebanese, Palestinians and Sudanese), who had been working for the BBC Middle East station based in London. These key professionals were therefore Western trained but still of Arab nationality.
- 13 Note that production houses in the Middle East mostly produce advertisements for television, especially in Dubai and Lebanon. Television stations almost always produce their own programmes and few films are made – almost none outside Egypt.
- 14 *Arab Ad*, January 2000.
- 15 These figures are only estimates and remain controversial, if not unreliable, but they nonetheless adequately highlight the importance of pan-Arab revenues as compared to national ones.
- 16 This temporary limitation is due only to technological reasons. Most viewers today still watch satellite television on analogue (C-Band), a means of transmission which is now saturated. Only public stations and the two Lebanese stations subscribed on time to transmit on the free-to-air analogue channels. Once enough viewers switch to digital technology, new and private stations will be able to participate in the sharing of real pan-Arab revenues.
- 17 Interview with Sanaa Mansour, ex-director of the Egyptian satellite network, December 2001.
- 18 Choueiri's group represents LBC (satellite); MTV (terrestrial); the largest Lebanese newspapers (*al-Nahar*, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, *al-Safir*); Al Jazeera; Saudi-owned *al-Hayat* and Egyptian Sat (both through Tihama); Bahrain's national television station and radio; several Lebanese radio stations; a series of national and pan-Arab magazines; and is very active in outdoor advertising through one of its companies, Arabian Outdoor, the largest of its kind in the region with some 10,000 panels. Interview with Antoine Choueiri, September 2000.
- 19 Al-Khalijia represents a large number of Saudi and pan-Arab media, including Sharq El Awsat and at one point (and indirectly) Future Sat.
- 20 Interview with Najah Abi Assi, spring 2001.
- 21 Their regular Egyptian channels, however, are represented by national state-controlled institutions.
- 22 Jordan also has a few production houses, which, to some degree, compete at the regional level. See *Arab Ad*'s special issue on production houses, March 2001.
- 23 Interview, spring 2001.
- 24 Smyth, 'Rise and Fall', p. 34.
- 25 For example, the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University, l'Université Saint Joseph and l'Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA) have developed active and respected programmes in these areas.

- 26 Other countries from the Western world or Asia also supply qualified professionals, especially in Dubai. But given the fact that 90 per cent of advertisements are in Arabic and that quality advertising requires strong cultural insight (so that the viewers can 'relate to the ad' produced), Arabic speakers still have a relative advantage, especially as managers, creative directors and copywriters.
- 27 For example: the recent MBC–Future so-called merger; ORBIT and ART's collaboration and co-productions with LBC, Future TV and MTV; Dubai TV and Future TV's joint venture, Zen TV; Abu Dhabi TV and MTV's special Ramadan programme in 2001.
- 28 This even includes new channels such as al-Mehwar in Egypt and the Dubai–Future TV joint venture which is still mostly produced in Lebanon.
- 29 So has ART network.
- 30 Although the Lebanese government welcomed this offer and probably first approached Saleh Kamel, as one of the only investors who would be willing venture into this non-lucrative institution, the audio-visual authorities have stalled the process, deeming it unconstitutional. A compromise may be reached with a long-term leasing agreement.
- 31 AHCAP's official shareholders: EFG Hermes (17.5 per cent); al-Arabi Investment Company (17.5 per cent); Alla El Khawaga (15 per cent; he is an important yet discreet player behind the scenes – a Jordanian businessman married to Isaad Yunis, a well-known Egyptian actress, also a shareholder); Ibrahim El Moallem (15 per cent; famous Egyptian publisher of *Dar El Shuruq*; apparently an important decision maker in the company); and three smaller shareholders supposedly given a 1 per cent share in return for assuming administrative responsibilities: Ahmed Heikkey (head of EFG Hermes); Ziad Bahaedine; and Isaad Yunis. AHCAP is sectioned into three principal companies: the Arab company for Visual Media (Alaa El Khawaga), the Arab company for Sound and the Arab Company for Publishing (Ibrahim El Moallem).
- 32 For example, with regard to Lebanese artists alone, Rotana is the current producer for Asala Masri, Majda al-Roumi, Kazem al-Saher, George Wassouf, Nawal Zoughbi and the 4 Cats, among others.
- 33 Ibrahim El Moallem has also laid out some ambitious plans in the publishing and distribution business and e-business for the whole region (*al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 502, 5–11 October 2000 and issue 510, 30 November–6 December 2000).
- 34 *Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 502, 5–11 October 2000 and issue 510, 30 November–6 December 2000.
- 35 The number is difficult to assess since this massive purchase remains quite controversial, for fear that these private investors might be able to monopolize these very popular 'cultural goods'.
- 36 Lebanese stations may seem like an exception to this rule. However, besides Télé Liban, the state-owned television station, each private station is financed by principal political players such as the Speaker of Parliament, the Prime Minister or other wealthy individuals active on the political scene. In the absence of a clear state authority or identity, the case of the Lebanese stations still fits into the regional pattern.
- 37 Although it is not officially state owned, Al Jazeera's owner is Qatar's Foreign Minister and it is therefore closely linked to the state.
- 38 Interview with Sanaa Mansour, ex-director of the Egyptian satellite network, December 2001.
- 39 By and large, both media free zones seem by now quite successful.

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- Interviews with some 150 media professionals: media owners, producers, art directors, and advisers in Lebanon and Egypt (August 2000–December 2001).

6 Indonesians in Saudi Arabia

Religious and economic connections

Mathias Diederich

For a long time, Indonesian Muslims maintained strong links with their counterparts in the Islamic world, especially with the holy cities of Arabia, Mecca and Medina in the Hijaz. Two distinct phases of contact are discussed in this chapter. The first phase, which lasted until the Second World War, was characterized by the predominance of religious contacts. The centrality of the pilgrimage in Islam brought Indonesians¹ to Arabia to perform this important religious obligation. While the majority of Indonesians returned to their country after the *hajj*, a small minority stayed behind, or continued to travel between Mecca and Indonesia. The second phase, after the Second World War, was marked by the increased migration of Indonesian economic workers to Saudi Arabia to seek employment, often in low-skilled jobs. While religious contacts, stimulated by the pilgrimage, continued, this second phase is a function of both the need for expatriate labour in Saudi Arabia and of Indonesia's uneven economic development, which failed to absorb excess human resources in the country itself. It is argued that the first phase generated intense transnational connections, centred on religious learning and motivated by contacts with other Muslims in the Hijaz; both threatened the stability of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia and prompted the Dutch authorities to intervene and control the flow of both people and discourses. In contrast, although today the number of Indonesian migrants in Saudi Arabia outnumber pilgrims, such migrants remain marginal transnational actors, whose weak bargaining position in both Saudi Arabia and Indonesia prevents them from playing a leading role in transnational processes. The Indonesian connections with Saudi Arabia demonstrate the importance of the structure within which such connections take place. While Indonesia benefits from migrant workers' remittances, it is unlikely that workers will challenge structures that maintain their marginality or push for better working conditions, despite efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international efforts drawing attention to the plight of workers, especially Indonesian female housemaids, who constitute a majority among Indonesian workers in Saudi Arabia.

Religious contacts before the Second World War

Contacts between Arabia and South East Asia are ancient. There is a strong tradition of exchange between the two regions. With the spread of Islam beyond

Arabia, South East Asians regularly visited Arabia, especially the western region (Hijaz) to perform the annual pilgrimage, while Arabs travelled to South East Asia to spread the faith and engage in commercial activities. The Dutch East Indies have always been of particular interest for them. Arabs, especially from Hadramaut, came as traders; some of them proselytized among the local population at the same time, and married into influential local families.²

Indonesians in Arabia were traditionally found in Saudi Arabia. Even long before Indonesia became an independent state, Indonesian Muslims were attracted to the centres of religious learning, especially Mecca and Medina in the Hijaz. In the 1880s more than 15 per cent of all pilgrims to Mecca and Medina were from the Indonesian Archipelago. A number of them, the so-called *mukims*, remained in the holy cities after the pilgrimage to study in the famous religious schools. Some Indonesians spent months and even years in Mecca attaining knowledge in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and other religious sciences. Some Indonesians earned their living as guides for countrymen who came to Mecca as pilgrims. Others had small shops and worked as tailors, especially to prepare the *ihram* (special dress for pilgrims) for their countrymen and others.³ Most of them, however, remained dependent on their connections to the Dutch East Indies. Relatives of the *mukims* brought money when undertaking the pilgrimage.⁴ Others financed their *hajj* by selling commercial goods in the Hijaz,⁵ and the *mukims* probably benefited from these trade activities, too. There were *mukims* who manufactured objects, such as embroidered caps, that were taken home by other pilgrims and sold for a very high price in the Dutch East Indies.⁶ But, as Vredenburg⁷ points out: 'Practically none of these Indonesian *mukims* in Mecca followed an important trade: there are a few small traders among them but they only sell to their fellow-countrymen.' The *mukims* of Javanese origin in the Hijaz were even described as helpless by the Dutch Consul in Jeddah:⁸ 'How smart the Javanese may be in their own country, but once they arrive here, it seems that they lose their brains and behave like stupids in front of the sheykhs.' It is interesting to note, however, that some returning pilgrims participated in changing the economy and social strata in the Dutch East Indies to a considerable degree.⁹ For this purpose, they made use of knowledge about commerce and money lending gained in Mecca while at the same time benefiting from their new social status as *hajji*.

Accurate figures on the presence of the *mukims* in Mecca are hard to come by. According to Snouck there were about 8,000–10,000 Indonesians in Mecca in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰ Interestingly, in 1930, the (Indonesian) Vice-Consul of the Netherlands in Mecca estimated their number at only 5,000.¹¹ The pilgrims who stayed in Mecca created small Indonesian enclaves in the Hijaz, characterized by the popularity of Indonesian cuisine, which still flourishes there.

Indonesians in the Hijaz led modest lives, and looked up to the local religious authorities with respect. However, their contributions to the development of Islamic science remain underestimated and even unrecognized. Indonesian religious scholars residing in Mecca gave themselves Arabic-sounding names; they were therefore not recognized as Indonesians by later generations. Some of their

publications were held in high esteem in the Muslim world, but few people knew that they were non-Arabs from the Indonesian Archipelago.¹² Some of their scholarly works are still used in Thai, Saudi Arabian and Egyptian religious institutions. For example, Ma'sum Aly's *al-Amthal at-tasrifyya* was still being studied at al-Azhar in Cairo, and Ihsan bin Muhammad Dahlan's commentary on Imam Ghazali's *Minhajul Abidin* was part of the postgraduate programme there, at least until the 1980s.¹³ These two scholars came from East Java – Jombang and Kediri, respectively.

In 1934, Indonesian scholars even opened their own religious school in Mecca, the so-called Darul Ulum. It was founded after a dispute with the '*ulama*' in the Shaulatiyah institute, which had until then been one of the schools favoured by Indonesians in Mecca. The Shaulatiyah itself had an interesting history: established by Indians in 1874, it was headed by the Indian scholar Rahmatullah bin Khalil al-'Utsmani, who had become well known for his anti-colonial discourse against the British in India. Both the Shaulatiyah and Darul Ulum have strongly shaped traditional religious learning in Indonesia.¹⁴

In addition to these scholars and small-scale merchants, there was another group of people originating from the then Dutch East Indies – pilgrims who became slaves.¹⁵ Indonesians came to Saudi Arabia as free men, but some eventually became heavily indebted after their arrival. Some of them had insufficient funds at the very beginning of their trip, and were not able to pay for the first leg of the long journey by boat. Others were robbed on the way or upon their arrival. Some Indonesians did not bring much money in the first place precisely because they were afraid of robbers.¹⁶ They thought they could work in Saudi Arabia and pay off their debts. In order to pay back the cost of the *hajj* journey, some had to work for local shaykhs. According to reports of the Consulate of the Dutch East Indies in Jeddah, shaykhs exploited the pilgrims and forced some of them gradually into slavery.¹⁷ Even many of those slaves who had been freed could not make a living by themselves and eventually ended up in the hands of their former owners again.¹⁸

It is worth mentioning that among the latter there were also Indonesians, some of them wealthy, who took advantage of the unfavourable situation of some of their compatriots. Husson mentions a report on a young man who found refuge at the Consulate of the Dutch East Indies after being sold to a Javanese 'priest'.¹⁹

In the port cities of the Dutch East Indies Indonesian shaykhs played an important role in recruiting pilgrims. Some of them came from the *mukim* community in Mecca. These shaykhs would be in contact with a Meccan shaykh and at the same time had relationships with Indonesian religious authorities, who would recommend their services to would-be pilgrims. In addition, they were able to procure tickets for the voyage to Jeddah, as they cooperated with the relevant shipping lines. For all these different services, recommendations etc. commissions were to be paid – which, of course, eventually added on to the costs the pilgrim had to shoulder.²⁰

Anti-colonial ideas and Dutch reactions

Despite these exploitative activities, Javanese, Sumatrans and other Indonesians met in Mecca and realized that they had a common interest; independence from Dutch colonial rule was often a topic for discussion. In Mecca, Indonesians debated these matters freely, whereas in the Dutch East Indies this was not possible. An Indonesian consciousness developed among these Muslims far away from their homes in the Dutch East Indies.²¹ At about the same time, similar activities took place among the Indonesian students at al-Azhar University in Cairo.²² Some Indonesians even went back and forth spreading religious and national ideas in Dutch East India. Pilgrims carried news about events in other parts of the world, such as anti-colonial activities, that might not otherwise have reached the Dutch East Indies. Both personal accounts and newspapers played a significant role.²³ These activities were part of an early manifestation of transnationalism, whereby ideas about independence and colonial rule found expression in distant contexts. Indonesians developed a Muslim identity together with an awakening of their national identity. They already used the Malay language, which would become the official language in independent Indonesia at a later stage. According to Bruinessen,²⁴ the use of Malay was second only to Arabic in Mecca from the 1860s.

A considerable number of Indonesian scholars and *hajjis* in Saudi Arabia turned against the rule of the Dutch in their homeland. An early prominent example is Shaykh Yusuf Makassar, from South Sulawesi. He spent several decades in Saudi Arabia and then eventually left in 1670 to settle in Banten (West Java). Shaykh Yusuf was involved in a power struggle within the local elite in Banten, siding with the Sultan against the Dutch. He and his followers were defeated by the Dutch and Shaykh Yusuf was deported to Ceylon.

Another scholar who needs to be mentioned in this context is 'Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani, from Palembang in Sumatra. He was a very productive writer between 1764 and 1788 who influenced Islamic teachings in Indonesia via his Indonesian disciples, who studied with him during their stay in Mecca.²⁵ 'Abd al-Samad made it clear that he was in favour of a *jihad* against the Dutch.²⁶ Woodcroft-Lee points out that returned *hajjis* also played a leading role in the anti-colonial wars in West Sumatra²⁷ and Java (1825–30).

Anti-colonial tendencies among the Indonesians in Mecca are well illustrated by the establishment of the Perkumpulan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (Association for the Liberation of Indonesia) in the town. The *mukims* joined in large numbers, propagating the struggle for liberty among Indonesian pilgrims.²⁸

In addition, an organization needs to be mentioned here which played an important role in fostering self-consciousness among the Indonesian Muslims: the Sarikat Islam (Islamic Union), an organization which was founded in 1912 to protect the rights of indigenous batik merchants and to promote Islamic teaching. The Dutch government tried to convince Indonesian Muslims not to join the organization. This in turn prompted Indonesian scholars in Mecca to react. The establishment and recognition of Sarikat Islam was supported by the Javanese

Muhammad Muchtar bin Attarid (alias Natanegara) and the Minangkabau shaykh Ahmad al-Khatib, who both resided in Mecca at that time. The latter insisted on the importance of Sarikat Islam to counter foreign, including Dutch, influence. The writings of Ahmad al-Khatib and Natanegara became known in Indonesia via returning pilgrims.²⁹

It is worth mentioning, however, that Ahmad al-Khatib³⁰ and other Indonesian scholars in Mecca did not limit themselves to anti-colonial ideas when it came to their contributions to Islamic teaching in the Dutch East Indies. In the early twentieth century, for example, discussions focused at times on opinions regarding religious rituals which differed according to the respective understandings of Islamic modernism and mysticism.

Bruinessen emphasizes that from the seventeenth century onwards Indonesian Islamic scholarship has been shaped by Indonesians who had resided in Mecca or Medina for a while.³¹ They did not necessarily always adopt ideas from local Arabs, but were rather inspired by other scholarly influences that were prominent in Mecca and Medina then. It was there that Indonesian Muslims acquired much of their knowledge of Indian Islam and the ideas of the Egyptian scholar Muhammad 'Abduh. These influences have deeply marked Islam in Indonesia up to the present day.

It is interesting to note that the Dutch authorities started to impose restrictions on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and in some cases prevented Arabs and Indonesians resident in Saudi Arabia from entering the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch were aware of the effect these grass-roots contacts in the Hijaz could have on the stability of their rule in Indonesia. Initially, however, the Dutch did not intervene too much in religious activities or education, as their primary concern was the exploitation of natural resources in the colony. Vredenbregt explains the different and sometimes inconsistent approaches of the Dutch *hajj* policy in detail.³²

However, the intensification of anti-colonial discourse led to a change in policy. Christian Snouck Hurgronje, a Dutch scholar in the service of the Dutch East Indies government, was charged with studying the activities of the Indonesians in Mecca at the end of the nineteenth century. His task was to find out about the possible role of Indonesian scholars and pilgrims in the anti-colonial struggle. His initial assessment was that the pilgrimage would not turn all Indonesians into religious fanatics. Instead, he felt that contact with the outside world would strengthen Sunni Muslim religious patterns and work against heterodoxy.³³ Federspiel interprets these early findings in the following way: 'In his way of thinking "right thinking Muslims" were concerned with religious observance, obeyed the law and accepted conditions as determined by God. This made them ideal subjects in comparison with those not understanding their religion well, who were subjects to other passions.'³⁴ But the increasing spread of the modernist ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh and his followers started to irritate the Dutch authorities even more. The wider distribution of print media, not only in Arabic but also in Malay, added to the concerns of the Dutch and other colonial powers in the area. The Dutch eventually banned publications advocating the modernist ideas³⁵ and, as was mentioned earlier, imposed restrictions on the *hajj*.

One reason for these steps was a change in Snouck's assessment of the situation. The ongoing First World War made Snouck believe that the subjects of the Dutch Indies should no longer be allowed to travel to the Hijaz: on the one hand, he wanted to 'save them from danger'; on the other, he feared that 'their impressionable minds might be adversely affected by witnessing the Turks' humiliating treatment of such previously respected foreigners as the British and the French'.³⁶

However, the Dutch government did not stop Indonesian Muslims from going to Mecca altogether. The Dutch feared provoking even stronger anti-colonial feelings among them. Another reason that they refrained from intervention was the fact that Dutch ship owners benefited from the transportation of the pilgrims.³⁷

The First World War and the crisis of the world economy in the 1930s caused severe economic setbacks for the Dutch East Indies, too. The ups and downs in the pilgrimage statistics in the late colonial period³⁸ have to be explained this way.

Until the Second World War, the Indonesian presence in Saudi Arabia was mainly a function of religious connections. Such connections revolved around the pilgrimage and religious education, and both fostered the development of anti-colonial discourse, challenging Dutch rule in Indonesia.

This situation changed slowly after the Second World War, when Indonesia became an independent state. From the late 1970s onwards, most Indonesians who travelled to Saudi Arabia were economic migrants, mainly low-skilled labourers, such as maids and drivers. Because of their low occupational status and low pay, such migrants have remained marginal and isolated in Saudi Arabia. They are unable to develop any kind of group solidarity or collective action because in the majority of cases they are confined to private households, with little contact with other Indonesians or the wider host society.

Migration in the post-Second World War period

After the Second World War, Saudi Arabia remained the most important destination in the Gulf region for Indonesian migrants. Estimates of the number of Indonesians working in Saudi Arabia differ tremendously. According to the *Jakarta Post* there were more than 300,000 Indonesians working in Saudi Arabia in November 1997. The Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration was planning to send 2 million workers to Saudi Arabia within 5 years (1998–2003).³⁹ The workers are given fixed-term contracts.

It is evident that Indonesians generally had little bargaining power in the Saudi Arabian labour market, as many of them had no experience of working overseas or developed skills. They could speak neither English nor Arabic. Their attempts to find employment in the skilled sectors of the Saudi labour market were not successful despite substantial efforts by the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration. Most Indonesians who went to Saudi Arabia to work found employment in private households. Saudi citizens could still afford to hire maids and drivers for their homes even when oil prices went down in the 1980s. Nowadays, the current monthly salary for a maid is 600 Saudi riyals. In addition, food and shelter should be provided for by the employers.

Indonesian maids were considered suitable for work in the private sphere because they were Muslims. Indonesian drivers were also hired by Saudi Arabians, but in smaller numbers than maids. As a result, female migrant workers exceeded the number of male migrants. Throughout the last two decades at least 75 per cent of the Indonesian migrants in Saudi Arabia have been female.

Local debate on foreign labour in Saudi Arabia is usually heated, but is rarely focused on Indonesians, as their number is limited compared to other foreigners. In general, Indonesians have a lower status than many other nationals working in Saudi Arabia. This is attributed to their work as maids. Although Indonesian maids are valued for being Muslims, this does not seem to lead to better wages or social integration. It is ironic that common religious bonds fail to have an impact on the status of female domestic workers.

In Saudi Arabia, many Indonesian maids encountering problems with their employers feel powerless. As most of them are not allowed to go out on their own, let alone to organize in labour unions, their position is extremely weak.⁴⁰ Given their lack of language skills and the generally poor pre-departure training, Indonesian women are rarely able to contact the police or the Indonesian Consulate when problems arise.⁴¹ If they do succeed they may not receive help, as the Saudi Arabian police and Indonesian diplomats are not always willing or able to intervene on their behalf.

In contrast to much of the contact between Saudi Arabia and Indonesia before the Second World War, any form of transnationalism is rather restricted for Indonesians in Saudi Arabia today. The isolation of Indonesian maids in Saudi Arabian households prevents the development of transnational activities. Lack of appropriate pre-departure training for their jobs overseas has also harmed the reputation of the Indonesian nation in general. Saudi Arabians are often unhappy with Indonesians' lack of language skills and their unfamiliarity with modern household equipment. Indonesian overseas workers (the most frequent Indonesian abbreviation for the migrant workers in the Middle East is *TKW* – *tenaga kerja wanita*, 'female workforce') are considered inflexible, slow and poorly educated. This image is still perpetuated, as the agencies responsible for the sending of the *TKW* are not able or willing to improve their pre-departure training despite numerous efforts by the Indonesian government.

The preparation and placement of female Indonesian workers overseas is indeed a typical case of how rampant corruption has influenced the political decisions taken by Indonesian governments since the 1970s. The temptation for underpaid civil servants to gain additional income through bribery is extremely high. As most of the applicants for overseas jobs are poorly educated,⁴² unaware of their rights and very eager to migrate, they easily fall victim to unscrupulous agencies, middlemen and corrupt civil servants.⁴³

The exploitation of the *TKW* is also linked to public perception of the kind of work they are supposed to do overseas. Housemaids have a low status in Indonesia itself, and are insufficiently protected by national law. Their poor standing is mainly caused by traces of Javanese feudalism in Indonesian society. In West and Central Java household helpers are expected to be obedient to their employers

and not supposed to question them in any way.⁴⁴ As in Saudi Arabia, wages are traditionally very low due to the fact that maids used to be considered part of the family, and were entitled to retirement in the house of their employers rather than higher remuneration.

It is obvious that poor pre-departure training and the low status of maids in Indonesia cannot be blamed on the Indonesian government alone. But the actual decision to allow the sending of female workers as domestic helpers to Saudi Arabia is Jakarta's responsibility.

Struggling for a share in the Saudi Arabian labour market

Reports on abuse of maids in Saudi Arabian households were so frequent in the 1970s and 1980s that the governments of several Asian countries, such as Bangladesh and India, stopped sending maids altogether or restricted their migration. These steps were taken despite the desperate need in these countries for foreign currency earned by their citizens abroad. The Indonesian government, however, seized the opportunity, and encouraged Indonesian women to take over these vacancies. This reflected their poor bargaining position: Indonesians had to take what was left behind by others. Countries such as Bangladesh and India protected their workers, while Indonesia turned a blind eye to the risks its citizens were facing for the sake of gaining a share in the Saudi labour market.⁴⁵ This attitude has not improved the reputation of Indonesian citizens in Saudi Arabia.

The Indonesian government continues to lack the necessary commitment to protect its workers abroad. Some of its highest representatives have benefited personally through direct involvement in the *TKW* industry, and they are obviously not motivated to end the programme. Ill-treatment, rape, cases of unexplained deaths and the disappearance of Indonesian citizens in Saudi Arabia have not been followed up by the relevant government agencies. The Indonesian Embassy and Consulate were understaffed, and documentation on the whereabouts of the *TKW* was incomplete. Indonesia has not wanted to put too much pressure on Saudi Arabia, as it wants to ensure continued access to the Holy Places for Indonesian pilgrims.

The *TKW* candidates, the agencies and the civil servants are confronted with an opaque system of rules and regulations which is constantly amended. The *TKW* themselves are also often responsible for their plight. Some ignore the regulations, overstay in order to perform the pilgrimage before returning to Indonesia, or change employers without being given official permission. This behaviour is resented in Saudi Arabia, making the *TKW* even more vulnerable to abuse, as they then become illegal immigrants.

Many Muslims in Saudi Arabia are of the opinion that a female Muslim should not travel unless she is accompanied by her husband or a *mahram*,⁴⁶ a close male relative who is not allowed to marry her – for example, her son or brother. The Saudi Arabian public was surprised to find out that so many women who were supposed to be Muslims worked in Saudi Arabia without any appropriate male

company. In their view, both the Indonesian government and public failed in several respects, as they fulfilled neither their moral nor religious obligations towards women.

Consequently, Indonesian maids were not necessarily perceived as good fellow Muslims by their hosts. This perception is particularly striking as the discourse on Islamic unity, in itself a reflection of transnational bonds, is emphasized and reiterated by the Saudi Arabian government for the sake of its self-legitimization. Islamic unity is also identified by the Saudi government as the driving force to promote Islam all over the world, including Indonesia. In reality, however, Saudi Arabian society does not grant equal status to Muslims from other parts of the world.

The host society's relationship with *TKW* and pilgrims

Limited interaction with the host society is one reason why Indonesians often feel insecure in Saudi Arabia. Their insecurity is also related to the frequent reports of abuse within Saudi households. Most *TKW* arrive in Saudi Arabia already frightened and nervous, making relationships with the locals difficult. Difference in culture also leads to misunderstandings between *TKW* and the host society. Islam cannot bridge this gap. On the one hand, Indonesians are more welcome than other foreigners because they are Muslims; but on the other hand, they are not necessarily seen as fellow Muslims of equal standing.

Although they experience life within Saudi households, *TKW* do not feel part of society, as they only participate in its activities as servants. The host society seems reluctant to integrate them. Their situation is somehow paradoxical: they live inside the very protected homes of Saudi Arabians – they might not even be allowed to go out – but at the same time they feel, and are obviously sometimes perceived as, complete outsiders.

Many Indonesians see Saudi Arabia as a place to earn money for themselves and their families at home. The host country is not a place to settle down, as immigration laws are very strict and few foreigners are given the chance to stay on; *TKW* usually receive two-year contracts. Inter-marriage between Saudi Arabians and Indonesians is rare.⁴⁷ The only contact most *TKW* have in the host country is with the family they are living with, and it is considered inappropriate for employers to marry housemaids – even as second, third or fourth wives.

Nevertheless, some Indonesians do try to stay on in order to improve their economic prospects in Indonesia. Mostly, however, these attempts drive them into illegality and are not likely to improve their chances of integrating into the host society. Instead, they have to hide, and are often forced to find jobs in the sex industry, which is itself illegal. Indonesians who choose this way to stay on therefore find themselves in the lowest stratum of Saudi Arabian society.

For Indonesians, Saudi Arabia is the country of the Holy Places of Islam. Most *TKW* wish to perform the *hajj* or *ʿumrah* during their stay in Saudi Arabia. They rarely succeed, which adds to the bitter feeling many *TKW* have towards the host society.

In general, many Indonesians are mesmerized by the religious image of Saudi Arabia. The strong renaissance of Islam in Indonesia will contribute even more to this. But there is another trend that may estrange the two nations. It is the reputation of Indonesians in Saudi Arabia as a 'coolie nation' or '*TKW* nation'. The effects of this are felt not only by the *TKW* during their stay in Saudi Arabia; the pilgrims also suffer because of it. Some Indonesians opt for special packages when they go on the pilgrimage: instead of sharing the hardships of the *hajj* with fellow Muslims from all over the world they stay with their travel groups in five-star hotels and air-conditioned tents during their *hajj* before they go on shopping sprees in Saudi Arabia or other countries in the region.⁴⁸ The limited exchanges between the pilgrims in Saudi Arabia tends to reinforce the image of Indonesians in Saudi Arabia as *TKW*. Ignas Bethan found out that even well-to-do Indonesian pilgrims were mistaken for *TKW* by the locals – much to their disappointment.⁴⁹

The experiences of these more influential Indonesian pilgrims may have contributed to another image of Saudi Arabia in Indonesia: feeling insulted by their fellow Muslims, some pilgrims portray Saudi Arabia as a nation that enslaves foreign workers regardless of their religion. Indonesian Muslims resent the ill-treatment of their fellow citizens by Saudi Arabians – especially when they are exposed to it personally. Analysing Bethan's observation more closely, I conclude that the Indonesian pilgrims in question feel a deep frustration while in Saudi Arabia: they suddenly become aware of the general poor standing of Indonesians there, and this happens when they are performing the *hajj*, the peak of their religious lives. Given the high price they pay for the performance of the *hajj* and the prestige they expect to gain from it, this experience must be even more galling.

The notion of the *ummah*, highlighted in the rhetoric of the Saudi Arabian government as the all-encompassing international ideal of the Muslim world, is also deeply rooted among Indonesian Muslims. However, the aforementioned irritations and lack of integration into the host society are not likely to give this rhetoric much credibility. To make matters worse, these contradictions emerge during the *hajj*, the symbol of the unity of the entire Muslim world.

Efforts of NGOs in the field of labour migration

Indonesian NGOs have contributed substantially to the democratization of Indonesia. It is partly due to their efforts that in 1998 the government of President Soeharto eventually came to an end. In the field of labour migration, however, NGOs have had a difficult task. They have to cope not only with Indonesian bureaucracy and corruption but also with the interests of the agencies and middlemen. In addition, it is almost impossible for them to support the protection of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, as they have no counterparts in that country on whom they can call. NGOs and labour unions are almost unknown in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰

One of the NGOs, the Centre for Indonesian Migrant Workers (CIMW), developed various activities to compensate for these shortcomings. As direct contacts with representatives of the Saudi Arabian government are hard to establish,

the CIMW tried to lobby with the help of representatives of the Indonesian government. Baharuddin Lopa, the former Attorney General and Secretary General of the National Human Rights Commission, strongly supported the cause of the *TKW* before he died in 2001.⁵¹ The CIMW also approached the powerful Indonesian mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama, which maintains good relations with various Saudi authorities.

On the international level various activities are to be mentioned: along with similar organizations in Asia, for example, from Malaysia and Bangladesh, the CIMW is affiliated to the Hong Kong-based Asian Migrant Centre. In addition, it recently managed to gain support from strong international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Apart from the problems in Saudi Arabia, another difficulty is the lack of support within Indonesian society. Many Indonesians identify with the *TKW* and feel that their national pride is hurt. However, NGOs are easily perceived as nitpickers, as they emphasize the weakness of the *TKW* and lash out at the class differences in Indonesia, thus adding to the feeling of national shame and endangering the privileges of the well-to-do at the same time.

It is not surprising that it is mostly NGOs run by women and for the interests of women that advocate the cause of the *TKW*. It has been argued that pauperization of migration usually goes hand in hand with its feminization. (The number of male migrants in organized labour migration from Indonesia to the Middle East has always been very small.) In the case of Indonesian women going overseas, we can establish that they were the frontrunners in labour migration on a larger scale to the Middle East. They were in a weak position from the start, and there has been very little support for them ever since. As their educational background and family situation usually do not enable them to make a living in Indonesia, they start looking for other opportunities overseas. Their lack of international experience makes them dependent on whatever employment is available, so they tend to accept poor conditions in order to survive and support their families. Agencies operating in the field of labour migration take advantage of their economic situation and unfavourable educational background: the applicants are often unable to question either the procedures or the high fees they are charged. As international labour migration is organized mainly by men, the *TKWs* cannot count on any kind of female solidarity either – except for activists within NGOs, who have only limited influence, especially in times of nationwide economic hardship.⁵²

In addition, the newly gained freedom of the press has not changed public interest. Indonesian NGOs complain that, after Soeharto stepped down in 1998, so many problems needed to be discussed in Indonesia that the situation of the *TKW* was marginalized.⁵³ Even the critical and sometimes meticulous coverage in the press does not provoke a reaction from the government.

Finally, it is extremely difficult for the NGOs to work with the *TKW* themselves. Many of the candidates decide to migrate because they have virtually no other choice. Extreme poverty in rural areas makes them susceptible to all kinds of promises by middlemen who offer their services in the area. After transferring to

Jakarta and other cities the *TKW* candidates are trapped. They cannot even afford the bus fare back to their villages, and are prepared to accept poor working conditions and high fees just to ensure employment overseas.

During this period desperate women are not willing to listen to warnings of NGO representatives. They are so eager to depart that even useful advice for their overseas posting is likely to fall on deaf ears. NGOs provide manuals for pre-departure training and even basic language courses. But all these efforts cannot bring about much if there is little support abroad and if the *TKW* are not addressed by qualified staff during the preparation period.⁵⁴ The fact that ministers and senior officials in the Indonesian Department of Manpower and Transmigration have been replaced frequently in recent years exacerbates the situation.⁵⁵ In addition, they still lack satisfactory legal protection: the drafting of a separate law on labour migration failed despite intensive NGO lobbying, while the existing labour law leaves much to be desired, including protection for housemaids in Indonesia itself.⁵⁶

Comparing the situation of the pilgrims before the Second World War with that of the *TKW* shows that we have come full circle. Like the pilgrims, the *TKW* depend on middlemen in both Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. Once they leave their home towns they lose whatever bargaining power they had, and become completely dependent on others. Middlemen, civil servants and employers decide their fate and destination. The process of labour migration is organized by others, who deliberately make it complicated. *TKW* are frequently exploited both before and after departure, and even when they return to their home country. According to Husson, religious authorities play an important role in this context: 'Dependence on intermediaries, often *kiyai*⁵⁷ or *haji*,⁵⁸ with an all-powerful religious status and an important social position, illustrates the system of clientelism which bears so heavily on Indonesian society.'⁵⁹

The impact on bilateral relations and future development

The *hajj* is of great importance to the middle and upper classes of Indonesian society. Well-to-do Indonesian Muslims are eager to go on the pilgrimage, and therefore their government has to make sure that it remains on good terms with the Saudi Arabian government. Strong advocacy by the Indonesian government on behalf of the *TKW* would put the interests of the pilgrims at risk, as the Saudi Arabian government might react by restricting the flow of Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca. Labour migration from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia has affected bilateral relations to a certain degree, but there can be no doubt about the low priority of this matter compared to the *hajj*.

Recently Indonesia has experienced an obvious Islamization of public life. The Soeharto government took the first steps in this direction in the early 1990s. There is a growing sense of transnational solidarity between the educated Indonesian Muslims and the rest of the Islamic world. Arabs in general are more and more admired. It seems that Islamization of the local culture is also understood as Arabization. Arabic music and dress are in fashion. The hardships of

migrants and the negative experiences of Indonesian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia are likely to become less important. The *hajj* is becoming more popular than ever, and Indonesian migrants will remain marginal on the agenda of both government and public opinion.

With the events of 11 September 2001 and the Bali bombing in 2002, however, frictions within Indonesian society are apparent. For some Indonesians, these events have helped to improve the standing of the Arabs. The Saudi Arabian government may have withdrawn Osama bin Laden's passport, but this is not widely known in Indonesia, where he is often seen as a courageous man – especially among the youth.⁶⁰ Numerous students of Islamic boarding schools hang bin Laden's pictures on their walls and adopt his ideas about hypocrisy and moral decadence in the USA and the West in general. But the events of 11 September also encouraged criticism of the present government in Indonesia: the economic situation has deteriorated since 1998, and expectations of democracy have waned. The Indonesian state is seen as corrupt and entirely dependent on the West and therefore unable to solve the problems of the nation. This situation is perceived as being deeply humiliating by many citizens and, consequently, radical tendencies among the youth exist.

Other Indonesians harshly criticize the influence of Arabs in Indonesia by pointing out that local radical Islamist groups, such as Laskar Jihad ('Jihad Troops') and the Front Pembela Isla ('Front of the Defenders of Islam'), are led by Indonesians of Arab descent. It is also stated that the leaders of the groups are appointed by decision makers in the Middle East. Certain Indonesian alumni of Saudi Arabian universities, some of them prominent figures in political parties, are said to have adopted radical ideas during their studies.⁶¹ This sort of religious transnationalism is obviously considered highly suspicious.

According to the noted Indonesian scholar Azyumardi Azra, Indonesians of Arab descent see it as their task to purify Islam in Indonesia as it has been influenced by elements of indigenous religions. This, Azyumardi pointed out, is not a specifically Indonesian phenomenon, but holds true for the Middle East itself. Nevertheless, Indonesians are likely to be attracted by this sort of quest for an authentic form of Islam and therefore, according to Azyumardi, Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, such as the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama need to respond by identifying alternative programmes.⁶²

The leader of one of these mass organizations, Ahmad Syafi Maarif of Muhammadiyah, showed his concern before the USA and its allies were about to invade Iraq in 2003. He indicated that this sort of military intervention was likely to undermine the authority of those Indonesian Muslims who were peace loving, and would instead provoke Indonesian citizens into joining the ranks of the radical Muslim groups in the country.⁶³

These controversial views on the West and the Middle East will certainly influence public opinion in Indonesia in the future and may even play a role in the upcoming national elections in 2004.

The standing of Indonesians in Saudi Arabia is not likely to improve, because their image will be continuously dominated by the presence of the *TKW*.

The Indonesian middle class is ashamed of the *TKW*'s image abroad, and is therefore unlikely to take a stronger interest in the *TKW* or to advocate their cause. The bargaining position of the *TKW* is not likely to improve either, due to the poor economic situation in Indonesia, which will probably last for some time. Indonesian job-seekers will continue to be interested in any job in any country overseas. In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, unemployment among the younger generation is increasing. This may lead to stricter immigration policies and more undocumented migration in the long run, undermining the situation of the *TKW* even more.

In the late 1980s and 1990s the international community began to show growing concern about migrant workers and their obvious vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The United Nations appointed a working group of experts to identify obstacles to the effective implementation of human rights in 1997 and a special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants in 1999. It appears that domestic workers are most vulnerable because of their isolation, which is exacerbated by long working hours, poor remuneration and lack of access to social security.⁶⁴

The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families came into force in 2003. The effect of this, however, should not be overestimated, as the Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990, but it took 13 years for 20 countries to ratify it. In addition, neither Saudi Arabia nor Indonesia is among those 20 countries.

However desirable, the elimination of trafficking is unlikely to be achieved through legislation and declaration of intent. Rather, the improvement of the socio-economic status of the population, particularly through the education of girls, is the best way of reducing it.⁶⁵

Notes

- 1 In this chapter I will refer to people from the former Dutch East Indies generally as 'Indonesian', although Indonesia only became independent in 1945.
- 2 H. De Jonge and N. Kaptein, *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002).
- 3 J. Vredenburg, 'The Hadj – Some of its Features and Functions in Indonesia', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 118 (1962): 91–154, at p. 134 n.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 6 C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning – The Moslems of the East Indian Archipelago* (Leiden and London: Brill and Luzac & Co., 1931), p. 222.
- 7 Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', p. 134 n.
- 8 In a letter to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 25 November 1886, quoted in M. Witlox, 'Mempertaruhkan jiwa dan harta jemaah haji dari Hindia Belanda pada abad ke-19', in Dick Douwes and Nico Kaptein (eds), *Indonesia dan Haji*, Seri INIS 30 (Jakarta: INIS, 1997), p. 74, translation from the Indonesian text by the author of this article.
- 9 See Vredenburg, 'The Hadj', pp. 114–15, who quotes at length from Djajadiningrat's *Herinneringen von Pangeran Aria Achmad Djajadiningrat* (Amsterdam-Batavia: Kolff, 1936), pp. 238 ff.

- 10 Denys Lombard, L'horizon insulindien et son importance pour une compréhension globale de l'islam, islam en Indonésie I, *Archipel* 29 (1985): 35–52, at p. 42.
- 11 Vredenburg, 'The Hadji', p. 134.
- 12 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Sedikit yang diketahui', *Tempo*, 20 April 1985; Azyumardi Azra, 'Networks of Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', paper presented at the Institute of Islamic Studies, Asian Centre, University of the Philippines (Diliman), 30 July 1997.
- 13 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Sedikit yang diketahui'.
- 14 M. van Bruinessen, *Kitab kuning: Pesantren dan tarekat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995), pp. 35–6.
- 15 Husson, 'Worship and Work', p. 117, points out that the Hijaz was the only area controlled by the Ottoman empire which was allowed to continue with the slave-trade throughout the empire's existence. The only restriction imposed on it was that trade was no longer allowed in public places, but had to be conducted inside private houses. I assume, however, that banning the trade in public places must have been detrimental to the interests of the slaves, as there was no more official control of the trade. Anscombe ('An A-National Society: Eastern Arabia in the Ottoman Period', paper presented at a conference on Transnational Connections within the Arab Gulf and Beyond, St John's College, Oxford, 22–26 September 2002) found out that even the officials of the Ottoman empire residing in what is today Saudi Arabia had slaves themselves.
- 16 Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', p. 136.
- 17 Husson, 'Worship and Work', p. 118.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', pp. 131–3; Husson, 'Worship and Work', p. 118. Husson (*ibid.*, p. 117) mentions that according to one report Sumatrans and Bugis shaykhs were singled out as being particularly unscrupulous.
- 21 Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', p. 122.
- 22 M. Abaza, *Indonesian Students in Cairo: Islamic Education Perceptions and Exchanges* (Paris: Archipel, 1994). By the second decade of the twentieth century Indonesians had started to prefer al-Azhar to Saudi Arabian institutions of higher education.
- 23 Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- 24 M. van Bruinessen, 'Mencari ilmu dan pahala di tanah suci: Orang Nusantara naik haji', in Douwes and Kaptein (eds), *Indonesia dan Haji*, pp. 121–33, at p. 121.
- 25 Bruinessen, *Kitab kuning*, pp. 61–4, 66–70.
- 26 Azyumardi Azra, 'Hadhrami Scholars in the Malay–Indonesian Diaspora: A Preliminary Study of Sayyid 'Uthman', *Studia Islamica* 2/2 (1995): 1–33 at p. 18; Bruinessen, *Kitab kuning*, p. 48.
- 27 Carlien Woodcroft-Lee, 'From Morocco to Merauke', in A. H. Johns and Raphael Israeli (eds), *Islam in Asia*, vol. II (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), pp. 67–114, at p. 70. The so-called Paderi war in West Sumatra (1821–34) was at its beginning a power struggle between Wahhabi-inspired reformists and the local elite. As the Dutch sided with the latter group the reformists took up the challenge. Their cause was reinforced by the notion of *jihad* because the Dutch were identified as infidels.
- 28 Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', p. 124.
- 29 Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement*, p. 186.
- 30 Ahmad al-Khatib's activities can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. He strongly influenced Indonesian Islam through his disciples, e.g. Hadji Rasul, Ahmad Taher (Howard M. Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology in the Emerging Indonesian State: The Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) 1923–1957* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), p. 27) and Shaykh Muhammad Djamil Djambek (Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement*, pp. 31–7).
- 31 Bruinessen, 'Mencari ilmu dan pahala di tanah suci', p. 127.

- 32 Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', pp. 98–9.
- 33 Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology*, p. 9.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., p. 26.
- 36 M. van Bruinessen, 'Muslims of the Dutch East Indies and the Caliphate Question', *Studia Islamica* 2/3 (1995): 115–41, at p. 123.
- 37 Bruinessen, 'Mencari ilmu dan pahala di tanah suci', p. 129.
- 38 See Vredenburg, 'The Haddj', appendix.
- 39 This plan apparently came to nothing. According to recent statistics published on the website of the department (www.depnpaker.or.id, visited 20 May 2003) the number of migrants sent to the whole of the Middle East was a little more than 334,000 for 1999–June 2001. Aside from Saudi Arabia the United Arab Emirates is an increasingly popular destination for Indonesian migrants, but almost all migrants who go to the Middle East go to Saudi Arabia.
- 40 In other countries Indonesian migrant workers have more freedom. In Hong Kong, for example, they established a labour union which had 700 members in 2001.
- 41 Because of their colonial history, Indonesians do not generally speak English as well as other Asians. But of course prospective employers do not take the historical background into account when comparing the language skills of Indonesians to those of Filipinos, Indians etc.
- 42 *TKW* from West Java are usually not well educated, whereas the educational background of *TKW* from other areas in Indonesia varies considerably. It is possible that the ceaseless activities of Indonesian pressure groups have contributed to a change in the sending policy of the Indonesian government. Indonesian NGOs, such as Solidaritas Perempuan, have repeatedly asked the government to send only better-educated women abroad.
- 43 If government officials, agencies and middlemen cooperate in an unlawful way, then *TKW* are hardly able to defend their rights.
- 44 Indonesia is composed of a large number of islands, but Java and the Javanese have a dominant position in many respects. In addition, most of the *TKW* going overseas are actually Javanese.
- 45 It goes without saying that restricting labour migration in this way is not an appropriate solution because the citizens interested in migration will most probably not find an adequate job on the domestic labour market. Consequently, they might try to leave without the necessary administrative procedures, and risk encountering even more difficulties overseas due to their resulting weak legal position.
- 46 In Indonesia also frequently called *muhrim*.
- 47 Maruli Tobing, M. Hartiningsih, A. M. Dewabrata and W. Krastawan, *Perjalanan nasib TKI–TKW: Antara rantai kemiskinan dan nasib perempuan* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1990).
- 48 It must be admitted that the large number of pilgrims who come to Saudi Arabia to perform the *hajj* every year has definitely changed the character of the pilgrimage: It has to be organized in a different way nowadays, and contact between pilgrims of different nationalities is therefore more limited than it used to be.
- 49 I. Bethan, *TKW di Timur Tengah* (Jakarta: Grafikatama Jaya, 1993), p. 105.
- 50 When it does come to exchanging ideas on the treatment of *TKW* in Saudi Arabia the Saudi Arabian side usually attaches conditions to any discussions on the subject. According to a representative of the CIMW, the *TKW* issue was raised during the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. In response, Saudi Arabian participants stated that Indonesian support for the Palestinian cause was a precondition for any advocacy for the cause of the *TKW* in Saudi Arabia (interview, 30 May 2003).
- 51 Baharudin Lopa had also served as Minister of Justice and Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, making him an ideal advocate for the cause of the *TKW*.

- 52 Some women do have influential positions in the recruitment of migrants, for example, in the West Javanese town of Sukabumi, but it seems that they also focus on their own benefit rather than the interests of the *TKW*.
- 53 M. Diederich, 'More Room to Move but More Desperate Migrants than Ever: The Public Discourse and the Situation of NGOs in the Field of Labour Migration Three Years after Soeharto's Resignation', paper presented at the International Workshop on Labour Migration and Socio-Economic Change in South East and East Asia, University of Lund, Sweden, 14–16 May 2001.
- 54 M. Diederich, *Indonesische Arbeitsmigration nach Saudi-Arabien: Hintergründe und Darstellung in der indonesischen Presse* (Bonn: Holos, 1995), pp. 192–5.
- 55 For details see Riwanto Tirtosudarmo, 'The Politics of Regulating Overseas Migrant Labour in Indonesia,' paper presented at the International Workshop on Labour Migration and Socio-Economic Change in South East and East Asia, University of Lund, Sweden, 14–16 May 2001.
- 56 Recently the Department of Foreign Affairs has seemed to show greater concern than the Department of Manpower and Transmigration when it comes to the *TKW*: it even institutionalized a directorate responsible for the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad. At the time of the writing the effect of this step could not yet be assessed.
- 57 Heads of religious boarding schools, especially in Java.
- 58 Husson is referring to the person (title) in this case, not the pilgrimage.
- 59 Husson, 'Worship and Work', p. 132.
- 60 During the second Gulf War, when Iraq had occupied Kuwait, T-shirts with the slogan 'Saddam Hussein – Lion of the Gulf' were sold in Indonesia. Palestinian intifada fighters and suicide bombers are also seen as heroes by some Indonesians. The events of 11 September 2001 shocked most Indonesians, but for some they have also shown that Arabs are even capable of challenging the USA.
- 61 He-Man, 'WNI keturunan Arab dan Islam radikal di Indonesia', 17 October 2002; see krikil-owner@yahoo-groups.com or krikil@yahoogroups.com. In the 1980s, the Indonesian government was concerned about a perceived radicalization among students after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It started sending postgraduate students of Islamic studies to Western universities, thus to some extent imitating the 'anti-radicalization' policy of the Dutch East Indies described in the first part of this chapter.
- 62 See <http://www.polarhome.com/pipermail.nasional-f/2002-October/000075.html>, accessed 6 November 2003.
- 63 The atmosphere between the different factions is tense indeed. The discussion on the so-called *Islam liberal* (liberal Islam) in Indonesia shows this very clearly: one of its protagonists, a representative of the Nahdatul Ulama, Ulil Abshar Abdallah, has even been threatened by a *fatwah* calling for his death.
- 64 H. S. Mattila, 'Protection of Migrants' Human Rights: Principles and Practice', *International Migration* 38/6 (2000): 53–67, at p. 60.
- 65 R. Skeldon, 'Trafficking: A Perspective from Asia', *International Migration* 38/3 (2000): 7–30, at p. 22.

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Part III

Beyond the Arab Gulf

7 **Saudi religious transnationalism in London**

Madawi Al-Rasheed

Writing in a prominent French daily newspaper a year after 11 September 2001, a French journalist investigated ‘terrorist networks’ in the heart of what he called ‘Londonistan’, a journey which led to mosques, Islamic centres and a series of interviews with a cross-section of the British Muslim population.¹ London is increasingly portrayed in American, British and European media as one of those sites where Islamic radicalism is bred, thanks to a liberal British tradition and transnational Muslim connections.² In this discourse, the problem of current terrorism is believed to result from religious flows between countries such as Saudi Arabia and British Muslims, both Arab and Asian. This chapter investigates Saudi religious flows in the British capital in an attempt to understand religious transnationalism as a complex process, which does not lend itself to straightforward cause-and-effect analysis.³ Moving away from the images conjured up by the association of the British capital with ‘Londonistan’, I examine Saudi–British religious connections with the objective of highlighting the unanticipated consequences of such flows.

Underlying understandings of transnationalism is the assumption that ‘diaspora’, ‘immigrants’, ‘creoles’, ‘middlemen’, ‘brokers’ and ‘hybrids’ are indispensable categories, resisting state influence from below.⁴ Immigrants are often defined as those who cross physical and moral boundaries, and operate on the margins of defined political entities such as the nation-state. Through personal choices, economic activities and cultural orientation, they are believed to challenge established boundaries. Immigrants are seen as representations of ‘cultural hybridity, multi-positional identities, border-crossing by marginal “others”’, who are depicted as ‘conscious and successful ordinary people’.⁵ However, making transnationalism conceptually dependent on the above categories fails to account for variants of the process because such an approach is built on the assumption that transnationalism is ‘something to celebrate, as an expression of a subversive popular resistance from below.’⁶ Those who overemphasize the free-floating hybrid in transnational processes are usually driven by what has often been described as ‘fetishization of hybridity’ in their quest for a world free of the constraints imposed by states.⁷

For centuries, Islamic religious exchanges were spontaneous, voluntary and under no serious control by governments – for example, the ancient Sufi networks

which spread across the Muslim world. Recently, religious exchanges have become a systematic operation with substantial funds dedicated to their realization. For a long time a neglected dimension in transnational studies, religion is now considered a transnational force.⁸ Islam incorporates a quest to spread its mission and an obligation towards co-believers; both encourage a commitment to reach Muslims outside the territories of the nation-state, which is much more limited in its boundaries than the Muslim *ummah* (community). Saudi Arabia has taken the responsibility to propagate faith more seriously than have other Muslim governments, thanks to its wealth, its quest for legitimacy and its symbolic significance as the land of Islam and its holy shrines.

Saudi religious transnationalism involves the establishment of connections with Muslims using institutions under state sponsorship and agents who are not necessarily Saudi nationals. It entails the transfer of funds and religious knowledge from Saudi Arabia to Muslims in other countries. Drawing on Saudi religious transnational connections with British Muslims, it is argued that such activities are not necessarily dependent on the presence of an overseas Saudi diaspora. Saudi Arabia draws on the services of others, mainly Arab and Asian Muslims, to establish direct relations with British Muslims.

The overseas activities of the majority of Saudis are usually sanctioned by the state. The small number of Saudi 'hybrids' and 'creoles' remain nationals, temporarily residing abroad to serve the purpose of promoting official Saudi economic, cultural and religious transnationalism. If they ever exist in large numbers, one finds that they are incorporated into the state legitimacy narrative. Rather than challenging the state from below, they are sanctioned from above. Their activities consolidate official policy abroad and contribute to enhancing state legitimacy inside the country. This is precisely what distinguishes Saudi hybrids from others in the same category. Theorists of transnationalism have concentrated on free-floating cosmopolitans whose activities fall within a niche beyond state control. But the Saudi case demonstrates that they can actually promote state interests abroad. While those who propagate faith are driven by an Islamic obligation towards other Muslims, they are used by the state to extend its political authority among Muslims as far as London. Their personal religious agenda is appropriated by the state in the pursuit of political legitimacy at home and abroad. Rather than representing a challenge to the state, they implement programmes, confirming state hegemony beyond its own frontiers.

Local discourse on religious transnationalism

The Saudi leadership has pledged to promote Islam, support Muslim minorities and encourage the dissemination of Islamic knowledge. This is considered a religious duty. Outreach programmes targeting Muslims abroad – for example, the establishment of mosques, Muslim colleges and organizations, and the dissemination of religious education – are understood as fulfilling *da'wah* (propagation of faith) and charity (both the obligatory *zakat* and the voluntary *sadaqah*). These Islamic obligations are the framework within which Saudi religious connections

are represented in local discourse. Over the last three decades, Saudi Arabia has been active in reaching Muslim communities outside its political boundaries through a systematic application of the concept of *da 'wah* and Islamic charity.

Among Muslim minorities in the West, the obligation to protect faith and educate Muslims, who are believed to face daily challenges to their identity, is regarded by Saudi religious scholars as an important duty of Muslim governments. In a pamphlet entitled *Muslim Minorities: Fatwa Regarding Muslims Living as Minorities*, two eminent scholars, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz and Shaykh Muhammad al-'Uthaymin, invoke a Qur'anic *surah* in which Muslims have a duty to 'invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and exhortation and argue with them in a way that is better'.⁹ With regard to Muslim minorities, the two scholars insist that Muslim governments should

send to them whoever can assist them in achieving this and ask them to send people to Islamic countries to spread knowledge. There should be, therefore, an exchange of people between those Muslim minorities and the Muslim societies in order to activate them and help them in all their affairs.¹⁰

The responsibility of such an exchange lies with political leaders and religious scholars:

The rulers of the Muslims everywhere as well as the scholars and the rich must expend whatever they can to assist the Muslim minorities. They must be good to them, help them to understand their religion and help them to acquire complete freedom to manifest the rites and practices of Islam.¹¹

While religious transnationalism is a response to local Saudi concerns, the process has led to unanticipated consequences, some of which represent a direct challenge to Saudi political authority and religious hegemony among Muslims abroad. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, British Muslims have contested Saudi religious outreach programmes. A growing debate among them has led in some instances to challenging Saudi religious interpretations and political wisdom.

The reality of the Saudi presence in London

Saudi transnational networks are not easily disclosed if one is to confine the investigation to official statistics and quantitative data. An ethnographic approach proves to be more beneficial in an investigation of a web of networks which both British Muslims and Saudi Arabia would prefer to remain unscrutinized.

British statistics on immigration and asylum seekers demonstrate that Saudi physical presence is insignificant in London. Unlike other Arab immigrants in Britain – Egyptians and Iraqis, for example – Saudis do not constitute an immigrant community. There are approximately 4,258 persons born in Saudi Arabia who are now living in Britain. This figure must include non-Saudis. Two obvious

aggregates come to mind. First, the figure includes children of the large British expatriate community in Saudi Arabia, estimated at 30,000 in 2002, whose parents have returned to the UK. Second, the figure includes children of parents of other nationalities living in Saudi Arabia who are now resident in Britain. It is also self-evident that country-of-birth figures miss Saudi nationals born outside Saudi Arabia and those born in the UK.

The 1991 census question on ethnicity offers little clarification because it mixes racial, ethnic and national categories. In the census, there were 10 ethnic categories: White; Black – Caribbean; Black – African; Black – Other; Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese; Other Asian; and Other – Other. Racial criteria ('White' and 'Black') are combined with nationality ('Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi'). Arabs in general, including Saudis, are expected to tick the 'Other – Other' box, an unfortunate residual ethnic category reflecting British thinking on Arab immigrants who, despite their increasing numbers, especially in the 1980s, remained socially marginal and statistically invisible.¹²

A cross-tabulation of 'Other – Other' ethnicity and country-of-birth categories gives a figure of 1,557 persons born in Saudi Arabia who indicated that their ethnicity is 'Other – Other' (see Table 7.1). Other sources indicate that the great majority of Saudis (approximately 1,200 persons) live in greater London and around 650 Saudi-born individuals live in inner London, with the Boroughs of Westminster, Chelsea and Kensington, and Ealing attracting most of the inner-London residents.

While Saudi permanent residents are an insignificant, small minority compared with other Arab immigrants in the capital, the UK attracts a large number of Saudi visitors, individuals who enter the UK on temporary 3–6 month visas. In 2000, Home Office statistics gave an estimate of 63,000 Saudi visitors, including 39,800 ordinary visitors, 5,230 businessmen and 2,020 students (see Table 7.2). The total of 63,000 visitors must include other categories of visitors who are

*Table 7.1 Birthplaces of those classified as
Other – Other in the 1991 census,
Great Britain (Arab countries only)*

<i>Country of birth</i>	<i>Total</i>
Algeria	1,176
Egypt	5,151
Libya	1,980
Morocco	3,883
Tunisia	611
Iraq	7,979
Jordan	1,173
Lebanon	2,390
Saudi Arabia	1,557
Syria	1,149

Source: Office of Population and Census Survey/
GROS (1993), volume 1, table 5.

Table 7.2 Saudis entering the UK for short visits 1994–2000

<i>Year</i>	<i>Ordinary</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Total</i>
1994	38,500	4,930	1,540	56,900
1995	39,100	4,890	2,020	58,200
1996	38,500	5,230	1,520	58,700
1997	42,100	5,840	540	64,300
1998	42,400	4,830	1,830	64,900
1999	40,800	4,700	2,210	63,000
2000	39,800	5,230	2,020	63,000

Source: Home Office/Government Statistical Service, *Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1994–1999*.

not listed in the statistics. Saudi visitors exceeded all visitors from other Arab countries.

Saudis in London are better considered as transient settlers or sojourners, consisting of a small number of individuals who are posted by their own government or Saudi employers to work in London. They include those with short-term work contracts and those who choose to come to London to gain work experience with the intention of returning to Saudi Arabia. They also include members of the wealthy elite, often the owners of large multinational financial institutions with offices in London and other European and North American cities. They tend to congregate in West London, where a 'Beirut-on-Thames' has evolved.¹³ The inhabitants of this enclave include members of a cosmopolitan Arab elite recently referred to as 'the Shaykhs of Knightsbridge'.¹⁴ Other Saudi sojourners come for short visits seeking pleasure, education or medical care. However, the impact that Saudi Arabia had in London since the 1970s is not in any way proportionate to the number of Saudi residents or sojourners. Saudi Arabia exerts tremendous influence as a result of financial resources and religious symbolism rather than mass density.

Non-Saudis, mainly Arabs and Asian Muslims, mediate Saudi influence in London. While Iraqi, Palestinian and Lebanese immigrants negotiate Saudi economic and media interests, Egyptians and Pakistanis promote Saudi religious transnationalism in the British capital. Saudi-funded religious institutions employ Egyptian and Pakistani directors, preachers, teachers and Arabic language instructors. Such groups are dependent on Saudi employment. This dependency is paramount especially among those who do not have easily transferable skills to enter the wider British economy. They tend to operate within the limited immigrant economic/religious niche.

Both Arab and Muslim middlemen play a crucial role in extending Saudi legitimacy beyond its frontiers. Their employment in Saudi overseas networks is a function of domestic concern requiring Saudi Arabia to extend its reach beyond its own population. It is ironic that such middlemen are both the targets and the means of religious transnational flows in the absence of a Saudi critical mass abroad.

The 'Saudization' of British Islam

The face of British Islam is highly Asian, Arabs being a fringe minority within a minority. Drawing on the results of the 1991 census, British Muslims are estimated at 1 million.¹⁵ Other estimates give a figure of 1,517,000, which includes Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians, South East Asians, Arabs and Africans.¹⁶ In 2002, a figure of 2 million Muslims was often quoted as realistic. Asian Islam tends to draw on the orthodox Deobandi and Sufi Berlewi traditions, both common in the Indian subcontinent, with very small pockets of Shi'a Muslims.¹⁷

Individual donations from princes and charitable Saudi non-governmental organizations are channelled to British Muslims as gifts for mosques and cultural and educational centres, part of a wider concern with Muslim issues in general. However, the amount of funds transferred through these means remains difficult to estimate. Saudi official publications highlight sums donated for prestigious and highly visible projects – for example, the building of mosques in London, Edinburgh, Leicester and Birmingham. Donations for less prestigious organizations tend to be covert, as they pass through personal networks and connections, which people are reluctant to disclose.

The Muslim World League (established in 1962), an inter-state Muslim organization, is an important institution through which Saudi government funds are generally distributed among British Muslims. Its objectives are set out in its mission statement: 'To explain and disseminate Islamic culture and teachings. Refute false allegations against Islam and repel pernicious trends and concepts. Defend Islamic causes in accordance with the interests and aspirations of Muslims and solve their problems. Provide assistance in the fields of education, culture, social welfare health care etc.'

The Muslim World League Journal, a monthly English and Arabic publication of the Muslim World League, is one of the sources highlighting Saudi spending and donations worldwide. In 1998, the cover story of this journal reported that 'Prince Abdul Aziz bin Fahd bin Abdul Aziz opened the new £3.5 million King Fahd Mosque in the heart of Scottish capital Edinburgh on Friday 31 July 1998'.¹⁸ Saudi Arabia contributed 90 per cent of the funds. In 1999, the same journal reported that 'the Muslim World League has so far spent over six billion Saudi Riyals in its endeavours to extend services to Islam and Muslims, most, if not all, coming from the government of Saudi Arabia'.¹⁹ Other organizations disseminate Saudi funds – for example, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the King Faysal Foundation and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth.

British Muslims themselves are reluctant to disclose Saudi funds as they attempt to draw the attention of local authorities to their needs as religious communities. Any public acknowledgement of outside funding does also open up debates about loyalty and commitment to the host society. Literature on British Muslims has either ignored the issue of Saudi funding, exaggerated it, or simply undermined its magnitude.²⁰ Some research highlights British Muslims' self-reliance and their ability to raise funds for religious and language education among members of the community. Occasionally members of the British Muslim

community disclose sources of funding when 'things go wrong' – for example, when they fall out with Saudi sponsors, often for ideological, political or personal reasons. The story of the principal of the Islamic College, Shaykh Zaki Badawi, an Egyptian, is revealing. Only when he became independent of Saudi funding was he ready to discuss Saudi control over British Islam and the funds dedicated to the purpose.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in estimating Saudi funding, it is clear that in Britain the number of annual mosque registrations grew suddenly between three- and fourfold after 1974. While the extent of Saudi funding remains a matter of speculation, the rise in the number of mosques in Britain was related to the Saudi oil boom of the early 1970s.²¹ According to several estimates, there are approximately 1,000 mosques in Britain.²² In addition to mosques, British Muslims have established cultural organizations funded by local communities and gifts from Saudi Arabia, among other Arab countries. It is estimated that there are more than 4,000 Muslim organizations in Britain, mostly concerned with welfare.²³ The sheer number of these is a function of the minimal British legal requirements for setting up such organizations. Some religious organizations look glamorous on paper, whereas in reality they are run from private homes serving as 'headquarters'.²⁴

Saudi interest in British Muslims started in the 1970s and was initially maintained by Pakistanis and Egyptians. However, since the 1980s more Saudis are occupying key posts in mosques and other religious centres due to the lack of indigenous specialists. Saudi graduates of the five religious universities are not easily absorbed into the local religious economy. Substantial numbers of such graduates are sent abroad as *du'at* (missionaries). They work as directors, mosque imams, Arabic language instructors and religious educators in the various Saudi-sponsored schools, colleges and organizations in the British capital, and tend to be seconded from Saudi institutions and universities. Many hold 'diplomatic status' which makes them invisible in British labour-force surveys and Department of Employment statistics. According to British government statistics on work permits, only a small number of Saudis are issued with such permits. Between 1994 and 1999, 20 work permits were issued annually to Saudi citizens.²⁵

In the 1980s a key event outside both Britain and Saudi Arabia accelerated Saudi interest in religious transnationalism – the Iranian Revolution, which had resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Iran adopted a hostile stance towards Saudi Arabia and endeavoured to use religious rhetoric to undermine Saudi legitimacy and even sovereignty over the two holy mosques. Saudi Arabia perceived Iran under the rule of the Ayatollahs as a real rival with similar desires to win over British Muslims. In addition to doctrinal differences between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia, the conflict intensified with the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War (1980), when Saudi Arabia openly sided with Iraq. While the battle was heated in the Gulf for eight years, competition and rivalry between the two countries increased Saudi Arabia's determination to establish itself as the guardian of Muslim interest worldwide. The 1970s religious initiatives of mosque and institution building in London, which started during

King Faysal's reign, began to be consolidated in the 1980s, and now Iran has emerged as an active agent, determined to export not only its revolution but also its political opposition to Muslim leaders allied with the West. Saudi Arabia was a direct target of this rhetoric. Competition between the two countries over religious interpretation and influence among British Muslims intensified.

A second event accelerating Saudi religious transnationalism was the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the beginning of the Islamic *jihad* movement against the occupiers. British foreign policies in the 1980s and early 1990s promoted and supported Afghan military resistance based on Islamic ideology, perhaps for lack of alternative options. The policy favoured training and financing various groups to pursue an ultimate goal, the defeat of the occupying Soviet army in Afghanistan. This objective was also on the agenda of Saudi Arabia, which dedicated vast sums to aid the military operations. Common political goals between Britain and Saudi Arabia meant that Saudi emissaries to British Muslims were tolerated. They were given clearance to enter the UK and an almost free hand to preach the call for *jihad*, in the process recruiting young British Muslims for the war in Afghanistan, as well as financing charitable foundations and Islamic relief operations aimed at alleviating the plight of the Afghan refugees.

Saudi sponsorship of religious institutions in London

Saudi sponsorship of religious institutions in London is vast. It includes several mosques, organizations and Islamic colleges. However, two highly visible projects are discussed here, the Islamic Cultural Centre and al-Muntada al-Islami. Unlike other Saudi institutions in London – for example, King Fahd Academy, which was initially conceived as an educational centre for children of Saudi diplomats and other Arabs – these two organizations are open to all Muslims in the British capital.

Any account of Saudi religious connections must start with the famous Regent's Park Mosque, part of the Islamic Cultural Centre, an imposing building with annexes in one of London's prime locations. Stacks of unopened boxes line the inside wall of the entrance hall. Boxes are labelled 'Copy of the Holy Qur'an in Urdu, a gift from the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Fahd ibn Abd al-Aziz to British Muslims'. A second pile of boxes full of copies of the Qur'an in English, Turkish, Bengali and several other languages lines the walls in the mosque entrance. Such copies of the Qur'an are produced in the King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex in Medina, established in 1985. The printing house has printed more than 100 million copies of the Qur'an in eight major languages. They are distributed free of charge to pilgrims as well as in mosques throughout the world.²⁶ Visitors to the London mosque and the centre have no doubt that they are in a religious institution with close financial ties to Saudi Arabia.

While the project of establishing a grand central mosque in London started early in the twentieth century, thanks to the efforts of Indian Muslims, it did not fully materialize until the Second World War when Britain felt it needed to make favourable impressions on the Muslim world. Prime Minister Winston Churchill

approved the allocation of £100,000 for the purchase of a site in 1940. In 1944 Regent's Lodge was founded as London's mosque and the property was transferred to a mosque committee, consisting of three Arab notables, Hasan Nashat Pasha, Hafiz Wahba and Rauf Chadirji, and an Indian Muslim scholar, Abdullah Yusuf Ali. The British parliament did not regard these notables as representatives of their governments. In parliamentary discussions, MPs referred to them as 'distinguished Muslims'. The Egyptian government 'shouldered the financial responsibility of running Regent's Lodge as a mosque and a cultural centre for almost twenty five years'.²⁷ It paid the salaries of imams, directors and preachers.

With the increase in Saudi oil revenues in the 1970s, the Regent's Park Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre became Saudi institutions in all but name. To inaugurate the take-over, Saudi Arabia initiated a plan to rebuild the mosque, which in 1977 cost nearly £6 million. Saudi Arabia contributed £2 million and King Khalid donated £1.2 million as a trust to cover maintenance and administration. In 1978 Dr Zaki Badawi, seconded from King 'Abd al-'Aziz University, arrived in London as the new director, thus terminating the directorship of previous Indian and Pakistani Muslims. While substantial finances came from Saudi Arabia, the human resources remained Egyptian. In 2000 a Saudi, Hamad al-Majid, was director. He dismissed any suggestion that Saudi Arabia controls the centre: 'Saudi support does not mean that the Saudis have political interest. Sometimes things happen at the centre that the Saudis do not approve of'.²⁸ Al-Majid was evasive when asked to give examples of 'things that the Saudis do not approve of'. He referred to 'demonstrations' and 'people who use the mosque to attack Arab governments, including Saudi Arabia'. However, if one follows the regular weekly Friday sermon in both Arabic and English, there is no doubt that criticism of Saudi Arabia on political and religious grounds is never a feature of this important Muslim event.

In 1986 Saudi Arabia established a second centre, al-Muntada al-Islami, a listed charity, in Parson's Green, south-west London. Al-Muntada seems to be a smaller and humbler version of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Regent's Park, with a prayer hall, lecture theatre, bookshop, school (150 mainly South Asian pupils in 2000), gymnasium, offices and guest rooms. The centre's mission statement describes it as 'an independent Islamic organisation of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamaah* that focuses on *da 'wah* (propagation of Islamic teachings through missionary activities), education and spreading awareness amongst Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK'. The organization claims to be 'a leading centre for the propagation of the teachings of *al-salaf al-salih* (our righteous predecessors) and a reliable source of guidance for all Muslims in Britain on matters of Islamic law, methodology, and moral distinction'.²⁹

Like the Saudi director of the Islamic Cultural Centre, the Palestinian director of al-Muntada, Muhammad Najjar, insists that the centre is 'an independent organization. We do not depend financially on any country. We try to stay away from links from particular countries'.³⁰

Reading the various publications of the centre, one has the impression of a strong association with Saudi religious interpretations. For example, in an article

praising the translation and publication of *Letters from Prison*, by medieval Muslim scholar Ahmad Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyyah, the reviewer describes this Islamic personality as 'a figure in the Islamic heritage, a dignified scholar, the most eloquent and truthful... a benevolent man with a heart full of emaan (faith) and mercy. This book is a must-read for all of those involved in Dawah.'³¹ Ibn Taymiyyah's theology was the basis of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's eighteenth-century reform movement, which lies at the heart of Islamic interpretations in Saudi Arabia.

A closer examination of the *fatwah* (religious decree) section of al-Muntada's magazine also points to an intimate connection with Saudi religious interpretations. In Saudi Arabia the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta (Riyadh) is in control of religious interpretations. Before the millennium celebrations in December 2000, one subscriber to al-Muntada's magazine asked for 'an Islamic opinion regarding celebrating this occasion, exchanging cards with the "unbelievers", and giving days off as a vacation during the period of this event'.³² The Committee gave nine reasons to 'make Muslims aware of the misguidance deliberately condoned by the People of the Book'. It urged Muslims to shun the celebrations because

1- Jews' and Christians' theories about the millennium are against the Islamic true revelation, and are merely an illusion. 2- Celebrating the millennium makes Islam appear as similar to other false religions. 3- It is prohibited to imitate the non-believers. 4- Imitating the non-believers in the exterior behaviour leads to some kind of love and support to them in the interior. 5- Celebrating with the non-believers is a sin, a trespassing of the borders of Allah. 6- It is unlawful to advertise the event electronically and in print media. 7- There is no Islamic evidence that those dates (of the Millennium) have any precedence over other days. 8- Congratulating each other or the non-believers is unlawful. And finally 9- Muslims should commit themselves to the Muslim calendar.³³

The banning of participation in the millennium celebrations draws heavily on the opinion of the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta and the *fatwah* of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sudays, the imam of al-Furqan Mosque in Mecca, copies of which are distributed by al-Muntada.³⁴

While the Centre is a Sunni institution, its publications indicate an obvious association with Saudi religious interpretations within the mainstream Sunni tradition. As mentioned earlier, al-Muntada's director is keen to stress the Centre's independence, but a close examination of publications and religious opinions indicate that this is another institution in London with intimate theological and financial links to Saudi Arabia. Both the Islamic Cultural Centre and al-Muntada al-Islami disseminate religious knowledge, produced either by Saudi scholars or others who endorse their interpretations.

Debating Saudi religious transnationalism

In the 1970s most British Muslims associated Saudi Arabia with authentic Islam. At a time when Islam was no more than a set of rituals for the majority of early Asian Muslim immigrants, deep gratitude for Saudi funding which enabled them to preserve their faith and its rituals characterized their attitude towards the Saudi religious global reach. When immigrants started bringing their families to Britain, their main concern was to preserve their Islamic identity and allow their children to retain their faith and rituals. Saudi funds, together with local-authority sources, were channelled towards achieving such objectives in the context of establishing immigrant organizations, mosques and educational centres.

However, in the 1980s, with the politicization of religious identity among Muslims in Britain and elsewhere in the world, the initial gratitude towards Saudi funding gave way to questioning the authenticity, religious credentials and political wisdom of Saudi Arabia. The country's popularity became inversely proportional to the level of finance it undertook after that time. Saudi global reach has become a contested issue among British Muslims in recent years. Saudi religious knowledge could not be dissociated from Saudi political decisions.

A series of events played a crucial role in the shift towards critical evaluation of Saudi religious global outreach among British Muslims. First, the Rushdie affair dominated public debate among Muslims in Britain in the 1980s. Bradford Muslims played a leading role in stirring the debate. The death *fatwah* of 1988 against Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini did not fall on deaf ears among British Muslims, whose first demonstrations against Rushdie's book in Bradford on 11 December 1988 and 14 January 1989 drew attention to scattered communities of Asian immigrants, who so far had been socially, politically and economically marginalized in British society. The Rushdie affair was a catalyst for the politicization of religious identity, especially among young Muslims. Their activism during the crisis also increased the visibility of such communities in British public discourse. What astonished the majority of British Muslims was the fact that the death *fatwah* was not issued from Saudi Arabia, until then regarded as the custodian of Islam and Muslim interests, but from Iran. In the words of a British Muslim, 'What had the Saudis done? Muslims openly began to question whether the ruling Saudi dynasty was worthy to be called the guardians of the two holy cities.'³⁵

In the aftermath of Khomeini's *fatwah*, the director of the Islamic Cultural Centre, Maghram al-Ghamdi, a Saudi, chaired a meeting of Arab ambassadors, all trustees of the centre, which resulted in an agreement to campaign peacefully against Rushdie's book. In the opinion of a British Muslim, the meeting called

rather weakly for a state ban of *The Satanic Verses*. It is only after questioning of the Saudi position during the crisis of 1988–1989 in the British Muslim media that Shaykh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia urged that Rushdie be tried in absentia, under Islamic law in a Muslim country, on charges of heretical crimes against the House of Islam.³⁶

According to many Muslims in Britain, the Jeddah-based Organization of the Islamic Conference (established in 1969) agreed reluctantly to put the issue on its agenda. The organization is described as 'essentially a club of pro-Western Islamic countries'.³⁷ The organization's resolution to ban the book and boycott all Penguin publications unless the offending book was immediately withdrawn had little effect.

British Muslims compared Saudi reactions to the showing of the film *Death of a Princess* on British television with the 'mild reaction' to the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. In the first incident, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Britain and threatened economic sanctions. The film, documenting the elopement of a Saudi princess with a commoner and her later punishment, exposed Saudi Arabia's legal restrictions on women. A British Muslim concluded:

The reputation of their family is, for the Saudis, more worthy of protection than the reputation of the Prophet Muhammad. ... The Saudi ban is, in real terms, hollow. For the Saudis routinely ban books; even imports of sacred literature (like the Koran) are prohibited if printed outside the Saudi Kingdom.³⁸

The different approaches of Iran and Saudi Arabia during the Rushdie affair should be understood in the context of the rivalry between the two countries over Islamic legitimacy and interpretation. Some British Muslims welcomed the Iranian position at the expense of the Saudi approach, described as a conspicuously slow, gentle and undemonstrative response.

In 1990 the controversial Director of the Muslim Parliament (established in 1992), Dr Kalim Siddiqi, published a Muslim Manifesto, which contained contradictory aspirations. For example, he envisaged an autonomous British Muslim community with a 'special relationship with the Islamic state of Iran'.³⁹ In previous speeches and publications, Siddiqi had declared that 'had Saudi diplomat, Maghram al-Ghamdi [Saudi Director of Islamic Cultural Centre] been leading an effective campaign of mobilising Muslim opinion in Britain against Salman Rushdie, the British government would have declared him persona non grata (an undesirable person) and expelled him'.⁴⁰ Saudi efforts to Saudize British Islam seem to have had their first setback with the Rushdie affair. Saudi Arabia lost the moral high ground in the eyes of British Muslims, ironically still receiving Saudi funds for the maintenance of their religious centres in Britain.

The second event fuelling the debate on Saudi religious transnationalism among British Muslims was the Gulf War of 1990–1. Saudi Arabia's overt resort to American and European military assistance infuriated not only sections of its own population but also some Muslims, including those in Britain. In the 1990s official Saudi transnational religious networks in London were increasingly seen by British Muslims as an attempt to divert attention from the country's close alliance with the West and the USA. The arrival of almost 500,000 foreign troops in Saudi Arabia to liberate Kuwait did little to change images of Saudi Arabia as a close ally of the West, to the detriment of Muslim causes. Sections of the Pakistani Muslim community in Manchester openly declared admiration of

Saddam Hussein and condemned Saudi Arabia for inviting foreign troops to the land of Islam. This stemmed from 'continuous opposition to the Wahhabi movement and its Saudi rulers, regarded as the desecrators of saints' shrines throughout Arabia, including that of the prophet himself'.⁴¹

In Saudi Arabia, the Gulf War led to the crystallization of a Saudi Islamist opposition whose outspoken members took refuge in London after being subjected to interrogation, harassment and imprisonment in Saudi Arabia. Some members of the British Muslim community in London welcomed the exiled Saudi dissidents. In 1994, Saudi dissidents Muhammad al-Masari and Saad al-Faqih established the Committee for Defence of Legitimate Rights in Saudi Arabia in the British capital. They considered London an attractive exile destination, given its robust media, which guaranteed wide publicity. More importantly, the director of CDLR, Saad al-Faqih, had been a medical student in London in the 1970s.⁴² During this period, he had cultivated links with British Muslims.

London was attractive because it hosted a wide range of Muslim opposition groups – for example, supporters of Hizb al-Tahrir, Palestinian Hamas and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, among others. The London Islamist infrastructure proved to be advantageous for the newly arriving Saudi dissidents as they all rejected Saudi decisions during the Gulf War. A sympathetic Arab and Asian Muslim constituency facilitated the establishment of the two Saudi exiles in the British capital. It would have been difficult to launch an opposition campaign without the hospitality and support of sections of the British Muslim community. Arab Islamist exiles who assumed leadership positions in several fringe London mosques and their followers, the majority of whom were young Asian and black Muslims, sympathized with the Saudi exiles who began to build networks with other Islamist groups.

Through their opposition campaign in the early 1990s, Saudi exiles further exposed contradictions in Saudi politics, to the detriment of the country's standing among British Muslims. Their press conferences (reported by the mainstream British press), demonstrations near the Saudi embassy and regular appearance on British television exposed Saudi rhetoric and undermined the country's credibility. It was obvious that in the early 1990s their demonstrations in front of the gates of the Saudi Embassy in West London attracted non-Saudis, mainly Arab and Asian Muslims who sympathized with their message.

More recently, the events of 11 September 2001 represented a further blow to Saudi credibility among British Muslims. The Saudi image deteriorated after 19 Arab hijackers (15 of them Saudis) crashed two aeroplanes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and a third into the Pentagon in Washington. The debate on Saudi religious transnationalism entered a new phase with the 'war on terrorism' campaign in 2001–2. In the months that followed the attacks, several British Muslims suspected of links with al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's idea of an Islamic international brigade, were arrested in London, Tipton, Luton, Birmingham, Leicester and other British cities. In October 2001, *Q News*, a leading British Muslim publication, took an overtly hostile stand

towards Saudi Arabia:

Islam leads some further astray, into the wilder wilderness of Wahhabism as preached by the fierce zealots of Najd, who consider the Shia and the Sufis to be unbelievers. Wahhabism itself is currently bitterly divided between royalists and Kharijii tendencies... The Ikhwan seem to be back... Ibn Saud had no idea that his citizens might become international terrorists when he established his state.⁴³

In general, after the September attacks, British Muslims felt vulnerable. Their loyalty to Britain was questioned, especially after several British citizens of Pakistani origin were arrested in Afghanistan following the defeat of the Taliban regime. A wide range of Muslims, including blacks and converts, now felt exposed. The arrest of several Egyptians and Algerians (for example Zacharia Moussawi, Djamel Beghal and Yasir al-Sirri) in both the USA and London revealed that such persons have come under the influence of London-based Arab preachers, for example Abu Qatada, Abu Hamza, and later an African by the name of Abdullah al-Faysal. Also, the detention of British Muslims in both Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba further contributed to the vulnerability of the British Muslim community and inflamed the debate regarding its loyalty to Britain. Almost all families of those arrested or detained in Afghanistan and Cuba described their young sons as having been 'brainwashed' by Arab preachers and radicals. The mother of 22-year-old Feroz Abassi from south London, who was among the detainees in Cuba, described her son as 'brainwashed'. She claimed he fell under the influence of Abu Hamza al-Masri, a cleric in Finsbury Park Mosque, who was arrested in 1999 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and released without charge.⁴⁴ The Muslim Council of Britain described British detainees as 'street kids who have been manipulated by others'.⁴⁵

As Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network is increasingly being described as a transnational web of Muslim terrorists with cells in more than 60 countries, new classifications are assuming hegemonic status among diaspora Muslim communities. After decades of emphasizing a kind of Muslim solidarity cutting across ethnicity and nationality in the pursuit of both the ideal of the Muslim *ummah* (community) and recognition in British society as a religious group, British Muslims are developing a new discourse. One of the main feature of this new discourse distinguishes between Asian and Arab Islam; the latter is understood to be predominantly Saudi, increasingly seen as radical and intolerant of religious diversity, with a rigid theology unsuitable for Muslim minorities living in the West.

A new category, 'European Muslims', is also gathering credibility. According to an advocate of this trend, 'European Muslims should be only Muslims instead of forever remaining North African, Pakistani, or Turkish Muslims. Active citizenship has to be encouraged, and a European Islamic culture needs to be created'.⁴⁶ Supporters of this new identity argue that Saudi religious transnationalism undermines the development of a tolerant European Islam.

British Muslims of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian origin are beginning to distance themselves from so-called Arab Islam, whose main champion so far is Saudi Arabia. Blaming Arab Muslims for brainwashing, radicalizing and leading

British Muslims astray has become common. In particular, extreme Islamic interpretations are increasingly seen as responsible for the radicalization of young British Muslims, without a serious assessment of the economic and social conditions that make these young people susceptible to radical preaching, Saudi or otherwise. The media play an important role in enforcing these perceptions among both Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain.

Calls for 'rooting out undesirable outside influences' became numerous in the aftermath of 11 September. Economist and former editor of *Inquiry Magazine* Iqbal Asaria, a Ugandan Asian Muslim, declared:

I would go further and say that the more pluralistic practice of Islam in parts of Africa and Asia is going to take over from Arab Islam as the driving force of the religion in the next few decades. Why? Because from the Arab heartland at the moment, apart from the annual pilgrimage, we get nothing. And now the oil money is running out too.⁴⁷

The future of Saudi religious transnationalism will depend on British policies – for example, tolerance of or restrictions on Islamist politics in general, both products of British interests at home and abroad. The British Anti-terrorism Acts of 2000 and 2001 reflect growing intolerance of activities broadly defined within the parameters of terrorism, especially when perceived to be instigated by foreign governments, their agents in Britain or asylum seekers. Historically, Britain has tolerated foreign opposition groups using its soil to launch aggressive political campaigns against their own governments. After 11 September, new legislation indicates a change of perception and policy. While new laws have already been put in place to fight terrorism, it remains to be seen whether political interests, expediency and opportunism will dictate the treatment of a whole range of dissidents, opposition groups and others who have made Britain a temporary home. This also applies to how Britain welcomes religious transnational connections, especially those initiated by Muslim governments, like those religious networks of Saudi Arabia. Given the intimate association between 11 September and Saudi Arabia, which has been played down by all parties involved for obvious reasons, official Saudi outreach programmes and charitable donations might come under greater scrutiny by the recipients and their host society.

Saudi Arabia will rejoice over the tightening of opportunities for Islamic dissidents – especially in Britain, where they had been guaranteed a platform which in the 1990s Saudi Arabia struggled to dismantle without obvious success. However, the same restrictions will affect its own ability to reach Muslims in Britain. It remains to be seen whether the country will regain its credibility among British Muslims. Substantial funds may be required to cement the relationship, but given the current economic situation in the country itself, this is not self-evident.

Conclusion

Saudi discourse emphasizes that the propagation of faith among Muslim minorities is a religious duty to be undertaken by government. In the Saudi case, the

quest of the Saudi leadership for legitimacy among Muslims abroad is achieved under the umbrella of religious duty. Other Muslim countries do not feel the urge to be seen as champions of Islam and Muslim causes, but Saudi Arabia does. It is unique in the Islamic world because of its sovereignty over territories considered the heritage of all Muslims and because of its wealth; both factors encourage a commitment to religious transnationalism.

While Saudi Arabia is not normally associated with transnationalism, this study has demonstrated that it is an active agent in the process. Saudi transnational connections in London demonstrate the shortcomings of approaches emphasizing the importance of diaspora communities in establishing overseas networks beyond the territorial nation-state. The Saudi case draws attention to the irrelevance of a large overseas population for the creation, promotion and maintenance of transnational connections. In the Saudi/British case, global reach has been dependent on other diasporas (mainly Muslims and Arabs) for the promotion of religious transnational connections, serving mainly to consolidate Saudi legitimacy in three concentric circles – one domestic, one Arab and one Islamic.

Saudi religious transnationalism has resulted in unanticipated debates among British Muslims. The process has set in motion strong controversies relating not only to the legitimacy of Saudi religious interpretations but also Saudi political decisions, policies and stature in the Muslim world. While such debates are an outcome of Saudi religious transnationalism, they represent a direct challenge to Saudi authority. These debates remain a product of the specific local context of British Muslims. It is ironic that the Saudi reputation has been inversely proportional to the funds deployed. It seems that as transnational processes gather momentum, they escape the control of those who initiate them. This chapter demonstrates that such connections can lead to outcomes contrary to the interests of those involved in sponsoring them.

Notes

- 1 J. P. Langellier, 'Au coeur du Londistan', *Le Monde*, 10 September 2001.
- 2 A. Alexiev, 'The End of an Alliance: It's Time to Tell the House of Saud Goodbye', *National Review* 54/20 (2002); see <http://www.nationalreview.com/flashback/flashback-alexiev112602.asp>. See also 'Put Britain on the List of States Sponsoring Terrorism', *Executive Intelligence Review*, 21 January 2000: see http://www.larochepub.com/lar/2000.terror_memo_2703.html
- 3 I am grateful to Christa Salamandra for research assistance and for conducting interviews in London.
- 4 L. Guarnizo and M. Smith, 'The Locations of Transnationalism', in M. Smith and L. Guarnizo (eds), *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), pp. 3–34, at p. 3.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 M. McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 274.
- 8 J. Piscatori, 'Religious Transnationalism and Global Order with Particular Reference to Islam', in J. Esposito and M. Watson (eds), *Religion and Global Order* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 66–99, at p. 73.

- 9 'Sura al-nahl 16/25', in A. Ibn Baz and M. al-'Uthaymin, *Muslim Minorities: Fatwa Regarding Muslims Living as Minorities* (Hounslow: Message of Islam, 1998), p. 16.
- 10 Ibn Baz and al-'Uthaymin, *Muslim Minorities*, p. 88.
- 11 Ibid., p. 19.
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8 Wahhabism in the United Kingdom

Manifestations and reactions¹

Jonathan Birt

Academic discussion has long speculated on the nature of the relationship between the Al Sa'ud and the Wahhabi '*ulama*' (religious scholars) in terms of state formation and maintenance, but rather less attention has been given to the implications of that association for the export of Wahhabism abroad.² It is possible to see the relationship between Wahhabism and its exterior – political and ideational – in purely instrumental terms. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, early Wahhabi thought rationalized conquest, plunder and subjugation of others on the part of a particular tribal power group ('*asabiyyah*') in terms of an exclusive theology.

In its most extreme manifestation, Wahhabism – in a definite break with the late medieval Sunni consensus, which took the faith of the Muslim masses as read – viewed others outside the expanding tribal polity as unbelievers (*kuffar*), whether they were non-Muslims or non-Wahhabi Muslims. During this period, Wahhabi clerics took the central role in defining the basis of political unity by demanding strict religious conformity from incorporated tribes, which was, however, mitigated by the need to maintain a tribal social hierarchy that kept the Al Sa'ud at the apex. And while realpolitik often dictated that relations with the non-Wahhabi exterior be other than one of *jihad*, the definition of political opposition in terms of theological heterodoxy, both internal and external to the Saudi polity, has remained a consistent trope until the present day.

Since the border was closed by British diktat in 1920s, the broad strategy of the Al Sa'ud has been to find ways of curtailing the moral authority of the '*ulama*' to interpret religion within the confines of a modern bureaucratic system by turning them into functionaries of the state, whose remit would ultimately be decided by the King.³ As Aziz al-Azmeh argues, the modern state was able to replace Wahhabi ideology as an effective means of control of the formerly nomadic tribes, through a system of subsidies and privileged citizenship.⁴ However, this arrangement remained open to periodic challenges between 1927 and 1930, in 1979 and after 1990, from religious conservatives, who have argued, on each occasion, for the greater independence that the '*ulama*' enjoyed in the pre-modern period.

Therefore, by way of partial compensation, the '*ulama*' were diverted by the opportunity, which arose because of the rise in oil revenues in the 1960s, to lead

a worldwide mission (*da 'wah*) to spread the one and true correct Islam elsewhere rather than challenging the legitimacy of the Saudi state.⁵ Similarly, the willingness and ambition of the Saudi state to assume the religious leadership of the Muslim world, once it had the means to hand, can partly be seen as a conservative reaction to external challenges to Saudi Arabia.

In the 1960s, the kingdom provided shelter to Egyptian Islamists who were supported in order to act as a conservative counterweight to Nasser's populist Arab socialism. An alliance between the Wahhabi '*ulama*', the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and other reform movements worked to establish a set of global Islamic institutions – the Islamic University of Medina in 1961, the Muslim World League in 1962, the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1969 and the Islamic Development Bank in 1975 – which the Al Sa'ud assumed would serve to cement their leadership of the Muslim world, as well as increase their influence among the Muslim minorities in the West, who were specifically targeted from the 1970s onwards.⁶ A recent estimate puts Saudi spending on religious causes abroad at between \$2 billion and \$3 billion per year since 1975 (comparing favourably with what was the annual Soviet propaganda budget of \$1 billion), which has been spent on 1,500 mosques, 210 Islamic centres and dozens of Muslim academies and schools.⁷ Serious money was also spent on buying up Arab religious publishing houses that espouse non-Wahhabi views – especially in Saudi Arabia itself, but also many in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as a few in Morocco and Syria. As a result, many works deemed unsuitable are no longer in print, or have been edited to remove sections seen as unorthodox. Equally important has been the sheer size of the Saudi book market, which has prompted commercial non-Wahhabi publishers to produce books for the international market that will not fall foul of Saudi censors.⁸ Another dimension of Wahhabi influence has been the subsidizing of scholars from al-Azhar, the traditional bastion of Sunni orthodoxy, since the 1960s in order to promote pro-Wahhabi views and to marginalize critical voices of the older generation, such as that of the Egyptian cleric Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996).⁹

In the 1980s, this leadership was contested by the Islamic Republic of Iran, which motivated Saudi support for the Afghanistan *jihad* against the Soviet Union in the spirit of geo-political rivalry with Khomeini's regime. And from the 1990s until the present day, the *da 'wah* has turned in on itself to counteract dissent from anti-Saudi Wahhabis at home and abroad, as well as the fallout from other Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which had opposed the use of American troops to defend the country from Saddam Hussein in 1991.

However, while putting Saudi religious diplomacy into immediate political contexts is essential, an instrumentalist analysis does not go far enough in explaining the ambition of the Saudi state to promote its religious vision beyond its own borders. Therefore, it is useful to invoke here the notion of 'empire', as a self-perceived 'universal order that accepts no boundaries or limits', in the case of Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ Once the borders were closed in the late 1920s, the Al Sa'ud recognized that they now had to work within the international order of sovereign nation-states and modern empires, a compromise that their Wahhabi military

vanguard, the *ikhwan*, deemed unacceptable. Yet, as was rather the case with the closure of the American border in 1890, it was not long before the ideology of empire found a utopian expression: for the Americans, it was 'manifest destiny'; and for the Saudis, it was the reopening of the borders for *da'wah*, the ideal surrogate for the expansionist *jihad* that was no longer possible.

Crucially, this new state Wahhabism, now circumscribed by the government at home, became an almost pure ideology, characterized by strict credal and ritual conformity combined with legal liberalism for the sake of the public good (*maslahah*) which allowed the clerics to endorse modern developments championed by the Al Sa'ud. This sharp bifurcation between religious and mundane affairs was achieved by eliding centuries of Islamic intellectual history, so that original Islam (of seventh-century Arabia) could be recreated according to the political convenience of the Al Sa'ud.¹¹ However, this contentless nature of the Wahhabi vision of economics and politics meant that it was very open to influence from Islamist ideas from the 1960s onwards, which succeeded in creating a revolutionary Wahhabism, whose radical wing was defined by the globalized *jihad* movements of Afghanistan in the 1990s,¹² but with its original theological and ritual rigidity intact. Internally, the Saudi system has only ever been able to encapsulate the elite corps of the '*ulama*', because the conservative opposition has often been led by students or younger colleagues of establishment clerics.¹³

Abroad, the simplistic assumption of the Al Sa'ud that the strategy of 'buying out' Sunni Islam would bring not only religious conformity but acceptance of their moral and political leadership of the Muslim world has failed in political terms, but has had a wide impact upon theological and ritual debate across the Muslim world, in which Wahhabism, in all its manifestations, has succeeded in setting the agenda. By the 1990s, the fracturing of Wahhabism into different subjects had come to subvert those very institutions that were meant to preserve the original dispensation of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance. According to one British graduate of the Islamic University of Medina between 1985 and 1993: 'Medina was a very diverse and internationalist university.... You had all sorts of people from all over the world with a wide range of views, from extreme to ultra-modernist. The teachers never encouraged students to go to Afghanistan. This was done outside the classroom.'¹⁴

The global spread of Wahhabism has been associated in recent decades with the scholarship of the traditionist Nasr al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999), the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz (d. 1999), and Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-'Uthaymin (d. 2000), whose ideas have been disseminated worldwide. At the centre of the global Wahhabi mission is the Islamic University of Medina, which boasts of having over 5,000 students from 139 countries.¹⁵ Its junior counterpart in this mission has been the Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud University in Riyadh, although the latter is more focused on producing judges for indigenous *shari* 'ah courts.¹⁶ The policy of the Islamic University of Medina is to allocate around 85 per cent of its places to non-Saudis.¹⁷ As the same theological controversies that are normally provoked by aggressive Wahhabi missionizing are now current in north-west China and Russia as well as in Britain, it is clear that

the orchestrated campaign to diffuse Wahhabism has been successful, even in reaching the Islamic periphery.¹⁸ Therefore, as a mere sub-domain of the global Wahhabi *da'wah*, the United Kingdom can claim no special distinction.

Yet, having said that, within the European context, Britain – and, in particular, London – now has greater strategic importance because part of the Saudi, and broader Islamist, opposition is based there, as well as much of the Arab press, which is also subject to Saudi patronage and influence; and an important part of Saudi aims abroad is to counteract dissidence, as well as to propagate their vision of Islam.¹⁹ Madawi Al-Rasheed has charted the role of important religious institutions in London either funded or directly controlled by official Saudi sources, and the wider impact of Saudi largesse on British Muslims in the UK.²⁰ Of note also has been the flooding of the local Islamic book market with Wahhabi literature, whose print runs can be five to ten times that of any other British-based sectarian publication, aggressively targeted for a global English-speaking audience.²¹ However, I intend to concentrate here specifically on the Wahhabi mission in the UK, in its various manifestations, and the reactions that it has produced.

The first British-born graduates from the Islamic University of Medina began to return home during the early 1980s. In total, British graduates from Medina number in the hundreds, and many have studied at the Faculty of Da'wah, specializing in the fundamentals of religion (*usul al-din*) so that they were trained as preachers rather than as imams per se. British students at Medina have gained a reputation for unreliability and laziness in their studies, with many failing to complete their degrees. At first, these returnees worked closely with the Indian Ahl-i Hadith movement, a small sectarian grouping with 31 affiliated mosques nationally, whose UK headquarters are in Birmingham.²²

This latter phenomenon, a nineteenth-century radical reform movement from North India, was best characterized by its vehement stand against *taqlid* (conformity to the ancient Islamic legal schools) and was more impatient to remove local custom than even its fellow movement, the Deoband. The core intellectual influences on the Ahl-i Hadith, at least until the 1920s, were the medieval Hanbalite theologian Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and his students, the key late medieval reformers such as the Indian Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762) and the Yemeni Zaydi al-Shawkani (d. 1839), but not the founder of Wahhabism, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792).²³ In Britain, the movement organized itself in the 1970s under the leadership of the Birmingham imam Mawlana Mahmud Ahmad Mirpuri (1946–88), also a Medina alumnus, with an emphasis on building core community institutions, such as the supplementary school, and cooperating with other sectarian groups to achieve basic concessions from local government with regard to the provision of *halal* meat in schools, the maintenance of segregated state schools and other ritual demarcations in the local public sphere.²⁴ Yet whatever sectarian amity was necessary in terms of credible negotiation with the local state, it is clear from the collected *responso* of the late Mawlana that much of his polemical attention was focused on reforming Sufi practices and beliefs common among British Pakistanis, the dominant Muslim ethnic group in Birmingham.²⁵

The British-born Medina graduates, however, impatient with what they saw as a lack of dynamism and relevance, and an unwillingness to prefer English over Urdu, formed the Jam'iyat Ihya' Minhaj al-Sunnah (JIMAS), or the Association to Revive the Way of the Messenger, in 1984. Its organizational headquarters moved south to Ipswich, and thereafter it did much of its pioneering work in London. However, it was only in 1995 that tensions in Wahhabi circles in the Gulf became apparent in Britain, when a breakaway faction was formed in Birmingham, under the leadership of Dawud Burbank, a convert and alumnus of the Islamic University of Medina. While JIMAS broadly accepted the *ikhwani* criticism of the Saudis, and has remained supportive of *ikhwani* scholarship and some of the *jihad* movements of the 1990s, the Birmingham group remained strictly loyal to the Saudi insistence that the priority was not political reform but the correction of false belief and practice among Muslims. Although all these groups work to attain a cross-ethnic appeal, there are noticeable ethnic emphases. The Saudi loyalists today have a presence in London and Luton as well as Birmingham, and have a disproportionate appeal among younger Somalis and Afro-Caribbean converts, among others. Those British Arabs or South Asians who are attracted to such views tend instead towards the more revolutionary strains of Wahhabism, decisively rejecting the idea that they must be loyal to the machinations of what they view as a corrupt foreign power. The *jihadi* fringe has more appeal for radicalized Arabs, while JIMAS and other Wahhabis who remained open to *ikhwani* views are relatively more attractive to young South Asians, as are the Islamist groups such as al-Muhajiroun (the Emigrants) and Hizb al-Tahrir (the Liberation Party).

Within the British sectarian context, the figure who has done most to popularize anti-Saudi sentiment among young Muslims has been Omar Bakri Mohammed (b. 1958), who dominated the British branch of Hizb al-Tahrir until he was ousted in 1996, but who has continued essentially the same work under his own organization, al-Muhajiroun. The critique of the Saudi state has become even further ingrained within Wahhabi circles as anti-Saudi Wahhabi scholars and activists settled in Britain during the 1990s, notably Shaykh Abu Hamza al-Masri (b. 1958, a veteran of the Afghanistan *jihad*), Shaykh 'Abdullah Faysal (b. 1963, who studied *'aqidah* at Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud University in Riyadh), the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Qatadah (b. c.1960, a student of al-Albani who has recently been accused of being a key figure in al-Qaeda's European network) and Muhammad al-Mas'ari (b. c.1951, Saudi dissident and former member of Hizb al-Tahrir), who are all based in London.

After the terrorist attacks on the USA in September 2001, the key interest of pro-Saudi Wahhabis in Britain was to disassociate themselves from theological fellow-travellers who were advocating global *jihad* and even terrorism. From Birmingham, they produced a subsidized translation of Ibn Baz's 1998 *fatwah* against terrorism, hijacking and suicide bombing for mass distribution in the English-speaking diaspora, including North America.²⁶ They also were quick to disassociate themselves from Richard Reid, a British convert caught in the act of attempting to blow up a Transatlantic aeroplane in December 2001, who had

attended their main mosque in Brixton, south London. In their public response, they were quick to emphasize that the authorities had ignored their warnings about the spread of *jihadi* elements, and to highlight their opposition to terrorism. A similar reaction was provoked when it was discovered that a suspected Muslim hijacker bound for the UK from Stockholm on a Ryanair flight was due to attend the annual pro-Saudi Wahhabi conference in Birmingham.²⁷ In terms of the intra-Wahhabi dispute, the loyalists attempted to capitalize on the atmosphere of panic and suspicion to harden public opinion against their critics. For instance, Abu Khadijah, the current leader of the Birmingham faction, was considerably more robust than the Metropolitan police in his assessment of al-Muhajiroun, which a Scotland Yard informant describes as being part of the 'mouth' rather than the 'trousers brigade': 'These people are inciters of terrorism. All these individuals in London incite terrorism into the youth of the UK and are all wanted in their countries. They should be deported.'²⁸ The vocal *jihadi* Wahhabis and Islamists have attempted to push for further recruitment through the oxygen of controversy by enraging the British press, especially right-wing newspapers. Much to the annoyance of more moderate Muslim leaders, this tactic seems to have worked to force the national debate at times to focus on questions of Muslim loyalty to the state. This has allowed radical Wahhabis to question the legitimacy of Muslim leaders such as the government-backed Muslim Council of Britain.²⁹ This was particularly true after the revelations in late October 2001 that some Muslim Britons had gone to fight for the Taliban.

After the attacks in the USA, the 'gentleman's agreement' between known radicals and the British secret services, by which the former were allowed to preach radical rhetoric so long as they were not deemed to have direct involvement in terrorist activities, was rendered inoperative. The British government passed anti-terrorism legislation in December 2001 that enabled them to incarcerate, without a right to trial, any foreign nationals suspected of links to terrorist groups, and a failed attempt was made to pass provisions against incitement to religious hatred, which was firstly directed towards silencing the outspoken militants, although it was marketed primarily as the means to tackle Islamophobia.³⁰ However, under political pressure from the pro-Israel lobby in particular (among others), alternative legal instruments were used to silence or incarcerate vocal radicals, who could not be detained under existing anti-terrorist legislation. After a controversial police raid on Finsbury Park Mosque in north London in January 2003, Abu Hamza al-Masri was excluded from it in February 2003 by the Charity Commission for using it to spread radical political propaganda. In June 2003, Abu Hamza became the first immigrant to be threatened with the stripping of his UK citizenship for 'seriously prejudicing' the nation's interests under the Asylum, Immigration and Nationality Act 2002. In February 2003, Shaykh Faysal was convicted under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act for soliciting the murder of unknown persons, the first time that this law had been invoked in over a century.³¹ It is clear therefore that despite the ability of radical Wahhabis to garner national notoriety, their vocal spokesmen have been casualties of the international 'war against terrorism' which has allowed their pro-Saudi rivals to

reposition themselves as moderate allies in the same campaign, thereby obscuring the closeness in credal and ritual issues between them.

It was during the period 1989–95, before these internal political tensions became apparent, that the Wahhabi *da'wah* made its greatest impact on British Muslims. This influence had little to do with politics as such, but was rather fuelled by the relative novelty of arguments made in the British context with regard to correct belief and practice underpinned by a more restrictive definition of forbidden innovation in religion (*bid'ah*), and a more generous one of ascribing divinity to other than God (*shirk*). This polemic attacks not only what might be seen as a late medieval Sunni consensus in theology, law and mysticism but even those sympathetic reform movements of the last 200 years that are seen as not having sufficiently internalized the Wahhabi perspective. There has been significant recruitment from most of the main South Asian sectarian groupings, with the exception of the Deobandis. The most affected groupings were the popular South Asian Sufi orders, otherwise known as the Berlewis, an alliance linked together by a common opposition to religious reform rather than by a mass programme of popular Islamic education, like their rivals, the Deobandis.³² This impact had much to do with the disruption of homogeneous ritual spaces – the established South Asian mosques – by the Wahhabi critique of what they describe as unfounded ritual practice. In particular, this ritual contestation has centred on the correct performance of the canonical prayer in congregation, various forms of which have become markers of sectarian allegiance, as was the case in British India.

As a result of this aggressive recruitment, the *da'wah* provoked significant religious reactions from the established South Asian sectarianisms. In general, the Wahhabi critique forced all groups to accelerate the shift in their religious discourse away from an implicit trust in received religious authority (*taqlid*) towards direct proofs from the Qur'an and sunnah. Hence, British Islam has become more purely scripturalist. This is, of course, a general feature in Muslim societies globally; however, it is perhaps underemphasized that petrodollar Wahhabism has been a key agent of this change in recent decades.

For Deobandis, it has encouraged the younger British-born '*ulama*' to accept aspects of the Wahhabi critique of Sufism, and to defend their attachment to the Hanafi legal school in terms of primary sources. It is ironic, given the history of sectarian competition from the subcontinent, that the Deobandis are portrayed with their rivals, the Berlewis, as deviant Hanafi Sufis and blameworthy innovators in religion.³³ One imam told me that while his Deobandi grandshaykh had been 'half-Berlewi', he considered himself to be 'half-Salafi'. This Deobandi Sufi preceptor admitted that there was now such a climate of scepticism among his disciples that when teaching classics, such as the *Risalah Qushayriyyah* for instance, he had to leave out everything that could not be proved explicitly by primary textual evidence. Thus, under pressure from the Wahhabi critique, even the reformed Sufism of nineteenth-century India is further scripturalized, and stripped of gnostic content in order to become closer to an inward praxis (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).

As the Berlewis, of all the South Asian reform movements, have not emphasized Islamic education to the same degree, young adherents have had to look outside their own tradition for answers. These have come from the anti-Wahhabi polemic within the Arab world, in particular from the Sufi orders, most notably from the cultural mediators of these traditions who operated in an Anglicized milieu: the Lebanese Naqshbandi Shaykh Hisham Kabbani (b. 1945), the American Shadhili scholar Nuh Keller (b. 1954), the British Ba-'Alawi scholar 'Abdal Hakim Murad (b. 1960) and the popular American scholar Hamza Yusuf (b. 1960). In particular, it has sparked a revival of explicitly 'traditional' Islamic studies that is underpinned by a vocal defence of the centrality of the *ijazah* (authorization to teach an Islamic discipline). True religion is defended as that which is connected through the continuous transmission of learning back to its Prophetic origin, which is the only way that true understanding and God's grace may be transferred from one generation to the next. From the first *ijazah*-based intensive study course in 1994, the model has spread from the UK to North America. The explicit defence of what was so implicit in scribal cultures – the *ijazah* – is indicative of its precipitate decline at a time when religious learning is now mostly autodidactic and information about Islam is easily obtained through forms of mass communication.³⁴ For those movements closer to pure scripturalism such as the Deobandis, the Wahhabi provocation has taken formal *hadith* studies out of the hands of the '*ulama*' into those of the Muslim public. Until very recently, it would have been unthinkable that the collection of Bukhari, revered as the most canonical of all compendiums of Prophetic tradition and the final book studied before attaining the rank of a cleric in the South Asian seminary, would be taught openly at Birmingham Central Mosque, and disseminated via audio tapes and the internet, as is now happening.

However, perhaps the most significant ideational shift has been the rise of popular theology among British Muslim movements that have increasingly come to define 'Muslimness' in terms of belief rather than practice. The theological turn in Islamic discourses pre-dates the colonial period; however, it only gained significant momentum with the impetus that European expansion provided in terms of dismantling the Islamic legal system, the impact of Christian mission and the spread of the technologies of mass communication which made new forms of trans-local religious mobilization possible. In simple terms, the pre-modern legal categories of 'faith' (*iman*) and 'unbelief' (*kufi*) were internalized as moral imperatives. The taxing of a fellow-believer with unbelief (*takfir*) became the ultimate social sanction, and the chief means of drawing sectarian boundaries, when it could not longer be legally enforced. At the same time, the formal theology (*kalam*) of the '*ulama*' gave way to simplistic popular catechisms, marked by the ubiquitous use of the term '*aqidah*' (creed) in the twentieth century. It is important to note that the shift towards theology was particularly important in Arabia and South Asia, which are the chief influences on Sunni sectarianism in Britain.

In the British context, the Wahhabi provocation has put credal issues at the centre of the search for religious authenticity among young Muslims by extending further the list of beliefs and practices that constitute unbelief, and putting

under scrutiny what had formally been seen to be sound. As a result, in internet chat-rooms, in the mosques and on the street, credal matters are now widely disputed and have become the preferred means of sectarian and hence social demarcation in youthful religious circles. With the rise of intra-Wahhabi disputes after the Gulf War of 1990–1, the debate on charges of infidelity (*takfir*) has moved on, from whether such an activity is legitimate or not, to consideration of which groups in society rightfully deserve its application. In Luton, a Saudi Wahhabi stronghold, courses for recent converts now include a section on the principles of taxing others with unbelief (*usul al-takfir*). The rise of demotic theology among British Muslims is certainly also a product of the religious self-consciousness that minority status reinforces as well as a symptom of a period of increased sectarian division where new and relatively small groupings struggle to establish their religious credentials.

William Roff's contention that paying close attention to contemporaneous religious debates is a key to understanding ideational and actual change in Muslim societies³⁵ is a fruitful premise from which to start when attempting to unpack the rather dense theologized arguments that take place among British Wahhabis. The following example concerns what has been the crucial debate in the last decade about the legitimacy, or otherwise, of challenging Muslim political rule, which has been imported wholesale to the UK. The point is not that this debate should be taken to be intrinsically irrelevant to the everyday concerns of British Muslims, but that exactly the same debate can be found everywhere among Muslims of a certain bent in the heartland and the diaspora, which is symptomatic of the intensified dislocation of religious ideas from fixed geographies when distance and time have been compressed. The difficulty is what to make of this apparent outcome of globalization: the radical decontextualization of rapidly disseminated ideas in new locales; in other words, how can the apparent obscurity of their local pertinence be understood?

The political debates between British Wahhabis are couched, for the most part, in theological rather than jurisprudential language. The pro-Saudi faction adopts a position close to the classical Sunni view with regard to assessing the faith of the head of a Muslim state (read King Fahd) who does not judge by Islamic law. It is assumed that he does so because of insufficient faith and not by way of rejection. This opinion was upheld by al-Albani, Ibn Baz and Ibn al-'Uthaymin.³⁶ The discussion comes to turn on the exegesis of Surah al-Ma'idah, verse 44: 'Whoever does not judge by what Allah revealed, then these it is that are the disbelievers' (*wa ma lam yahkum bi-ma anzala Allah fa-ula 'ika hum al-kafirun*). The key point of contention is over the implication of 'disbelievers' in this verse. Saudi loyalists argue, with the early Qur'anic exegete Ibn 'Abbas, that it is 'unbelief (*kufi*) less than unbelief, wrong less than wrong, sinfulness less than sinfulness'.³⁷ This minor unbelief relates to actions, while major unbelief pertains to credal issues. Thus the discussion comes to turn upon what was the earliest theological debate in Islam between two sects, the Kharijites and the Murji'ites, which arose in the 650s – namely, whether acts are considered to be an essential part of faith or not.³⁸ Thereafter, a lengthy digression can ensue as to whether or not the mere omission

of the canonical prayer, rather than its denial, constitutes an act that obviates one's Islam. Al-'Uthaymin and Ibn Baz agree that the simple neglect of prayer nullifies Islam, while al-Albani disagrees. Thus the whole discussion transmutes into theology proper about the relationship between faith and acts even though its genesis is a political dispute.³⁹

The critics, such as Abu Hamza al-Masri, argue the opposite: that failing to apply the *shari'ah* is an act of major unbelief. He argues that this comment of Ibn 'Abbas about 'a unbelief less than unbelief' referred to the dispute between two groups of the Companions who both had exercised their legal reasoning, and so it did not refer to outright rejection of Islamic law. He further argues that a Muslim leader who fails to apply Islamic law has broken his divine covenant with God, and therefore it is the duty of scholars to tax him with unbelief and to incite the masses to rise against him in rebellion.⁴⁰

Wahhabi critics of the Saudi royal family have now made political dissidence itself a theological principle. They have attempted to add a fourth pillar to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's three principles of monotheism:⁴¹ the unity of governance (*tawhid al-hakimiyyah*). Principally, therefore, politics becomes theological rather than jurisprudential in Wahhabi discourse so that judging the performance of the political elite becomes a matter of faith, so as to break the natural conservatism of Sunni political theory, which preferred autocracy to rebellion.⁴²

At the annual conference (August 2001) held by Saudi Wahhabis in Birmingham, which had an attendance of around 4,000, it was clear from the questions asked by loyalists that pro-Saudi state propaganda, however wrapped up in theology, is under considerable pressure, and from the arguments of *jihadi* Wahhabis in particular. Furthermore, the drift of the questions demonstrates that Wahhabi recruits seek to translate complex theological ideas into simplified acts of social and ritual avoidance of sectarian rivals.

- Is a person who joins many groups and who criticizes anyone who maligns Sayyid Qutb part of the Salafi way?
- Is the ruling correct that initiating the *salam* with the people of innovation (*ahl al-bid'ah*) is impermissible?
- How are we supposed to have patience when the infidels are killing Muslims and invading their lands?
- How are we supposed to find a good Islamic state to migrate to when even Saudi Arabia has a king?
- Which is the best country to migrate to?
- Can one train for *jihad* even if one's [Muslim] trainers are not following the methodology (*minhaj*) of the pious predecessors (*salaf*)?
- If we all migrate [abroad], then who is left to perform missionary work?
- What are the rulings of the scholars with regard to [the Islamic status of political rule and of waging *jihad* on behalf of] Afghanistan and Chechnya?

What is immediately apparent is how divorced these questions are from the local politics of inner-city Birmingham. Pnina Werbner argues convincingly that

behind the global fabrications that invoke the imagined global Muslim nation (*ummah*) lie the frustrations of British Muslims at their relative social marginalization, both locally and nationally. The suffering of oppressed Muslims abroad is read as an allegory of how the diaspora sees its own status in Britain, couched in rhetoric of victimhood, which coincides with the rationale of multicultural identity politics.⁴³

Once when I asked a *jihadi* (who was, of all things, an ex-banker) what he thought of local issues facing Muslims in Birmingham, he launched into a ferocious diatribe against the ineffective and corrupt religious leadership of the pioneer generation, who were set on advancing personal interests. In his view, Birmingham was a dystopia in which a whole generation of young Muslims was being lost to drug culture and criminality, and therefore he had to look outside Britain to find ways of changing the world. It was revealing of the attitudes of a younger generation who felt that their professional skills and contextualized cultural knowledge were being overlooked by their parents. It is evidently also a repudiation of kinship-group-based social organization in favour of what is seen as pan-ethnic as well as transnational Muslim solidarity. Thus the difference with the pioneer generation is that some in the next generation, locked out of local (and national) politics, have instead turned towards global Islamism.

However, it is important to stress that it is the fabrication that really matters most of the time. At a small *jihadi* circle (*halaqah*) in Birmingham that I attended in early 2001, neophytes were regularly exposed to the rhetoric of global *jihad*.⁴⁴ Yet for the most part, the participants, who only ever numbered between eight and fifteen, seemed to look for ways out of acquiescing to uncompromising appeals for immediate migration (*hijrah*) to the then Islamic emirate of Afghanistan or participation in holy war with the usual legal excuses of looking after aged parents, conducting *da'wah* and the like.

Beyond politics, the social touchstone of Islamic radicalism in Birmingham – and, I suspect, elsewhere – is the repudiation by a vocal minority of marriages arranged within kinship networks. Among British Pakistanis, it is estimated that rates of first-cousin marriage remained above 50 per cent in the post-migration context.⁴⁵ On this issue, the Saudi loyalists in Birmingham have, on occasion, proposed radical solutions. In one case, a young Pakistani Muslim student who had become a Wahhabi taxed her parents with unbelief, migrated to the ‘safe abode’ of Birmingham and then promptly married a convert. The local Wahhabi leadership denied all knowledge of the couple’s whereabouts in order to confound the attempts of her male relatives to seek redress. Marriage among the Saudi loyalists is not only non-kinship-group and cross-ethnic in character, but there are higher rates of polygyny, divorce and remarriage than in Muslim society at large. These ‘shotgun’ marriages require few of the complicated niceties that accompany the more widespread arranged method or, increasingly, the love match that is eventually stamped with parental approval. It is a young Muslim’s social experiment where new social rules are being worked out in a rereading of Islamic tradition.

It is clear that Muslim political radicalism fits within a larger framework of social and doctrinal reform that is fundamentally about challenging generational

hierarchies within the various Muslim ethnic groups. It is about holding the 'elders' – the British government, one's parents, the local mosque committee or corrupt Muslim governments abroad – to account in the name of a holistic identity unanchored in any ethnicity, kinship group or nation-state on the part of an impatient younger generation. Furthermore, the general globalization of political concern, expressed as 'ummatic' politics, works against the public expression of local concerns in new religious movements defined by a rigid scripturalism and an agenda driven by foreign funding.⁴⁶ However, it is equally evident that a growing political awareness of global Muslim issues has made British Muslims much less likely to absorb propaganda from a foreign state gullibly. As such, from the Saudi perspective, a doctrine once developed in service of tribal and then national unity has become unbound from such constraints; Wahhabism is now resolutely globalized and prone to pan-Islamist dissidence.

Finally, political anxieties about the loyalties of transnational Muslim diasporas to the nation-state, especially after September 2001, should not obscure the greater significance of ideational religious debates among Muslims in the diaspora. These discussions currently centre on the relevance of *taqlid* to a scholarly tradition in an age of mass education and communication, on what is the proper etiquette for all forms of public dissent, and on the merits of the increasing privatization of the religious conscience that links moral rectitude to the verities of personal faith rather than to the application of the law. It is the 'theological turn' in Islamic discourses from *fiqh* to *'aqidah*, which initially coincided with the loss of Muslim political power, in which the individual rather than the state became the locus of religious authority, and so, in turn, this new Islamic individual comes to hold the state to account. In both instances, the impact of colonialism and of new minority status in the diaspora appears to have encouraged theologized moral rearmament. It is primarily in ritual and personal religious space that Wahhabism in Britain is likely to have a much longer-term influence in the articulation of this new sort of religious individualism, even when political engagement in the diaspora begins to emphasize local concerns as well as global fabrications.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in Birmingham and London between 2000 and 2002, on interviews and on a survey of popular Islamic literature produced or distributed in Britain.
- 2 Although 'Wahhabism' has always been a polemical epithet, it remains my preferred usage (except in paraphrases or quotes) because it is much clearer than self-ascribed descriptions such as *al-muwahhidun* (unitarians) or *salafyyah* (pious predecessors), which might equally be applied to historically distinct, and often theologically very divergent, Islamic movements.
- 3 See A. al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Boulder: Westview, 1985); Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000); and Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 4 Aziz al-Azmeh, 'Wahhabite Polity', in Aziz al-Azmeh (ed.), *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 104–21, at p. 112.

- 5 Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge, MA: Belknap and Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 70–5.
- 6 Ibid., p. 75.
- 7 While this estimate comes from Alex Alexiev ('The End of an Alliance: It's Time to Tell the House of Saud Goodbye', *National Review* 54/20 (2002)), a hawkish ex-Sovietologist and Rand Corporation adviser, and thus part of the post-11 September security stance of some right-wing policy makers who see the strategic relationship between the USA and Saudi Arabia as misguided, the figure was not thought unrealistic by several of my informants who have long experience of raising money in Saudi Arabia. Kepel (*Jihad*, p. 72) agrees with Alexiev's figure for Saudi-financed mosques.
- 8 E-mail communications with non-Wahhabi 'ulama' in Syria and Jordan, February 2003. The saturation of the book market is apparent at Islamic book fairs across the Arab world, in which modern Wahhabi polemical works attacking Sufism and medieval Sunni theology now predominate. Editing of classical works is often unscrupulous or, at the very least, hostile, and aims at rewriting the classical Sunni heritage of higher learning in Wahhabi terms. For example, a recent Riyadh edition of al-Nawawi's *Kitab al-adhkar* retitled the chapter 'Visiting the grave of the Prophet' as 'Visiting the mosque of the Prophet' in line with the verdict of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328).
- 9 For further details, see the illuminating profile (Franklin Foer, 'Moral Hazard', *New Republic Magazine*, 11 July 2002) of Khaled Abou El Fadl (b. 1962), a professor of Islamic jurisprudence at the University of California and a former Azharite graduate and student of Muhammad al-Ghazali, who has taken a stand against the spread of Wahhabi thought, both in the Muslim world and among the Muslim diaspora.
- 10 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (*Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)) argue that unlike the older, nineteenth-century imperialisms, which were resolutely territorial, today's empire is a 'decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers' (p. xii, authors' italics) and transcends the powers or agendas of any one state (p. xiv). While, as I argue below, Saudi ideological imperialism has been frustrated, Wahhabism has been globalized, and now forms a kind of reactionary counter-empire, which nonetheless shares the qualities of empire as it can only work within the system (Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 146–50). In the process, Wahhabism has become hybridized and is no longer confined to Saudi control.
- 11 Al-Azmeh, 'Wahhabite Polity', pp. 112–15.
- 12 Kepel, *Jihad*.
- 13 For instance, the proclaimed saviour of the 1979 movement, Muhammad al-Qahtani, had studied theology under Ibn Baz, the leading state cleric, and after 1990, the 'awakening shaykhs', Safar al-Hawali (b. 1950) and Salman al-'Awdah (b. 1955), were, respectively, Chair of the Department of Theology at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, and possessor of a master's degree in principles of religion from Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud University in Riyadh. See Teitelbaum, *Holier than Thou*, pp. 28–32 and al-Yassini, *Religion and State*, p. 124.
- 14 John Hooper and Brian Whitaker, 'Extremist View of Islam Unites Terror Suspects: Salafi Purist Teaching Backed by Saudi Royals', *Guardian*, 26 October 2001.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 See James Piscatori, 'Evolution of a Wahhabi University', paper presented at a conference on Transnational Connections with the Arab Gulf and Beyond, Oxford, September 2002.
- 17 Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 156.
- 18 Dru C. Gladney, 'The Salafiyya Movement in Northwest China: Islamic Fundamentalism among the Muslim Chinese', in Leif Manger (ed.), *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies 26 (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), pp. 102–49; Galina Yemelianova, 'Transnational Islam versus Ethnic Islam in

- Eastern Europe: The Role of the Media', in Stefano Allievi and Jorgen S. Nielsen (eds), *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), pp. 243–80.
- 19 Christa Salamandra, 'London's Arab Media', paper presented at a conference on Transnational Connections within the Arab Gulf and Beyond, Oxford, September 2002.
- 20 See Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi religious transnationalism in London', chapter 7 in this volume.
- 21 Information given by a Birmingham-based Muslim printer who produces religious titles for several sectarian publishing houses in the city, including Saudi Wahhabi ones.
- 22 Cornelius William North, 'Muslims in Birmingham: Religious Activity in Mosques and Para-Mosques' (Ph.D. thesis: Birmingham: Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, Selly Oak College, 1996), p. 86.
- 23 E-mail communication with Claudia Preckel (Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany). In fact, the earliest proven contact between Wahhabi scholars and the Ahl-i Hadith, according to Arab sources, were letters written to Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan of Bhopal (d. 1890), one of the founding scholars of the Ahl-i Hadith, introducing 17 Najdi students who trained between 1880 and 1930 with Khan and other Ahl-i Hadith scholars in the sciences of Prophetic tradition. I owe this information to Guido Steinberg.
- 24 See North, 'Muslims in Birmingham', pp. 85–104, for an overview of the development of the Ahl-i Hadith sect in Birmingham from the 1970s until 1995, and Daniele Joly, *Britannia's Crescent: Making a Place for Muslims in British Society* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), for an in-depth analysis of Muslim debates on education in Birmingham.
- 25 Mahmood Ahmed Mirpuri, *Fatawa Sirat-e Mustaqeem*, trans. Mohammed Abdul Hadi al-Oomeri (Riyadh: DarusSalam, 1998).
- 26 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz, *Clarification of the Truth in Light of Terrorism, Hijackings and Suicide Bombings and an Advice to Usaamah ibn Laden from Shaykhul-Islam Ibn Baz* (Birmingham: Salafi Publications, 2001).
- 27 Staff and Agencies, 'Mosque Leader Warns over Extremist Converts', *Guardian*, 26 December 2001; Vikram Dodd, 'Sect Opposes Protests and Brands Terrorists as Sinners', *Guardian*, 31 August 2002.
- 28 Dodd, 'Sect Opposes Protests'.
- 29 Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The Campaign to Subvert Islam as an Ideology and a System*, 16 October 2001 (pamphlet). Here it is argued that some Muslims have been prepared 'to provide their services to the West in order to secure some petty interests', but that 'it is obligatory on the Muslims at this time to stand shoulder to shoulder in one line facing the challenges that confront them. It is not allowed for the Muslims to disown his brother or snub him so as to remove the suspicion from himself and gain the love of the disbelievers. It is also not allowed for the Muslims to forsake their brothers even if their opinions, schools of thought, trends of thinking and movements are different – we should not forget that the attack is directed against the Muslims; no Muslim is safe from it and no Muslim is safe.'
- 30 This allegation is from a Muslim activist who was shown a list of candidates for arrest, drawn up in advance of any legislation on incitement to religious hatred, and more Muslim names were present than non-Muslim ones.
- 31 Tania Branigan, 'Salvation Army Boy who Converted to Campaign of Hate', *Guardian*, 25 February 2003; Vikram Dodd, 'Radical Cleric Barred from Mosque', *Guardian*, 25 February 2003.
- 32 Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and his Movement, 1870–1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- 33 For a seminal overview of Berlewi–Deobandi disputation in British India see Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 296–314. A recent example of Wahhabi criticism of the

Deobandis illustrates the rather abstruse points of difference between them: 'these evil Deo-Bandits [*sic*] who combine Soofism, Kalaam [impermissible speculative theology], Khalq-ul-Qur'aan [arguments for the createdness of the Qur'an], Takfeer [taxing Muslims with unbelief], Khurooj [a reference to the tours of Tablighi Jama'at which are condemned as baseless acts], Ta'weel [unfounded use of reason in the interpretation of primary textual sources], Tafweedh [failing to affirm the Attributes of God when denying any human knowledge of the modality of the Divine Attributes] and many more bid'ahs [unsanctioned innovations in religion]'. This comment comes from a Saudi loyalist e-group list, based in Birmingham, from Abu Hanifa al-Salafi, 'Deobandi Deceivers', *Salafi Publications Yahoo! Group*, 21 November 2001, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/salafipublications/messages/110> (accessed 30 November 2001) [link broken].

- 34 For a modern British Muslim defence of the *ijazah*, see Aftab Malik, *The Broken Chain: Reflections on the Neglect of a Tradition* (Bristol: Amal Press, 2001).
- 35 William R. Roff, 'Whence Cometh the Law? Dog Saliva in Kelantan, 1937', in Katherine P. Ewing (ed.), *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 25–42.
- 36 Khalid bin Muhammad al-'Anbari, *Ruling by Other than what Allah Revealed [and] the Fundamentals of Takfir [al-Hukm bi-ghayr ma anzala Allah wa usul al-takfir]* (Detroit: al-Qur'an was-Sunnah Society of North America, 1999), pp. 85–104.
- 37 Ibid., p. 107.
- 38 Fazlur Rahman, 'Early Sects and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy', in Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*, ed. and intro. Ebrahim (ed.), Moosa (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), pp. 30–68.
- 39 A good example from Birmingham can be seen from 'Ali Hasan al-Halabi, 'A Response to the Permanent Committee's Verdict', *Minhajus Sunnah* 1 (November 2000).
- 40 Shaykh Abu-Hamza al-Masri, *Khawaarij and Jihad* (Birmingham: Makhtabah al-Ansaar, [2001]), pp. 87–96, 174–7.
- 41 Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's three principles of monotheism are the unity of worship (*tawhid al-rububiyyah*), the unity of divinity (*tawhid al-uluhiyyah*) and the unity of the Divine Names and Attributes (*tawhid al-asma' wa'l-sifat*).
- 42 Omar Ahmed Ali Abdurrahman, *The Present Rulers of Islam? Are they Muslims or Not?* (London: al-Firdous, 1989); al-Halabi, 'A Response', p. 18.
- 43 Pnina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims* (Oxford: SAR Press and James Currey, 2002), pp. 153–83.
- 44 In this case, reading through a commentary on Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's *Usul al-thalathah* by that pillar of the Saudi clerical establishment, al-'Uthaymin, which demonstrates the ideological closeness of the pro- and anti-Saudi Wahhabis in terms of theology and jurisprudence.
- 45 Alison Shaw, 'Biradi Solidarity and Cousin Marriage', in Alison Shaw (ed.), *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain* (Amsterdam: Harvard Academic Publishers, 2000), pp. 137–59.
- 46 In the case of the Birmingham Saudi loyalists, much funding is obtained from Kuwait, although not exclusively (some monies also come from local government), according to corroborative second-hand sources. Given sensitivities over being accused as sell-outs by fellow British Muslims, allied with suspicions over foreign funding of Muslim organizations in general, especially after September 2001, it is very hard to get direct information on funding from the parties involved. Instead, information has come from disaffected ex-members of groups.

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