

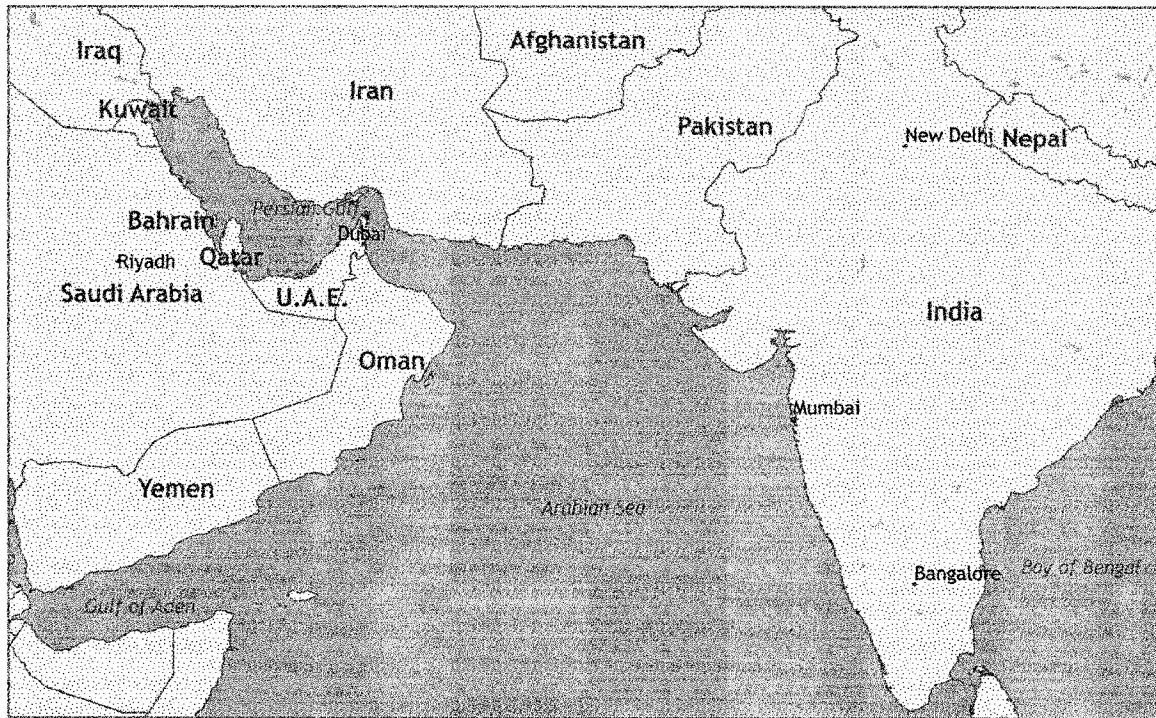
## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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



**Map 1: The Arabian Sea**

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

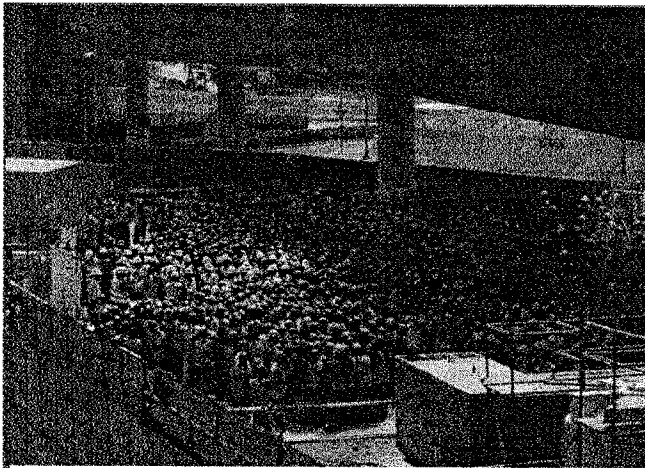
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<sup>3</sup> Jane Kinninmont, "Bahrain," in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Annual Report of the Bahrain Petroleum Co. Ltd 1940. National Archives of India, External Affairs, Near East Branch, 1941. F 360-N/41.

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

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



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

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

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

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<sup>5</sup> I J Seccombe and R I Lawless, "Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 3 (August 1986), pp. 564-565.

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

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

### **Networked Pipelines**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, pp. 121-122.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Oil Companies and British Imperialism in the Gulf

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

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

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<sup>18</sup> Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, p. 83.

foreigners except those approved by the British government.<sup>19</sup> The first of these treaties was signed with the Sheikh of Kuwait in 1913. Sheikhs, or rulers, of the Gulf signed similar treaties with the British throughout the following decade. The Sheikh of Bahrain signed in 1914, Sheikh of Qatar in 1916, the Sheikhs of the Trucial States (contemporary United Arab Emirates or UAE) in 1922, and the Sheikh of Muscat in 1923.<sup>20</sup> Lord Curzon, the former viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, spearheaded these treaties in an effort to gain control over Middle Eastern oil for Great Britain and provide a buffer between the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and British India.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>24</sup> Seccombe and Lawless, “Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50,” pp. 550-551.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 558.

British army when the company needed additional workers. The British only approved oil agreements with the stipulation that the companies would hire large numbers of locals and British subjects. As a consequence, the British Political Resident in the Gulf had considerable control over the recruitment of employment. In addition to restricting the numbers of Americans working in the Gulf, the British also limited the numbers of skilled Persians and Iraqis working there, for fear of political upheaval. The political agreements between the British authorities and oil companies enforced the recruiting of workers from British India. Many of these employees came from APOC, but others were sent from Burmah Oil, where over six thousand Indians worked in 1904.<sup>26</sup> Still other Indian workers were recruited in Bombay by a British recruiting agent based there. By the beginning of World War II, the number of Indians working in the Gulf was rapidly rising. The growth of the Gulf was further spurred by Japan's entrance into the war. Japan's involvement meant a loss of Asian oil resources for the Allied forces, and oil in the Gulf, particularly Iranian oil, became of greater importance. Increased demand for oil meant more workers were needed in the oil industry. As the industry grew, more and more Indians went to work in the oilfields of the Gulf.<sup>27</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Contemporary Migration to the Gulf: Indians on the Arabian Sea**

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



the postcolonial era. Specifically, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) has overseen emigration from India and provided services for Indians abroad since 2004.<sup>30</sup>

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

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

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

<b>TABLE 1: Indian Labor Outflows to the GCC<sup>32</sup></b>					
<b>Country</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Bahrain</b>	31,924	16,541	15,101	14,323	20,150
<b>Kuwait</b>	35,562	42,091	37,667	45,149	55,868
<b>Oman</b>	89,659	74,963	105,807	73,819	84,384
<b>Qatar</b>	82,937	46,292	45,752	41,710	63,096
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	228,406	281,110	275,172	289,297	357,503
<b>UAE</b>	349,827	130,302	130,910	138,861	141,138
<b>Total</b>	<b>818,315</b>	<b>591,299</b>	<b>610,409</b>	<b>603,159</b>	<b>722,139</b>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**TABLE 4: Foreign Workers in the Gulf<sup>37</sup>**

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

The majority of Indians in the Gulf work in unskilled or semi-skilled positions.

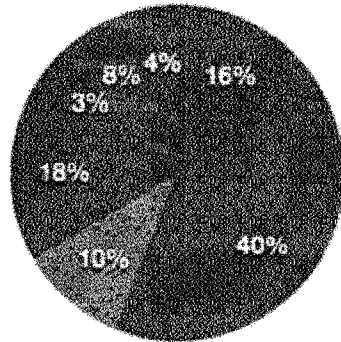
Unskilled and semi-skilled are two categories used by the Indian government historically and today to classify workers. The term “unskilled workers” refers to manual laborers who, in my research, mostly worked in construction in the Gulf. “Semi-skilled workers” usually have some technical training or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

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

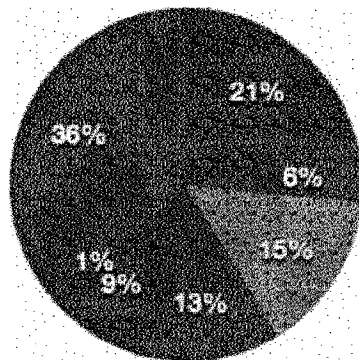
and clerks. [GRAPH 1: Occupation Category of Migrants in Gulf<sup>38</sup> and GRAPH 2: Occupations of Migrants in UAE<sup>39</sup>]

**GRAPH 1: Occupation Category of Migrants in Gulf**



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

**GRAPH 2: Occupations of Migrants in the UAE**



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER I

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

The migration of Indians to work in the oilfields of the Persian Gulf grew as the oil industry expanded in the area. By the mid-twentieth century, work on the oilfields had become a major source of employment for Indian emigrants, and oil companies were hiring almost one-quarter of the Indian emigrants going overseas for jobs in 1951.<sup>40</sup> Though increasing numbers of Indians were moving to work in the Gulf, conditions were far from ideal. Both skilled professionals and day laborers faced discrimination and difficult working conditions. In the 1940s and early 1950s, workers living in Aden, Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, and Qatar all had similar complaints. These complaints revolved around poor living conditions, lack of medical and recreational facilities, “gross discrimination ... between senior staff which is American or British and the Indian or local junior staff,” poor sanitation, and the absence of any means for workers to redress grievances.<sup>41</sup> In order to improve their working conditions, Indian workers in the oilfields deployed multiple methods – from work stoppages to hunger strikes to appealing to the Indian government for support. These actions by Indian workers in the Gulf helped form the oil industry in the Arabian Sea.

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

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

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

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

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

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

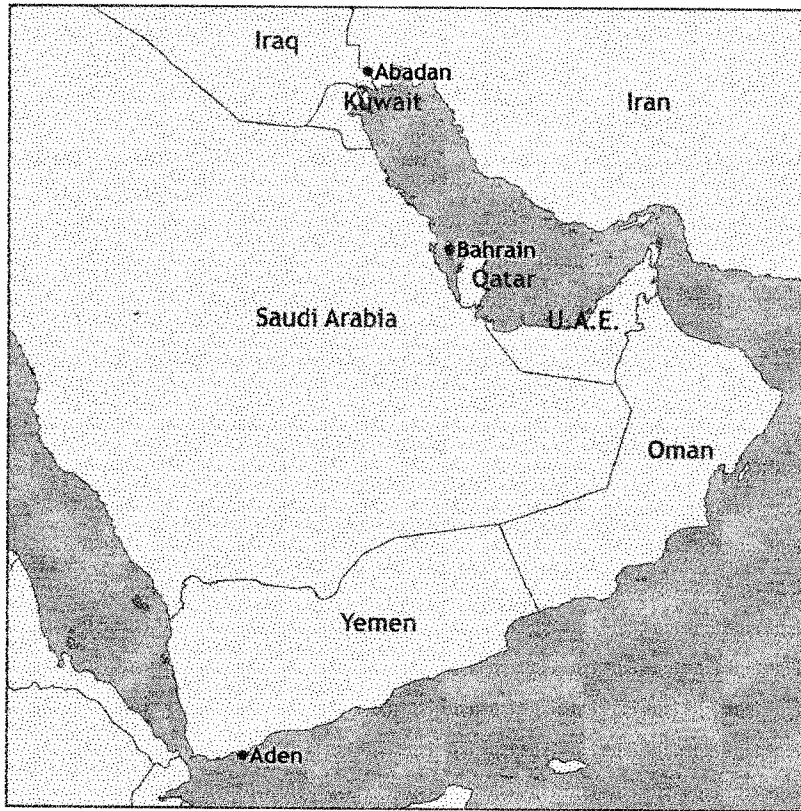
selectively invoke the nation. In the context of Indian independence, transnational migration highlights that nationalism and citizenship were used by workers to push for additional rights. Exploring these claims, in conjunction with other localized political claims, allows us to look at the construction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

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

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

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



**Map 2: Sites of Indian Worker Action**

### **Labor History and the Specificities of Oil Production**

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

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