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The Role of Colonial Knowledge in Building the Arab Gulf's Migration Regime

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine how the British Empire in the Arab Gulf created colonial classifications between Gulf Arabs and South Asians. The British racialised the Gulf Arabs in a way which presented them as an eternal, homogeneous, and 'pure' group. This racialisation contributed to the exclusion of others within the Gulf, most notably South Asian migrants. Firstly, I discuss some of the gaps within the literature which include the erasure of race and colonialism. Then, I identify how these gaps can be remedied using a Decolonial framework. Based on these theoretical foundations, I interrogate the racialisations of Gulf Arabs and how these racialisations influenced the migration regime in the Gulf. Lastly, I examine how South Asians were racialised in the Gulf. I conclude that the exclusionary migration regime in the Arab Gulf is built on the foundations of the racialised colonial classifications of the British Empire.

KEYWORDS

Race; decoloniality; migration; colonialism

1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine the racialisation of Arabs and South Asians in the Arab Gulf and the ways in which this racialisation contributed to the creation of the citizen and migrant divide. Often these distinctions are taken as natural however, I argue that using a Decolonial lens can help illustrate how these racialisations are products of the colonial classifications. Firstly, I examine the gaps in literature on migration in the Gulf, namely, the erasure of race and colonialism from discussions of migration in the Gulf. Secondly, I introduce the Decolonial framework for understanding the racialised colonial identities of the Gulf. Then, I investigate the colonial racialisation of the Gulf Arabs and how this racialisation introduced concepts such as territoriality and a migration regime. Lastly, I present the British's racialisation of South Asians as more suited for labour and the ways in which South Asian migrants opposed this racialisation.

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2. Literature Review

Literature discussing migration in the Arab Gulf is often focussed on the economic and demographic aspects of migration.¹ While this literature has made important contributions, the political aspects of migration need to be examined comprehensively as well. The economic focus can serve to present migration to the Gulf in terms of supply and demand which can obscure the structural exploitation and the political dynamics of the Gulf migration regime. Additionally, Literature which focuses heavily on the economy of migration can serve to separate and externalise migrants from the social and political dynamics. Migrants are separated as almost existing in a different context than citizens. My argument, however, aims to show how the racialised identities of the citizens and migrants, which act as a foundation for socioeconomic roles, are mutually constitutive, rather than existing separately.

Additionally, the literature has often excluded discussions of colonialism and the British Empire's impact on the formation of the migration regime of the Arab Gulf.² Of course, the literature does not have to focus solely on colonialism however, when discussing the precarity of migrants or the reasons South Asian workers migrate to the Gulf it is still important to present these issues as contingent on the specific historical context of colonialism, in the way it has privileged 'natives' and excluded others. Although there are several notable exceptions, John Chalcraft for instance discusses the influence of Arab migrants on political mobilisation in the Gulf during the British protectorate.³ Omar Al-Shehabi discusses the role of the British in the formation of *Kafala* and Manal Al-Jamal discusses the formation of tiered citizenship in the United Arab Emirates under the British protectorate.⁴ Aside from these exceptions, the role of the Empire in constructing the migration regime is overlooked. This serves to obscure the purposes to which the Gulf migration regime has been historically deployed,

¹A. Azeez and M. Begum, 'Gulf migration, remittances and economic impact', *Journal of Social Sciences* 20(1), (2009), pp. 55–60; N. Colton, *The International Political Economy of Gulf Migration* (Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute, 2010); M. Moniruzzaman and M. Walton-Roberts, 'Migration, debt and resource backwash: how sustainable is Bangladesh-Gulf circular migration?' *Migration and Development* 7(1), (2017), pp. 85–103; G. Z. Oommen, 'South Asia-Gulf migratory corridor: emerging patterns, prospects and challenges', *Migration and Development* 5(3), (2015), pp. 394–412; M. M. Rahman, 'Bangladeshi labour migration to the Gulf states: patterns of recruitment and processes', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement* 33(2), (2012), pp. 214–230; P. Wickramasekara, 'South Asian Gulf migration to the Gulf: a safety valve or a development strategy?' *Migration and Development* 5(1), (2016), pp. 99–129; M. Valenta and J. Jakobsen, 'Moving to the Gulf: an empirical analysis of the patterns and drivers of migration to the GCC countries', *Labor History* 57(5), (2016), pp. 627–648.

²B. Malla and M. S. Rosenbaum, 'Understanding Nepalese labor migration to Gulf countries', *Journal of Poverty* 21(5), (2017), pp. 411–433; G. Naufal, 'Labor migration and remittances in the GCC', *Labour History* 52(3), (2011); D. Sancho, 'Exposed to Dubai: education and belonging among young Indian residents in the Gulf', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18(3), (2020), pp. 277–289; N. M. Shah, 'Socio-demographic transitions among nationals of GCC countries: implications for migration and labour force trends', *Migration and Development* 1(1), (2012), pp. 138–148; Z. Strabac, M. Valenta and M. Al Awad, 'Temporary labour migration to United Arab Emirates: a complex story', *Migration and Development* 7(3), (2018), pp. 352–365; M. Valenta and J. Jakobsen, 'Moving to the Gulf: an empirical analysis of the patterns and drivers of migration to the GCC countries', *Labor History* 57(5), (2016), pp. 627–648; M. Valenta, 'Itinerant labour: conceptualising circular, serial and stepwise migrations to the Arab Gulf and onwards', *Migration and Development* 11(3), (2020), pp. 674–696.

³J. Chalcraft, 'Migration and popular protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79, (2011), pp. 28–47.

⁴O. Alshehabi, 'Policing labour in empire: the modern origins of the *Kafala* sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab states', *British Journal for Middle Eastern Studies*, (2019); M.A. Jamal, 'The 'tiering' of citizenship and residency and the 'hierarchization' of migrant communities: The United Arab Emirates in historical context', *International Migration Review* 49(3), (2015), pp. 601–632.

namely, to anchor some populations and create and consolidate the mobility of others in order to make them more susceptible to labour exploitation without politically destabilising the Gulf regimes.

Race is also omitted from examinations of the migration regime. If prejudice against migrants is discussed, it is portrayed as more xenophobic than racist.⁵ The justification seems to be that prejudice directed towards migrants is based on their foreignness rather than racialised difference. However, this omits the 'migrants' who have lived in the Gulf for generations.⁶ It also neglects to interrogate the so-called 'foreignness' of migrant workers; if migrants have been made temporary, first by the British Empire and then by the Gulf's migration regime, then their 'foreignness' is constructed rather than natural. Therefore, it should be addressed critically by the literature rather than taken for granted. Relatedly, there is a reason this 'foreignness' is set in stone and there is no method by which 'migrants' can shed this designation. It is because the Gulf Arabs' identity is constructed in racialised terms that it is impossible for migrants to be integrated into Gulf society. If this identity had been based on cultural aspects, then it would be more permeable, however, despite South Asian culture being highly influential in the formation of Gulf culture, South Asians are still considered external to Gulf society.

A common truism within the literature on migration in the Gulf is the contention that South Asian migrants were preferred to Arab migrants because they were more passive and apolitical.⁷ For instance, Sharon Russell, in her work on migration policy formation in Kuwait notes that South Asians 'were perceived by many to be more disciplined than their Arab counterparts'.⁸ Ginu Oomen writes 'Asian migrant workers are considered to be relatively less expensive, diligent, submissive and least interested in local politics'.⁹ This assumption contributes to the ways in which South Asian migrants have been historically racialised as more able to withstand exploitative hard labour which in turn serves to naturalise this exploitation. Instead, as will be shown later in this paper, South Asian migrants have historically been vocal about the exploitative nature of their work and have expressed opposition to the ways they have been racialised.

⁵O. Alshehabi, 'Histories of migration to the Gulf', quoted in A. Hanieh, A. Khalaf and O. Alshehabi eds., *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf* (Pluto Press, 2014); R. Jureidini, 'Migrant workers and xenophobia in the Middle East', UNRISD, (2003); A.A. Ullah, S. Chin and W. Lee, 'Xenophobia in the GCC countries: migrants' desire and distress xenophobia in the GCC countries: migrants' desire and distress', *Global Affairs* 6, (2020), pp. 1–20.

⁶F.D. Bel-Air, 'Asian migration to the Gulf states in the twenty-first century', quoted in M. Chowdhury and S.I. Rajan, eds., *South Asian Migration in the Gulf: Causes and Consequences* (Springer International Publishing, 2018), pp. 7–34; A. Gardner, 'Engulfed Indian guest workers, Bahraini citizens, and the structural violence of the Kafala system', quoted in N. D. Genova, N. Peutz and W. Walters eds., *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (Duke University Press, 2010); S.S. Russell, 'Politics and ideology in migration policy formulation: the case of Kuwait', *The International Migration Review* 23(1), (1989), pp. 24–47; N. Vora, 'Between global citizenship and Qatarization: negotiating Qatar's new knowledge economy within American branch campuses', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(12), (2014).

⁷J. Chalcraft, 'Monarchy, migration and hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula', (2010); A. Gardner, 'Engulfed Indian guest workers, Bahraini citizens, and the structural violence of the Kafala system', quoted in N.D. Genova, N. Peutz, and W. Walters eds., *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸S.S. Russell, 'Politics and ideology in migration policy formulation: the case of Kuwait', *The International Migration Review* 23(1), (1989), p. 36.

⁹G.Z. Oommen, 'South Asia-Gulf migratory corridor: emerging patterns, prospects and challenges', *Migration and Development* 5(3), (2015), p. 395.

3. Theoretical Framework

Instead of taking the identities of citizen and migrant within the Gulf for granted, my paper aims to examine the ways in which these different identities have emerged as a result of colonial racialisations. In order to accomplish this, it's important to use the theoretical framework developed by Decolonial scholars in order to interrogate these identities critically. Decolonial scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo, Anibal Quijano and Ramón Grosfoguel have explored the knowledge produced by empires as characteristic of coloniality, which refers to the continuing forms of colonial domination in modernity.¹⁰ Colonial knowledge produced various classifications, the most important for this paper being racial classifications. With the advent of colonialism, labour became articulated for the global capitalist market and race came to signify relations of domination and notions of inferiority and superiority. Quijano argues that colonised populations were articulated into races and some racial categories came to be associated with labour. As will be shown, this coloniality of power can be seen in the British Empire associating South Asian migrants with labour in the Gulf.

Also relevant to the colonial classifications in the Arab Gulf is Nandita Sharma's work in which she argues that colonised populations were often split into 'Indigeneous-Natives' and 'Migrant-Natives'.¹¹ The former were granted territoriality under Empire by which they, being born into a racialised group rather than in the land itself, can claim rootedness and political control over the land. The latter were categorised by their mobility which proved problematic for the British seeing as this mobility made them difficult to control. Thus, a colonial migration regime was introduced in order to assert control over 'Migrant-Natives' in a way that guaranteed that they could be exploited for labour but barred from settling. Therefore, their mobility and subsequent deportability served to anchor 'Indigenous-Natives' in their land. 'Indigenous-Natives', as seen in the racialisation of Gulf Arabs below, are racialised as timeless manifestation of their land. They are seen as more traditional and static. Sharma states, 'imperial ideas of stasis and mobility, around which the separation of colonised Natives revolved, was not reflective of some existing reality but productive of it'.¹²

3.1. Racialisation of Arabs in the Gulf

Throughout this section, I aim to document and explain the significance of the various tropes of the Arab as he exists in the colonial imagination through examining the travel writings of British colonial administrators of the Gulf. These tropes include the so-called 'purity' of the Arab Bedouin along with his assumed inertia and existence outside linear time. These tropes, as I will demonstrate, are highly racialised and serve to exclude 'impure' influences in the Gulf. It is important to note that the writers

¹⁰W.D. Mignolo, 'Local histories/global designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking', Princeton University Press, (2012); A. Quijano, 'Coloniality of power and eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology* 15(2), (2000), pp. 215–232; A. Quijano, 'Coloniality and modernity/rationality', *Cultural Studies* 21(2–3), (2007), pp. 168–178.

¹¹N. Sharma, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 42.

discussed below frequently cite each other's work. Therefore, the racializing discourse regarding Arabs becomes self-contained and presents an impermeable logic by which the colonial knowledge is 'true' because it has been so widely attested within colonial literature to be 'true'.

Additionally, it is crucial to begin this section with my argument that within all this praise of the 'Arab' as he figures in the British imagination, there is an underlying denigration of other non-European peoples. For instance, Pelly notes 'I confess that during my recent journey to Koweit, I was much impressed by the Arab character: I found in it, an appombe, sound sense, thought-fullness and ready energy, which contrasted favourably with at least one other Oriental people'.¹³ It is unclear which 'Oriental people' Pelly is referring to within his report. However, this description serves to illustrate that any romanticisation of the Arabs should not be seen as a statement *only* about the Arabs. Rather, it is a reflection of how other imperial subjects are known within the colonial narrative.

Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* has been named the 'book about Arabia to end all books about Arabia'.¹⁴ Originally published in 1959, the book encapsulates the traditional romantic tropes associated with other British writings on the region. One of the most fascinating aspects of Thesiger's romanticism, however, is the disdain he showed for the changes he perceived as destructive of the pure Arab Bedouin space as he had known it. In his 1984 preface, Thesiger wrote, 'I realised that after all these years and under these changed conditions the relationship between us could never again be as in the past. They had adjusted themselves to this new Arabian world, something which I was unable to do. We parted before I went to Abu Dhabi, which I found an Arabian Nightmare, the final disillusionment. For me this book remains a memorial to a vanished past, tribute to a once magnificent people.' Again in his 1991 preface, Thesiger mourns Arabia, 'I was disillusioned and resentful at the changes ... the traditional Bedu way of life ... had been irrevocably destroyed ... spread over what had previously been empty desert the town [Abu Dhabi] represented all that I hated and rejected'.¹⁵

Thesiger, a writer who is still revered in the Gulf¹⁶, best articulated the inherent racial connotations within the romanticism of the travel writing on Arabia. He notes that, out of all races 'the inhabitants of Arabia have kept their racial purity'.¹⁷ He compares this purity to other Arabs who he claims have mixed with other races. Thesiger later claims, '[no] race in the world prizes lineage so highly as the Arabs and none has kept its blood so pure. There is, of course, mixed blood in the towns, especially in the seaports, but this is only the dirty froth upon the desert's edge'.¹⁸ These extracts demonstrate that the romanticisation of Arabia is not simply an essentialising of their identity, there is a clear racialised ideology which explains the kinship between the British

¹³L. Pelly, 'Report No.67 of 1863 detailing the tribes, trades and resources of the Gulf Littoral [2v]', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1863), p. 22.

¹⁴W. Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (Penguin Travel Library, 1991).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶'The late Sir Wilfred Thesiger', Abu Dhabi Awards, (July 2017).

¹⁷W. Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, p. 92.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 92.

and the Bedouin. This contrasts with the way they viewed the coastal Arabs whose urban and cosmopolitan life proved decidedly unromantic to the British.

Harold Dickson, who served as Political Agent in Bahrain (1919–1920) and Kuwait (1929–1936), was a notable figure in the construction of the Gulf Arab. Dickson's *The Arab in the Desert* is prominent in its heavy romanticism of the Bedouin Arab. Despite the actual experience of the Gulf, Dickson frequently referred to tropes through which the Arab become intelligible. For instance, he noted the biblical significance of Arabia by noting, 'I have found the Badawin and his wife to be the most lovable and delightful of all people, just primitive Adam and Eves, like their ancestors'.¹⁹ This form of praise centres around the Arabs' seeming stasis and incapability of being of the world, rather, they are transported from worldly matters into something higher and seemingly untouchable. Additionally, they are in Dickson's words 'like their ancestors' confirming their eternal nature and inertia. The significance of this characterisation of the Arab Bedouin is that it leads to the assumption that the Arabs are apolitical. This is then confirmed by Dickson's assertion that the Bedouin 'is a wild, simple man of the desert, not versed in the cunning ways of settled life'.²⁰

Perhaps no description better encapsulates the Bedouin Arab as he figures in the British imperial imagination than Trenchard Fowle's, a Political Resident in the Gulf from 1939 to 1946, following observation:

the Bedouin, stately, calm, aloof, one of the last picturesque figures left to a civilised world ... Such is the Bedouin, the spirit of the desert made manifest in flesh. Such was he that day in Kuwait; such was he long centuries ago or ever Mohammed was born to Amina, wife of Abdullah, the merchant of Mecca. Not otherwise can we imagine him on the Last Day, facing the assembled nations, stately, calm, aloof ...²¹

One of the most striking aspects of this description is the way Fowle detached the Bedouin temporally from the civilised world, namely the West. The Bedouin, here, is a figure unattached to the linear passing of time experienced by Europe. The notion that non-Europeans are lagging behind Europe is common in the colonial imagination however the distinguishing feature of the Bedouin is that this lack of temporality is romanticised. Interestingly, Fowle used the same language to describe a camel he encounters, 'here he is the spirit of the land made manifest in flesh. He belongs to the desert and the desert to him'.²² Both the Bedouin and the camel are natural phenomena in the desert, unchanging and explicitly tied to the land.

Additionally, the implication in Fowle's praise of the Bedouin is that the civilised world had destroyed other 'picturesque' figures in favour of progress. Within the context of a Britain in which rigid hierarchies were slowly eroded²³, it is understandable that there was something picturesque about a society which seemed fossilised and unchanging. This fixity was not only to be admired but extended into the future. Fowle was certain that this Arab society should remain as he has described as will be

¹⁹H. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert* (Crows Nest: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967), p. 56.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 108.

²¹T. Fowle, *Travels in the Middle East: Being Impressions by the Way of Turkish Arabia, Syria, and Persia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), p. 9.

²²*Ibid.*, p36.

²³D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 72.

seen later in this paper. It is worth noting that the Bedouin's picturesqueness is not only tied to his seeming unchanging nature but also to Fowle's praise of the calm and aloof nature of the Bedouin. In being aloof, the Bedouin does not form resistance to the Empire seeing as he is unconcerned with worldly matters. The Bedouin is detached and therefore does not form a disruptive influence.

One of the most important ways in which this Arab archetype functions is that there is a constant underlying comparison with other 'Orientals'. For instance, Fowle, recounting a story from Arabian Nights, expresses dismay that in spite of Arab divers bringing in wealth, the pearl trading was in the hands of 'banias (money-lenders and merchants) from Hindustan, and when the Bania has squeezed the orange there is not much juice left'.²⁴ Fowle goes on to observe the unloading of a ship on which some Arabs were sitting, 'And by the side of these placid Biblical figures of a bygone age the machinery clanked and groaned brought up large bales from the depths of the hold - while the coolies yelled caution as one man-swung across the deck ... It was a strange medley of the east and west rubbing shoulders, the twentieth century and the first cheek and jowl'.²⁵

In both scenes described by Fowle, the Arabs are positioned against South Asians. The former scene depicts the clash between the expected romantic Arabia and the actual Arabia. The disappointment in Arabia as encountered by Fowle solely rests in this instance on the presence of the Bantias as opposed to the pearl diving depicted in Arabian Nights. The Bantias serve to corrupt the colonial imaginary which does not possess the framework for an Arabian Peninsula which is hybrid and has a mixed population. The latter scene is even more significant in the way it juxtaposes the 'Biblical figures' of the Arabs on the ship to the scene of machinery and 'coolies'. The significance of this scene can be noted in Fowle's surprise at having encountered the Arab, both ancient and eternal, in a scene of modernity complete with machinery and labourers.

Rupert Hay, a Political Resident in the Persian Gulf from 1941 until 1942 and then again in 1946 until 1952, was also important in the construction of the Arab as a racialised archetype. While Hay's actions as Resident, specifically his deportation of South Asian workers, will be discussed further, it is crucial to understand these actions as being founded on his characterisation of Arabia and Arabs. In Hay's book, *The Persian Gulf*, published in 1959 contains some of the archetypal features of Arabs admired by the British, namely pride of race. For instance, Hay wrote in his chapter, *The People*, 'The Arabs are democratic by nature so far as their relations with each other are concerned. All pure Arabs are equal and everybody else is very much their inferior'.²⁶ He went on to note, 'although in the more progressive centres Arabs show a good deal of sympathy for their brethren in other parts of the Arab world and pictures of President Gamal Abd-al-Nasir are displayed in some of the suqs, parochial usually outweighs national feeling'.²⁷

²⁴T. Fowle, *Travels in the Middle East: Being Impressions by the Way of Turkish Arabia, Syria, and Persia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), p. 8.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

²⁶R. Hay, 'The Persian Gulf States', *The Middle East Institute*, (1959), p. 28.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 29.

Interestingly, throughout his book, Hay referenced both Arnold Wilson, another British colonial administrator, and Harold Dickson. It is common for many of these works to reference each other leading to the emergence of similar narratives and characterisation of Arabs in particular. Hay noted the importance of racial purity among Arabs, like Dickson and subsequent writers such as Thesiger, and he attempted to reconcile this perceived attachment to racial purity to its 'natural' evolution as nationalist feeling. In the excerpt mentioned above Hay ties nationalist feelings to the degree of progressivism of the town in question. Therefore, for Hay, the Arab concern for racial purity needs to be translated into a racialised nationalism for the Arabs to be sufficiently 'civilised'. Racialised nationalism would naturally lead to more defined borders, which Hay bemoaned do not exist in the Persian Gulf states.²⁸ Hay also saw the British role in the Gulf as protecting from outside encroachment.²⁹ Thus, in order to aid the Arabs in achieving their nationalist ambitions, in spite of the lack of evidence that Arabs of the Gulf perceived themselves as a cohesive nation lying in wait, the British must provide protection. This protection, both through the Empire's time in the Gulf and through Hay's tenure, often manifested itself in the exclusion of perceived foreign influences.

Another manifestation of this colonial form of protection is the desire for Arabs to remain the same. Throughout the Empire's records, both in the administrative records and the more romantic travel writing, Arabs are praised for their stasis. In this praise, the British see themselves as protecting the Arabs from change. In his epilogue, Hay wrote that the rulers in the Gulf 'still rule more or less as patriarchs and Great Britain continues to exercise her protecting influence' with the real danger coming 'from without'.³⁰ Specifically, he wrote about the push from some in the West for democracy and self-rule and responds that '[such] doctrines could lead to the premature abandonment by Great Britain of her position in the Gulf states with disastrous results both to the states themselves and to the oil companies whose operations have brought so much benefit both to these states and to the Western world. ... I hope that no drastic change will take place for some years to come so that this book may be of some use to the American and British who have to live and work in those strange but fascinating survivals from a bygone age.'³¹

The excerpt is incredibly revealing of the Empire's need for the Arab patriarchal archetype in order to maintain its role. British government correspondence in 1927, for instance, expressed concern that 'the heady wine of Western civilisation may merely turn [the Arab] into a discontented decadent ... we can either let the Arab continue to dream out his low life or we can set ourselves to create in him a divine discontent.'³² The reasoning follows that the Arab, specifically the Arab of the Gulf, is pure and uncorrupted by the outside or by time, therefore, the Empire must step in to preserve the Arab as he was found by the British. It is in this stasis that the Arab is apolitical, according to Hay and others, and therefore more amenable. The British in

²⁸R. Hay, 'The Persian Gulf States', p. 3.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 153.

³¹R. Hay, 'The Persian Gulf States', The Middle East Institute, (1959), pp. 153 –154.

³²File 1/19 jurisdiction over foreigners in Bahrain', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1927).

presenting the Arab as politically vacuous can step in to fill the void. If the Arab were perceived to be capable of change then the Empire's entire reasoning for being in the Gulf collapses. Most importantly, Hay expressed hope that the Arabs never changed so that his book may remain useful. The British cultural reservoir from which the archetypal Arab originates must remain intact for the Empire to maintain its role in the Gulf and for the knowledge produced by the colonial encounter to remain.

4. Building a Nation-State

In racialising the Arabs in a way that fixes them with essential characteristics and cordons them as a self-contained and biological category, the assumption was that they would go on to form a nation-state. Racialised identity, in the colonial imagination, has its inevitable destiny in the racialised nation-state. For instance, when asking the opinions of the natives in Bahrain regarding the Arab Revolt 1916-1918, the Political agent reported 'the outstanding and most noticeable feature of native opinion here is neither approval nor disapproval but a somewhat surprising indifference ... the local population is far more interested in the local Pearl Market than in religio-political matters.'³³ The reason this is 'surprising' is that coloniality, reliant as it is on racialised categorisation, would assume a form of racialised solidarity between the Arabs of the Eastern coast and those in the interior which would ultimately culminate in a common struggle for a racialised nation-state.

Approaching the Gulf through colonial knowledge meant that it needed to be placed on the progression towards the nation-state, the nation-state, in the colonial imaginary specifically, is a racialised construction aimed at fulfilling racialised ideologies.³⁴ This nation-state requires an exclusionary migration regime in order to maintain its racial meaning. Therefore, exclusion becomes the primary mechanism through which the Gulf nation is perpetuated. If it once again allowed free movement and settlement then the racial meaning of its nation-state, along with its citizenship and legitimating narratives would be diluted. Therefore, the Gulf nation-state must be bordered and perpetuate these borders through exclusion in order to retain the meaning of its nationalist racialised narratives.

Throughout the British intelligence on the Gulf, which is formed of countless meticulous reports and correspondence, there is a discomfort with the fluidity of borders and a desire to push Gulf society along the evolutionary ladder towards order through the nation-state. The imposition of boundaries came in many forms, some seen in the fixation with territoriality and ownership of land and others seen in the imposition of cultural boundaries. It's important to understand these borders as a perceived fulfilment of the Arabs' racialised destiny towards a nation-state by the British. This approach allows a demonstration of the coloniality of the current exclusionary measures in place in the Gulf. This, then, relates to the Gulf states' legitimisation

³³'Eastern bureau, Basrah branch', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1916).

³⁴J. K. Gani, 'Escaping the nation in the Middle East: A doomed project? Fanonian decolonisation and the Muslim Brotherhood', *Interventions*, (2019), pp. 1-19; D. T. Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

narrative which sees them as the inevitable culminations of a long past in which the Gulf Arabs existed as a self-contained racialised unit.

In the early twentieth century, Foreign Office letters regarding the pearl fisheries are riddled with frustrations at the fluidity of the fishing boundaries. They detail the lack of exclusive rights for the tribes of the Gulf and propose that seeing as these tribes will not enforce a monopoly over these pearl fisheries, then the British must do it for them. It is worth noting that Pearl fisheries and maritime economic activities were the lifeblood of the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms, far more important than land, and yet they were not subject to concrete boundaries by the people of the Gulf. In 1904, in a letter addressed to the Law Officers' Department discussing potential foreign interference in the Gulf's pearl fisheries, Sir Eldon Gorst detailed the efforts of the British in preventing foreign interference in the Gulf's fisheries while also bemoaning that '[it] must be added that none of the tribes have any judicial system or courts of law for dealing with trespassers or trespassing boats'.³⁵ He recommended that the British maintained the tribes' monopoly over the water and asks for 'the procedure to be followed in expelling interlopers and dealing with their boats and fishing appliances'.³⁶ The Law Officers' Department agreed with his assessment and added that any foreign vessels should be denied supplies. However, the department also noted that it would be better to make it difficult for foreigners to fish in supposed tribe territory rather than seek the opinion of any international tribunal because they could not prove that the tribes of the Gulf historically enjoyed exclusive rights to these waters.

These letters proved that the territorial rights of the Gulf Arabs were far from certain and they provided evidence that the British sought to manufacture the Arabs' territorial claims. This is particularly salient because of the many contradictions included in this correspondence. First there is the assertion that these waters do, as a matter of fact, belong to the Arabs whilst another fact is that there is no historical proof that these waters belong to the Arab tribes of the Gulf. This is never reconciled within the correspondence, but the conclusion remains that 'foreigners' ought to be prevented from entry regardless of the lack of territoriality shown from the Gulf tribes. This shows an Empire anxious to order its subjects and delineate them into separate and self-contained territorial units which would go on to form modern nation-states.

It also shows imperial subjects who are at least initially unwilling or uninterested in imposing the boundaries so integral to the modern nation-state. It does not occur to Gorst that the lack of laws dealing with 'trespassers' is not rooted in a deficiency in the Gulf tribes' maturity as a society. Instead, it is more likely that the concept of 'trespassers' did not hold sway because there were no boundaries to trespass against. The British mistakenly approached the Gulf tribes as nation-states in their infancy yet to achieve all the trappings of a modern nation-state including a migration regime. Therefore, this reasoning follows, the imposition of boundaries integral to the modern nation-state is inevitable as the Gulf progresses into a more mature civilisation.

³⁵E. Gorst, 'Persian Gulf: Pearl fisheries. Investigation into alleged depletion of Pearl Banks. Germans and the industry. Concessions, etc', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers., (1904).

³⁶R. B. Finlay and E. Carson, 'Persian Gulf: Pearl fisheries. Investigation into alleged depletion of Pearl Banks. Germans and the industry' Concessions, etc', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1905).

The British Empire valued a homogenised political structure because it made it easier for the Empire to carry out its functions. A very telling meeting was held in 1933 between Foreign Office officials, the British representative at Jedda, an India Office official, and Fowle, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf at the time. During this meeting the discussion centred on the Empire's relation with Kuwait which had gained importance to the Empire due to its strategic position on the air route to India. The question of whether or not to tighten control over Kuwait, which at that point was not a formal protectorate, was raised in connection to oil concessions gained by the United States. One of the Foreign Office officials worried that if Americans in Kuwait were to be treated 'prejudicially' by the Sheikh of Kuwait, it may cause tensions between the UK and the US. He was then assured by other officials that in that case, the Empire would not hesitate to put pressure on the Sheikh or to dispose of him entirely as it had already done in Bahrain. Fowle later adds, 'Speaking generally, he added that, in fact, little trouble was likely to be experienced with foreigners in Koweit, so long as it remained a Bedouin town ruled by a Bedouin Sheikh, and not, like Bahrein, a relatively cosmopolitan commercial centre'.³⁷

It's interesting here to note that there are two kinds of foreigners, one explicitly named while the other is implicit. The former consists of Western citizens in the Gulf carrying out the work of oil companies, the second kind are those which have made Bahrain cosmopolitan and thus troublesome for the former to carry out their functions. A 'Bedouin town ruled by a Bedouin Sheikh' provides a political vacuum as later stated in the same meeting. This political vacuum allows the Empire and its global capitalist market to function in peace. However, a cosmopolitan place, in the way that Bahrain is cosmopolitan, means migrants from the Global South. These migrants include the usual mix of people found in port cities along the Indian Ocean, namely Persians, East Africans, and South Asians. These politicise a place and render it inhospitable to Empire which requires a vacuum in which to exercise its power.

The assumption that a 'Bedouin town ruled by a Bedouin Sheikh' denotes a political vacuum is particularly relevant to the way the Gulf Arabs are racialised. Their apoliticism seems rooted in their racialised identities as Bedouin Arabs. This is the same Trenchard Fowle that romanticised the Bedouin Arab as 'aloof' and static. It is in this meeting, that the articulation of the Empire's romanticism is translated into policy. Fowle argued that, although a full protectorate would be preferable, it was not necessary since no trouble to the Empire's market could be expected from the Bedouin Arabs. The crucial caveat being that Kuwait '*remained* a Bedouin town'. This demonstrates the ways in which racialising narratives not only homogenise the past and present as we had seen in Fowle's previous statements but also extend that racialised homogenisation into the future as policy.

South Asians within the Gulf are often presented as labourers or agitators. Prior to British intervention in the Gulf, South Asians could move freely into different port cities.³⁸ The British sought to regulate and survey what they saw as chaotic movement

³⁷T. Fowle, 'Relations between His Majesty's government in the United Kingdom and the Sheikh of Koweit', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1933).

³⁸N. Fuccaro, 'Rethinking the history of port cities', quoted in L. Potter ed., *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports, and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

by imposing passport controls and requiring approval of the relevant British authority for entry into the Gulf.³⁹ The main reason for these attempts to regulate migration is to prevent any trouble for the British. As demonstrated, the British saw foreigners in the Gulf as a direct threat to their position. However, there was also the issue of the Gulf needing migration so in order to ensure that migrants did not corrupt the 'pure' and ordered society of the Gulf they were only permitted to be transitory labour.

Often within the India Office Records, there are detailed accounts of foreigners' movements within the Gulf. For instance, the British made sure that anyone entering the Gulf would be required to pass through their controls.⁴⁰ It was feared that the Sheikhs of the Gulf were too lax with allowing the entry of foreigners and so the British felt the need to impose their own controls. For instance, in a correspondence regarding the employment of Indian labour, companies importing had to ensure that the Political Resident in the Gulf was 'duly warned'.⁴¹ Additionally, people travelling into the Gulf were required to obtain No Objection Certificates from the Political Agent. Companies employing foreign labour also had to promise to repatriate the foreigners as soon as the work was done. This was rooted in the fear that a 'colony' would be created if foreigners were allowed to stay after their contracts were terminated.⁴²

A letter by Charles Belgrave, advisor to the Bahraini government, detailed that passport regulations had been imposed to finally halt the landing of 'undesirable' persons in the Gulf.⁴³ He also stated that only the Sheikhs acknowledged and legitimised by the British government could approve the entry of persons into the Gulf. This demonstrates that the purpose of passports within the Gulf is to uphold exclusionary boundaries and prevent free movement. Additionally, it displays the role of the different Sheikhdoms within the Gulf as upholders of exclusionary boundaries initiated by the British. It is clear then that foreigners coming into the Gulf must be the kind deemed desirable by the British, labourers who could be deported once the work is done. Creating this migration regime serves to create the migrants as temporary labourers and ensures a lack of continuity and longevity for migrant communities.

Additionally, the British frequently complained about the floating population of the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁴ The fear lay in the assumed disorder of an idle population when work periods ended, for instance a memorandum by the Political Agency noted that the diverse population of the Arab Gulf would be idle half the year when not engaged in the pearl trade and '[as] a result petty crime, assaults, thefts etc. are very

³⁹O. Alshehabi, 'Policing labour in empire: The modern origins of the Kafala sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab states', *British Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* 48(2), (2019).

⁴⁰'File 29/7 I consular: Passport and visa regulations (governing Bahrain, Muscat, Kuwait and other Shaikhdoms)', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1933).

⁴¹'Coll 30/132 'Persian Gulf. Importation of Indian labour to Bahrain by petroleum concessions Ltd.' [14v]', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1936).

⁴²'File 10/1 G BAPCO labour' [27r]', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1938–1944).

⁴³'Consular: Passport and visa regulations (governing Bahrain, Muscat, Kuwait and other Shaikhdoms)', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1931).

⁴⁴J. Lorimer, 'Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf. vol I. historical. Part IA & IB', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1915); 'File 1/A/24 I Persian subjects in Bahrain and registration of foreigners in Bahrain with proposals for institution of Bahrain nationality and property laws', Qatar Digital Library, (1933); 'File 18/78 I (C 100) Bahrain order in council, 1913', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1922); R. Hay, 'The Persian Gulf States', The Middle East Institute, (1959).

common'.⁴⁵ While the British did institute controls, it was admitted that it would be far too difficult to impose concrete boundaries, especially seeing as the Shaikhdoms themselves seemed uncooperative. This issue extended into the 1950s with a letter from the British residency stating, 'it is a wild and woolly region where immigration control is far from complete ... considerable numbers of destitutes and undesirables arrive on the coast often without valid travel papers'.⁴⁶ Within the same correspondence, British Residency administrators complained that the governments of these states were unwilling to impose immigration controls and that the costs of repatriating 'undesirables' had fallen to the Residency. Interestingly, the Residency staff attributed the lack of immigration control to the developmental stage of the Arab Gulf states, admitting that it would take some time before immigration controls are fully implemented. Subsequently, it was decided that the cost of repatriation must be taken from public funds. This demonstrates that an exclusionary migration regime based on notions of racialised nativity was seen as essential to the process of 'civilising' the Arab Gulf states.

5. Association of South Asians With Labour

The variety of restrictions imposed on migration to the Gulf coupled with the novel surveillance of migrants, employers were required to guarantee the 'good behaviour' of their migrant labour,⁴⁷ meant that the free movement of the pre-colonial Gulf had ended. Legal divisions between those seen as migrants, namely South Asians and Persians, and those seen as native ensured that they inhabited different roles within the Gulf. In contrast to the diversity of roles migrants fulfilled previously, migrants came to embody one function within the Gulf and promptly disappear through deportation after they had performed that function.⁴⁸ The British also sought to prevent different categories of South Asians stating, 'no visas should be granted to persons looking for work, indigent persons, prostitutes, persons already repatriated from Bahrain'.⁴⁹ Instead, the British sought the importation of South Asians solely as labourers, suggesting to the Kuwait Oil Company that Indian labour would be desirable as men who are used to the conditions, who had experience of similar work.⁵⁰ Added to this category of undesirables are journalists and tourists without means. In this way the British created the South Asian as a labourer.

Additionally, racialising South Asians as being suited for manual labour enables different exploitative practices. In their comparisons with Arabs, South Asians are presented by the British as more enduring of manual labour. Therefore, while Arabs were seen as unable to withstand certain conditions, South Asians could be subjected to harsh labour precisely because of the way they are racialised. The complaints of South

⁴⁵File 18/78 I (C 100) Bahrain order in Council, 1913', p. 16.

⁴⁶British Residency, 'Control of aliens entering trucional States without valid travel papers', The National Archives of the UK, Kew, (11 July 1955).

⁴⁷File 28/14 labour employed by the Bahrain petroleum company limited, Bahrain', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (18 January 1936).

⁴⁸File 10/3 BAPCO labour', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1945–1950).

⁴⁹File 29/7 I consular: Passport and visa regulations (governing Bahrain, Muscat, Kuwait and other Shaikhdoms)', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (11 August 1932).

⁵⁰File 5/1 XVI Kuwait oil company', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1944–1948).

Asians over their work conditions were dismissed precisely because of this. Comparisons were also made to the pay South Asians received in their countries of origin leading to the conclusion that they were much better off in the Gulf than they were in South Asia.⁵¹ This demonstrates clearly the way that South Asians were externalised from the Gulf context and tied to South Asia in spite of the presence of South Asian workers who called the Gulf their home. In creating their externality to the Gulf context through the migration regime, the British ensured that their discontent over their work conditions would not be met with solidarity or concern from wider society.

The context of labour is the only one in which the Arab inhabitant of the Gulf is compared unfavourably to South Asian labourers. In a letter from the Political Agency to the Political Resident in the Gulf, it is stated '[t]he plain fact here is that the Bahrainis are on the whole not worth even one half of the pay drawn by Indians'.⁵² In a memorandum circulated within the Bahrein Petroleum Company Ltd., it is stated that a Bahraini 'does his work satisfactorily but is definitely inferior to the Indians'. The memorandum goes on to state that despite being trained the Bahrainis still do not compare with Indian labourers. Additionally, the memorandum complains that the Bahraini has not been sufficiently 'industrialized' and therefore cannot hope to replace Indian labour.⁵³

6. The Political Mobilisation of Migrants in the Gulf

The most suitable way of gaining insight into how South Asian labourers in the Gulf were racialised is through what these labourers said. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s there were many mobilisations by South Asian workers in the Gulf, and it is through these mobilisations that their racialisation and exploitation become apparent. Unfortunately, it is rare to gain access into the first-hand accounts of South Asian labourers in the Gulf. However, from the surviving material, these accounts show the use of deportation as a method to depoliticise the Gulf and get rid of 'undesirables'. The deportation regime is heavily underpinned by racialising narratives of the Arabs as belonging and South Asians as being foreign, therefore, relating back to the romanticising travel writing of colonial administrators. It is through these accounts that the romance of British Arabia reveals its exclusionary nature. The Arabs in these writings do not exist without 'Other Orientals'.⁵⁴

In beginning to discuss the political mobilisation of migrants in the Arab Gulf, it's important to recognise that migrants were created by the British Empire. The temporary stays of migrants were not by their own choice, rather the legal constraints put in place by the British made them temporary. Therefore, any reference to migrants should be seen through the prism of British imperial interests. Additionally, the status of migrants exists in order to ensure a separation between them and so-called natives.

⁵¹File 10/1 G BAPCO labour', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (11 March 1942).

⁵²File 19/169 II (C 76) agitation in Bahrain [190r]', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1938).

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴L. Pelly, 'Report No.67 of 1863 detailing the tribes, trades and resources of the Gulf Littoral [2v]', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1863).

Labelling any South Asian in the Arab Gulf as migrant, regardless of how long they had been there or how long they intend to stay, serves to assert the stasis of the natives while emphasising the mobility of South Asians in the Gulf. Unfortunately, throughout the Empire's records there are many references to migrants without any indication of whether these 'migrants' saw themselves as such.

It is worth noting that Indians in the Gulf were not consistently subject to this form of racialisation. Instead, in the beginning of the twentieth century Hindu merchants in Qatif appealed to the British to increase their presence in the Gulf in order to protect them from Turkish officials. In the discussions between the Political Agent and Resident, they generally agreed that a British presence maybe necessary to prevent further expansion of the Ottomans into the Persian Gulf which would be threatening to their Hindu subjects.⁵⁵ It is clear in the relevant correspondence that the protection of the Hindu merchants provides a justification for an expanded and more robust British presence in the Gulf. Therefore, in this instance, the Indians' class prevents them from being racialised as outsiders because that racialisation would prevent the Empire's reason for being in the Gulf. Additionally, these merchants served to consolidate the Empire's ideology of free trade. It is, however, when Indians in the Gulf problematise colonial ideology that they are racialised as outsiders and promptly deported.

It is important to recognise the instances where the racialisation of specific groups is not consistent because it reveals the purposes of colonial racialisation in the Gulf. The racialisation of South Asian labourers as lacking belonging and as being disruptive to the Gulf is not one which exists in a vacuum. Labour within the Gulf is meant to be cheap and expendable to ensure the functioning of the oil companies for the interests of Empire. Therefore, it is in their position as labourers that South Asians are racialised in a way which externalises them from the Gulf and creates their deportability. The Hindu merchants by contrast are useful to Empire and promise no great disruption to the Empire's purposes in the Gulf, namely to ensure the safety of their oil concessions and make sure the oil companies remain stable and profitable. The racialisation of different groups is dependent on their position within Empire and how conducive they are to the Empire's purposes.

Additionally, another interesting facet of the racialisation of South Asians in the Gulf is the presence of Indian administrative clerks within the British colonial administration in the Gulf. This is heavily detailed in James Onley's works.⁵⁶ As mentioned with the Qatif merchants, racialisation is often deployed towards a purpose, it does not simply exist as a reaction to perceived physical difference. Indian native agents working within the colonial administration are not racialised as inferior because they serve colonial interests. The presence of Indian administrators does not, for instance, preclude the deportation of 'undesirables' nor does it factor into how oil companies treat their South Asian workers. Additionally, it is worth noting that it is precisely the racialised colonial hierarchy which permits these native agents to not be racialised as inferior. The presence of a colonial administration associated with whiteness and

⁵⁵File No. E/1. Hindu Merchants at Qatif', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1900).

⁵⁶J. Onley, 'Britain's native agents in Arabia and Persia in the nineteenth century', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(1), (2004), pp. 129–137; J. Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Empire on the top of the racialised hierarchy of the Gulf is precisely what permits the native agents to escape their racialisation by becoming associated with it.

The presence of a racialised hierarchy in the Gulf is only confirmed in instances where South Asian migrants are racialised differently from other South Asians. Vora for instance, details that she often performed as a Westerner in the Gulf in order to assert her authority.⁵⁷ She consciously ‘performed as a Western anthropologist in front of my classroom, emphasising my American accent and asserting my positionality as someone who was not Indian ‘from India’ in order to maintain authority. In this way, although I am not white, I carried a symbolic whiteness’.⁵⁸ Despite looking Indian, Vora consciously attempts to appear white because of the racialised meaning of whiteness and Indianness within the Gulf. So, race is not simply about physical appearance, instead the context dictates what these physical markers mean socially. In performing whiteness, Vora attained the social meaning of whiteness. This can be applied to other contexts in which other migrants, South Asians specifically, escape their racialisation within the Gulf due to class.

7. First-Hand Accounts

The following First-hand accounts of South Asians labourers speak directly against the racialisation of South Asians as being ‘good’ labourers yet inferior in the Gulf context. By detailing the exploitative practices they had been subjected to and directly addressing these practices as exploitative, they shed the ‘good’ labourer identity and problematise their racialisation. The South Asian migrants mentioned in this section also note that their treatment was motivated by racism. Therefore, the argument that South Asians in the Gulf were racialised in a way that made them more susceptible to exploitation, while novel to the literature, has been made decades earlier by South Asian labourers themselves as will be shown in this section.

It is worth noting that in the period between August 1945 to September 1947, representations regarding poor working conditions and low wages had been made by a group of South African workers and a group of Bahraini labourers. The way these demands were received is revelatory of the differing racialisations of the different racialised groups. The group of South African workers were promptly deported after going on strike and complaining that they were not paid as much as the white employees and that they were placed in subordinate positions to white employees who were less qualified. It is also worth noting that this strike was the first attempt made by non-American workers to demand the same wages as American staff in BAPCO.⁵⁹

⁵⁷N. Vora, ‘Is the university universal? Mobile (Re)constitutions of American academia in the Gulf Arab states’, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 46(1), (2015), pp. 19–36.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁵⁹‘File 10/3 BAPCO labour’, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1945–1950).

8. Raghu's Letter

In 1948, a letter written by an Indian worker in BAPCO named Raghu was published by the Free Press Journal.⁶⁰ It details the treatment that Indian workers received working for BAPCO and the racialised forms of discrimination they experienced. The letter is cited by Ali Alshehabi in an academic article to show the origins of the Kafala system in the Gulf.⁶¹ Interestingly, Alshehabi does not develop his interpretation of this letter into the anticolonial, antiracist, and anticapitalist polemic which it explicitly is. Instead, he interprets the significance of this letter as being revelatory of the citizen vs migrant dynamic as well as the politics of sponsorship.

The racialised humiliation of South Asians in Bahrain is the main grievance in Raghu's letter. He makes frequent comparisons to South Africa in which he claims that the reality of the more than a thousand Indian emigrants working for BAPCO is similar to the racialised segregation and humiliations of South Africa. It's important to note that Raghu is not only speaking about Indians, rather he is including South Asians in his condemnation of BAPCO. This conveys the way South Asians were perceived in the Gulf as being the same rather than taking into account differences in region, religion, or sect. This is due to their racialisation in relation to the white employees of BAPCO and the Arab Bahraini population. Seeing as the most important categorisation in the functioning of BAPCO being notions of racialised inferiority and superiority, which dictate and are in turn informed by the work conditions and wages, differences within a racialised group are not significant. Their racialisation as being the same on the racialised hierarchy of colonial Arabia dictated the racialised actions they were subjected to and the exploitative nature of their work.

Raghu expands on the South African example and details the racialised segregation separating South Asians from the white employees of BAPCO. He recounts that the white employees live in much better accommodation and enjoy better facilities. He goes on to complain that, 'Strict care is exercised to see that no Indian caste his evil shadow over this cosy and compact residential town of the master race.'⁶² These practices have remained in place in much of the contemporary Gulf and while they are often attributed to cultural difference as mentioned in the literature review section of this chapter, Raghu and presumably other South Asian labourers understand these segregations as a form of racialised difference. White and South Asian employees are segregated in a variety of ways including the buses they take to work. The physicality of these separations shows the ways in which race is transcribed onto the body; a group racialised as inferior is subject to various ways of reaffirming that inferiority and separateness. The race myth is reiterated consistently through accommodation and transport in order for it to be held as self-evident. Whiteness needs to be consistently manifested through spatial separations in order for the white employees to retain the ways in which they are racialised.

Raghu then draws contrast with the South African example and claims, 'Bahrein is in a way even worse than South Africa where the Indian can at least stay on & fight

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹O. Alshehabi, 'Policing labour in empire: The modern origins of the Kafala sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab states', *British Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* 48(2), (2019).

⁶²'File 10/3 BAPCO labour', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1945–1950).

but in Bahrain they are booked by the first available ship.⁶³ Apart from their racialisation as inferior and therefore exploitable, South Asians are also crucially racialised as being from outside. This is one of the most detrimental forms of racialisation because it facilitates the exclusion of South Asians and severs their ties to the Gulf, both geographically and temporally. Through being racialised as interlopers and outsiders to the Gulf, South Asians are more easily deportable which in turn confirms their racialisation as being from 'outside' and lacking in belonging. Instead of being temporary workers by choice, the workers are made temporary and subsequently de-politicised by deportation in order to prevent demands for better working conditions and to sever their connection to the Gulf.

9. Indian Employees Association

A letter written by an organisation called the Indian Employees Association on the 24th of June 1948 to the Political Agent in Bahrain echoes many of the sentiments in Raghu's letter. The main grievance in the letter is the low wages of the Indian workers. Interestingly, the letter also complains that the Indian workers are treated as though they were foreigners in Bahrain. Their treatment, the letter details, is dehumanising and they call on the Political Agency to put pressure on the various offices in Bahrain to adjust their pay. Evidently, no action had been taken by the Political Agency and the Indian Employees Association wrote another letter to urge action. In this following letter, the language is more assertive, and the Association emphasises that Indians 'have every right of freedom to enjoy like you people; because India is free and independent now.' The letter continues, 'your treatment given to the INDIANS is worst than an animal which is not Fair'. They also use the comparison with South Africa in order to highlight the racialised dehumanisation they undergo in Bahrain.⁶⁴

10. ARAMCO Deportations 1949

In 1949, the ARAMCO deported approximately 60 Pakistani and Indian workers to Karachi for communist activities which include staging a strike and forming a union in protest of their work conditions. The British residency in Bahrein both provided and collected information from ARAMCO regarding the deportation and supported the decision while making sure to contact the United Kingdom High Commissioners in Karachi and Delhi with information regarding the strikers. The British also made sure to inform the Pakistani government of the names of the workers suggesting that they be placed on a communist watch list. Throughout the British correspondence, the activities of the South Asian workers who formed the union are dismissed. Many of these workers, however, are seen as naïve and simply following the ringleaders, with correspondence from ARAMCO describing the deported workers as 'sheep'.⁶⁵

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴File 16/61 complaints from the public', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1945–1949).

⁶⁵Pol Ext 6494/49 'Deportation of Pakistani employees from Aramco', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, (1949).

The British circulated an extract from an article submitted to the Sind Observer by the strike leader, Hazoor Ahmed Khan, which details the indignities suffered by the workers. Khan mentions that they have been 'victims of national arrogance, racial discrimination, religious bigotry and ruthlessness of dollar imperialism'. Again, displaying that the South Asian workers in the Gulf understood their exploitation as driven by racism and imperialism even in areas that have ostensibly been 'independent'. Khan goes on to detail the numerous and incessant humiliation the workers have been subjected to, both during their time at ARAMCO and during their deportation. He continues, '[they] assigned us coolies work ... we were aware that no outside help would be forthcoming and apparently we would be chucked out without remuneration'. Khan also complains of being consistently insulted and punished if they showed any defiance or retaliated. They were told by the District Manager, 'No granting of demands, therefore no hearing, fall back, go back you mad dogs, we know what you are etc'.⁶⁶

This extract provides an interesting view of how colonial racial classifications functioned. The superiority of the British in the Gulf was based on whiteness rather than any cultural explanations. If the American ARAMCO employees could step into the Arabian Peninsula and immediately assume a role of racialised superiority, it shows that the prejudices of the Gulf were based on race. It was their shared whiteness with the British that allowed the Americans to function in the Gulf in the ways narrated by the striking employees. The parallels between the Americans and the British in the Gulf could be understood through their shared coloniality. The quote relayed by Khan, 'we know what you are' is especially significant because it points to the shared reserve of racial colonial knowledge extracted by both the Americans and British by which to identify South Asians. Throughout the letters sent by the workers to management and to the Sind Observer it's clear that the striking workers understood their exploitation as racialised. The racialised hierarchy which enabled and prolonged this exploitation is one which both American and British interventions in the region benefit from and have an interest in keeping. The letters undercut the notion of South Asian labourers as more pliant, more willing to work, and more efficient labourers than Arabs. The displacement of this racial ideology unsettles colonial racialisations of the British and of Arabs.

11. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I discussed the colonial racialisation of Arabs by the British and how these characterisations formed a foundation on which an exclusionary migration regime could be built. The racialisation of Arabs as pure, unchanging, and uncorrupted lead to the bordering of the Gulf as a way of protecting this racialised group and perpetuating it into the future. This bordering was meant to keep out those deemed to be a corrupting influence on the fantasy of a homogeneous and hierarchical Gulf. In this process, South Asians were relegated to forming the labouring class while being made deliberately transitory in order to perpetuate the British racialisation of the Gulf

⁶⁶Ibid.

as a purely Arab homogeneous space. The racialisation of the Gulf by the British is extremely relevant to the contemporary racialised marginalisation of South Asians in the Gulf. It is because of this colonial imaginary, that the Gulf states can continue to represent themselves as inheritors of an internally cohesive and pure Arab lineage which leads to the externalisation of South Asian migrants from a space that was historically hybrid and fluid.

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